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Predictors of Incarceration for African American Males Aging out of Foster Care

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Walden University

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Marylean Wrotten

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2018

Abstract

Predictors of Incarceration for African American Males Aging out of Foster Care

by

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MA, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2011

BS, College of New Rochelle, 2009

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

Walden University

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Abstract

Past research has shown that many youths in the United States age out of foster care group homes unprepared for independent living. Lack of connections to adults, low educational attainment, and homelessness are negative outcomes that have been linked to incarceration for youth who age out of foster care. The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to determine how well the independent variables of connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness predict the dependent variable of likelihood of incarceration for African American males ($n = 504$) within 3 years after aging out of foster care group homes. The Bridges transition model was the theoretical framework for this study. Data came from the archived National Youth Transitional Database. Logistic regression revealed that connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness were not statistically significant predictors ($\chi^2 = 4.64, df = 3, p > .05$) of the likelihood of incarceration for African American males within 3 years of aging out of foster care group homes. The Nagelkerke R^2 value showed that the independent variables accounted for only 2.9% of variance in the model. Additional research is needed to determine what services, skills, or resources African American males may need to minimize the likelihood of being incarcerated after aging out of foster care. Findings from this study could contribute to social change by providing professionals in human services and other fields with empirical evidence that there is a need to extend the range of services provided to African American males in foster care to minimize the likelihood of them experiencing incarceration after aging out of foster care.

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Dedication

First and foremost, I dedicate this dissertation to God, my Father, and my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Without God, this journey would have been impossible. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 3:14, King James Version).

I dedicate this dissertation to young people in foster care and former foster youth. You have endured much pain and loss. Take heart; you are not alone. Many people are working on your behalf, including me.

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To my daughter, Evelyn, thank you for your support as I pursued my educational goal.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	1
Problem Statement.....	5
Purpose of Study.....	7
Research Questions and Hypotheses	7
Research Question	7
Hypotheses.....	7
Theoretical Framework for the Study.....	8
Nature of the Study.....	10
Definitions.....	10
Assumptions.....	12
Scope and Delimitations	13
Limitations	14
Significance.....	15
Summary.....	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review	17
Introduction.....	17
Literature Search Strategy.....	18
Theoretical Foundation	18
End Zone Transition	19

Neutral Zone Stage of Transition.....	20
Future or New Beginning Zone of Transition.....	21
Research Using the Bridges Transition Model	22
Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or the Concepts	24
Aging Out of Foster Care.....	25
Legislation on Services to Help Youth in the Transition Out of Foster Care.....	25
Negative Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care	29
Negative Educational Experiences	34
Summary.....	44
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	47
Introduction.....	47
Research Design and Rationale	47
Methodology.....	49
Population	49
Sampling and Sampling Procedure.....	50
Data Collection	51
Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs	52
Data Analysis Plan.....	54
Research Question	55
Hypotheses.....	55
Threats to Validity	57
Internal Validity.....	58

External Validity	60
Conclusion Validity	60
Ethical Procedures	62
Summary	63
Chapter 4: Results	65
Introduction	65
Data Collection	66
NYTD Data Collection Process	66
Demographics	69
Predata Screening.....	72
Testing Statistical Assumptions.....	73
Results.....	74
Conclusion	77
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	79
Introduction.....	79
Interpretation of Findings	79
Limitations of the Study.....	84
Recommendations for Future Studies.....	85
Implications for Practice.....	87
Conclusion	89
References	90
Appendix A: Terms of Use Agreement	115

Appendix B: G*power Sample Size Computation118

List of Tables

Table 1. Coding Schema for Variables.....	54
Table 2. Coding Schema for Variables.....	68
Table 3. Demographic Information on African American Males in the Sample.....	70
Table 4. Demographic Variable Information Crosstabbed With Dependent Variable.....	71
Table 5. Missing Data for Independent Variables	72
Table 6. Bivariate Correlation Matrix of Independent Variables	74
Table 7. Logistic Regression: Predicting Incarceration.....	76
Table 8. Regression Classification Table.....	77

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In cities across the United States, thousands of young people age out of the foster care system each year (Zlotnick, Tam, & Soman, 2012). The term *aging out* describes a young person who becomes ineligible to receive state aid for housing, food, and medical care from the foster care system upon turning 18 years old (Getz, 2012). Often, this population of young people is at risk for poor outcomes such as homelessness, criminal activities, incarceration, low educational attainment, and financial instability (Avery, 2010; Courtney, Lee, & Perez, 2011). Many young people who age out of the foster-care system enter adulthood without supportive relationships with their biological families, and many lack stable relationships that could help them through the transitional process (Dion, 2015; Graham, Schellinger, & Vaughn, 2015). This study focused on analyzing the relationship between connection to adults, educational attainment, homelessness, and incarceration for African American males who have aged out of group foster homes.

This chapter includes background information on the issue at hand. It also contains the study's statement of purpose, the significance of study, and the research questions and hypotheses. The theoretical framework, nature, assumptions, scope, delimitations, and limitations of this study are also included in this chapter.

Background

According to Pecora (2010) African American males are disproportionately represented in the foster care system. They are also placed into group homes at a higher rate than their White male counterparts (Pecora, 2010). Miller, Farrow, Meltzer, and Notkins (2014) provided data that revealed that 21% of African American males were

placed into group homes and other institutionalized settings in 2010. In the same year, other ethnic groups were placed at a rate of 15%. Hargett (2013) reported that African American males age out of group homes at a higher rate than males of any other race. Pecora noted that African American males age out of group homes at a rate 13% higher than any other racial group. Miller et al. reported that the number of African American males who aged out of group foster homes nearly doubled over a 10-year period, increasing from 7% in 2001 to 13% in 2010. Other authors revealed that African American males' involvement with the child welfare system placed them at an increased risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system after aging out due to instability in living situations, poor education, and living in economically distressed neighborhoods (Miller et al., 2014).

The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS, 2013) provides an overview of youth transitioning out of foster care in the United States. In 2012, 20,305 youth aged out of the foster care system (AFCARS, 2013). The Chafee Act of 1999 and the Independent Living Act of 2010 brought changes to the plight of youth aging out of foster care (Courtney et al., 2011). Government leaders on the federal, state, and local levels have begun to focus their attention on the increased challenges that youth encounter as they transition out of foster care into adulthood and independent living (Katz & Courtney, 2015).

Title IV-E, which is a part of Public Law 106-169 or the Foster Care Act of 1999, provided increased funding for transitional services. This act gave states freedom to design and implement services that would enable youth to become self-sufficient after

aging out of foster care (Foster Care Act of 1999, Pub. L No 106-169, § 101). However, as per Courtney et al. (2011), youth continue to age out of foster care without receiving \ transitional services designed to aid them in making the transition to independent living as outlined in the federal legislation. Katz and Courtney (2015), also showed that youth transitioning out of foster care to independent living often meet challenges that render them unable to meet their basic needs. Researchers have shown that youth who are emancipated from foster care have a difficult time completing high school, going to college, obtaining housing, and finding and keeping employment (Jones, 2014; Kirk & Day, 2011; Lee & Berrick, 2014; Mandelbaum, 2010). Additionally, Krinsky (2010) reported that 25% of youths were incarcerated within the first couple of years of transitioning from foster care.

Education is a key factor that enables African American males to transition successfully into adulthood after aging out of group foster homes (Hargett, 2013; Miller et al., 2014). However, other authors have revealed that African American males who age out of foster care are more likely to leave without having obtained a high school diploma (Frerer, Sosenko, Pallegirin, Manauk, & Horowitz, 2013; Shpiegel & Ocasio, 2015; Yates & Grey, 2012). Several researchers have shown that African American males in foster care are also subjected to negative educational experiences. For instance, high numbers of African American males are placed in special education classes (Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damasheth, & Fogarty, 2012). They experience grade retention more than the general student body (Lewis, Simmons, Uzzell, Horowitz, & Casserly,

2012). They are suspended for disruptive behaviors more frequently, and they tend to drop out of school at higher rates (Mastin, Metzger, & Golden, 2013).

The results from studies have also shown that African American males who age out of foster care are at a higher risk of becoming homeless than their peers who live at home with their parents (Bender et al., 2015; Courtney et al., 2011; Holtschnieder, 2016; Shah et al., 2017). The findings from one Midwestern study involving former foster youth who aged out of foster care in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin revealed that 37% of the youth experienced homelessness, or couch surfing after aging out of foster care (Dworsky et al., 2013; Havlicek & Courtney, 2016; Perez & Romo, 2011). Findings from the study revealed that those who experienced being homeless did so within the first year after aging out of foster care (Courtney et al., 2009).

Researchers have shown that without an adequate education, African American males who age out of foster care are not likely to find suitable employment that will enable them to support themselves (Miller et al., 2014). Osgood, Foster, and Courtney (2010) maintained that employment outcomes for youth aging out of foster care are bleak during the youths' transition to independent living. Unlike their peers who remain with and rely on their families financially into their 20s, former foster youth must fend for themselves (Courtney, 2009; Dworsky et al., 2013). Results from a study by Hook and Courtney (2010) on former foster youth from California, North Carolina, and Minnesota revealed that 22% of those who aged out of foster care in those states were still unemployed at age 24 years.

Results from past studies have also revealed that youth who age out of foster care unprepared for independent living are at risk for incarceration (McCarthy & Gladstone, 2011; Yates & Grey, 2012). Cusick et al. (2011) investigated the rate of criminal involvement during the transition period of youth aging out of group foster care. The sample consisted of 732 youth transitioning out of group homes across three states. Findings indicated that young people who resided in group home settings were more likely to engage in criminal behavior during their transition to adulthood. McCarthy and Gladstone (2011) conducted a study of 2,564 inmates to determine whether the inmates had any experience in the foster care system. Findings revealed that 52% of the participants said that they had previously lived in group homes. Thirty-three percent of participants were identified as African American males, and 19% of African American male inmates reported being imprisoned within 2 years after aging out of foster care (McCarthy & Gladstone, 2011).

Problem Statement

Researchers have that shown many African American males age out of foster care group homes without being prepared for transitioning into independent living (Leigh, Hutt, Jones, & Marshall, 2007; Miller et al., 2014). As a result, African American males who age out of foster care experience higher rates of homelessness than their non-foster-care peers (Bender et al., 2015; Courtney et al., 2011; Holtschnieder, 2016; Shah et al., 2015). Results from other studies have revealed that youth who age out of foster care unprepared for independent living are more likely to experience arrest, conviction, and

incarceration (Knott & Donovan, 2010; Figgopry & Pavloulos, 2015; Lee, Courtney & Hook, 2012; Scott & McCoy, 2015).

Several authors have documented a range of negative outcomes such as homelessness, low educational attainment, unemployment, low wages, and lack of connections to adults that are related to African American males' involvement with the criminal justice system after aging out of foster care homes (Figgopry & Payloulos, 2015; Katz & Courtney, 2015). According to other researchers, having connections to caring adults may buffer youth from experiencing the negative outcomes associated with aging out of foster group homes (Dion, 2015; Graham, Schellinger & Vaughn, 2015; Thompson et al., 2015). However, many African American youth age out of foster care without having adequate emotional support, which could buffer them from becoming engaged in criminal activities (Rutman & Hubherstay, 2016; Stott, 2013).

Despite the passage of federal legislation to prepare foster youths for independent living (Courtney et al., 2011), researchers have documented a problem whereby large numbers of African American males who age out of foster group homes become involved in the criminal justice system (Figgopry & Payloulos, 2015; Katz & Courtney, 2015). Several researchers have assessed relationships between individual variables such as low educational attainment, homelessness, lack of connections to adults, and criminal involvement for African American males after aging out of foster care group homes.

However, during my literature review, I did not find any studies that addressed the joint effect of those variables and the incarceration of African American males after aging out of foster care group homes. There is a gap in the literature regarding the

predictive relationships between the independent variables of connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness as predictors of the likelihood of criminal involvement for African American males after aging out of foster care group homes.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to explore the predictive relationships between connection to adults, educational attainment, homelessness, and the likelihood of incarceration for African American males within 3 years after aging out of group foster homes. New York State was the setting for this study. The three independent variables were connection to adults, educational level, and homelessness. The dependent variable was likelihood of incarceration. Binomial logistic regression analysis was used to assess the predictive relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research question and hypotheses guided this study:

Research Question

How well do connections to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness predict the likelihood of incarceration for African American males after aging out of foster care group home?

Hypotheses

H₀: Connections to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness are not statistically significant predictors of the likelihood of incarceration for African American

males within 3 years after aging out of foster care group homes as shown by data collected from the National Youth Transitional Database (NYTD).

Ha: Connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness are statistically significant predictors of the likelihood of incarceration for African American males within 3 years after aging out of a foster care group homes as shown by data collected from the National Youth Transitional Database (NYTD).

The equation that expresses the null hypothesis for this research can be presented as follows: $H_0: \beta_1\chi_1 + \beta_2\chi_2 + \beta_3\chi_3 = 0$. According to this equation, the null hypothesis posits that in the population, the odds of the independent variables increasing the likelihood of the dependent variable, incarceration for African American males within 3 years after aging out of a foster care group home, is zero. Connection to adults, educational attainment, homelessness, and incarceration are represented in the equation below. The equation for the alternate hypothesis can be presented as $H_a: \beta_1\chi_1 + \beta_2\chi_2 + \beta_3\chi_3 \neq 0$, which shows that the population, the odds of the independent variables increasing the likelihood of the dependent variable, incarceration for African American males within 3 years after aging out of foster care, does not equal zero.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

Bridges' transition model (BTM) served as the theoretical foundation for this study. Bridges (2002) created the BTM. The model focuses on *transition* rather than *change*. According to the principles of the BTM, change is an external process, whereas transition is an internal process that happens in people's minds as they go through change. Thus, transition is a slow process, whereas change happens at a quicker pace.

BTM includes three transition stages: the past or end zone, the neutral zone, and the future zone (Bridges, 2002). In the first stage, which is the *past* or *end zone*, people are not ready for change. During this phase, people may display resistance against change that causes them to make a transition (Bridges, 2002). During the second stage, the *neutral zone*, individuals may experience a feeling of being disorganized during the transition. In the third and final stage, which discusses the stage of acceptance of the transition, individuals become open to experience a new beginning (Bridges, 2002).

Transition is a slow and gradual process, which leaves room for errors. However, for many youths aging out of foster care, the process happens quickly. They are thrust into adulthood unprepared and without guidance to maneuver through change (Katz & Courtney, 2015). In discussing independent living skills for youth aging out of foster care, Katz and Courtney (2015) argued that the foster care system neglects to prepare youth before they age out. According to Blakeslee (2015), the foster care system does not offer multidimensional resources and long-term support to prepare youth to make the transition after aging out of foster care. For these reasons, many youth ages out of foster care unprepared and without support for independent living. These youths are not ready to make the change from foster care to independent living (Bridges, 2002). Consequently, youth experience homelessness, and many become incarcerated as they engage in criminal activities to survive. The principles of the BTM were used to explain how lack of connections to adults, inadequate education, and homelessness are related to the incarceration of young African American males who age out of foster care group homes.

Nature of the Study

This study used a quantitative, nonexperimental research design because the primary purpose of this correlational study was to assess the predictive relationship between the independent variables of connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness and the dependent variable of likelihood of incarceration for African American males within 3 years after aging out of foster care group homes. Unlike researchers conducting qualitative studies to understand individuals' experiences, quantitative researchers investigate facts and causes to explain a phenomenon (Figgory & Palopoulos, 2015; Geluso, 2015). Using the quantitative research method was appropriate for this study because it allowed me to quantitatively measure and assess the relationships between the three independent variables and the dependent variable. Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software was used to analyze the data (Maric, Haan, Hogendoorn, Wolters, & Huizenga, 2015; Weaver & Wuensch, 2013).

I conducted a secondary data analysis of archival data from an existing publicly accessible database, the National Youth Transitional Database (NYTD). Data from the NYTD were used to test the null hypotheses for the research question. Binomial logistic regression was used to calculate the likelihood of incarceration for African American males within 3 years after aging out of foster care group homes based on three predictor variables: connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness.

Definitions

Definitions provided for terms used in this study are presented below.

Aging out: Occurs at the age at which the government no longer carries the responsibility of caring for individuals in foster care. The court has no more authority over foster youth once they turn 18 (Getz, 2012).

Connections to adults: Connections to adults whom a youth feels close to, who can offer advice and guidance when the youth must make decisions or solve a problem, or who provide the youth with companionship in addition to celebrating personal achievements (Fowler, Marcal, Zhang, Day, & Landseverk, 2017).

Foster care: The U.S. Federal Government (2004) definition of foster care involves children being placed in temporary homes away from their parents due to abuse. With foster care, the government becomes responsible for a state agency offering care and ensuring the safety of the child.

Educational attainment: Refers to youth having a high school or general equivalent degree (GED), associate degree (e.g., AA), bachelor's degree (e.g., BA), or higher degree (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect in collaboration with Administration for Children Services, 2014)

Homelessness: Housing instability, temporary housing, or couch surfing after youth aging out of foster care (Bender et al., 2015).

Incarceration: Experienced by youth who have been arrested, convicted of a crime, and then confined in jail, prison, or a community detention facility (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2014).

Independent living skills: Life-skills training given by case managers to youth preparing to age out of foster care in order to equip them to live independently (e.g.,

training in skills related to budgeting, medical and mental health care appointments, cooking; Berzin, Singer, & Hokanson, 2014).

Assumptions

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) maintained that without assumptions, research problems could not exist, and different types of studies are predicated upon different types of assumptions. There are four expectations associated with a survey: participants' comprehension of the questions, participants' retrieval of information from long-term memory, participants deciding on how they will respond to the questions by providing information needed to answer them, and participants responding to the questions (Collins, 2003; Schaeffer & Dykema, 2015). I had to assume that these conditions were met when participants completed the survey. Further, I had to assume that participants answered questions honestly. Moreover, I had to assume that participants understood that they could withdraw from the study at any time with no ramifications. Another assumption was that participants understood the questions that were asked in the survey.

Furthermore, for archival studies, it is essential for the secondary data analysis to be correct, reliable, precise, unbiased, valid, and appropriate (Tasic & Feurh, 2012). Data must reflect what is being studied. Reliability refers to measuring the same variable at various times and getting the same results (Creswell, 2013; Tasic & Feurh, 2012). Henceforth, I had to assume that the archival data from the NYTD for outcomes of youth aging out of foster care were accurate and had reliable information regarding African American males who aged out of foster care group homes. Tasic and Feurh (2012) noted that validity includes but is not limited to ensuring that proper procedures are followed as

data are collected, organized, and analyzed. I assumed that proper procedures were followed during the data collection process for the NYTD. Therefore, I had to assume that other researchers would be able to replicate the details of this study. I had to assume that the results of this study would be generalizable to the entire population of African American males who have aged out of foster care.

Scope and Delimitations

Researchers have suggested that youth aging out of foster care group homes experience negative outcomes when transitioning to independent living. Miller et al. (2014) contended that lack of adult support, poor educational attainment, and homelessness are more likely to lead to involvement with the criminal justice system and incarceration than having a high school diploma, supportive relationship, and stable housing. Hence, the focus of this study was addressing the predictive relationship between the independent variables—connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness—and the dependent variable—incarceration for youth aging out of foster group homes. Therefore, the scope of the study encompassed African American males aged 18-21 years who had aged out of group foster homes in New York State. Existing research has focused on youth aging out of foster care but has failed to explore the impact of aging out of foster group homes for African American males. Previous researchers have overlooked challenges associated with African American male outcomes after transitioning out of foster care group homes (Bryant, 2013; Farrow et al., 2011; Hargett, 2013; James, 2013, McIntosh, 2011; Stevenson, 2013). Miller et al. revealed that African American men who age out of foster-care group homes without reunification with family

or preparation for adulthood must also deal with structural racism. Hence, the scope of this study was limited to African American males.

Limitations

One potential limitation of this research was the reliance on self-reported data, which may include specific biases such as exaggeration. Self-reported data are also limited because they cannot be verified. In other words, people may say anything in focus groups, interviews, or questionnaires (Ponto, 2015). Participants' responses must be taken at face value. All data contained in NYTD were collected through self-reported questionnaires. Questionnaires are efficient tools for gathering information from a large sample of individuals (Chen & Philips, 2014; Jackson, Connolly, Garrison, Levin, & Connolly, 2015; Ponto, 2015). However, questionnaires may present a threat to construct validity because participants may not interpret questions similarly. Some respondents may have interpreted questions about connections to adults, educational attainment, homelessness, and incarceration differently from others, and participants may not have responded in the same manner. Such variations may have affected the results.

Additionally, data were collected using a nonprobability sampling method. This type of sampling strategy limits the ability to make a statistical inference from the sample population. The justification for using a nonprobability sampling strategy for this study because I was able to select participants for my study from the NYTD of youth aging out of foster care based on certain information.

Significance

This study was unique because it addressed an under researched area: how connections to adults, highest educational level, and homelessness affect the likelihood of criminal involvement for African American males after aging out of foster care group homes. Results from this study could provide information that could be used to emphasize the need for foster care agencies to develop strategies that will equip child welfare practitioners to deliver meaningful transitional services to adolescents aging out of care. The results could also be used to highlight the need for increased accountability among foster care agencies and organizations that oversee group homes to ensure that African American males receive educational guidance, life skills, and money management skills before transitioning out of group homes. Findings could also show the need for support services that focus on deterring emancipated youth from involvement in criminal activities. Results from this research study may provide evidence of the need to develop transitional housing to provide emancipated youth with shelter and support until they can become fully self-sustaining through steady employment.

Summary

The study investigated African American males aging out of foster care group homes unprepared for independent living. When youth in foster care reach the age of 18, they age out of foster-care group homes and the foster care system and enter independent living (Courtney et al., 2009; Fowler et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2014). The loss of dependency for many youths aging out of foster care group homes could have a negative

impact on them as they transition into adulthood (Katz & Courtney, 2015; Lee & Berrick, 2014; Miller et al., 2014).

This study used a quantitative research design. Secondary data were gathered from the New York State National Youth Transitional Database. For analysis, a binomial logistic regression was conducted to assess how well connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness predict incarceration for African American males aging out of foster group care homes.

Chapter 2 of this study contains an in-depth review of literature that is relevant to and forms the foundation for the current study. It provides a justification for the inclusion of the chosen variables in the study. Chapter 3 contains a description of the method used to collect and analyze the data in this study. In addition, Chapter 4 reveal the results and Chapter 5 includes discusses the findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Because they are unprepared, African American males encounter difficulties transitioning from foster care to independent living after aging out of the foster-care system (Bryant, 2013; Henzel, Mayfield, Soriano, Marshall, & Felver, 2016; O'Hanlon, Sherretz, & Wessel, 2012). This research investigated the likelihood of incarceration for African American males by exploring predictive relationships between connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness after aging out of foster care. The process of transitioning to adulthood from foster care group homes can lead to poor outcomes for African American male youth leaving foster care (Katz & Courtney, 2015; Krinsky, 2010; Pecora, 2012). During this stage of transitioning, African American males may experience unfavorable outcomes such as incarceration due to gang activities, job loss due to low educational attainment, homelessness because of lack of stable housing, and lack of stable relationships due to the loss of adult support (Miller et al., 2014). Okypch (2015) indicated that African American males aging out of the foster care system are more likely to have low educational attainment and are at a higher risk of being involved in the criminal justice system. Consequently, these youths are also more likely to become involved with the criminal justice system (Mastin et al., 2013; Miller et al., 2014; Pettit, 2012).

This chapter contains an in-depth literature review that addresses the literature search strategy, the theoretical foundation of foster care legislation, literature on post-foster-care transition planning, and literature related to each independent and dependent

variable. The chapter concludes with a summary of the current literature and a discussion of the importance of African American males effectively aging out of foster care.

Literature Search Strategy

I searched numerous databases through Walden University to obtain scholarly articles. Those databases included Science Direct, Google Scholar, Academic Search Complete, ERIC, ProQuest Criminal Justice, PSYCINFO, SOCINDEX, and Education Research Complete. The keywords or phrases used for this searched included *youth aging out of foster care*, *African American males aging out of foster care*, *youth aging out of foster care and family support*, *youth aging out of foster care and educational attainment*, *youth aging out of foster care and homelessness*, *youth aging out of foster care and incarceration*, *African American aging out of foster care group home and family connection to adults*, *African American aging out of foster care group home and education*, *African Americans aging out of foster care and homelessness*, and *African American aging out of foster care and incarceration*.

It was necessary to conduct more searches on child welfare policies pertaining to youth aging out of foster care group homes related to African American males aging out of group foster homes because they were not in the literature for aging out of foster care. The three independent variables that were found based on the literature review were as follows: connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness.

Theoretical Foundation

In the Bridges transitional model (BTM), the feelings that people go through during change are highlighted. The BTM served as the theoretical framework for this

study. Bridges (2002) formulated the BTM to provide a framework for explaining the processes of transition or change that people go through in their lives. The BTM applies to African American males aging out of foster care group homes unprepared for independent living. The model includes three transitional stages: the past or end zone, the neutral zone, and the future zone (Bridges, 2002).

End Zone Transition

In the first stage, the *ending zone*, people may not be ready for change. Often, individuals in this stage display resistance to change that is causing them to undergo transition (Bridges, 2002). Bridges (2002) addressed the initial requirements for a successful transition from foster care to independent living for foster youths. During the end zone transition, foster youth must let go of familiar routines and ways of doing things (Bridges, 2002; Dinsman, Zeira, Suliman-Aiden, & Benbenishty, 2013; Havelick, Bilaver, & Beldon, 2016). Some scholars have focused on the ways in which youth aging out of foster care internalize the loss of that care (Berzin et al., 2013; Syuliman-Aiden, 2014). During the end zone transition, youth may feel fear, anger, and frustration at having to make the transition to adulthood. Youth may feel a sense of loss, and they may struggle to learn new routines (Brown, Courtney, & McMillen, 2015; Heiger, 2012; Valdez Lin & Parker, 2015). Without adequate preparation or ongoing support to make the transition, some youth may engage in behaviors that lead to their involvement with the criminal justice system.

Neutral Zone Stage of Transition

The second stage, the *neutral zone*, relates to the feeling of being disorganized and ambiguous in the process of change (Bridges, 2002). The psychological steps of midway transitioning are the neutral zone phase. In this stage, individuals may have a feeling of being disorganized in their thinking (Berzin et al., 2013; Dima & Skehill, 2011; Syuliman-Aiden, 2014). This feeling of being disorganized involves internal struggles and experiences that individuals must process for change to happen. Young people aging out of foster care may experience a variety of feelings and behaviors that reflect the internal struggle of living on their own without a safety net (Katz & Courtney, 2015; Refaeli, Behenishty, & Eliel-Gev, 2013).

In addition, adapting to new ways may cause youth to experience frustration during the transition period (Dima & Skehill, 2011; Singer & Hokanson, 2013; Syuliman-Aiden, 2014). Youth in this situation may need to undergo psychological realignment, which means adopting a new mindset about changes that are happening as they transition to a new stage in their lives (Anghel, 2011; Dima & Skehill, 2011; Havlock, Bilaver, & Beldon, 2016). Authors such as Anghel (2011), Dima and Skehill (2011), Havlock et al. (2016), Singer and Hokanson (2013), and Syuliman-Aiden (2014) have noted that young adults aging out of group foster homes may need to adopt a new attitude about changes that are happening as they move into a new stage in their lives.

Individuals aging out of foster care and transitioning to adulthood may become frustrated, fearful, and angry because they are on their own without support (Getz, 2012; Krinsky, 2010; Osgood et al., 2010; Stott, 2013). Youth are more likely to have negative

experiences during this stage in the transition process if they do not have attachments to other influential people (Havlicek et al., 2016; Refaeli et al., 2013). The loss and the uncertainty that await them as they age out of the foster-care system leave them in limbo, caught between leaving their past and embracing a new path while unprepared for change (Getz, 2012; Kasper, 2014; Stott, 2013). The literature on this topic indicates the loss and doubt that young adults experience when aging out of group homes, which can leave them in a place where they feel trapped and unable to move forward.

Future or New Beginning Zone of Transition

The third and final stage is accepting the transition, in which the individual has the potential to experience new beginnings and opportunities (Bridges, 2002). This phase includes accepting and adapting to the change that has led to a transition (Bridges, 2002). In this stage, the individual no longer fights the change but readily embraces it (Havlicek et al., 2016; Kasper, 2014; Nesmith, 2017). The individual has an eagerness to learn and be committed to the change (Getz, 2012; Krinsky, 2010; Stott, 2013). Youth aging out of foster care have no choice but to embrace change because they have reached the legal adult age at which they must support themselves (Brown et al., 2015; Nesmith & Christophersen, 2014; Suliman Aidan, 2015).

In this process of change, youth must learn to adapt to their new roles as adults. This adult role can only be achieved when youth are given the skills and tools to transition successfully from dependency to independent living (Anghel, 2011; Havlicek et al., 2016). As young adults face the challenge of supporting themselves, poor job preparation and limited skills training can place them at a disadvantage in entering the job

market and attempting to meet their basic needs. Each of these influential studies claimed that youth aging out of group foster homes must learn to accept and adapt to their new roles as adults (Angehel, 2011; Havlicek, 2016)

Research Using the Bridges Transition Model

Several studies have been conducted in which the BTM has defined the theoretical orientation. Dima and Skehill (2011) conducted a mixed-method study using the BTM to address the complexity of the transition process for youth aging out of foster care in Romania. Dima and Skehill noted the following themes associated with transitioning from foster care: feelings of loss, not being connected, anxiety, confusion, feeling scared, resentment, and lack of preparation for the social transition. In a 2011 study, Anghel argued that adolescents aging out of foster care must view leaving the system as an end to care. She went on to say that when youth are undergoing this transition, they are experiencing an internal transition that involves fear, anxiety, and loss because they are no longer being cared for by others.

In a quantitative study, Van Ryzin et al. (2011) sought to explore and assess how youth internalize and externalize aging out of foster care based on the BTM framework. The sample for this study included male ($n = 285$), female ($n = 277$), and transgender ($n = 1$) individuals recruited from various participating foster care agencies. These foster care agencies employed the BTM in their efforts to help youth age out of the system successfully. Data were collected using the Youth Experience of Transition (YET) survey questionnaire. The survey included a variety of questions focused on how youth felt and thought about aging out of foster care. A Likert scale was used to measure 13 items based

on a 5-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The data provided convincing evidence that when youth reflect on the change, they may be able to better handle aging out of foster care without having strong internalizing symptoms such as anxiety and depression, which the BTM refers to as the letting-go stage.

Additionally, research carried out by Walters et al. (2011) addressed aging out of foster care through a philosophical lens. Walters et al. argued that aging out of foster care is a process that is emotional, psychological, and physical for young adults preparing for independent living. Walters et al. found that employing the BTM in the planning stage for youth aging out of foster care could improve outcomes. This theoretical framework can help practitioners and policymakers understand the internal and external struggles facing young adults as they prepare to age out of foster care. The BTM helps young adults and child welfare practitioners to understand and explore their emotional and psychological states in the transition process. Moreover, it provides opportunities to identify effective strategies for successful transition. Using the BTM can help young adults make the most of the change process as they internalize and externalize their transition out of foster care.

Van Breda (2014) supported the notion that the BTM could have a positive outcome for young adults aging out of foster care and transitioning to independent living. Van Breda conducted a study using a qualitative research design employing a grounded theory approach. Unlike other researchers who focused on foster youths' internal emotions and psychological processes, Van Breda sought to examine their behaviors and social interactions after aging out of foster care. The target population ($n = 74$) was restricted to males and females who aged out of Girls and Boys Town in South Africa.

Eligible subjects were between the ages of 19 and 23 years. Participants in this study were selected based on availability. The sample consisted of nine males.

Data in Van Breda's (2014) study were collected by means of unstructured interviews, which were digitally recorded and transcribed. Interviews were focused on positive and negative challenges encountered by young adults after aging out of foster care. Participants could share their experiences. The results yielded emerging themes focused on belonging, self-determination, building self-confidence, and connection to others. The data analysis in this study provided evidence in support of the BTM, which addresses the end of care, the in-between stages, and new beginnings for youth aging out of foster care. Van Breda argued that if child welfare practitioners and policy makers employ components of the BTM prior to youth aging out of foster care, they can help youth achieve better outcomes in the transition to independent living.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or the Concepts

The literature review in this section reflects current issues involving youth aging out of foster care group homes. In the first part of this chapter, an overview of the literature on youth aging out of foster care was provided. The second section includes a discussion of research related to this study's three IVs (connection to adults, education attainment, and homelessness) and DV (incarceration). In the third section, the social implications of this study are discussed in terms of influencing changes in policy and practice by implementing the transitional planning concept for African American males aging out of group foster homes. This chapter concludes with an overview and an introduction to Chapter 3.

Aging Out of Foster Care

Aging out is a term used to describe youth in the foster care system who have reached the age of 18 and are no longer served by the system (Hirst, 2014; Lee & Berrick, 2014; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). These children have not been adopted or reunited with their birth families before the age of 18 years and are no longer eligible for services because they now meet the legal criteria for adulthood (Children's Rights, 2014; Greenberg, n.d.; Kelly, 2015; Youth.gov, 2010). The process of aging out occurs when the family court ends its authority over youth in foster care (Greenberg, n.d.; Krinsky, 2010; Mandellbaum, 2010.).

There are two key concepts associated with aging out. Under the first concept, the state is no longer responsible for providing services to an individual through the child welfare system (Getz, 2012; Krinsky, 2010; Mandellbaum, 2010; Stott, 2013). The second concept associated with aging out is that individuals become responsible for providing for their well-being (Getz, 2012; Krinsky, 2010; Stott, 2013). For this study, *aging out* was defined as an experience undergone by young people who have reached the age of 18. In addition, the aging-out experience applies to those who have not been adopted or reunited with their biological parents and who no longer receive provisions for shelter, clothes, and food from the state government. In 2014, 22,395 young people aged out of the foster-care system in the United States (National Kids Count, 2016).

Legislation on Services to Help Youth in the Transition Out of Foster Care

Several legislative acts have been passed that provide services and support for youth preparing to age out of foster care and young adults who transition to adulthood in

the United States. Among the major pieces of legislation in this area are the John F. Chaffee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, The Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendment of 2001, and the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act of 2008. Details regarding elements of those acts that pertain to the variables being investigated in this study are presented in the paragraphs that follow.

John F. Chaffee Foster Care Independence Act (1999). In December 1999, President Clinton signed into law the John F. Chaffee Foster Care Independence Act. A major provision of this act established the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP; Children's Bureau, 2012; Katz & Courtney, 2015; Okypch, 2015; Stott, 2013). This law, also known as the Chafee Act, provided a framework for reforming the system to meet the needs of youth preparing to age out of foster care and young adults who had already transitioned to independent living. Additionally, the Chafee Act broadened the scope of independent-living support by expanding services to include young people until the age of 21.

Moreover, the Chafee Act expanded the provisions for Independent Living Programs (ILP) by increasing funding for transitional services as given under the Title IV-E Independent Living Program of the Social Security Act (Katz & Courtney, 2015; Okypch, 2015; Stott, 2013). The CFCIP federal allotment to states doubled from \$70 million per year to \$140 million (Stott, 2013). With this increase in funding, states could use 30% of independent living funds to give room and board to young people aged 18 to 20 years who transitioned to independent living (Stott, 2013). Other key components of

the Chafee Act included extended Medicaid coverage to youth until the age of 21 (Katz & Courtney, 2015; Okypc, 2015; Stott, 2013).

Additionally, the CFIC required states to begin checking the outcomes for youth aging out of foster care and to report the results to the Secretary of Health and Human Services. However, states were not required to report data until 2011 because the final rules for reporting data for the NYTD were not published until 2008 (Katz & Courtney, 2015; Okypch, 2015; Stott, 2013). The NYTD was created because of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act (1999). Chafee Act required-the United States Department of Health and Human Service collect two types of datasets on youth preparing to age out of foster care (a) information about services provided and (b) outcome data that would measure outcomes for the transitions programs, such as youth educational attainment, employment, homelessness, incarceration, childbirth, and high-risk behaviors. These two datasets make up the NYTD.

Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendment. The Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendment (2001) was signed into law by President Bush. This new law created a new state grant program to provide educational and training vouchers for youth who age out of foster care. The Educational Training Voucher Program (ETV) provided \$60 million dollars in additional funding for states to provide vocational training and postsecondary education for youth 18 and older who aged out of foster care (Stott, 2013). Under the ETV program, youth could receive up to \$5,000 a year, as well as remain eligible for services until the age of 23, providing they enroll in the program at the age of 21 (Stott, 2013).

However, the ETV is not granted until a youth has exhausted other resources such as Pell Major Provision Grants (Stott, 2013). Consequently, the ETVs may not be used as intended. Scholars have documented youth who age out of foster care do so without having a high school diploma or a general equivalence diploma (GED; Research Highlights on Educating and Foster Care, 2014; Salazar, Roe, Ullrich, & Haggerty, 2016). The young people who age out of foster with low educational attainment are not able to take advantage of this program (Burley, 2015; Miller et al., 2014; Stott, 2013). Further analysis of the author's claims about the ETV services, suggests that young adults are not able to take part in this program unless they are still in high school, college, or in a training program.

Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act of 2008. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act of 2008 was created to enhance the lives of youth preparing to age out of foster care. Furthermore, this act was to prevent children from lingering in the child welfare system (Garwood & Williams, 2015 ; Salazar et al. 2016; U.S Department of Health and Human Services, n.d). The part of this act that is relevant to this study is the Fostering Connections to Success (FCS). The FCS allow states to permit youth who aged out of foster care at 18 to be readmitted for foster care and transitional services until age 21. Additionally, guidelines of the FCS allowed youth in foster care to remain in care as long as they are enrolled in school. The youth could also remain in care if they worked at least 80 hours per month or if they are enrolled in a training program (Garwood & Williams, 2015; Nesmith & Christophersen, 2014).

The FCS gives practitioners in the field of child welfare a concrete period plus structure for developing a transitional plan for youth preparing to age out of foster care (Garwood & Williams, 2015; Havlicek & Peters, 2014). Nesmith and Christophersen (2014) pointed out that a transitional plan must be in place for every youth preparing to age out of foster care 90 days before their 18 birthdays. The Fostering Connection Act requires specific elements that should be included in the transitional plan such as housing, education, employment, mentoring and continued support services (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013; Nesmith & Christophersen, 2014).

According to Katz and Courtney (2015) and Stott (2013), extending services and support to youth beyond age 18 would help young adults to transition smoothly and successfully into adulthood. Unfortunately, many youths who are eligible to remain in care past 18 opt to age out of care at the age of 18 and do not take advantage of the services available to them (Havlicek & Peters, 2014). Hence, many youth aging out of foster care do not meet the criteria for remaining in foster care because they drop out of school (Garwood & Williams, 2015; Katz & Courtney, 2015; Nesmith & Christopher, 2014). By criteria, authors are referring to youth being enrolled in college, a training, and employment program, or being underemployed.

Negative Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

Several researchers have revealed that youth who age out of foster care unprepared for independent living are at risk for negative outcomes (Dworsky et al., 2013; Havlicek et al., 2016; Sewart, Kum, Barth & Duncan, 2014). Researchers have

found that youth who linger in foster care until they age out tend to lack positive supporting relationships with a parent or an adult (Dworsky et al., 2013; Graham et al., 2015; Havlieck et al., 2016; Katz & Courtney, 2015). They are also more likely to have substance abuse problems (Hook & Courtney, 2010; Miller et al., 2014; Okypch, 2015). Youth who linger in foster care group homes until they age out are also more than likely to have health care needs (Miller et al., 2014; Osgood et al., 2010; Schaeffer & Dykema, 2015), may have mental health issues (Mastin et al., 2013; Tasic & Feurh, 2012), and are at a greater risk of suicide and risky sexual behaviors (Katz & Courtney, 2015; Miller et al., 2014; Pryce, Napolitano & Samuels, 2017; Stott, 2013).

Authors have also suggested young adults have emotional and mental health issues that are not addressed after aging out of foster care (Miller et al., 2014; Scaeffler & Dykema, 2015). Youth aging out of foster care typically experience confusion, anxiety, and fear about aging out (Bridges, 1991; Mastin et al., 2013; Tasic & Feurh, 2012). They may not be mentally, emotionally, or physically ready to be the sole providers of their needs as they transition into adulthood (Cunningham & Diversi, 2012; Goodkind et al., 2011; Mares, 2010).

Cunningham and Diversi (2012) conducted a qualitative study using an epistemological approach to engage youth ages 15 to 21 to share their views on the process of aging out of foster care. Semi-structured interviews consisted of questions that covered topics such as placement history, development, stressors, and emancipation/aging out. Findings indicated that youth expressed anxiety and fear of

aging out which was related to the loss of social support, the pressure of becoming self-sufficient, housing instability, and economic challenges. Unfortunately, the federal government and states expect youth to live independent lives after they age out of foster care without the support and basic skills (Goodkind et al., 2011; Mares, 2010; Miller et al. 2014; Schaeffer & Dykema, 2015). Dworsky, Napolitano and Courtney (2013) estimated that the 25,000 to 30,000 youth who age out of care yearly are at the greatest risk for negative outcomes in the areas of lack of connections to others, unstable housing, low educational attainment, and incarceration.

Lack of connections to adults. Child development experts have acknowledged that a key factor to children growing up as healthy, functioning, and productive members of society lies in having a permanent home and family (Herman, 2012; Mastin et al., 2013; Williams-Mbengue, 2008). Families that provide a stable nurturing environment, as well as a network of support, contribute to the well-being of a child (Zlotnick et al., 2012). Such a network of support increases children's confidence, builds their self-esteem, and helps them to be well-adjusted adults later in life (Okpych, 2015; Zlotnick et al., 2012; Youngblade et al., 2007). The lack of supportive or personal connections may damage the adolescents' development (Courtney et al., 2011; Jones & Laliberte, 2013; Okpych, 2015; Stott, 2013).

Perry (2006) found that disruptions in a child's support network could lead to distress and affect their psychological well-being. Unfortunately, without any adult connections, the emotional development of young people may be more than likely hinder them from setting up a solid relationship (Blakeslee, 2011; Okpych, 2015;

Osgood et al., 2005; Stott, 2013). When the feeling of not belonging occurs, often the results are detrimental to a person's well-being (Herman, 2012). Close connections and support from family or other adults help youth to build their confidence during their transition to adulthood (Mastin et al., 2013; Yampolskya, Sharrock, Armstrong, Strozier, & Swanke, 2014).

Many youth age out foster care without having a relationship with their families or having any other adult connections to help them transition to adulthood (Jones, 2013; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016; Tadriss & Russell, 2015). Jones (2013) argued that even though group homes provide a safe environment they may not necessarily help youth to form positive relationships or attachments with others. Researchers have revealed that having a connection to adults or family is critical to the well-being of youth aging out of foster care and transition into adulthood (Brown et al., 2015; Gardwood & Williams, 2015; Hieger, 2012). They have also shown that having a relationship with a caring adult may improve outcomes for youth after they age out of care (Jones & Laliberte, 2013; Singer, Berzin & Hokanson, 2013). Young adults are in constant need of encouragement (Collins et al., 2010), consistency in relationships (Goodkind et al., 2011), and long-standing relationships (Kagitablas, 2013).

According to Gardwood and Williams (2013) having a safety net of people for emotional and social support enables foster youths to transition more smoothly into adulthood. Nesmith and Christophersen (2014) conducted a study using the Creating Ongoing Relationship Effectively (CORE) Model to examine and discuss the social and emotional needs of youth preparing to age out of foster care system. This study

consisted of a 3-year evaluation of the CORE model. Participants consisted of 58 participants (treatment group) enrolled in the CORE program and 31 individuals (non-treatment group) who were not involved in the program. Individuals placed in treatment group received services and support to develop a supportive relationship and ongoing interaction with other adults (teachers, coaches, minister, and counselor). While the comparison group did not receive help to establish and sustain supportive relationship after aging out of foster care.

The authors found that 30% of participants from the CORE group identified several connections to adults in different professional roles (teachers, parents of friends, pastors, coaches) from who they could receive support after aging out foster care. Only 17% of individuals in the comparison group named adults who were available to aid them after aging out of foster care group home. They also found that the treatment group participants felt they had a broader variety of adult support after aging out of foster care in comparison to the other group. Participants in the treatment group were more likely to find, develop and keep lasting supportive relationships with other adults because of the support and services provided to them. This information was relevant to my study because findings indicates that young adults are more than likely to develop supportive relationships with adults who plays a different role in their lives such as a teacher or a school counselor.

Youth may depend on their families for support as they emerge into adulthood and self-reliance. Unfortunately, youth who age out of foster care often lack a strong social support network because of disruption in the family (Katz & Courtney, 2015).

There are many reasons for the loss of social support for former foster youth such as being removed from their biological family, multiple placements, loss of community, and friends (Katgiticibasis, 2013). Another loss young people experience after aging out of foster group home is financial and emotional support like their peers who still lives at home with their parents (Nesmith & Christophersen, 2014).

Researchers have shown the key factor to children growing up healthy is to have a supportive family and home (Herman, 2012; Mastin et al., 2013). Zoltnick et al. (2012) argued that family support is essential for a child emotional and psychological development yet Katz and Courtney (2015) noted youth aging out of foster care often leave care without being close to their parents or a caring adult.

Negative Educational Experiences

Education has the potential to improve the lives of young people in foster care. Every year in the United States, more than 25,000 youth age out of foster care (Whitehouse Government, 2014). However, many youths in foster care are failing in school because of adverse educational experiences such as multiple changes in schools, special education placement, and school suspensions, which hinders their academic success (Cunningham, 2013; Osgood et al.; Quest et al., 2012; Weinberg, Oshiro & Shea, 2014).

Foster youth who experience school changes because of multiple placements falls behind academically when compared to their peers (Berger, Cancian, Noyes, & Rios-Salas, 2015). Frerer et al. (2013) showed 75% of children in foster care, changed school multiple times in one school year, in comparison to 40% of children not in foster care.

Such changes may contribute to negative academic outcomes such as low achievement test scores and young people dropping out of school (Barror, Buck, Brien, Pecora, & Ellis, 2015; Berger et al., 2015; Conger & Rebeck, 2001; Frere, Sosenko, Pellegrin, Manchik, & Horowitz 2013).

According to Hill and Koester (2015) special education is designed to meet the need of the child with specific designed instructions. To determine if a foster child need special education, psychologist, social workers and teachers evaluates the student by testing, interviewing and observation (Cox, 2012; Hill & Koester, 2015; Zetlin & Weinberg, 2013). Then, an Individualized Education Program(IEP) is written based on the evaluation (Cox, 2012; Koester, 2015). However, research has shown that 60% of youth in the foster care system receives special education services (Foulk & Esposito, 2016; Hill & Koester, 2015).

In discussing special education, Cox (2013) argues that youth in foster care receives special education services at a higher rate than youth not in foster care. Zetlin and Weinberg (2013) argued that foster youth may be inappropriately placed in special education without being evaluated properly. By inappropriate placement, Zetlin and Weinberg argued that foster youth education progress is not maintained, and school record are not present when they transfer to another school. Also, foster youth may feel frustrated with multiple placement and school changes (Zetlin & Weinberg, 2013). Therefore, school professionals are not evaluating the whole picture of the foster youth life (Zetlin & Weinberg, 2013).

There are numerous reasons why a foster child receives special education service which may include problems with reading, writing and doing math. In fact, Cox (2012) reminds us that not only are youth in foster care placed in special education because of poor academic, but also referred to special education because of emotional, physical and psychological issues stemming from neglect and abuse. Zetlin and Weinberg (2013) recognize the trauma of abuse and the impact it will have on foster youth self-esteem, relationships, and behaviors, which may impair their learning ability. According to Zetlin and Weinberg, 23% of those with emotional behaviors are placed in special education. Another 45% of foster youth with learning disabilities receive special education service (Zetlin & Weinberg, 2013).

Quest et al. (2012) conducted a longitudinal qualitative study which followed seven foster youth ages 15-18 who were in special education classes, for 6 to 9 months. Participants were recruited from a student body of 128 individual enrolled in the Project Success program. Participants were randomly selected from the intervention or control group. The purpose of this study was to examine the participants' perceptions of placement in special education. Data were collected through interviews conducted with participants in various locations such as the youths' home, local libraries, and local parks.

According to Faer and Cohen (2015) foster youth in California were suspended and expelled from school at a higher rate than non-foster care youth. For the year 2012 - 2013, data on foster care students from Sacramento County revealed that 15% of foster youth in that count experience suspension (Faer & Cohen, 2015). Further data showed 43% of youth in foster care attending school in Sacramento County received disciplinary

action at least once in the same year (Faer & Cohen, 2015). Taken altogether, these studies presented here provide evidence that suggests a correlation exist between foster care and educational barriers for children and youth in the child welfare system across America. Results yielded from these studies could be useful to shed light on this phenomenon as well as influence changes in practice in the foster care system. Also, practitioners, educators and policy makers may develop strategies that will help this population to achieve academically

Poor educational outcomes. There has been ample research which has revealed how the negative educational experiences affect educational outcomes such as lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates, for youth in foster care. Frere et al. (2013) conducted a quantitative study using secondary data from administrative records of children in foster care in California to determine whether foster youth had educational deficits when compared to the general population of students. The results revealed that across the grade levels children in foster care scored lower in several areas of the California Standardized Tests (CST) compared to students in the general population. In another quantitative study, Berger et al. (2015) used secondary data to examine the academic achievement of children and youth in foster care who were in 3rd through 8th grades ($n = 222,049$). The researchers also found that foster care children in the 8th grade on average read at the 5th-grade level while their peers read at 8th-grade level or higher (Berger et al., 2015).

According to the National Working Group on Foster care and Education (2014), about half of foster youth earns a high school diploma compared to 70% of youth never

involved in the foster care system. Researchers agreed that youth in foster care are at a higher risk of dropping out of school compared to youth who had never experienced foster care (Foulk & Esposito, 2016; Mastin, et al., 2013). Results from several studies revealed that only 65% of foster youth graduated from high school by age 21 compared to 86% of their peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014; National Youth in Transitional Database, 2016).

Courtney et al. (2011) conducted a longitudinal study to investigate the educational attainment of former youth post-aging out of foster care. Participants were 17 or 18 years of age at the time of the initial data collection ($n = 732$). The researchers discovered through data from follow-up interviews ($n = 603$) that 36% of former foster youth had not attained a high school diploma nor a GED when they aged out of foster care. The researchers re-interviewed some of the same youth 6 years later when they were 23 and 24 years of age, and the data revealed that 24% of participants still had not obtained in a high school diploma or GED. Data from the Trend Data Bank Report (2015) provided further support for the notion that youth aging out of foster care have low educational attainment. During the years covered by the report (2004 to 2014) only 48 % of youth aging out of foster graduated from high school at the age of 18. Only 54% of participants had graduated high from school within 4 years after aging out of foster care. Cumulatively the findings from several studies have revealed that obtaining a high school diploma or GED has been problematic for youth aging out of foster (Cox, 2013; Pettit, 2012).

Education opens the door for better employment opportunities, higher education and is the pathway to escape social and economic disadvantages (Bender et al., 2015; Dworsky, Napolitano, & Courtney, 2013; Foulk & Esposito, 2016). Proponents of education for foster youth have voiced a concern that more needs to be done to ensure youth aging out of foster care obtain their high school or GED diploma (Miller et al., 2014; Villegas, Rosenthal, O'Brien, & Pecora, 2016). However, many youths continue to age out of foster care without finishing high school. For that reason, many former foster youths are not able to find employment to help them sustain in life, and many find themselves homeless within 3 years of aging out of foster care (Barrow et al., 2015; Cox, 2013; Mastin et al., 2013).

Homelessness. Many youths who age out of foster care at age 18 become homeless within the first year after exiting care (Bender et al., 2015; Holtschneider, 2015; Katz & Courtney, 2015). Courtney et al. (2013) conducted a secondary analysis of survey data from the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Function of Former Foster Youth where they investigated homelessness among youth age 17 and 18 who had aged out of foster care. There was follow-up contact with the same group of participants during 2010-2011 when the participants were age 26. The data were collected in three states: Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin. The author revealed that there was a high rate of homelessness (37%) experienced by this sample of youth post-aging out of foster care.

Dworsky, Napolitano, and Courtney (2013) conducted a secondary analysis using data from the Midwest Evaluation of Former Foster (n=732) from Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 21 years. The purpose of the study

was to investigate homeless outcomes for youth who had aged out of foster care. Findings revealed 31% to 46% of those who had taken part in the study shown they experienced being homeless before turning 26 (Dworsky et al., 2013).

Researchers have appeared to support the notion that youth experience being homeless post aging out of foster care group homes. Every year since 1991, a statewide study is done on the homeless population in Minnesota. Data reported in 2012 showed that 20% of youth who aged out of foster care group homes were homeless at the time of the study in Minnesota (Wilder Research Institute, 2013). Subsequently, a government report on housing revealed that 37% of foster youth became homeless post aging out of foster care group homes in the United States (U.S Department of Housing, 2014). There is ample evidence to support the argument that homelessness is a widespread problem for youth preparing to age out of foster care (Barrow, et al., 2015; Heiger, 2012; Mastin et al., 2013).

Incarceration. Youth aging out of the foster-care must also determine how to become responsible and self-sufficient after aging out of the system (Stott, 2013; Yates & Grey, 2012). The foster care system stops providing them with the necessities of life and the youth are faced with meeting their basic needs on their own (Katz & Courtney, 2015; Yampolskya, Sharrock, Armstrong, Strozier, & Swanke, 2014; Yates & Grey, 2012). Many youths may find themselves engaging in criminal activities to get the resources needed to meet their basic needs (Lee et al., 2014; McMahon & Fields, 2014; Stott, 2011). Data from several studies and information in official government reports have documented rates of criminal involvement and incarceration of foster youth after they

transition into adulthood (Barn & Tan, 2012; Cusick et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2014; McMahon & Fields, 2014). Data from past studies have revealed that up to 50% of emancipated youth reported that they were involved in the criminal justice system, specifically incarceration, as they transitioned into independent living (Cusick et al., 2012; Huang, Ryan, & Rhoden, 2016)

McCarthy and Gladstone (2011) conducted a quantitative, descriptive survey of 2,564 male inmates in California 33 prisons to investigate how many inmates had been involved in the foster care system, what type of placement in foster care, age at which they left foster care, and how long after aging out did they became involved in the criminal justice system. Results from the study revealed 14% of the inmates reported having been in foster care, and 52% of the inmates reported having lived in a group home setting during foster placement (McCarthy & Gladstone, 2011). Approximately 21% of participants reported leaving foster between the ages of 18-19. Roughly 19% of inmates reported that they were incarcerated within 2 years after leaving foster care, 22% of inmates revealed it was between 2-5 years after exiting the child welfare system they went to prison. The largest number of 55% of respondents said they were incarcerated more than 5 years after leaving foster care.

Courtney et al. (2014) conducted a quantitative study with a sample ($n = 727$) to find the prevalence of criminal involvement among foster youth who were aging out of the foster-care system. Results from survey questions revealed that 39.2% of participants had been in foster care. About 21.3% of participants reported that they had been previously convicted of a crime, and 25% of the respondents indicated that they had been

in jail, prison, correctional facility, or a community detention facility. Cumulatively the findings from several studies have shown a relationship between aging out of foster care and criminal involvement of former foster youth (Courtney, 2014; Lee et al., 2014; McCarthy, Gladstone (2011, McMahon, & Fields, 2014; Stott, 2011).

In addition, the rate for African American males age 18-24 to be incarcerated on a national level is 3,148 per 100,000 that is six time greater than their White counterparts same age at 463 per 100,000 (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistic, 2014). Clearly this revealed that African American males aging out of foster care are at a high risk for engaging in criminal activities, which leads to incarceration. Furthermore, percentages showed that a problem exists across America between aging out of foster care and incarceration for African American males. It also revealed that new services need to be developed that could help prevent potential interaction with the criminal justice system for young adults aging out of foster care.

Outcomes for Black males aging out of foster care. Researchers have focused on results for the general population of youth aging out of foster care (Blakeslee, 2015; Cunningham & Diversi, 2013; Graham, Schellinger, & Vaughn, 2015). However, there is a growing concern about African American males aging out of foster care and the long -term outcomes that they face (Allen, 2014; Miller et al., 2014; Najdowski, Bottoms, & Goff, 2015). African American males are more likely to age out of foster care without reunification or adoption than their white counterparts. which means they grow up in the system and then transition as an adult to independent living (Lee et al., 2014; Miller et al., 2014). Upon exiting the foster care system,

African American males are more likely to be unemployed and lack stable housing than males in another ethnic groups (Knott & Donovan, 2010; Miller, 2015; Scott, McMillen & Snowden, 2015). They are also more likely to age out of foster care group home without a high school diploma or GED (Clemens, Lalonde & Sheesley, 2016; Okpych, 2015) and to have mental health and emotional issues (Brown, Courtney & McMillen, 2015).

African American males may also deal with negative social and contextual stressors of black males as they age out of foster care group homes (Butler, 2011; Miller et al., 2014; Scott & McCoy, 2015; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Scott and McCoy (2015) found some of the following events as being negative social contextual stressors for African American youth: being followed when entering a store; hanging out in the park or playground and being asked by the police what you are doing there. These individuals may also encounter negative expectations and biases of potential employers (Najdowski et al., 2015; Otuyelo, Graham, & Kennedy, 2016; Smiley & Fakunle, 2015) or being racially profiled by police officers (Elon, 2014; Moore et al., 2016). Leaving foster care for African American at age 18 may leave them vulnerable and unprepared for independent living. Without a safety net, they are more likely to become involved with gangs, alcohol and drug addiction, and criminal activities (Braciszewski & Stout, 2012; Raimon, Weber, & Esenstad, 2015; Ryan et al., 2008). Unfortunately, African American males may also become homeless, as well as suffer from mental health issues. Additionally, they may be unemployed, without a high

school or GED diploma and lack a supportive relationship with an adult (Katz & Courtney, 2015; Scott & McCoy, 2015; Valdez et al., 2015)

Researchers at the national level have shown African Americans males in foster care are at a higher risk of dropping out of school any other race (Mastin et al., 2013; National Center for Education Statistics, 2016;). Holzman (2010) showed that graduation rates for African-American males are lower than the rate for their White male's counterpart. According to Holzman (2010), the graduation rate for African-American males in New York in 2009 to 2010 was 37% compared to white males who graduated at a rate of 78%. On the national level, graduation rates for African-American males for the year 2009-2010 were 52% compared to 78% graduation rate for white males (National Center for Education Statistical, 2016). In sum, further analysis continues to show poor educational outcomes for youth preparing to age out of foster care (Cunningham, 2013; Osgood et al., 2010; Quest et al. 2012; Weinberg, Oshiro & Shea, 2014).

Summary

In general, young people aging out of the foster-care system are one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged group in society (Katz & Courtney, 2015; Rutman & Hubbertey, 2016). Researchers have provided empirical evidence which supports the argument that supportive relationships are essential for youth to successfully age out of foster care (Getz, 2012; Graham, Schellinger & Vaughn, 2015; Noltemeyer et al. 2012). Foster youth need guidance, advice, encourage and support as they transition to adulthood. (Courtney, 2015; Thompson, Greeson, & Brunswick, 2015; Valdes, Lin &

Parker, 2015). Close connections with an adult helps foster youth to build self-esteem (Garwood & Williams, 2015; Singer, Berzin, & Hokanson, 2013; Yates & Grey, 2012).

Education is the key to economic and social success and stability within in our society (Kirk & Day, 2011; Lafontaine et al., 2015; Miller, 2015). However, many researchers have showed many youths age out of foster care without completing high school (Barrat & Berliner, 2013, Courtney et al., 2015; Villegas et al., 2013). Another key factor to having low educational attainment is being suspended or expelled from school (Frerer et al., 2013; Mclean & Smith, 2013; Pecora, 2012). According to some researchers, African American have a high rate of dropping out of school in comparison to their white counterparts (Mclean & Smith, 2013; Miller, 2015).

Several researchers have revealed that within the first three months after aging out of foster care, many youths experienced being homeless (Heiger, 2012; Quest et al., 2012; Sulimani-Aiden, 2014). According to Rosenberg and Kim, (2017), 37% of the youth experience being homeless within the first couple of months after aging out of foster care. Then an additional 26% to 50% of foster youth had unstable housing after leaving care (Villegas et al., 2013). Without safe and stable housing, many youths become homeless post aging out.

The BTM model guided this study by explaining, predicting and understanding the relationship between independent variables connection to adults, educational attainment and homelessness and dependent variables, incarceration. This theoretical framework was also tested by the hypothesis and research questions to explain the phenomenon for African American male's post aging out of foster group home

unprepared. This theoretical framework explained human behavior in terms of letting go of the past or what is familiar like so many African American experience males aging out of foster care. BTM described how internal struggles could evolve into positive or negative outcome during the change for African American male's post aging out of foster care.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative, correlational, survey-based study was to explore the predictive relationships among connection to adults, educational attainment, homelessness, and incarceration among African American males within 3 years after aging out of foster group homes. In this chapter, I present the research design and rationale for this study. I also present the methods, data collection procedures, instrumentation, and data analysis procedures for this study. The final sections cover the research questions and hypotheses, threats to validity, and ethical considerations. The chapter ends with a summary and a transition to Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

I used a quantitative, nonexperimental, archival research design using the survey method to conduct this study. The quantitative design was appropriate for this study because quantitative designs use measurement and statistical analysis to examine relationships and differences between variables being investigated in research (Babbie, 2012). The major purpose of this study was to assess how well the independent variables of connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness predict the likelihood of the dependent variable, incarceration, occurring.

Researchers use the quantitative research method when using numeric data to address research questions (McNeil, Frey, & Embrechts, 2015). The analysis of numerical data cannot occur in a qualitative study. Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative methods do not examine relationships between variables through standardized

measures; qualitative methods are used to explore phenomena in depth (Yin, 2009).

Quantitative research is much more useful than qualitative methods when the researcher's objective is to assess the nature of relations between variables (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2009). I used data collected in this study to examine the predictive relationships among connections to adults, educational attainment, homelessness, and incarceration among African American males who aged out of foster care. Therefore, use of the quantitative methodology was appropriate for this study.

According to Salkind (2010), nonexperimental design is appropriate when variables are not manipulated and when participants are not randomly assigned to groups. According to Babbie (2016), nonexperimental research is used in studies where it would be unethical to manipulate the independent variable. Nonexperimental research was suitable for this study because the independent variables would not be manipulated, in that the data existed in archived files.

Survey research is useful for investigating a variety of current issues and concerns in the fields of education and social sciences (Rea & Parker, 2014; Trochim, 2012). Survey research has proven to be an efficient way to collect data from a small sample of participants to represent a larger population (Rea & Parker, 2014; Trochim, 2012). I chose the survey methodology as the data collection strategy for my research because it offers the following advantages: (a) it is easy and cost-effective; (b) survey participants may be more willing to share information than interviewees would be; (c) the personal information of respondents can remain anonymous; (d) less time is needed for data collection; (e) a survey questionnaire can be easily accessed; and (f) a broad range of data

can be collected (Berger, 2015; Fassinger & Morrow, 2013; Fowler, 2014; Rowley, 2014).

According to Cheng and Phillips (2014), researchers can take either a question-driven approach or data-driven approach when using existing/archived data. The question-driven approach is used when the researcher has developed research question(s) or a hypothesis for which there is an existing dataset that contains relevant variables (Cheng & Phillips, 2014). Advantages of using secondary analysis of existing data, according to Cheng and Phillips include the following: (a) such analysis tends to be low cost, (b) real-life data are available to test new statistical models, and (c) data posted online have already been cleaned by professional staff members (and there is detailed documentation for the data collection and data cleaning processes). I therefore concluded that the use of secondary/archived data was appropriate to achieve the goal of my study.

Methodology

Population

The targeted population for this study was African American males who aged out of foster care group homes in New York during the period 2011–2014. According to Dworsky et al. (2013), an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 youth age out of care yearly in the United States. There were 2,501 African American males who aged out of group foster homes in the city of New York during the specific period of interest. Data related to the variables of interest were extracted from an existing database, the NYTD.

Sampling and Sampling Procedure

I selected records from the database for analysis through a nonprobability purposive sampling procedure. According to Robinson (2014) when using nonprobability sampling, researchers use their judgment to select subjects to be included in a study based on their knowledge of the phenomenon. Walker (2012) further described purposive sampling as “a method of sampling where the researcher deliberately chooses who to include in the study based on their ability to provide necessary data” (p. 232). Yang and Banamah (2014) confirmed that in the process of sampling, a group of individuals who represent the targeted population is selected to be a part of a study. I chose purposeful sampling as the sampling procedure because it offered the advantages of greater accessibility, higher speed, and lower cost (Coy, 2008).

My rationale for choosing a nonprobability purposive sample was that I was seeking knowledge about African American males who had aged out of foster care. Only records for African American males who met the eligibility criteria were purposively chosen for this study. I conducted a power analysis to determine the minimum sample size needed to detect true differences in the data if they existed. I used G*power to compute the minimum sample size for achieving adequate power for the data analysis. Assuming the use of binomial logistic regression as the statistical procedure for the data analysis, I used the following input parameters: an alpha or level of significance (α) of 0.05, power of 0.80, and an anticipated odds ratio of 1.3. An odds ratio of 1.3 is normally used in binomial logistic regression analysis to provide valid statistical results (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2009). Based on the input parameters, the computed total

sample size needed was 182 data sets (Appendix B). A statistical power of 0.80 is the minimum power required for a quantitative study. I anticipated that the targeted minimum number of 182 records would be obtained based on the available population number of 2,501 African American males who aged out of group foster homes in New York during 2011–2014. However, my study included ($n = 504$) sample size which was greater than anticipated, but appropriate.

Data Collection

The data for the independent variables of connection to adults, highest educational attainment, and homelessness were obtained from the NYTD. The data were secondary data. Secondary data are data that already exist in historical records, databases, and documents (Elmes, Kantowitz, & Roediger, 2011). Hence, as a researcher, I neither recruited nor interacted with any human subjects. Therefore, procedures for recruitment and participants are not discussed in this study. The data came from secondary analysis.

Initial collection of NYTD data. The State of New York has specific procedures for entering data in records (Rain, 2016). Data for the NYTD were collected via telephone interviews that consisted of several questions. The interviewers recorded the participants' answers directly into the database. Participants also completed online surveys, and the data collected were automatically added to the same database. Finally, caseworkers also provided participants with paper surveys. After participants completed the survey, the case workers entered their responses into the database. According to Rain (2016), all staff who handled the database received rigorous training on techniques designed to optimize accuracy of input by applying data verification techniques. Under

data verification procedures, one staffer entered data, then another staffer re-entered the same information and rechecked the same data, and then a computer system compared the two data entries. Any variation was highlighted, and a supervisor was used to make necessary corrections.

The data that were collected for this study were predicated upon the survey methodology. The data for this study came from the NYTD. Data were extracted for a 3-year period spanning 2010, 2011, and 2012. The data were collected from transitional youth in the 50 states of the United States and Puerto Rico. The survey questions pertained to outcomes for the youth in the areas of housing, incarceration, employment, educational attainment, early pregnancy, and high-risk behaviors. Data for the NYTD were collected in three waves beginning when the youth were age 17 and ending when the youth turned 21. During Wave 1, data were collected from participants twice. First, baseline survey data were collected just before the youths' 17th birthdays. Data collection was conducted within 45 days after the youth turned 17. Wave 2 data collection occurred after the youth reached the age of 19. In the final wave, Wave 3, follow-up data were collected as the youth reached age 21. Officials who collected the information submitted the data to the Children's Bureau in the Office of the Administration for Children and Family National Agency.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

Validity of the NYTD recordkeeping process. Validity of the data collection process is important to address the validity of the data and maintain the integrity of the research (Frankfort-Nachimas et al., 2014). The rationale for maintaining the integrity in

the data is to detect possible errors in the data collection process (Frankfort-Nachimas et al., 2014). The validity of data collected in a study also affects the validity of statistical conclusions drawn from the data analysis. One method for establishing validity of the NYTD data collection process pertained to the training provided for individuals who collected the data for the project. Certified officials from New York State provided intensive training to all staffers who collected the data through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program, which is a leading provider of research education content (S. Rain [NYTD Lead Researcher], personal communication, January 4, 2016). Upon completion of training, staffers receive a CITI certificate (Rain, 2016). NYTD staffers were supervised during data collection to ensure quality control (Rain, 2016).

Reliability of New York NYTD. The notion of reliability in research methods refers to the accuracy, trustworthiness, and reputability of data that were collected (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2014). Reliability of data collected in a study is important because it also affects the accuracy of results and the statistical conclusions drawn from the data analysis. The reliability of data in the NYTD was enhanced by the recordkeeping process. According to Rain (2016), all staffers who handled the database received rigorous training on techniques designed to optimize accurate input. In addition, specific steps were taken to verify accurate input of data. Data verification allowed one staffer to enter data and another staffer to re-enter the same data. A computer system then compared the two sets of data entries. Any variations in data were highlighted, and a supervisor was called upon to reconcile the differences and make proper corrections.

Operationalization of constructs. Dummy codes were created for the independent variables. Table 1 shows the coding for the independent variables and the level of measurement for each variable. The independent variable of highest educational level was coded as an ordinal variable. Connection to adults and homelessness were independent variables, and they were coded on a binary level. Incarceration was the dependent variable and was coded as a binary variable.

Table 1

Coding Schema for Variables

Independent variables	Coding	Level of measurement
Highest educational level	1 2 3	Ordinal
Connections to adults	1 0	Binary
Homelessness	1 0	Binary
<hr/>		
Dependent variable		
Incarceration	1 0	Binary

Note. Higher education level: 1 = high school/GED; 2 = vocational certificate/license; 3 = AS degree or higher. Connection to adults: 1= yes; 0 = no. Homelessness: 1= yes; 0 = no. Incarceration: 1= yes; 0 = no.

Data Analysis Plan

The secondary data from the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) was downloaded and sent to me by a research aide from the NDACAN Project at the Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research at Cornell University.

The aide gathered the information and emailed the data in a secure zip file folder. The data were then imported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 20.0) software program, where the statistical analyses were conducted. As part of the data analysis, I took several steps to prescreen the data. As a first step, I reviewed the data for missing items. Missing data represent a problem, in that this affects the generalizability of findings, decreases the amount of usable data in a data set, and decreases the power associated with a statistical test (Mertler & Vanatta, 2005). Individual record entries with a lot of missing data on the variables of interest were removed from the file.

Research Question

RQ: How well does connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness predict the likelihood of incarceration for African American males within 3 years after aging out of foster care group homes?

Hypotheses

H₀: Connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness are not statistically significant predictors of the likelihood of incarceration for African American males within 3 years after aging out of foster care group homes as indicated by data extracted from the NYTD.

H_a: Connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness are statistically significant predictors of the likelihood of incarceration for African American males within 3 years after aging out of foster care group homes as indicated by data extracted from the NYTD.

Data analysis plan/statistical analysis. For the data analysis, first, descriptive statistics for the study variables were obtained to summarize the data. Additionally, demographic data on gender, age, education, housing, incarceration or involvement with the criminal justice system, and connection to an adult were reported. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe each of the variables. I then used binomial logistic regression to test the null hypothesis. Binomial logistic regression is used when the response variable is categorical (binary or with more than two categories) while the independent or predictor variables are either dichotomous or continuous (Hilbe, 2011). The dependent variable of incarceration was coded as a dichotomous categorical variable with binary codes of 1= yes and 0 = no, thus necessitating binomial logistic regression.

Binomial logistic regression was used to estimate the logit or the possibility of being incarcerated within 3 years of aging out of foster care. The logit is defined as the logarithm of ratio of the probability of presence of the study characteristic (incarceration, coded as 1) to the probability of absence of the characteristic (not incarcerated, coded as 0). If p is the probability that a former foster youth who aged out of a foster care group home in New York is incarcerated, then the logit is defined as $\ln(p/1-p)$. Taking the logit as the dependent variable and connection to adults, highest educational certificate received, and homelessness as the independent variables, a binomial logistic regression model was fitted. Estimates of the model parameters provide the log-odds probability of incarceration.

These coefficients can be easily transformed to their respective odds ratios by taking exponentiation of the log odds (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2013). The odds

were compared, and the significance of the difference in odds was tested using Wald's test. The relationship between the independent and the dependent variables will be stronger the further the odds deviate from one. The coefficient of the odd ratio statistics of $\text{Exp}(B)$ of the significance independent variables was investigated to determine change in the log odds of the probability of incarceration for a one unit increase in the values independent variables (Hilbe, 2011). A level of significance of $p < 0.05$ was used in the regression analysis to determine statistical significance. There was a statistically significant relationship if the p -value is less than or equal to the level of significance value. When using binomial logistic regression, I interpreted the following statistics:

1. Significance of the p -value of the Wald statistics of each independent variable at level of significance of 0.05. This will determine if the independent variables have statistically significant relationships the dependent variable.
2. Investigate the coefficient of the odd ratio statistics of $\text{Exp}(B)$ of the statistically significance independent variables to determine change in the log odds of the dependent variable of incarceration for a one unit increase in the values in the significant independent variables. This determined the odds that the three were incarceration.

Threats to Validity

Threats to validity encompass threats to internal and external validity. The internal validity of a quantitative study refers to "the degree to which observed changes in a dependent variable can be attributed to changes in an independent variable" (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 2013, p. 154). In research studies, the degree to which threats to internal

validity influence the study are determined by the type of design and the degree of control that the researcher has with regard to sampling, data collection, and data analyses (Mertens, 2013; Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 2013).

Internal Validity

Threats to internal validity include history, statistical regression, and mortality (Mertens, 2013; Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 2013). These internal threats to validity are relevant only to experimental studies and other studies that use pretest and posttest data, or longitudinal studies (Mertens, 2013). The history effect, for example, is when a historical event occurs between the first and second data collection; it was not a concern in this study as data were collected at only one time (Mertens, 2013). Statistical regression refers to participants who scored very high or low on a pretest having less extreme scores when they take a posttest, and instrumentation refers to any changes in the survey from pretest to posttest (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 2013).

The threats of history, statistical regression, and mortality are not relevant to this study as pretest and posttest data were not collected (Mertens, 2013; Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 2013). There are, however, threats specific to the internal validity of studies using survey research designs (Mertens, 2013). One threat is selection, which is related to who participates in the study (Mertens, 2013; Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 2013). Participants who volunteer to participate in studies may provide different response than those who do not volunteer (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 2013). It is likely that former foster youth who participated in the original study may differ from the population of former foster youth in general. For example, some participants may have responded to the survey because they

had strong attitudes (positive or negative) about transitioning out of foster care. This study results were only true for former foster youth who aged out of foster care group homes in New York during the 3-year time frame from 2011- 2014. The results of the study will only be generalizable for this specific group within the population.

Other threats to internal validity of quantitative studies using survey research designs are reverse causation and covariates (Mertens, 2013; Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 2013). Reverse causation refers to the inability to know which came first, the independent or dependent variable; that is, the dependent variable may be the independent variable and vice versa (Mertens, 2013; Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 2013). However, as the independent variables pertained to demographic and work characteristics of the participants, reverse causation was likely not an issue in this study. Covariates refer to confounding variables that act as independent variables to influence the dependent variables (Mertens, 2013). This did not have any effect on the study because there were no covariates included in this study.

Participant or respondent bias is potentially a threat in all survey research or self-reported research (Torangeau & Tan, 2007). Participant bias can result from several things such as participants not understanding the instructions or items, social desirability, sensitivity of information requested from items, etc. (Torangeau & Tan, 2008). As a researcher I acknowledged that this source of bias could potentially affect the results. Possible limitation of the generalizability of results was noted in Chapter 5.

External Validity

External validity concerns the degree to which conclusions of a study can be generalized to other categories of people, settings, and times (Salkind, 2010). This study only used secondary data of African American males after aging out of group foster homes. Results from this study, therefore, may not be generalizable to other males aging out of group foster homes. Results furthermore may not be generalizable to all males after aging out of group foster homes.

One of the threats to the validity of the study is nonresponse bias, where the data for some records are not complete since some of the data in the study variables are missing (Berger, Bayarri, & Pericchi, 2013). This would cause a decrease in the sample size. Nonresponse bias is a threat that could affect the generalizability of the data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). As a result, this study sampled a significant number of samples (182) computed from the power analysis. It was ensured that all the data collected for each of the study variables from the database was completed. To be safe, the number of samples collected was greater than the minimum of 182 data sets. Thus, 504 data sets was collected from the database. Also, the research was conducted in a timely fashion in order to obviate any threats to data becoming outdated.

Conclusion Validity

A major threat in quantitative studies is the threat to statistical or conclusion validity. Since a quantitative study was conducted, the primary threat to statistical conclusion validity for the study pertains to statistical conclusion validity. A threat to conclusion validity is a factor that can lead to reaching an incorrect conclusion about a

relationship in the statistical analysis observations (Hoe & Hoare, 2012). There are two kinds of errors about relationships which can be (a) concluding that there is no relationship when in fact there is and (b) concluding that there is a relationship when in fact there is not. Conclusion validity in statistical analysis is ensured by using a good statistical power (80%) and using a reliable measure for each of the study variables (Hoe & Hoare, 2012).

In regression analysis, the degree to which the assumptions of regression are met affects the statistical conclusion validity of the results. To address the notion statistical conclusion validity each of the assumption: level of measurement for dependent variable dependent, coding of dependent variable, independence of error terms, adequacy of sample size, and multicollinearity was tested before conducting the statistical analysis. The assumptions of binomial logistic regression that were relevant to this study are presented below according to Hilbe (2011):

1. Level of measurement for dependent variable. Binary binomial logistic regression requires the dependent variable to be dichotomous. This condition was met in this study as the dependent variable on the likelihood of incarceration only have two response options: yes or no.
2. Coding of dependent variable. Secondly, since binomial logistic regression assumes that $P(Y=1)$ is the probability of the event occurring, it was necessary that the dependent variable was coded accordingly. That is, for a binary regression, the factor level 1 of the dependent variable should represent the

desired outcome. This assumption was met by coding 1 as “yes” likelihood of incarceration and 0 as “no” likelihood of incarceration.

3. Adequacy of sample size. Lastly, a binomial logistic regression requires quite large sample sizes because maximum likelihood estimates are less powerful than ordinary least squares (e.g., simple linear regression, multiple linear regression). Whilst OLS needs 5 cases per independent variable in the analysis, ML needs at least 10 cases per independent variable. Some statisticians recommend at least 30 cases for each parameter to be estimated (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The power analysis indicated that a minimum sample of 182 cases was needed to achieve adequate power for the study.
4. Multicollinearity. Multicollinearity occurs when an explanatory variable within a multivariable regression model can be linearly predicted by another explanatory variable. In other words, when independent variables are highly correlated (Belsley et al., 1980).

Each statistical assumption was tested in Chapter 4. Details of results are from testing the statistical assumptions are presented and discussed in Chapter 4.

Ethical Procedures

The methodology of the study, specifically the data collection procedures, was comprehensively reviewed by members of the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB review was conducted to ensure that the data collection process is acceptable ethically and legally. It is important that ethical guidelines with regards to human subject are followed in research, as well as ethical procedures in data collection

and consent forms. However, no contact was made with participants, and data collection strategy had no affect any participants' mental or physical well-being. Available documentation on the data was read to ensure that the participants in the original study were treated in an ethical matter. Permission was obtained to use and access the NYTD from the before analyzing the data from this study. Consent was given from the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) Project Manager at the Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research, Cornell University to use the NYTD. See a copy of the request to use the NYTD in Appendix A.

All the data gathered in this study were kept on a password-protected computer. This researcher is the only person who could access the data. I was the only individual who had access to the information by providing a username and password. Data obtained from the database was collected and stored for a minimum of 5 years. All data used in this study were deleted and destroyed after the completion of the study. Data stored in hard drive were electronically wiped clean by permanently deleting it in my computer.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided an overview of the research methodology of the study that includes research design, target population, data collection, and instrument and data analysis plan. Also, steps were taken relating to confidentiality and protection of participants as well as data. In Chapter 3, this I explored the likelihood of incarceration for Black males' post-aging out of group homes based on three predictor variables in the area of adult support education attainment, and housing.

This study was a quantitative study using nonexperimental and survey research design which come from existing archived data. The secondary data came from the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN). The data for the independent variables of connection to adults, highest educational attainment, and homelessness and the dependent variable of incarceration was obtained from the NYTD. The targeted population for this study was African American males who aged out of foster care group home during the 2011 calendar year. Binomial logistic regression analysis was conducted to test the null hypothesis for the research question. Research findings and data analysis were presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to assess the predictive relationships between connection to adults, educational attainment, homelessness, and likelihood of incarceration for African American males within 3 years after aging out of foster care group homes. The research question that guided this study is presented below, along with the associated hypotheses.

RQ: How well does connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness predict the likelihood of incarceration for African American males 3 years after aging out of foster care group homes?

Null hypothesis (H_0): Connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness are not statistically significant predictors of the likelihood of incarceration for African American males within 3 years after aging out of foster care group homes as shown by data collected from the National Youth Transitional Database (NYTD).

Alternate hypothesis (H_a): Connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness are statistically significant predictors of the likelihood of incarceration for African American males within 3 years after aging out of foster care group homes as shown by data collected from the National Youth Transitional Database (NYTD).

This chapter presents results from the data analysis. The first part of this chapter addresses the data collection process. The second part of this chapter provides results of the data analysis. The last part of the chapter, the discussion of results, includes an evaluation of the statistical assumptions and the results of the statistical analysis.

Data Collection

NYTD Data Collection Process

Validity of the NYTD recordkeeping process. It is important to ascertain the validity of the data collection process to address the validity of the data and maintain the integrity of the research (Frankfort-Nachimas et al., 2014). The rationale for maintaining the integrity in the data is to detect possible errors in the data collection process (Frankfort-Nachimas et al., 2014). The validity of data collected in a study also affects the validity of statistical conclusions drawn from the data analysis. One method for establishing validity of the NYTD data collection process pertained to the training provided for individuals who collected the data for the project. Certified officials of New York State provided intensive training to all staffers who collected the data through the CITI Program, which is a leading provider of research education content (S. Rain, personal communication, January 4, 2016). Upon completion of training, staffers received a CITI certificate (Rain, 2016). NYTD staffers were supervised during data collection to ensure quality control (Rain, 2016).

Reliability of NYTD. The notion of reliability in research methods refers to the accuracy, trustworthy, and reputability of data that are collected (Frankfort-Nachimas et al., 2014). Reliability of data collected in a study is important because it also affects the accuracy of results and the statistical conclusions drawn from the data analysis. The reliability of data in the NYTD was enhanced by the record keeping process. According to Rain (2016), all staffers who handled the database received rigorous training on techniques designed to optimize accurate input. In addition, specific steps were taken to

verify accurate input of data. Data verification allowed one staffer to enter data and another staffer to re-enter the same data. A computer system then compared the two sets of data entries. Any variations in data were highlighted, after which a supervisor was called upon to reconcile differences and make proper corrections.

Data used in this study were collected from NDACAN maintained at Cornell University in New York. Details regarding the steps that Cornell University took to enhance the reliability and validity of the data were presented in Chapter 3. This section of Chapter 4 outlines the steps I took to collect data for this study, as well as my results.

To gain access to the NYTD through NDACAN, I first gained permission from the administrator of Cornell University. To obtain the data set, I was required to submit my contact information using an online mailing list form. After completing the online mailing form, I signed and faxed a Terms of Use Agreement form for the entire dataset for Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 to a designated research specialist from Cornell University. After receiving an agreement form from NDACAN, the clerk from Cornell University gathered the information and electronically emailed the data file in a secure zip file folder. The data files were in SPSS and Excel spreadsheet formats. In addition, NDACAN provided me with a secure zipped folder and password for the dataset. There were no costs to order the data set. A copy of the Terms of Use Agreement for use of the dataset is presented in Appendix A.

I collected the data necessary for this study on August 31, 2017, from the NYTD data file. On the same day, I coded the original independent and dependent variables to facilitate data analysis in SPSS. There were no discrepancies between the original data

collection plan and the actual data collection. The data file did not contain any personally identifying information; all data were anonymous. Data screening and preparation were conducted in Excel so that the data would be ready for analysis. I imported the data set from an Excel spreadsheet into SPSS for statistical analysis. The variables were enumerated in the columns, and the rows listed the response data from the survey.

Variable coding. Dummy codes were created for the independent variables.

Table 2 shows the coding for the independent variables and the level of measurement for each variable. The independent variable of highest educational level was coded as an ordinal variable. Connection to adults and homelessness were independent variables, and they were coded on a binary level. Incarceration was the dependent variable and was coded as a binary variable.

Table 2

Coding Schema for Variables

Independent variables	Coding	Level of measurement
Highest educational level	1 = High school/GED 2 = Vocational certificate/license 3 = AS degree or higher	Ordinal
Connections to adults	1 = Yes 0 = No	Binary
Homelessness	1 = Yes 0 = No	Binary
Dependent variable		
Incarceration	1 = Yes 0 = No	Binary

Demographics

I ran a frequency count to get descriptive statistics for the demographic data.

Table 3 presents a summary of the results. The sample only included males ($n = 504$). All participants (100%) were African American. The age of all participants was 21 years. Data showed that 84.5% of males in the sample ($n = 426$) had a connection to an adult, while 13.5% ($n = 68$) indicated no connection to an adult. Most participants had a high school diploma/GED (92.3%, $n = 465$); only 6.7% ($n = 34$) had a vocational license/certificate. A small group of individuals (1.0%, $n = 5$) had an associate's or higher degree. A majority of the sample (71.4%, $n = 360$) had no experience of homelessness, compared to 27.5% ($n = 138$) who had been homeless within 3 years of aging out of foster care. Approximately 95.2% ($n = 480$) of the participants reported having been incarcerated, compared to 4.8% ($n = 24$) who had not been incarcerated.

Table 3

Demographic Information on African American Males in the Sample

Demographics	<i>n</i>	Percentage
Connection to adults		
No	68	13.5
Yes	426	84.5
Homelessness		
No	360	71.4
Yes	138	27.4
Educational attainment		
High school/GED	465	92.3
Vocation/license	34	6.7
Degree (AA or higher)	5	1.5
Incarceration		
No	24	4.8
Yes	480	95

For each demographic variable, I compared the number of individuals who had been incarcerated to those who had not been incarcerated. Table 4 presents a summary of results. Among those who had been incarcerated, 94.83% had a connection to an adult, compared to 5.16% of African American males who had not been incarcerated with a connection to an adult. The data further showed that 97.8% of those who had been incarcerated experienced homelessness, compared to 2.17% who had not been incarcerated.

Regarding education, 95.2% of those who had been incarcerated had a high school diploma/GED, compared to 4.73% who had not been incarcerated. Among those

who had been incarcerated, 97.06% had a vocational license/certificate, compared to 2.94% of those who had not been incarcerated. Among those who had been incarcerated, 80% had an associate's or higher degree, compared to 2.0% of those not incarcerated who reported an associate's or higher degree.

Table 4

Demographic Variable Information Crosstabbed With Dependent Variable

Demographic variable	n (%)	Incarceration	
		Yes n (%)	No n (%)
Connection to adults			
No	68(13.8)	66(97.06)	2(2.94)
Yes	426(86.2)	404(94.83)	22(5.16)
Homelessness			
No	360(72.3)	339(94.17)	21(5.83)
Yes	138(27.7)	135(97.8)	3(2.17)
Education			
High school/GED	465(92.3)	443(92.5)	23(4.73)
Vocation/License	34(6.7)	33(97.06)	1(2.94)
Degree (AA or higher)	5(1.0)	4(80.00)	1(20.00)

Predata Screening

Before running the logistic regression, I screened the data for missing items, and I tested the assumptions for logistic regression. First, the data were analyzed for missing data (Chatterjee & Hadi, 2015; Field, 2009; Fox, 2016; Hosmer, Lemeshow, & Sturdivant, 2013; Osborne, 2014). The rationale for identifying any missing data and testing multicollinearity was presented in Chapter 3, which contained a discussion of how these elements can affect data analysis if left unchecked. I checked the assumptions for regression analysis to ensure that the data were appropriate for statistical analysis.

Missing data. I ran a frequency count for each independent variable for missing records. Table 5 presents a summary of the results. I found that data were missing for connection to adults and homelessness due to missing responses. I excluded those cases and rechecked the records from the NYTD for any additional missing cases. There were no missing fields for the independent variables when the logistic regression analysis was conducted.

Table 5

Missing Data for Independent Variables

Variables	<i>n</i>	Percentage
Connection	10	2.0
Homelessness	6	1.2

Testing Statistical Assumptions

The tests for the assumptions of binomial logistic regression that were relevant to this study are presented below (Hilbe, 2011). I also present results from testing for the assumptions.

Level of measurement for dependent variable. This assumption was met in this study because the dependent variable, the likelihood of incarceration within 3 years, only had two response options—*yes* or *no*—therefore meeting the assumption for logistic regression.

Coding of dependent variable. For a binary regression, the Factor Level 1 of the dependent variable should represent the desired outcome. This assumption was met by coding 1 as *yes* in relation to likelihood of incarceration and 0 as *no* in relation to likelihood of incarceration.

Adequacy of sample size. The power analysis indicated that a minimum sample of 182 cases were needed to achieve adequate power for the study. In my final data analysis, there were $n = 504$ cases.

Multicollinearity. I employed the bivariate correlation procedure to evaluate the data for relationships among the IVs. Table 5 provides a summary of results. When the bivariate analysis was conducted, there was a negative association of $r = -0.148$ between homelessness and connection to adults, which was small and not statistically significant. This indicates that there was no multicollinearity between the independent variables. When the correlation between IVs is close to .80, it signifies a strong relationship between the variables (Coleman, 2008; Salkind, 2010.) There was no other show of

multicollinearity among other variables, as evidenced by the presences of bivariate correlations that were close to the $r = .80$ level.

The data in Table 6 do show a statistically significant negative relationship ($r = -0.148, p = -0.001$) between the variables of connection and homelessness. The negative correlation revealed that having connections was inversely related to homelessness. This result indicated that having connections with others lessened the occurrence of homelessness among respondents who completed the survey.

Table 6

Bivariate Correlation Matrix of Independent Variables

		Connection	Education	Homelessness
Connection	Pearson correlation	1		
	Sig (2-tailed)			
Education	Pearson correlation	-0.038	1	
	Sig (2-tailed)	0.395		
Homelessness	Pearson correlation	-0.148**	0.015	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	0.001	0.731	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level(2-tailed).

Results

RQ: How well do connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness predict the likelihood of incarceration for African American males 3 years after aging out of foster care group homes?

Null hypothesis (H_0): Connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness are not statistically significant predictors of the likelihood of incarceration for African American males within 3 years after aging out of foster care group homes as shown by data collected from the National Youth Transitional Database (NYTD).

The null hypothesis indicates that in the population the odds that changes in the independent variables would lead to an increase of the likelihood of the criterion variable, incarceration for African American males aging out of foster care group homes is zero.

The null hypothesis is expressed as presented below:

$$H_0: \beta_1\chi (\text{connection to adults})_1 + \beta_2\chi (\text{educational attainment})_2 + \beta_3\chi (\text{homelessness})_3 = 0.$$

Alternate hypothesis (H_a): Connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness are statistically significant predictors of the likelihood of incarceration for African American males within 3 years after aging out of foster care group homes as shown by data collected from the National Youth Transitional Database (NYTD).

The alternate hypothesis indicates that in the population the odds that changes in the independent variables would lead to an increase in the likelihood of the criterion variable. Connection to adults, educational attainment and homelessness is not zero, the equation. The equation for the alternate hypothesis is expressed below:

$$H_a: \beta_1\chi (\text{connection to adults})_1 + \beta_2\chi (\text{educational attainment})_2 + \beta_3\chi (\text{homelessness})_3 \neq 0$$

Results from the regression analysis are presented in Table 7. The overall model was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 4.634$, $df = 3$, $p = 0.201$) in predicting incarceration

for African American males 3 years after aging out of foster care. Additionally, the Nagelkerke pseudo R^2 indicated that the model accounted for only 2.9% of the variance in the dependent variable. The Cox and Snell R^2 further indicated that the model only accounted for 0.9% of the variance in the dependent variable. The results from logistic regression analysis showed no statistically significant predictive relationships between connection with an adult ($p = .564$), homelessness ($p = .108$), education ($p = .344$) and incarceration of African American male 3 years after aging out of foster care at 5% level of significance. The regression equation is given by:

$$\text{Incarceration} = (-0.438) \text{ connection} + (1.012) \text{ homelessness} - (0.529) \text{ education}.$$

Table 7

Logistic Regression: Predicting Incarceration

Variables	Beta coefficient	Wald statistic	P	OR	95% CI
Connection	-0.438	0.333	0.564	0.645	0.146, 2.853
Homelessness	1.012	2.579	0.108	2.750	0.800, 9.455
Education:	-0.529	0.896	0.344	0.589	192. 1.763

The results from the 2X2 classification table indicated that the model correctly classified 95.1% of all cases. The results from the 2X2 classification table can be found in Table 8. The logistic regression model correctly classified 0% of African American males as not having experienced incarceration within 3 years after aging out of foster

care. The model correctly identified 100% of African American males in the sample as having experienced incarceration within 3 years after aging out of foster care.

Table 8

Regression Classification Table

Observed	Predicted		% correct
	Incarceration		
	No	Yes	
Incarceration: No	0	24	0
Yes	0	464	100
Overall % Correct			95.1

Findings indicated a high percentage of African American males were incarcerated despite having a supportive relationship, completing high school/GED, and having stable housing. These findings are rather unexpected. A more detailed discussion of the results is presented in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the predictive relationships between connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness was more than likely to predict incarceration for African American males at least 3 years post aging out of foster group homes. The results of this study found that the lack of not having or having supportive relationships, high school/GED and stable housing had no bearing on African American incarceration after leaving care.

Results from the logistic regression lead to the failure to reject the null hypothesis, which stated that connections to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness were

not statistically significant predictors of the likelihood of incarceration for African American males within 3 years after aging out of foster care group homes.

Contrary to my expectation for this study, demographic findings showed that a high percentage of African American with connection to adults, a high school diploma, and with stable housing were incarcerated 3 years after aging out of foster care. In addition, the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 indicated that youth who age out of foster care tend to lack connection to an adult, dropout of school, and lack stable housing (Courtney, 2014; Lee et al., 2014; McCarthy & Gladstone, 2011; McMahon & Fields, 2014; Stott, 2011). Further work needs to be done to determine if there are other issues which contribute to incarceration of African American males 3 years post aging out of foster care.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative, correlational study was to assess the predictive relationships between connection to an adult, educational attainment, homelessness, and the likelihood of incarceration for African American males 3 years after aging out of foster care. The results from the logistic regression analysis indicated that connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness were not statistically significant predictors of incarceration for African American males 3 years after aging out of foster care. In this chapter, I discuss interpretations of the findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and implications of the study.

Interpretation of Findings

The outcomes associated with aging out of foster care have been studied broadly (Miller et al., 2014; Scott & McCoy, 2016; Smiley & Fakunle, 2015). However, I did not locate any previous studies examining whether variables such as connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness predicted incarceration for African American males within 3 years of aging out of foster care group homes.

The results from the demographic data collected for this study were not anticipated. Findings were not congruent with what was expected based on the literature presented in Chapter 2, which revealed that youth who aged out of foster care tended to lack connections to adults, as well as to be vulnerable to dropping out of school and becoming homeless after leaving care (Bender et al., 2015; Katz & Courtney, 2015). This literature does not align with the findings, which showed that African American male

respondents who aged out of foster care had connections to adults and reported completing high school or a GED, with some respondents reporting some college or a vocational certificate/license. Further, respondents reported stable housing after leaving care.

One unanticipated finding from the study pertained to the number of participants' records that indicated that the participant had graduated from high school or obtained a GED within 3 years after aging out of a foster care group home. Prior studies have noted that youth in foster care are at a higher risk of dropping out of school (Holtzman, 2010; Mastin et al., 2013). Data in a National Center for Education (2014) report revealed that youth were less likely to have gained their diplomas by the time they aged out of foster care at 18 years of age. Results from the demographic data for this study contradicted findings from past literature, in that most of the records were for individuals who had graduated from high school or obtained a GED, had an associate's or higher degree, or had obtained a vocational certificate or license.

Surprisingly, a high percentage of the African American males represented in the study had experienced incarceration even though they had a high school/GED 3 year after aging out of a foster care group home. Previous researchers have noted that half of youth who age out of foster care report having been incarcerated (Cusick et al., 2012; Huang, Ryan, & Rhoden, 2016). Findings from this study did not reveal a relationship between education and incarceration 3 years after aging out of foster care. A possible explanation for these findings may be related to other factors that were not investigated in this study.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on the importance of youth having connections to adults as they age out of foster care. Several researchers have found that a relationship with an adult is essential for the well-being of youth during the transition to independent living, and that lack of connections has been linked to negative outcomes for individuals who age out of foster care (Barn & Tan, 2012; Cusick et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2014; McMahon & Fields, 2014). Findings from previous research have revealed a positive relationship between lack of connection to an adult and incarceration (Dworsky et al., 2013; Havlieck et al., 2016; Sewart, Kum, Barth, & Duncan, 2014). The findings of the current study does not confirm the literature in Chapter 2 on aging out of foster care and having connections to adults.

It was somewhat surprising that a large percentage of the African American males represented in the data had not experienced homelessness within 3 years after aging out of foster care. Results from the demographic data revealed that almost three quarter 75% of the survey respondents reported having stable housing with 3 years of aging out of foster care. This finding is contrary to the work of previous researchers presented in Chapter 2, which revealed that African American males were more likely than other racial groups to become homeless after aging out of foster care group homes (Miller et al., 2014; Scott & McCoy, 2014). The results contradicted previous researchers who showed that youth aging out of foster care often become homeless within the first year after leaving care (Bender et al., 2015; Katz & Courtney, 2015).

Data from the crosstabs procedure further indicated that most African American males with stable housing also had a high rate of incarceration. The percentage of

individuals who did not experience homelessness but did experience incarceration was like the percentage of individuals who had been homeless and experienced incarceration. Results for the logistic regression analysis did not reveal homelessness to be a statistically significant predictor of incarceration. This finding contradicted previous researchers who found that homelessness and incarceration were negative outcomes encountered by many youths after aging out foster care (Miller et al., 2014; Scott & McCoy, 2014). Therefore, findings suggest that being homeless or not being homeless does not predict incarceration for African American males 3 years after aging out of foster care group homes.

The BTM was used as the foundational theory for this study. Premises of the theory rest on the notion that individuals go through three stages as they encounter changes in their lives: ending, neutral, and beginning zones (Bridges, 2002). The BTM defined the ending zone as characterized by the individual experiencing losses such as relationships, letting go of familiar routines, and letting go of the past (Bridges, 2002). Additionally, the BTM rests on the notion that after having experienced losses, individuals enter a state of limbo—an in-between stage involving uncertainty about the future—known as the neutral zone (Bridges, 2002). In the last stage of the BTM, after losses and uncertainty, individuals begin to accept change and start working toward building a life for themselves; this is the new beginning stage (Bridges, 2002).

The principles of Bridge's (2002) first stage of transition, known as the ending zone, suggest that African American males may experience loss of connections with adults after aging out of foster care because they no longer receive the care and support of

the environment they are leaving. From this perspective, they have to break connections with adults in the system and make a transition toward taking care of themselves.

However, demographic findings showed that African American males had connections to adults 3 years after aging out of foster care group homes. Therefore, the findings of this study were not consistent with the model because results indicated that African American males had connections with an adult after aging out of foster care.

The premises of Bridge's (2002) second phase, the neutral zone, indicate that African American males may become uncertain about their future after they age out of foster care. They may enter a state of limbo and a stage of uncertainty. This study did not collect data that could directly assess the second phase of the BTM. Although not addressed in the current study, unemployment may have been a variable that contributed to uncertainty among the former foster youth. Additional research would be needed to determine whether this was the case for some youth.

The last stage of the BTM addresses how individuals come to accept and adapt to changes (Bridges, 2002). Based on the overall demographic findings, African American males after aging out of foster care worked toward building a life for themselves by finishing school, building relationships, and finding stable housing. However, there was a high percentage of incarceration despite the achievements of the youth in this study, which suggests that African American males at one point or another struggled with accepting and adapting to their changes after aging out of foster group homes. Additional research would be needed to determine whether this was the case for some youth.

Limitations of the Study

The main limitation of this study was that I used secondary data. Therefore, I had no influence over the methodology used to collect the data (Geng & Phillips, 2014). According to Rain (2016), there were specific parameters for entering data into the archival system that was used for this study. However, there was no guarantee that all employees would follow all of these guidelines for entering data. If any data were entered incorrectly by NYTD staff, these errors could have affected the accuracy of the data used in the analysis (Fowler, 2014; Herrera et al., 2007; Osborne, 2012).

Another limitation of this study was relying on self-reported data, which could have reflected bias or exaggeration. Self-reported data cannot be verified and must be taken at face value (Andres, 2012; Lavrakas, 2015). Further, the scope of this study was limited in terms of race and gender, in that it only included African American males. In addition, this study used a convenience sampling method that limits the ability to make a statistical inference from the sample. Finally, one source of weakness in this study that could have affected the measurement of incarceration was the potential for confounding variables influencing the outcome of this study.

The generalizability of this study is limited by the demographic characteristics of the study population as well as the demographic results. First, this population was made up of African American males who were 21 years of age and had been out of foster care for at least 3 years. It would be difficult to generalize the findings to any other group, race, and gender.

Second, demographic findings revealed that African American males had connections to adults, high school degrees/GED credentials, and stable housing. Therefore, these results are not conducive to generalization to the population of young adults aging out of foster care. Previous researchers have shown that many young adults age out of foster care without having a diploma, a connection to an adult, or stable housing (Bender et al., 2015; Katz & Courtney, 2015).

In addition, overall demographic findings showed that African American males had a high rate of incarceration despite having a high school degree/GED, connection to an adult, and stable housing. Again, generalization is not reasonable to represent the population of those who age out of foster care with a high school degree/GED, connection to an adult, and stable housing because there may be few, if any, studies on this phenomenon. However, this is an issue for future research to explore.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Results from the data analysis revealed that connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness were not statistically significant predictors of the likelihood of incarceration for African American males within 3 years after aging out of foster care. I recommend that additional studies be conducted to confirm these results. Because this study was limited to African American males, researchers conducting future studies in this area should also include other young adults (male and female) of different races. Besides foster group homes, secure campus-style residential facilities and non-family foster homes should be considered for future studies. This study focused on African American males in the United States. Future researchers should expand their

focus to countries outside the United States, such as China, which has a large population of foster youth leaving care at 18 years of age (Xiaoyuan & Fisher, 2017).

Data for the NYTD are collected in three waves, beginning when youth reach age 17 and ending when youth turn 21. During Wave 1, baseline survey data are collected after youth turn 17. Wave 2 data collection occurs after the youth reach the age of 19. In the final wave, Wave 3, follow-up data are collected as the youth reach age 21. In future research, I would recommend that researchers include Waves 1 and 2 using the same variables of connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness to determine if the same results are achieved. Waves 1 and 2 should be considered because data from those waves might provide a specific time frame for the greatest likelihood of incarceration for youth after aging out of foster care. Data from Waves 1 and 2 were not included in this study, which focused on the third year after exiting foster care. Additionally, I recommend that this study be repeated several years later using the same variables to ascertain whether there are the same or different results across time.

I also recommend that further research explore the connection between employment status and incarceration. Results from the demographic findings indicated that a high percentage of African American males who had a connection to adults, educational attainment, and stable housing experienced incarceration at least 3 years after aging out of foster care group homes. Past researchers have discussed employment or lack of employment as a variable related to incarceration for youth aging out of foster care (Katz & Courtney, 2015; Miller et al., 2014). Because this study did not include

employment as a predictor of the likelihood of incarceration, further research is suggested to include employment as a variable.

Furthermore, research is needed to determine other factors that might have bearings on incarceration after youth age out of foster care. Therefore, I recommend that a qualitative study be conducted to examine former foster youths' perspectives on what variables contributed to their incarceration after they aged out of foster care. A qualitative study could provide greater insight on the factors that contribute to the problem of former foster youth being incarcerated after aging out of the system by gaining direct information from former foster youths on what factors played a part in their incarceration.

Implications for Practice

The literature review included barriers and negative outcomes that are encountered by the population of youth transitioning to adulthood from the foster care system. The literature addressed variables such as young adults' lack of supportive relationships, poor educational attainment, and lack of stable housing after aging out of foster care as variables related to incarceration (Okpoch, 2015). However, demographic findings showed that the majority of the African American males included in this study had obtained a high school degree/GED, had a connection to an adult, and had stable housing, and yet a high percentage had experienced incarceration.

The findings from this study have some implications for developing effective best practices to minimize the likelihood that African American males will experience incarceration after they transition out of foster care. To promote positive outcomes and continued success for African American males, social workers, child counselors, and

child welfare agencies could develop follow-up plans with youth for at least 3 years after youth age out of foster care. The follow-up program could collaborate with a mentoring program to provide mentors for African American males after they age out of the foster care system.

The presence of mentoring programs and engaged mentors could contribute to early detection of problems, and preventive services could be put in place to address problems that could lead to incarceration. A peer-mentoring approach could be implemented involving African American males who have successfully transitioned to adulthood from foster care group homes. Peer mentors are individuals who are similar in age and have had the same life experiences as mentees (Metzey et al., 2015). This is very important in peer mentoring because mentors could share their experiences with, motivate, and help mentees to set goals (Metzey et al., 2015). More importantly, mentees may feel that they have someone who understands how they feel, and who can relate to their situation (Metzey et al., 2015). African American males who become peer mentors could provide support to those who have aged out of foster care but are still in the neutral zone, a phase of limbo and uncertainty.

Like other programs, a peer mentoring program has costs associated with providing services. Therefore, policymakers could increase or allocate funding toward a stipend for African American males who become peer mentors to other African American males aging out of foster care. A stipend could be used as an incentive to prompt other African American males to become mentors. Such a structure might empower mentees to do better and become mentors themselves.

Conclusion

The purpose of this quantitative, correlational study was to assess the predictive relationship of connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness with the likelihood of incarceration for African American males at least 3 years after aging out of foster care. The individual variables included in this study were connection to adults, educational attainment, and homelessness.

Overall, the results from this study revealed that stable social support and housing support practices and services are important to African American males and other young adults aging out of foster care. More importantly, policymakers, child welfare agencies, and other stakeholders should consider developing policies and procedures that maximize housing services that African American males and other young adults aging out of foster care receive from federal funding and private foster care agencies. These policies could improve knowledge regarding the best ways to support housing services and effective practices for long-term assistance prior to and after aging out of foster care for this vulnerable population (Katz & Courtney, 2015; Okypch, 2015; Stott, 2013).

Furthermore, policymakers, child advocates, and child welfare workers could explore various programs developed by the state department of education that would ensure African American males and other young adults leaving foster care obtain a high school degree/GED. In addition to exploring various educational programs, policymakers could provide additional funding to mentoring programs that would collaborate with foster care group homes to provide mentors to build a strong social network for African American males and other young adults aging out of foster care.

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Appendix A: Terms of Use Agreement

Terms of Use Agreement

National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect

DATASET NAME	Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reportin System(AFCARS)Foster File
DATASET NUMBER	#187,176,167,163,153,202,

The Investigator accepts the definitions as described and agrees to follow the terms and conditions outlined in this Agreement:

I. DEFINITIONS

- a. Investigator The person who serves as the primary point of contact for all communications involving this Agreement. The Investigator is the person primarily responsible for analysis and other use of Research Data obtained through this Agreement. The Investigator must have a research-related affiliation with an institution or be granted an exception from NDACAN, when allowed by NDACAN procedures.
- b. Institution An organization or business that is registered as a legal entity.
- c. NDACAN The National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect at Cornell University acting on behalf of the Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- d. Promise of Confidentiality A promise to a Research Subject that the information the respondent provides will not be disseminated without the permission of the respondent; that the fact that the respondent participated in the study will not be disclosed; and that disseminated information will include no linkages to the identity of the respondent. Such a promise encompasses traditional notions of both confidentiality and anonymity. Names and other identifying information regarding respondents, proxies, or other persons on whom the respondent or proxy provides information, is presumed to be confidential.
- e. Research Data The original data provided by NDACAN and any variables derived from the original data. Data resulting from merges or matches to the original or derived variables are included in this definition. Aggregated statistical summaries of data and analyses, such as tables and regression statistics, are not considered "derived data" for the purposes of this Agreement.
- f. Research Subject A person, family, household, or organization observed for purposes of research and to whom a promise of confidentiality has been given. A Research Subject includes any person providing information to a study or on whose behalf a proxy provides information.
- g. Statistical Purposes The description, estimation, or analysis of the characteristics of groups, without identifying the individuals that comprise such groups; and

includes the development, implementation, or maintenance of methods, technical or administrative procedures, or information resources that support the aforementioned purposes.

II. PRIVACY OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

Any intentional identification of a Research Subject or unauthorized disclosure of confidential information violates the Promise of Confidentiality given to the providers of the information. Therefore,

- a. The Research Data will be used solely for research or statistical purposes.
- b. No attempt will be made to identify Research Subjects.
- c. If the identity of any Research Subject is discovered inadvertently, no use will be made of this knowledge; NDACAN will be advised of the discovery; the identifying information will be safeguarded or destroyed as requested by NDACAN; and no one else will be informed of the discovered identity.

III. ACCESS TO THE RESEARCH DATA

- a. Access to the Research Data is limited exclusively to the Investigator and to colleagues who also have a signed Terms of Use Agreement on file with NDACAN.
- b. The Research Data will be protected from loss, theft, or unauthorized access.
- c. The Investigator has followed the policies and procedures for conducting research that are in place at the Investigator's institution.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

- a. All books, articles, conference papers, theses, dissertations, reports, or other publications that employed the Research Data or other resources provided by NDACAN will acknowledge both NDACAN and the original collectors of the Research Data.
- b. Citations of published work using Research Data will be sent to NDACAN for inclusion in a database of related publications.

V. OWNERSHIP OF THE DATA

- a. Permission to use the Research Data may be revoked by NDACAN at any time, at its discretion. The Investigator must return all originals and destroy all copies of the Research Data, on whatever media they exist, within 5 days of written request to do so. Failure to comply may be considered a material breach of the Terms of Use Agreement.
- b. The Investigator will not make any claim to copyright ownership of the Research Data and accompanying documentation.

VI. DISCLAIMER

The original collector of the Research Data, NDACAN, Cornell University, and the agency that funded the research bear no responsibility for use of the data or for interpretations or inferences based upon such uses.

VII. VIOLATIONS OF THIS AGREEMENT

If NDACAN determines that the terms of use may have been violated, NDACAN will inform the Investigator of the allegations in writing and will provide an opportunity for a written response within 10 days. Sanctions for violating the License may include the following:

- a. NDACAN may revoke the existing Agreement, demand return of the Research Data, and deny all future access to NDACAN data.
- b. The violation may be reported to the Investigator's institution and to the Investigator's funding agency with a request for an investigation.
- c. If the confidentiality of Research Subjects has been violated, the case may be reported to the Federal Office for Human Research Protections, which may result in an investigation of the user's institution.
- d. A court may award the payment of damages to any individuals or organizations harmed by the breach of the Agreement.

SIGNATURE PAGE TO FOLLOW

Signature of the Investigator

I certify that all information that has been submitted in association with this request for the Research Data is truthful. Furthermore, I acknowledge that I am legally bound by the covenants and terms of this Agreement.

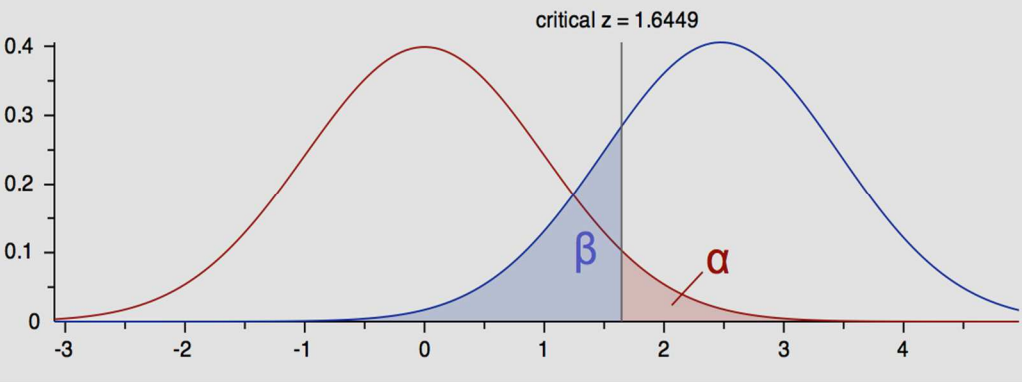
Signature: Marylean Wrotten Date: January 29,
2015

Name	Marylean Wrotten
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Appendix B: G*power Sample Size Computation

G*Power 3.1

Central and noncentral distributions Protocol of power analyses



critical z = 1.6449

Test family: Statistical test:

Type of power analysis:

Input parameters

Tail(s):

Odds ratio:

$\Pr(Y=1|X=1) H_0$:

α err prob:

Power ($1-\beta$ err prob):

R^2 other X:

X distribution:

X parm μ :

X parm σ :

Output parameters

Critical z	1.6448536
Total sample size	568
Actual power	0.8005867