

Effect of Independent Living Program Services on Enrollment of Foster Youth

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ABSTRACT

Education is associated with many individual life advantages; yet disparities in educational outcomes exist for some vulnerable populations. Foster youths are young adults generally age 18-25 who were formerly wards of their state due to legal intervention resulting from parental abuse or neglect. The success of these young adults affects the well-being of society, inviting interest from policymakers and child welfare practitioners.

The Independent Living Program (ILP) was introduced nationally by the federal government and is administered by states. This program assists foster youths in their transition to adulthood through various supports and services. The present study explored the effects of ILP services on the educational enrollment of foster youths beyond the legal emancipation age of 18. Logistic regression was utilized to examine relationships between the receipt of ILP services and enrollment in high school, General Education Development (GED) classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses while controlling for common life outcome barriers. Ethnicity and gender were also examined.

The study results revealed statistically significant relationships between certain ILP services and enrollment. Results also showed youths who remained in foster care had greater odds of being enrolled. Further results indicated a statistically significant relationship between Black and Hispanic youths and enrollment in each analysis compared to White youths. Female foster youths were also found to be more likely than male foster youths to be enrolled with ILP services. Factors that decreased the odds of enrollment included past incarceration and having children.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Taylor and Jacob; may you never stop learning, discovering, and achieving. To my parents, who have given me everything. To Michael, who is my everything, and to the countless children and families affected by child abuse and neglect and the social workers who serve them.

Johnnie Glass (May 21,1948 –August 30, 2021)

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Study Overview

This study examines the effect of Independent Living Program (ILP) services on educational enrollment among foster youths who have reached the age of legal emancipation. The stage of life in which young people transition from dependency into adulthood can be a difficult time for all young adults, as this phase presents challenges related to leaving the dependency of childhood and entering the uncertainty of independent living. During this formative age, youths are tasked with obtaining the education and other means necessary to sustain their basic needs while experiencing continued interpersonal changes. The period of human development for young adults nearing college age has been reconceptualized due to recent research that found the adolescent brain continues to develop longer than previously assumed as it transitions from adolescence to full adulthood. This transition period for all young people may be referred to as the distinct developmental stage of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004; Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011; Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, 2015). While this period is marked by challenges for all the people experiencing it, the various obstacles experienced are particularly relevant for youths emerging from the foster care system. Foster youths generally comprise children who are in foster care and have reached the eligible age to receive independent living services from the foster care system. Foster care youths may also be referred to as foster care alumni or foster youths. These youths experience the stage known as emerging adulthood in a distinctive way, compared to other young people.

Foster care youths are faring poorly as a group on many adult independent living dimensions compared to their peers (Courtney et al., 2007; Courtney et al., 2011). Foster care youths are generally referred to as young people aged 18-25. These young people experience unique difficulties that place them at greater risk for poor educational outcomes and an array of other negative outcomes in many facets of life. Many of the challenges of these youths are related to their past traumas and involvement with the foster care system. A considerable amount of research has described foster children who are leaving care as among the country's most vulnerable emerging adult populations (Courtney et al., 2007; Kim & Sobczyk, 2004). In Fiscal Year 2019, there were 20,445 foster youths exiting foster care in the United States due to reaching 18 years of age (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Young people during this time are presented with choices regarding continuing education, including high school and postsecondary school programs. One prominent barrier for foster youths during this transition is the reliance of youths on familial support to move them successfully to independence. For most foster youths leaving the care of the foster care system, these supports are minimal or nonexistent. Society must confront the negative consequences of sustaining a population of adults who are unable to meet their own basic needs as a social problem. The federal government, through state-delivered foster care systems, addresses the needs of foster youths by instituting a variety of services and supports through Independent Living Programs to enhance foster youths' probability for success. These programs provide supports including independent living training services and education, basic needs support, financial assistance, and other provisions to supplement the lack of family connections. These supports are designed to counter the effects of early circumstances contributing to disparate outcomes associated with foster youths.

An essential factor influencing successful independence for emerging adults in the postmodern era is the need for the education necessary for earning a living wage. Former foster youths are considered to be at a significant disadvantage academically and at risk for poor educational outcomes due to their experience in the foster care system (Courtney et al., 2001; Courtney et al., 2007; Kim & Sobczyk, 2004; Rios & Rocco, 2014; Wolanin, 2005). To describe the steps needed for the successful completion of college for at-risk students, Horn and Carroll (1997) developed the concept of the pipeline to college. The five steps that make up the college pipeline include: 1) aspirations for a bachelor's degree, 2) academic preparation for college, 3) taking entrance exams, 4) application to college, and 5) enrollment. The first of these steps involves the desire of a youth to complete college. Researchers estimate that as much as 70% of the foster youth population desires postsecondary education, yet only 20% actually enroll in college (Courtney et al., 2004; Wolanin, 2005). According to the U.S. Department of Labor, nearly 70% of all 2016 U.S. high school graduates were enrolled in colleges or universities in the general population (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). The gap between the foster youths' desire to attend college and their actual enrollment behavior prompts further investigation. For the remaining steps of the pipeline, external support for individual academic preparedness and advocacy from adults are critical for completion of the pipeline. Due to recent legislative changes, youths may voluntarily opt to remain in foster care up to age 21 while continuing to receive needed supports and services. Juvenile courts have exclusive jurisdiction, in most cases, over children up to their eighteenth birthday, unless they are legally emancipated prior to this age. When legal jurisdiction over foster youths terminates at age 18, foster youths often voluntarily choose to leave the support provided to them when faced with the prospect of freedom from the foster care system. During this time, individual decisions are made regarding

continuing education. Research supports a positive relationship between student involvement, including enrollment status, and overall student success outcomes (Adelman, 2006; Kuh et al., 2008). Research further indicates that enrollment directly from high school into postsecondary education programs significantly increases the likelihood that the student will persist and complete a postsecondary degree program. Adelman (2006) explained that this behavior reflects intrinsic commitment to obtaining a degree and therefore increases the odds of successful degree completion for students. Considering these findings, the educational enrollment of foster youths following legal emancipation at age 18 is of particular interest to policymakers and child welfare practitioners. At age 18, the courts no longer have the legal decision-making authority for foster youths and the choice of continued education at any level remains solely with the youth. The ILP is intended to increase the odds that a foster youth will have the resources needed to attain sufficient education and sustain independent living.

This study observes the behavior of foster youths who were surveyed at the post-foster care age of 19 in relation to their involvement with education and the ILP. The researcher is interested in the enrollment of foster youths after the legal emancipation age of 18 in any educational program including GED, high school, technical school, and college. The current study builds on earlier research to investigate the risk factors, demographic factors, and systemic supports most influencing educational enrollment among foster youth. Logistic regression analysis is employed to reveal any specific ILP services that may increase the likelihood of continued educational pursuits for these emerging adults. The services and demographic factors are discussed. The research questions that guided this explanatory study are as follows: What is the relationship between foster youths' access to academic support services and enrollment at age 19? What is the relationship between foster youths' access to budgeting and financial

management services and enrollment at age 19? What is the relationship between foster youths' access to mentoring services and enrollment at age 19?

The Emerging Adult

Building on the early efforts of established developmental theorists, an increasing body of research describes social changes in the past few decades, which, together with new brain development research, led to a new, distinct developmental life stage termed Emerging Adult (Arnett, 2004; Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011; Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, 2015). A frequently referenced theory of human development was proposed by Eric Ericson. The life span generally associates developmental characteristics to humans in accordance with their chronological age. Ericson's theory postulated that the developmental stage of adolescence is directly followed by young adulthood, lasting from the late teens to about age 40, when middle adulthood begins (Ericson, 1950). Arnett (2004) asserted that a new stage of the life course, spanning from age 18 to about 25, is more appropriate for describing aspects of the modern young adult. This new life stage is proposed due to societal events leading to the later age of marriage and parenthood in addition to the never before experienced freedom to explore future paths that is characteristic of most young people today (Arnett, 2004). Arnett described Emerging Adulthood, in part, as "the period of being in between adolescence and young adulthood, a period of being in the process of reaching adulthood but not there yet" (p. 207). Concurrently, the age of 25 is deemed to mark the age of full brain development, along with such milestones as college completion (Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011). Modern research on adolescent brain development suggests the need to view this population as one in need of additional support due to biological immaturity. Modern neuroscience reveals that the adolescent brain continues to develop into the mid-twenties or later for some emerging

adults, which is much beyond that which was traditionally assumed (Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011). Considering the neuroscience behind brain development along with environmental influences is vital for delivering developmentally appropriate services and supports to a developing cohort of young people.

Theoretical Framework

Life course theory provides structure for examining progress for the population of young people emerging from foster care to independent living. Dissimilar to the developmental concept of the life span, life course theory highlights the importance of time and social influences in the lives of individuals as they develop. This theory provides a context for the existing evidence demonstrating the poor performance of so many youths leaving foster care and suggests areas for additional attention. The theory examines the developmental process of humans in the context of the environment. A large body of research demonstrates the importance of education for adults in the postmodern age. This framework is useful in this study, as it provides further insight into the individual development of youths who share common experiences in a changing world. Life course theory is further detailed and explored in the literature review section of this study.

Scope of the Problem

Significance of Postsecondary Education

Successful completion of education is a determinant of both economic and social success during adulthood. Positive life outcomes associated with postsecondary education include overall higher earnings, good health, broader job opportunities, fertility, marital satisfaction, and higher job satisfaction (Isaacs, Sawhill, & Haskins, 2008; Mares & Jordan, 2012; McDaniel & Pergamit, 2013; Rios & Rocco, 2014; Salazar, 2013; Schudde, 2015).

In addition to this impact, the projected direction of the job market indicates an increasing need for workers with postsecondary certifications. Jobs requiring postsecondary education are expected to reach 63 percent of all work over the next 10 years (Carnevale et al., 2010). Due to the nature of a recent shift in our economy, job skill attainment and advanced education following high school have become even more necessary for adults. These achievements are more necessary in current times for earning a living wage than in previous generations. This shift is due to the nature of our economy moving from a “manufacturing-centric” economy to an “information-centric” economy (Mares & Jordan, 2012, p. 1509). While a high school diploma or GED certificate can be considered a minimum requirement for achieving self-sufficiency, these may also serve as a foundation for continued education leading to higher earnings and various life benefits. Research indicates that enrollment directly from high school into postsecondary education programs is an indication of commitment and will significantly increase the likelihood that the student will persist and complete a degree program (Adelman, 2006). Therefore, enrollment for the foster youths at the time when legal mandates over their individual decision making terminate is an important determinant for the continued success in educational endeavors of these young adults.

Enrollment of Foster Youths during Emerging Adulthood

Former foster youths are reported to earn a high school diploma or GED at a completion rate of 50% compared to 70% for the remainder of the population. Following secondary school completion, foster youths are faced with decisions regarding enrollment in postsecondary education programs. Studies show that 20% of foster youths enroll in college (Courtney et al., 2004; Wolanin, 2005). This number can be compared to 70% of U.S. high school graduates in the general population who were enrolled in colleges or universities in 2016 (Bureau of Labor

Statistics, 2017). These findings demonstrate divergence in the postsecondary education enrollment rates of former foster youths as a group compared to non-fostered youths, placing them at higher risk for a number of negative outcomes. Young adults who have left foster care are found to not fare as well in their educational pursuits even at the basic level. The enrollment rate for former foster youths in any educational program appears to decrease at the post-foster care age of 18. In 2014, the U. S. Children's Bureau found a higher percentage of 19-year-olds in foster care receiving a high school diploma or GED, compared to 19-year-olds who were no longer in foster care, having chosen to leave prior to age 19. Given the indication that enrollment in continued education directly after achieving a high school diploma or GED is a factor in overall success, enrollment is an element that warrants close examination for youths nearing the legal emancipation age.

Lower Achievement of Foster Youths

Former foster youths who are college graduates are found to be similar to the general population in the areas such as income and employment rates but are behind in areas related to job security, health and mental health, and public assistance usage (Salazar, 2013). The achievement of a college degree brings the same benefits for foster care alumni as with the general population, with some moderating effects related to trauma before and during foster care (Salazar, 2013). After persisting through the foster care system, foster youths may abruptly lose public support at the time they are emancipated. In general, young people in the United States are leaving the parental home and gaining independence at later ages than ever before, at an average age of around 28 (Jones, 2014; Kim & Sobczyk, 2004). These young people are typically provided with a variety of supports from familial caregivers, who are usually absent or inappropriate for the foster care population.

The ILP was introduced nationally in recognition of the special needs of transitioning foster youths. When youths aged 18-21 elect to remain within the auspices of foster care, they may receive housing services and financial and educational supports through age 21 (Georgia Division of Family and Children Services [GA DFCS], 2013). Many states offer extended youth services through the ILP for youths who choose to remain engaged in approved educational activities beyond age 18. For those former foster youths who are emancipated and choose to leave foster care while rejecting extended youth foster care services from the child welfare ILP, the choices are limited. Many foster youths maintain connections with birth family members and choose to return to their former environment where the home was found to be unfit for them. Research shows that many have no source of income, have received disability payments for physical or mental challenges, have unplanned pregnancies, or are involved with the criminal justice system during this transition period (Courtney et al., 2007; Dworsky et al., 2013; Salazar, 2013; Szilagyi, Rosen, Rubin, & Zlotnik, 2015). It is also estimated that 11% to 36% of emancipated foster youths become homeless, making them the population at greatest risk for homelessness among other populations (Dworsky et al., 2013). Society may support a portion of transitioning youths through the funding of jails and support of dependent children born to dependent adults. Rather than supporting individuals through these channels, providing early, extended services to at-risk emerging adults can be considered as an investment in human capital and the avoidance of higher future costs that result from public dependency.

Purpose of the Study

Little research has focused on the experience of transitioning youth during emerging adulthood specifically for the foster care population and their pathway to educational success. The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of the Independent Living Program services on

educational enrollment among foster youths after the legal emancipation age of 18. The study intends to identify specific ILP services factors, controlling for common life outcome factors that are significantly associated with educational enrollment for foster youths who were surveyed in 2013 at age 19.

This study is based on youth survey data collected by the federal government pursuant to the Foster Care Independence Act (P. L. 106-169) of 1999. The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) contains information regarding services received by a cohort of foster youths and individual outcomes experienced beginning in 2010 at age 17 and then every 2 years for three waves of data for these foster youths. The present study focuses on data reporting for 13,367 youths who responded to wave 2 of the 2010 survey cycle at the age of 19. The respondents were reduced to include only those who submitted no blank answers to survey questions (N = 2,109). These youths were evaluated on their enrollment status in any educational program, as indicated by their survey responses, at age 19. Statistical significance is assessed in relation to the types of ILP supportive services received by foster youths. Further, certain life outcome factors that have been shown to interfere with continuing education for foster youths during emerging adulthood are analyzed. These factors will be controlled for associations to the educational standing of the sample. Additionally, relationships with demographic factors, including race/ethnicity and gender, were analyzed.

Study Significance

This study has implications for further review of the ILP service delivery model, field-level child welfare casework practices, and postsecondary institution policy. Many members of society may not recognize this issue as a social problem. Failure to reach financial independence for these emerging adults is a concern for the general population due to economic and societal

effects resulting from their dependence on others for support. Furthermore, the derailment of their success is largely due to the foster care experience placing responsibility on adults who make decisions for children. The need for public assistance programs is more likely for young adults with no means of self-sustainment or assistance from a supporting adult to offset public cost (Jones, 2014; Salazar, 2013). Additionally, foster care youths who struggle with achieving independence represent wasted human potential in our society. In recognition of this issue, substantial financial support has been afforded to address the problem by the federal government. The federal dollars that are afforded by taxpayers to fund educational scholarships, grants, and living expenses for foster youths in college are expected to result in a return in the form of completion of a degree program with resulting self-sufficiency. While current research sufficiently describes the circumstances of foster youths, including educational attainment, very little is found describing the impact of the ILP supports on this outcome. This study seeks to contribute to the literature by bridging the knowledge gap between ILP service components, commonly found life outcomes, and the educational enrollment of foster youths beyond age 18. The results of this study have implications for public policy and clinical practice. Determining the effectiveness of supports afforded to foster youths will inform child welfare policymakers on the best investments for program funding. Social workers will benefit from understanding the most effective means of preparing and supporting foster care youths in their educational pursuits. Additionally, postsecondary institutions will gain information to help direct the development of programs, recruitment, admissions, and on-campus support of enrolled foster care youths.

Summary

The time of transition to adulthood is an intermediate stage of life laden with uncertainty and anxiety about the future for youths (Arnett, 2004). Successful transition is dependent on the

mastery of numerous tasks and includes biological processes in the changing brain of a young person. Current and former foster care youths are a subpopulation of emerging adults with unique obstacles. As foster youths, they often face additional challenges during their transition as they confront the negative past experiences that have placed barriers in their path while they try to move forward in their development. The presence of debilitating health and mental health conditions, disordered academic histories, and lack of guidance are a few of the commonly found obstacles in the way of the foster youths who are emerging adults (Courtney et al., 2001; Pecora et al., 2009; Szilagyi et al., 2015).

Postsecondary education or training is necessary for young adults to compete in the current economy and enjoy many associated life benefits (Isaacs et al., 2008; Mares & Jordan, 2012; McDaniel & Pergamit, 2013; Rios & Rocco, 2014; Salazar, 2013; Schudde, 2015). Embarking on a course of higher education is more difficult for youths who have endured systemic events characteristic of long-term foster care placement and early developmental disruptions and traumas. The continued financial dependence on others results in the loss of valuable human capital that would contribute to the growth of certain dimensions of society.

Public policy reflects attempts to improve the outcomes for children who have been affected by their episodes of foster care through the development and funding of ILP initiatives. Some research has found that foster youths who are engaged in these services perform better on outcomes (Barth, 1990; Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Mares, 2010; Scannapieco et al., 2007; Sim et al., 2008). Yet, as a group, foster youths continue to demonstrate poor outcomes during emerging adulthood over many aspects in comparison with other cohorts of young adults (Courtney et al., 2007; Horn & Carroll, 1997; Mech & Fung, 1999; Munson & McMillen, 2009;

Pecora et al., 2009; Zetlin & Weinberg, 2004). Seeking to understand the basis for this disparity is a step in the direction of improving the futures of these youths.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with an overview of the theoretical framework underpinning this study. A brief historical overview of the Independent Living Program is provided along with a detailed review of the existing literature and research enveloping the factors most impacting educational achievement among foster youths transitioning into adulthood. A brief discussion is also presented on ethnicity and gender as factors. In addition, developmental characteristics and various life outcomes commonly found in this population are explored. Further, independent living services provided by the foster care system to youths are examined in the literature. Implications from the literature review are discussed.

Theoretical Framework Overview

Life course theory underpins the study of this research subject. While there is no known theory that specifically addresses the academic achievement for foster youths who are emerging from foster care, life course theory provides a framework for understanding the varying pathways that can be taken during transition into adulthood for young people. For the study, this theory provides a structure for understanding the divergence in educational outcomes among this population and the responsibility of the foster care system in improving success for foster youths.

As a basic premise, life course theory argues that changing lives alter developmental pathways in humans (Elder, 1998). Life course theory explains differing directions that may be taken by youths during their transitional years. In an ecological context, this theory postulates that human development is influenced by changes in the environment. Four basic principles are included in the theory as elements shaping the pathways of individuals on the life course: (a) historical time and place, (b) timing in life, (c) linked lives, and (d) human agency (Elder, 1998).

Historical time and place in life course theory refers to the influence of social events in shaping the lives of people living within them. Major historical events occurring in time, such as war and economic depression, will have crucial interactions with the development of individuals experiencing their effects. The timing of life in which a person experiences these historical events further alters developmental trajectories. Timing of other life events, such as marriage, childbearing, and educational achievement, further impacts development. For children of the foster care system, consideration must be given to the timing of entrance into care as well as timing of traumatic events within this principle of the theory. Linked lives is a principle that highlights the interdependence of human beings and the impressions certain historical and social events leave on the social networks of individuals. For foster youths, linked lives relates to the experiences of the youths in care as their removal from the home impacts all the members of the family of origin in addition to the foster families created as a result of the foster care event. In this manner, historical and social influences are linked through the network of shared relationships in the family networks of the youths (Elder, 1998).

The final principle of the theory describes how adaptations to ecological changes are made by individuals. Given the traumatic experiences that are shared by most foster children, life decisions are made that may alter their life courses. Children who are faced with multiple losses and adverse childhood experiences are forced to adopt new coping mechanisms within the opportunities and constraints of their social circumstances and historical influences, according to this theoretical perspective (Elder, 1998).

Within the framework of this theory, it is important that ILP services address aspects of a youth's development within foster care and in relation to the principles described within life

course theory. The interruptions to development for foster youths during emerging adulthood and their ability to achieve life skills are a focus within this framework.

Adolescent Brain Development and the Emerging Adult

New research is changing the way we understand the challenges of emerging adults today, both biologically and socially. Arnett (2005) defined emerging adulthood in part as “the period of being in between adolescence and young adulthood, a period of being in the process of reaching adulthood but not there yet” (p. 207). For youths navigating this process, multiple factors may influence their decision making in relation to pursuing goals. As postulated by the life course perspective, environmental circumstances as well as past experiences affect individual functioning and decision making. The ILP offers youths involved with the foster care system multiple resources to support positive activities as they prepare to leave foster care.

Since Ericson’s landmark work on human development, social changes have subtly altered the patterns of behavior in young people after age 18 in the areas of education, work, and family. Arnett (2005) contended specific events have occurred over the past several decades that have gradually shaped social behaviors leading to the development of a new developmental stage. These changes include revolutionary adjustments in technology, sexuality, women’s issues, and society’s perception of childhood and youth (Arnett, 2005). The technological revolution has changed the face of employers, resulting in more education being required of employees. The economy has shifted from the manufacturing industry of the past decades to the information management-based economy we know today. Further, the sexual revolution resulted in society’s disconnect between sexuality and reproduction and marriage. There is also an increased tolerance today of premarital sex and cohabitation, leaving youths with less reason to marry. The women’s movement has led to women delaying marriage and parenthood in addition

to shifting their workforce patterns and goals outside of the home. Arnett (2005) referred to the ambivalence toward childhood and a new appreciation and view of youth as the youth movement. These revolutions have resulted in the new freedom that characterizes youths as they are free from responsibilities that were characteristic of 18- to 25-year-old youths a few decades before.

Generally, all young people in high-income, industrialized countries experience this time of life and the necessity of educational attainment differently than those in lower-income countries, although variations with vulnerable populations exist within them. Arnett (2005) found this age to be characterized by five features: explorations, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and an age of possibilities and optimism for the future. These features refer to the emerging adult's ability to try different options in areas such as love and career. Further, emerging adults experience instability through frequently changing jobs, housing, and educational goals. The young adult today is characterized by a self-focus due to lack of ties to spouses, children, or their parental figure in many cases. Overall, Arnett's research shows today's general population of young people to be optimistic about their futures and their ability to navigate challenges and achieve full-fledged adulthood and independence (Arnett, 2005).

Biologically, young adults are also experiencing variability in development. The science of adolescent brain development is increasing the understanding of the behaviors and abilities of young adults and children in foster care. Their social development, considered along with the brain development, suggests young people do not move directly from adolescence to adulthood but progress through an interim period of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2005). Neuroscience reveals that the adolescent brain continues to develop into the mid-twenties or later for some emerging adults, depending on individual variations (Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011). During

adolescence, the brain advances through a new period of development, making experiences during this time critical in shaping adolescents' futures as adults. The development in the brain that occurs during adolescence is believed to be just as important developmentally as that occurring during the early years of life (Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011). Understanding the neuroscience behind brain development in concert with the social forces influencing the success of emerging adults informs developmentally appropriate practice for child welfare professionals and caregivers. According to Freundlich and Greenblatt (2011), the area of the brain that governs reasoning, decision making, judgement, and impulse control is found in the frontal lobes. These parts of the brain are the last to reach full development in humans, making this period of development during adolescence particularly important for caregivers to recognize and understand. Correlating with the continued development of the brain during this time is cognitive development. There is significant development in the capacity to think abstractly, make reasoned judgements, process information more efficiently, and utilize self-reflection and insight for this age group (Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, 2015).

During the early years of brain development, the connection of synapses in the brain is essential for building upon for later development. The frequently used synapses that are provided for positive nurturing remain in the brain while those not often used are eliminated (Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011). The result is long-term effects on brain development. This translates to the reality that children who are not provided with opportunities for positive social interaction and learning, such as the majority of abused or neglected children in foster care, face struggles with positive brain development at the next critical stage during adolescence. Freundlich & Greenblatt (2011) used the term "toxic stress" (p. 25) to describe the unpredictable and chronic exposure to abuse and neglect that results in the interruption of positive creation of meaning, regulation of

emotion, memory organization, and capacity for empathy and communication for many children in foster care. This exposure disrupts brain development in children and can slow the brain's development, which affects them later, during adolescence. Early chronic physical abuse and neglect have long-term consequences on human brain development. Much research studying the impact of negative experiences on brain development shows immediate and long-term effects on brain development in the areas of social, psychological, and cognitive development (Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, 2015). Trauma research focused on the implications for brain development finds that complex trauma and ambiguous loss cause identity- and grief-related issues for young people. Children exposed to traumas such as maltreatment at an early age experience disruptions in their brain development that may manifest as difficulty trusting adults and the expectation for instability and unsupportive environments. Adolescents with this history may revisit early traumatic events, resulting in the reemergence of previous problems. As many as 80% of children in foster care have been found to have significant mental health issues (Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011).

However, just as early child abuse, neglect, and trauma can negatively impact brain development, research shows that positive experiences during adolescence can strengthen healthy neural connections due to neuroplasticity. Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to alter itself, or "rewire," and change its response to experiences (Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011, p. 28). The correction of impaired development could lead to greater growth and potential for the young adult such as that needed to complete educational programs. This correction was found to be possible with the connection between a young person and a supportive adult in a healthy relationship (Goldner & Ben-Eliyahu, 2021).

The Foster Care System

The child welfare system is a group of services, including foster care, provided by the states but supported by the federal government through funding, legislation, and oversight (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). Children are placed in foster care when a child protective services worker has determined the need for shelter care because of safety concerns or risk of maltreatment and has made a subsequent referral to the juvenile court for placement in foster care (Child Trends, 2014). In 2013, there were more than 400,000 children in foster care nationally (Child Trends, 2014). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Children's Bureau works with states to develop programs focusing on preventing maltreatment, protecting children, and reuniting children safely with their families or finding permanent families for children who cannot safely return home (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). From a national perspective, child welfare systems contain complex programs and procedures that vary widely among states and agencies.

Formal child protection has existed for some time in the United States, while the recognition of the needs of emerging adults by the federal government is only decades old. At the turn of the twentieth century, unaccompanied children were found in group institutional care with little attention afforded to them. The Social Security Act of 1935 provided the first federal funding to assist states in establishing or improving their child welfare systems (Oettinger, 1960). These programs were outlined in Title V of the Social Security Act for the protection and care of certain children considered to be without a competent caregiver or at risk of becoming delinquent (Oettinger, 1960). With the occurrence of WWII and the accompanying effects on the institution of family, funding increased to the states to provide care for more dependent and

delinquent children. From 1933 to 1955, the number of children in public family foster care increased from 49,000 to 123,000 (Oettinger, 1960).

In 1974, the first piece of national legislation was passed addressing abuse of a child. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) brought national attention to the need for child protection because of abuse by defining child abuse and recommending treatments (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2012). CAPTA authorizes federal funding to states in support of protection and prevention initiatives and programs in addition to supporting research, technical assistance, and data collection and analysis (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). CAPTA has been amended several times. Transitioning foster youths as a group in need of individual attention were not addressed by federal policymakers until the passage of the Independent Living Initiative (P.L. 99-272) in 1986 (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2012).

Before the twentieth century, there was no organized means of family foster care and child protection in the United States. The beginnings of child protection are often associated with animal protection advocacy in the late 1800s in New York (Myers, 2008). Several nongovernmental agencies arose around the country for the next few decades, including the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC), the first known entity devoted solely to the protection of children (Myers, 2008). The juvenile courts were established in the United States initially to address delinquency in young people but soon evolved to include matters of child abuse, neglect, and overall welfare of children. The early existing charitable child protection agencies continued to call for increasing involvement from government entities with more authority to intervene in situations as necessary. Increasing early governmental interest in child welfare can be seen with funding allocations along with the launch of the federal Children's Bureau in 1912 (Myers, 2008). The Great Depression of the 1930s and the funding of

Social Security and other entitlements prompted disbursement of the nongovernmental child protection organizations operating during this time.

Negative Outcomes Associated with the Foster Care System

Former foster youths enter adulthood with a history of challenges unique to their experience that impact their success during emerging adulthood. From the beginning, this population encounters obstacles that derail academic achievement directly related to their experience as foster children. Foster children are found to be more likely to have negative perinatal experiences, growth abnormalities, and untreated mental and medical health problems that place them at a higher level of morbidity throughout childhood (Harden, 2004; Szilagyi et al., 2015). These challenges often result in the risk of negative adult outcomes in certain areas of well-being, including financial and educational outcomes (Rios & Rocco, 2014; Salazar, 2012; Salazar, 2013; White, 2014). In particular, this population's educational achievement is shown to be far behind other young adults compared to the general population (Courtney et al., 2004; Courtney et al., 2011; Jones, 2014; McDaniel & Pergamit, 2013; Rios & Rocco, 2014; Salazar, 2012; Unrau et al., 2011). Much of the educational upheaval for these youths can be directly related to the characteristic disturbances that coincide with the foster care experience, including foster home moves and changing of school districts. Youths involved with the child welfare foster care system are more likely to drop out of high school or GED programs than their non-fostered peers. Foster youths are found by some sources to obtain a high school diploma or a GED at a rate of 50%, while the general population is found to earn these at a rate 70% (Rios & Rocco, 2014; Unrau et al., 2011).

Only about 20% of former foster youths enroll in college compared to 60% of the general population (Rios & Rocco, 2014). When enrolling in postsecondary education programs, former

foster youths are found to begin attending college later than their peers. Explanations for this involve youths leaving foster care at age 18 for reasons involving stringent rules and a desire to return to their birth families. In addition to delayed enrollment, foster youths often begin their college endeavors with remedial classes due to the characteristic risk factor of academic unpreparedness related to the foster care experience (Courtney et al., 2001). According to cumulative research, of all foster youths who attend college, only an estimated 1 to 11% graduate with a college degree, depending on the age at which their educational attainment is measured (Dworsky & Perez, 2010; Rios & Rocco, 2014; Unrau et al., 2011). Comparatively, approximately 30% of 25- to 29-year-olds have earned at least a bachelor's degree in the general population of emerging adults (Dworsky & Perez, 2010).

Only one source was found to suggest that negative outcomes for former foster youths are not predicted by the foster care experience, but rather are a result of characteristics that are associated with the individual, the individual's family, and the environment of the individual (Berzin, 2008). Although this view is supported by the study's research, the overwhelming evidence supported by research for this population points to the harmful effects of the foster care experience for youths from varied individual and family backgrounds.

A review of the existing research supports the presence of common traits for foster youths that impede their goal of achieving independence, including academic unpreparedness and low educational achievement; low employment rates; increased participation in public assistance programs; decreased physical health; higher instances of involvement with the criminal justice system; and increased instances of mental health needs, pregnancies, and housing instability and homelessness during their transition to adulthood (Boldis, 2014; Courtney et al., 2007; Dworsky et al., 2003; Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011; Kim & Sobczyk, 2004; Mech

& Fung, 1999; Munson & McMillen, 2009; Rios & Rocco, 2014; Salazar, 2012; Salazar, 2013; Schelbe, 2011; Szilagyi et al., 2015). These traits are often found in children who have faced the adversities of growing up in foster care.

Low Educational Achievement and Educational Unpreparedness

Early challenges with educational activities set a course for academic unpreparedness and resulting low educational achievement persisting into emerging adulthood for foster youths.

Berzin (2008) cites low educational attainment and poverty as the two factors that most impede the success of the young adult emerging from foster care. Children in foster care often have difficulty completing primary and secondary education due to their environmental and systemic circumstances (Unrau et al., 2011). During the early formative years of education, foster youths face barriers to learning stemming from maltreatment and past traumas coupled with separation from caregivers and frequent placement moves with school changes (Fisher et al., 2009; Mech & Fung, 1999; Rios & Rocco, 2014; Salazar, 2013; Unrau et al., 2011). Studies have also concluded that foster children have high rates of special education statuses and overall lower reading abilities, grades, and grade point averages (Pecora et al., 2009). These early setbacks increase the obstacles for young adults aspiring to a college education and seeking adequate employment after emancipation. McDaniel and Pergamit (2013) found that foster youths with high reading ability fared better on employment and college enrollment measures directly following emancipation, including higher monthly average earnings. Regardless of individual ability, the experiences of foster care set the course for increased challenges for these children.

While Courtney et al.'s (2004) study of foster care alumni in the Midwest found more than 70% of youths aspire to graduate from college, cumulative research shows only 39% to 65% of foster youths earn a high school diploma or GED that would lead to attending postsecondary

school (Courtney et al., 2007; Jones, 2014; Rios & Rocco, 2014; Unrau et al., 2011). Havalchak et al. (2009) found individuals with GED certificates do not fare as well in adult earnings as those with a high school diploma. Further, those foster children who do complete college are found to have lower rates of enrollment in college preparatory classes while in high school (Havalchak et al., 2009). A dismal 15% of foster youths enroll in college preparatory coursework during their high school years compared to non-fostered youths who enroll in this high school curriculum at a rate of 32% (Unrau et al., 2011). Recent data indicates a national rate of 53% of youths in the general population having attended at least 1 year of college compared to only 30% of foster youths (Jones, 2014). When they do attend college, these young adults are found to be more likely to attend 2-year institutions compared to the national average, which substantially impacts their earnings and the disparate numbers on comparison measures (McDaniel & Pergamit, 2013).

Academic unpreparedness is often the result of frequent school moves and changing caregiver patterns, which are a direct result of a history of foster care (Pecora et al., 2006). This instability can later lead to academic challenges in the college setting for the emerging adult. Caregiver changes, primary and secondary school interruptions, and problematic emotional and behavioral functioning are unique to children experiencing foster care. Pecora et al. (2009) found that foster youths having an average of one fewer foster care placement per year are nearly twice as likely to complete high school. The effects of maltreatment and past traumas further impede the focus needed to progress in academic activities and permanently impact the developing brain (Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011). Foster children often endure chronic abuse and come from families facing multiple stressors, including poverty and mental health and substance abuse disorders, while attempting to progress in educational development (Freundlich & Greenblatt,

2011). Children experiencing foster care involvement are also affected by complex trauma and ambiguous loss. Losses such as physical contact with biological family members and multiple changes in placements bring recurring unknowns for children, leaving them unable to feel secure and trust that their needs will be met (Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011). When these challenges are coupled with caregiver changes, maltreatment in foster care, and school changes and stigmas, the likelihood of educational success is substantially diminished.

In addition to the changing caregiving patterns experienced due to this phenomenon, frequent placement moves often correlate with inconsistent school curricula and grade retention (Mech & Fung, 1999; Salazar, 2012; Salazar, 2013). One study estimated that children in foster care change schools an average of once every 6 months. With each move, children may lose an average of 4 to 6 months of education (Wolanin, 2005). Another study underlined the poor coordination between schools resulting in transcripts and school records not being transferred in a timely manner, or at all, when foster children changed placements (Zetlin & Weinberg, 2004; Zetlin et al., 2005). Along with school disruption, children experience discontinuity in their caretakers and accompanying study habits that can interfere with educational progression. Unrau et al. (2011) also found that messaging from foster parents and other child welfare contacts to the foster youths is not always encouraging regarding college degree pursuit. Considering these findings, the disparate rates of low educational performance for these young people relates to the system they are involuntarily immersed in.

Mental Health

Mental health diagnosis rates for foster children are found to be much higher than for the general population. It is estimated that one in three children in foster care have a mental health diagnosis (Boldis, 2014; Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011; Jones, 2014; Salazar, 2012; Salazar,

2013; Unrau et al., 2011). Also, many children in foster care are placed in special education school settings. These findings can be directly related to the early experiences and subsequent time spent in foster care for these children.

Foster care youths also share common emotional challenges and mental health diagnoses. Salazar (2012) identified post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as one of the most common mental health diagnoses for the transitioning foster youth population, with a prevalence of 15% compared to a rate of about 7% of non-fostered youths. Foster youths have self-reported in qualitative studies that they consider mental health counseling to be essential during their college enrollment time (Salazar, 2012).

Substance abuse by foster youths is also shown to occur at higher rates than with young adults from other home constructs (Berzin, 2008). Furthermore, mental health diagnoses and substance abuse are often shown to coincide. Kilpatrick et al. (2003) found almost 75% of all adolescents diagnosed with PTSD had at least one comorbid diagnosis, such as substance abuse. Additionally, involvement with interpersonal violence, such as that common for children in foster care, is found to increase the risk of mental health and substance abuse disorders among adolescents (Kilpatrick et al., 2003).

Children in foster care are more likely to exhibit emotional and behavioral problems that hinder education at an early age compared to children living in other home environments (Barth et al., 2007; Child Trends, 2014). In one study, it was found that nearly 60% of foster children under the age of 2 were at high risk for a developmental delay or neurological impairment (Vandivere et al., 2003). Emotional and behavioral problems are also associated with foster care placement moves because each time children leave familiar surroundings and a caregiver, they experience emotional discomfort and must adapt to a new situation (Barth et al., 2007; Fisher et

al., 2009). Addressing these outcomes is the responsibility of the foster care system. Research suggests children with placement instability stemming from multiple placement moves have a 63% higher risk for behavior problems (Fisher et al., 2009). Children exhibiting this behavior are again manifesting the results of the emotional instability associated with their change in situation. Fisher et al. (2009) found evidence that placement instability has a negative impact on the development of neurobiological substrates in children, including the self-regulation of emotions and self-control. While emotional and behavioral problems often are positively associated with placement moves, some studies indicate it is difficult to disentangle whether the behaviors initiate the moves or the moves cause the behaviors (Barth et al., 2007; Harden, 2004). However, the large body of research supports the notion that these negative outcomes are the after-effects of a child's experience in foster care.

The importance of college completion for this population goes beyond the individual vocational reward. Research indicates that postsecondary educational success can actually counteract early abuse and traumas experienced as children (Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011; Rios & Rocco, 2014). Brain development research supports the ability of the brain to alter its structure throughout adulthood, indicating the possibility of restoration of healthy functioning for young adults who experienced damaging events during early development that affected their ability to become self-sufficient (Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011). The effects of healthy functioning are immeasurable for the functioning of adults in relation to societal participation and rearing of future generations. Young adults who have experienced early trauma and the harmful effects of the foster care system have continued potential to improve their mental health functioning.

Homelessness and Housing Instability

Securing independent housing is one of the key tasks that must be completed during emerging adulthood. Young adults emerging from the foster care system face unique decisions about housing. If they choose to leave the foster care placement at age 18, they must find housing and then they must have a supportive adult or peer or their own financial means to sustain their home. Research has found that youths who remain in foster care past the age of 18 experience better outcomes (Kim & Sobczyk, 2004; Salazar, 2013). This finding is based on the continued support experienced by a youth who has a deficit in other stable support sources. These youths also gather more needed maturity and further education than those who leave foster care at age 18. Studies have estimated that 11 to 36% of all former foster youths become homeless after age 18 (Dworsky et al., 2013). Additionally, Kushel et al. (2007) found more than half of their sample of emancipated youths ages 17 to 18 to have experienced housing instability or homelessness after leaving foster care. Emancipating foster youths are identified by research as the population at greatest risk for homelessness among all other populations (Dworsky et al., 2013).

Homeless individuals require assistance from the general population with subsistence. Health care expenses are the largest cost to the public for homeless people (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2010). The 2008 Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act extended the eligibility age for youths to receive Medicaid health insurance to age 21, provided that the youths complete the information needed and comply with review processes.

Former foster youths often turn to public assistance to sustain them, with no means of self-support. Berzin (2008) found the attainment of a high school diploma to be negatively

associated with poverty and public assistance and that females were more likely to receive public assistance due to pregnancy. Former foster youths have higher rates of public assistance use and poverty than the general population (Berzin, 2008; Jones, 2014). Due to many foster youths leaving the support of foster care, they are unable to become self-sufficient and must rely on other sources of financial support. Foster youths are unable to cope emotionally or financially with independence when they leave the system unprepared.

Poverty and Unemployment

The transition from school to work is another important task for emerging adults to master. The amount of education an individual has is associated with higher earnings and other life advantages (Isaacs et al., 2008; Mares & Jordan, 2012; Rios & Rocco, 2014; Salazar, 2013; Schudde, 2015). The outcomes of poverty and unemployment are commonly found among the foster care alumni population. Former foster youths are obtaining less education than their non-fostered peers and graduating from high school less often (Berzin, 2008; Jones, 2014; Salazar, 2012; Salazar, 2013). When youths leave foster care, it is more often to pursue work at unskilled low-wage jobs (Berzin, 2008; Salazar, 2013). With the low high school and GED completion rates, these youths have low levels of college completion. The benefits of college degree attainment are well-established, including higher earnings and improved general well-being. Former foster youths have lower earnings, higher rates of poverty, and higher rates of utilization of public assistance programs (Berzin, 2008; Jones, 2014). Berzin concluded in a 2008 study on this population that low educational attainment and poverty were the two factors that most hampered successful transitions for foster youths.

Criminal Justice System Involvement

Foster care alumni are overrepresented in numbers of incidents with the criminal justice system (Barth, 1990; Courtney et al., 2007; Dworsky et al., 2013; Mech & Fung, 1999; Salazar, 2012; Salazar, 2013; Schelbe, 2011). The activities involved in resolving legal matters disrupt academic programs, and the achievement of degree attainment is shown to impact criminal involvement. Pecora et.al. (2009) found that the earning of a high school diploma is associated with lower involvement with the criminal justice system among former foster youths. Research shows that the former foster care population is not earning high school diplomas at a rate comparable with those from other home conditions (Berzin, 2008; Courtney et al., 2007; Jones, 2014; Salazar, 2013; Salazar, 2012).

Pregnancy and Early Parenting

Foster youths are at a higher risk for early parenting compared to their non-fostered peers (Svoboda, Shaw, Barth, & Bright, 2012). The occurrence of pregnancy or fathering of children during or right after foster care is a factor that may hinder educational success for foster youths. In one recent study, female parents are shown to have lower rates of school enrollment and higher rates of incarceration by age 17. Males in this population are shown to have disproportionately higher rates of risky behavior and homelessness by age 17 (Shpiegel & Cascardi, 2015). These findings suggest a correlation between poor educational outcomes and early parenting.

Hamilton, Martin, and Ventura (2010) reported an overall decline in the adolescent birth rate in recent years; however, disparate rates among various racial and gender categories continue to persist. Young women who are Hispanic, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Black continue to display higher rates of births than non-Hispanic White females (Hamilton et

al., 2010). Also, a higher percentage of young adult females reported having experienced pregnancy than the number of males in this age group who reported fathering of children (Leslie et al., 2010).

Emerging adults who are parenting children are a subgroup of foster youths requiring special attention. Studies show the rates of teen parenthood for foster youths to be higher than the national average (Svoboda et al., 2012; Courtney et al., 2007; Pecora et al., 2009). Later in life, foster care alumni have children earlier than their non-fostered peers (Berzin, 2008). Szilagyi et al. (2015) emphasized that almost 50% of all foster youths have chronic medical problems and are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors and experience sexually transmitted disease and pregnancy. Approximately half of female youths emerging from foster care have experienced pregnancy as compared to the national average of 31% (Szilagyi et al., 2015). In some cases, the children of foster youths are placed separately from them. Foster youths who are parenting and pursuing a degree face the physical and financial responsibility of caring for their children concurrently with providing income and successfully completing coursework. Research shows that young female adults are more likely to receive public assistance due to pregnancy (Berzin, 2008; Svoboda et al., 2012; Shpiegel & Cascardi, 2015). This subgroup is especially likely to struggle with high school and postsecondary school completion along with having higher rates of receiving public assistance to sustain them and their children (Berzin, 2008).

Connections and Social Support

Considerable research substantiates the importance of connection to a supportive adult and support network for foster youths during emerging adulthood to promote successful educational attainment and other life achievements (Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011; Harden,

2004; Havalchak et al., 2009; Jones, 2014; Munson & McMillen, 2009; Pecora et al., 2009; Salazar, 2012). Foster youths contend with the notion of not only losing support from the foster care system abruptly at emancipation, but also the support of responsible adults to assist them with navigating unfamiliar systems. Older youths represent approximately 24% of the foster care population (Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011). These youths are less likely to reunite with their biological families or to have adoption recorded as their permanency goal, as is common with younger children in foster care. This reality results in the probability of youths aging out of foster care when reaching age 18 (Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011).

Foster youths have often experienced fractured support networks because of the placement instability they encountered during the foster care experience. Social connections have a tremendous impact on improving outcomes for these youths in many areas (Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2001; Harden, 2004; Havalchak et al., 2009; Munson & McMillen, 2009; Pecora et al., 2009; Salazar, 2012). Freundlich and Greenblatt (2011) asserted that the social support foster youths receive can assist in self-repair of the damage caused to the brain by maltreatment and trauma sustained from previous abuse and neglect. For educational attainment measures, social support is found to have a significant impact on participation in higher education for foster youths (Havalchak et al., 2009; Salazar, 2012). Havalchak et al. (2009) found evidence that a stable, supportive placement increased the odds of high school graduation and returning to an educational or job training program by foster youths following disengagement. Research studies on the importance of mentors as a source of support for transitioning youths found similar results. Mentoring services is a strategy employed by the ILP to ensure youths have a connection to a caring adult. Prior research findings showed the presence of a mentor for at least 1 year prior to a youth reaching the legal age of majority resulted in former foster youths having higher levels

of education, better physical and mental health, and less involvement with the criminal justice system (Aherns et al., 2008; Munson & McMillen, 2009). Another study concluded that a preventive mentoring program project utilizing current college students was effective in assisting foster care youths in making positive decisions about their postsecondary education plans (Bruster & Coccoma, 2013).

Institutional supportive services at the postsecondary level are also found to be beneficial for foster youths. Studies show that students emerging from foster care are more receptive and more likely to use support services than students from other backgrounds (Rassen et. al., 2010; Unrau et al., 2011). Support services offered in the college setting can be critical for retention and increasing the overall chances for these youths to succeed in completing their educational degree programs.

Ethnicity and Gender

Foster youths face many barriers to educational success due to their personal backgrounds. Foster youths obtain postsecondary education at a lower rate than the general population of college-aged youth. For the general population, data shows 53% of youths having attended at least 1 year of college, compared to 30% of foster youths in the same age cohort (Jones, 2014). Among the foster care population, ethnicity and gender categories indicate further divergence in educational outcome measures presented for this population (Kena et al., 2015). Examining the presence of this divergence can further assist policymakers and practitioners.

For the general population, national data from the U. S. Department of Education shows an overall trend of disparate numbers concerning enrollment in and attainment of education for youth by ethnicity and gender. Females and White students are achieving the highest in certain educational measures in the general population. Between 1990 and 2014, the outcome measure

of achieving at least a high school diploma has remained higher for White youth compared to Black or Hispanic youth (Kena et al., 2015). For the attainment of a bachelor's degree, the lowest achievers are non-White males between the ages of 25 and 29 (Kena et al., 2015). In 2013, national U.S. education records reflect outcomes for bachelor's degree attainment to be highest for Asian students, followed by White students and then other students of color (Kena et al., 2015).

The same pattern concerning ethnicity and gender held true for the undergraduate postsecondary enrollment status of all youths in 2013. The highest number of enrollees recorded in 2013 were White female students, followed by Hispanic and Black female students. However, in the 3 years prior to 2013, a trend can be seen for an increase nationally in enrollment for Black and Hispanic males in the general population, as well as a narrowing of the gap in high school diploma achievement between White and Black youths (Kena et al., 2015).

Studies found in the literature examining relationships between ethnicity and gender of foster youths and their educational achievement provide varied findings. One study indicated that American Indian/Alaska Native former foster youths were as likely to complete high school as their White peers but were more likely to have a GED rather than a high school diploma (O'Brien et al., 2010). The Casey National Alumni Study found that American Indian/Alaska Native youths were just as likely to have any postsecondary education compared with White youths; however, American Indian/Alaska Native youths were less likely to graduate with a degree compared to White foster youths. The same study found no differences between Black and White youths who were alumni of the foster care system and their levels of attainment of postsecondary education (O'Brien et al., 2010). In the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study, researchers found that Black foster youths were more likely to have completed some

postsecondary education or training but less likely to have a high school diploma. The Black foster youths in this study completed a GED more often compared to youths who are not Black (Pecora et al., 2009).

Other research points to a likelihood that Black former foster youths achieve higher levels of postsecondary education than White former foster youths. Courtney et al. (2011) found that Black foster care alumni were more likely to have enrolled in and attended college and completed at least 1 year of college by age 21 than White foster care alumni in their Midwest Evaluation of Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth. This study also found several gender differences in educational attainment and enrollment outcome measures. Reflective of the findings of achievement for the general population of youths, female foster youths were found to be significantly more likely to have completed at least some college compared to males. Female youths were also more likely to be enrolled in college than male former foster youths (Courtney et al., 2011).

The universal finding among these informants highlights the increased odds of success for females, suggesting female youths retain increased internal capacities related to academic activity compared to males. Females are found to have better study habits and organization in their schoolwork. One source affirmed this conclusion in a study finding female students in this age range to have superior time management skills compared to males (Misra & McKean, 2000).

The Independent Living Program

The Independent Living Program (ILP) is the part of the child welfare system that specifically addresses the needs of transitioning youths. Former foster youths are young adults who were formerly legal wards of their state because of maltreatment or the absence of a caregiver. This program was created in 1986 by the Independent Living Initiative, which also

provided federal funding to states to deliver these services (Schelbe, 2011). State programs differ in their specific program models. Foster youths exit foster care by reaching the age of majority at 18 years old or when a court transfers legal custody to another party (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). In some exceptional cases, a youth may be legally emancipated prior to reaching the age of majority due to a finding by the court that the youth is already self-sufficient. In many jurisdictions, youths may remain in foster care and receive extended youth services up to age 21. Prior to exiting foster care, youths are provided with a transition plan, independent living training, and other supports as they approach the legal age of majority at 18 years old. Not all states have selected to extend youth services to this age group.

The federal legislation creating the ILP has allocated funds to provide stipends for foster youths for tuition and education expenses in addition to other scholarships, grants, and supports.

Historical Overview of the Independent Living Program

The recognition of foster children as a vulnerable population can first be seen at the federal level in 1909 during President Theodore Roosevelt's first Conference on Children's Issues. The conference concluded that with the "proper training of destitute children being essential to the well-being of the State, it is a sound public policy that the State through its duly authorized representatives should inspect the work of all agencies which care for dependent children" (United States Children's Bureau, 1967, p. 5). The same conference recommended the establishment of the Children's Bureau, the federal agency dedicated solely to the welfare of children, which came to fruition shortly after, in 1912 (United States Children's Bureau, 1967). Historically, states have shouldered the responsibility for providing out-of-home care, along with private entities. The Social Security Act Amendments of 1980 (P.L. 96-272) established federal funding support as an independent funding source for states to provide foster homes for children

in foster care (Fernandes, 2012). The Independent Living Initiative, the first piece of federal legislation specifically addressing the needs of transitioning foster youths, (Schelbe, 2011). This legislation first illuminated the specific issues of foster children aging out of foster care for broader society and provided a national response to the challenges faced by these often-marginalized youths. This program was replaced in 1999 by the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP), authorized under the Foster Care Independence Act (Fernandes, 2012). The Foster Care Independence Act greatly expanded federal financial support for youths aging out of foster care, to include: (a) identification of youths likely to remain in care until age 18 and transition service provision, (b) provision of education, training, and services necessary for employment and to enter college for youths identified as likely to remain in care to age 18, (c) services aimed to prepare youths identified as likely to remain in care until age 18 for postsecondary training institutions, (d) personal and emotional support provided through mentors and interaction with dedicated adults for youths identified as likely to remain in care to age 18, and (e) provision of financial, housing, counseling, employment, education, and other supports to foster youths between 18 and 21 years old (Schelbe, 2011).

The Foster Care Independence Act was again amended in 2001 with the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments (P. L. 107-133). Federal funding was again added with this amendment, primarily targeting postsecondary education for former foster youths. This amendment authorized \$60 million of federal funding to provide monetary vouchers for postsecondary education for youths who have aged out of foster care (Mares, 2010). The Chafee Educational and Training Vouchers (ETV) Program, a part of the CFCIP, added a sixth purpose to the original CFCIP purposes by providing funds to address the financial barriers for foster care

alumni seeking postsecondary education and training. Eligible youths can receive vouchers to be utilized for education and training tuition and related expenses.

More recently, additional legislation has recognized the increasing needs of youths emerging from foster care into adulthood. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 (P. L. 111-148) extended Medicaid eligibility to age 26 for youths who age out of foster care beginning in 2014. This legislation compelled child welfare staff to ensure emerging adults from foster care have a health care transition plan (Szilagyi et al., 2015). The Uninterrupted Scholars Act of 2013 provided improved information sharing between schools and child welfare agencies, further acknowledging the growing needs of foster youths who are emerging adults. The aim of this legislation was an attempt to mitigate the harmful effects of disrupted academic progress due to frequent placement moves that are often associated with foster care. Finally, the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, signed into law in 2014, provided that credit reports with credit education and certain personal documents shall be provided to foster youths at the time of their emancipation to assist them in successfully transitioning to adulthood.

Program Administration among States

The CFCIP is the current national construct of the Independent Living Program for foster youths. Created in 1999 by the Foster Care Independence Act, the program mandates funds to all states for use in providing transition services to young adults. To receive funding, the CFCIP requires states to complete application activities at outlined intervals. The law provides that states must deliver services to youths between ages 18 and 21 who left foster care because they attained 18 years of age. States may provide services to former foster youths who left foster care

prior to age 18. These decisions are made by individual state jurisdictions (Congressional Research Service, 2017).

The 1999 Foster Care Independence Act doubled the Independent Living Program funds from \$70 million in the previous law to \$140 million in its current form. To receive the full federal CFCIP and ETV allocations, federal funds are integrated with a 20% state match (Congressional Research Service, 2017). States must submit a 5-year plan outlining the intended use of the ILP funds. Upon completing these requirements, states (and a few tribes) receive funds based on their proportion of the national total number of children in foster care. States that do not apply for their allotment do not receive funding. These unused funds are distributed to participating states. Additionally, states have 2 fiscal years in which to utilize the CFCIP and ETV funding. In Fiscal Year 2017, all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and four tribal entities received funding totaling more than \$180 million (Congressional Research Service, 2017).

Once funding is in place, the law directs states to use funding to provide services that may include educational assistance, vocational training, mentoring, preventive health activities, and others. States may allocate 30% of their program funding toward room and board for foster youths ages 18 to 21 years who remain in foster care home placements or who are enrolled in a postsecondary education program until age 19, 20, or 21. While room and board are not specifically defined in the statute, these include budget items such as food and shelter, rental deposits, rent, utilities, and first home establishment items (Congressional Research Service, 2017). The CFCIP funds do not allow the support of a youth to acquire property. Youths may also use funds to establish trust funds or savings accounts in accordance with their state's program format.

According to guidelines, there is no minimum age requirement for the CFCIP. This legislation gives states broad discretion in determining individual state policies on the beginning eligibility age for ILP services for their youths. As long as the child is in state custody, states can utilize funding to provide services to children 17 years and younger in any type of foster care placement.

For Independent Living Programs nationally, the method of program administration at the local level differs among states. States follow application guidelines and make decisions about local delivery models and youths who may be eligible outside of the mandatory guidelines found in the CFCIP. In some states, programs are administered by a state-independent living office, while other states use contract providers or partner with private organizations to deliver their programs. In some states, such as California, states follow a county-operated ILP delivery system in which each county receives and distributes funding (Congressional Research Service, 2017).

Independent Living Services

The barriers to success for foster youths because of their interaction with the foster care system are well documented, necessitating specialized services to mitigate negative outcomes (Courtney et al., 2001; Courtney et al., 2007; Rios & Rocco, 2014; Wolanin, 2005). The Independent Living Initiative of 1986 began the formal recognition of the needs of transitioning foster youths as a population by the federal government and state child welfare agencies. Evolving since its inception with additional amendments to the original federal law, the ILP provides funding to states for independent living skills training, financing for higher education, supplies, housing, and other supports for youths transitioning to adulthood. Individual state programs vary.

Multiple studies on the common outcomes for foster youths emerging into adulthood illustrate that youths need connections to supportive adults, access to stable housing, and supportive services that are normally provided by birth parents or adoptive parents (Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011; Harden, 2004; Havalchak et al., 2009; Jones, 2014; Munson & McMillen, 2009; Pecora et al., 2006; Salazar, 2012). In some cases, foster youths are not living in family settings where life skills are naturally learned. Arnett (2004) found that only 35% of young adults in the general population consider high school to provide adequate preparation for the world of work. Research related to the effects of ILP services on the success of the emerging adult is limited. A handful of researchers have attempted to ascertain which services may best assist foster youths in their transition. Life skills training, employment services, financial supports, and education are cited as the most desired services in those studies (Barth, 1990; Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Mares, 2010; Scannapieco et al, 2007; Sim et al., 2008). One often cited national study of Independent Living Programs found that former foster youths who received life skills training in financial matters performed better than those who received no education in this area (Cook, 1994).

Services often provided for youths ages 14 to 21 include life skills workshops, financial assistance with secondary and postsecondary expenses related to high school graduation and college tuition, and support to assist the youths with pursuing individual goals related to their transition, including individual counseling. Foster youths who are aged 18 to 21 are eligible to receive foster care assistance through the Independent Living Extended Youth Support Services Program in some states. When youths elect to remain within the auspices of foster care, they may receive housing services and financial and educational supports (GA DFCS, 2014). Youths who opt out of the Extended Youth Support Services

Program may continue to receive some ILP support services independently of the welfare agency foster care placement and oversight in states where extended services are offered (GA DFCS, 2014).

The CFCIP, as created by the 1999 Foster Care Independence Act, provided states with funding to administer their ILPs. The law also required data collection by states to track the independent living services provided to youths and use of outcome measures to evaluate the performance of programs. These activities mark efforts to address the root causes of poor educational attainment of foster youths and determine the best practices to improve a variety of outcomes for foster youths. The NYTD requires two data collection activities, including (a) collecting information on each youth who receives independent living services and (b) collecting demographic and outcome information for foster care youths. States began collecting data on October 1, 2010. These data are reported by states to the Administration for Children and Families semiannually (Children's Bureau, 2014). The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2014) reported 101,780 youths and young adults received at least one independent living service in Fiscal Year 2012. Almost half of these youths were between ages 14 and 17, and 53% were between ages 18 and 26, with an average age of 18 years (Children's Bureau, 2014).

There is little research on the efficacy of specific ILP services associated with the successful educational outcomes for foster care youths. Independent living services are designed to teach youths basic skills for navigating independent living that they would have learned from their biological or adoptive family caregivers. Child welfare agencies are responsible for ensuring each youth is provided with services that will teach needed skills and provide social and

financial support during their transition to independence. Differences in state independent living service provision are relative to the state program design.

Life Skills Training

The foundation of the ILP has historically encompassed the life skills training component. Life skills include financial management and budgeting, employment skills, educational skills, household management skills, and other areas of day-to-day adult functioning. Training for these skills is provided in a variety of mediums. Resources available to programs providing life skills trainings to youths include workbooks, videos, games, classroom training, and one-on-one training by foster caregivers (Collins, 2004). Collins (2004) asserted that training should be delivered in a real-world, practical setting and that classroom delivery is not sufficient for youths' development.

The ILP aims to provide life skills and supportive services to children identified as likely to age out of care at age 18. These life skills and supportive services are related to academic support, college tours and preparatory workshops, financial resources, postsecondary education assistance, career preparation, information on maintaining healthy relationships, self-supports, health education and risk prevention, budgeting and financial management, housing education and household management, and legal matters (GA DFCS, 2014). Foster youths are administered an independent living needs assessment to determine needed services. The Casey Life Skills Assessment measures the needs of youths beginning at age 14, and these results are incorporated in the youths' plans (GA DFCS, 2014).

Employment Services

The provision of education, training, and services necessary for employment of foster youths is one of the six purposes addressed by the CFCIP to support foster youths aging out of

foster care. Low employment rates are a common characteristic of former foster youths who have aged out of foster care (Barth, 1990; Berzin, 2008; Courtney et al., 2007; Dworsky et al., 2013; Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011; Mech & Fung, 1999; Salazar, 2012; Salazar, 2013). Foster care youths are more often found to pursue employment at unskilled low-wage jobs after aging out of foster care (Berzin, 2008; Courtney et. al., 2007; Salazar, 2013).

Pergamit and Johnson (2009) compared foster youths to a national sample to determine whether youth job preparedness impacts employment and education outcomes. These researchers compared similarly aged youths from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 to former foster youths. Their findings revealed similar results for both cohorts. At age 19, nearly 63% of youths in foster care with high job preparedness and high reading ability were employed. In the same study, 41% of foster youths were enrolled in college programs (Pergamit & Johnson, 2009). Similarly, McDaniel and Pergamit (2013) found in a multi-site evaluation of foster youth programs that youths with a high sense of job preparedness were more likely to have current employment and to have held employment in the past year than youths with a lower sense of job preparedness. The implications of these studies support the conception that high job preparedness among youths predicts more employment.

Job skills training programs provide real-world experience in addition to classroom-based training for foster youths. Programs such as the Georgia TeenWork Internship Program (Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, (n.d.) were created to increase the job readiness of youths as they prepare to transition from foster care to adulthood and self-sufficiency.

Administered through the Georgia Division of Family & Children Services (DFCS), the Georgia TeenWork program is designed to ensure that Georgia's foster youths are provided with the opportunities for career preparation and to build job skills to prepare them for the adult world of

work through practical experience. Foster youths who are age 15 to 17 may participate in job training opportunities within their communities through partnerships with organizations and businesses in the public and private sectors (GA DFCS, n. d.). The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (n. d.) identified four areas of focus for the TeenWork program, including service, career preparation, employment skills training, and youth resource connections. Additionally, training workshops target topics such as resume writing, dressing for success, customer service skills, and office etiquette, among other areas (Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, (n.d.).

Financial Support

The Foster Care Independence Act expanded federal financial support for foster youths transitioning into adulthood. An allocation of \$140 million each year is provided to states for independent living service provision to children in foster care and post-emancipation foster youths (Mares, 2010). The 2001 Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments added another \$60 million in funding for postsecondary education for foster care alumni. This funding is used to provide direct and indirect financial contributions to foster youths before or after emancipation. The ILP offers assorted financial support services intended to support foster youths in the transition to independence.

Budgeting and financial management services provide education and training in areas from living within a budget to credit and tax education. The child welfare system recognizes the fraud and abuse of identity for many foster youths as having an impact on their personal credit ratings. The 2014 Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act provided that foster youths will receive credit report reviews and copies of their credit reports at emancipation (GA DFCS, 2014). Youths are provided with credit counseling and education as well as

assistance in resolving errors on individual credit reports as needed. This support is intended to prevent the youths from entering adulthood with financial barriers to their credit ratings.

Savings account establishment is another area of financial assistance offered to foster care youths. One model is Georgia's Individual Development Account (IDA) which consists of a matched savings account opportunity for foster youths ages 16 to 21 years. The purpose of the IDA is to assist foster youths with the accumulation of assets and resources needed for their impending independence. Georgia apportions the matched amount of one thousand dollars for each youth, with accumulated funds (GA DFCS, 2013).

An important financial support provided to foster care youths is the Chafee Educational and Training Vouchers program, which helps finance higher education and is made possible through amendments to the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001. The provision of this funding is intended to buffer the negative effects of financial obstacles faced by transitioning foster youths. The ETV program increases support available for foster youths by making more financial resources available for tuition costs. Educational and training vouchers in the amount of five thousand dollars per individual per year provide eligible foster youths with additional assistance with education and training tuition and related expenses.

The first Chafee ETV funds were appropriated in the U. S. in Fiscal Year 2003. The program criteria allow some discretion for states to fashion their programs, while some areas of the policy are predetermined. The federal policy does not specify that youths must have reached age 18 in the foster care system to receive funding for their pursuit of postsecondary education; however, some states require that youths must have exited foster care on or after their eighteenth birthday to participate in the ETV program (GA DFCS, 2014). Federal criteria also set the age of enrollment and time limits for receipt.

Educational Supports

The challenges of learning for foster children result from past maltreatment and trauma, separation from caregivers, and frequent placement moves with school changes (Fisher et al., 2009; Mech & Fung, 1999; Rios & Rocco, 2014; Salazar, 2013; Unrau et al., 2011). In addition, research shows children in care have higher rates of special education statuses, lower reading abilities, and overall lower grades than children not in foster care (Pecora et al., 2009). These youths need additional supports to assist them in overcoming their disadvantaged conditions, which affect their educational success. The ILP seeks to improve educational outcomes for foster youths through additional supports.

The ILP also provides help for children who are likely to remain in foster care until 18 years of age to prepare for and enter postsecondary training and education institutions by coordinating college enrollment activities and other college preparatory activities, including graduation from high school or GED attainment. Services related to financing higher education are provided to increase success for transitioning foster youths.

Study Hypotheses

This study seeks information about the ILP and the continued enrollment of foster youths in education after leaving the foster care system. The review of data in this study will provide evidence of relationships between the services provided to youths to prepare them for independent living and their enrollment in education at age 19. The primary research question for this study is: What is the relationship between foster youths' access to ILP services and their enrollment at age 19? The researcher hopes to gain more understanding of the educational enrollment of foster youths after reaching the legal age of majority.

Summary

Foster care youths are a vulnerable and often marginalized subpopulation of emerging adults (Kim & Sobczyk, 2004; Rios & Rocco, 2014). Foster youths experience events of childhood that are dissimilar from that of children developing in other family structures. These youths are exposed to emotional distress and systemic factors that are inexorably a part of the separation from caregivers and the reality of involvement with the child welfare system. Research demonstrates that foster youths attain lower levels of education and training than their non-fostered peers by comparison (Berzin, 2008; Courtney et al., 2001; Courtney et al., 2007; Rios & Rocco, 2014; Wolanin, 2005). Drawing from life course theory, we know that changes in the environment can shape human development. Further, life course theory provides a lens for examining the challenges faced by this population during a particular phase of development. The child welfare system, through the ILP, offers an array of services and training opportunities that are intended to mitigate these barriers faced by foster youths. Services and training target prevention education for negative outcomes and training for life skills and independent living. Many young adults without the ability to sustain their basic needs require support from other members of society. The recognition of disparate data concerning this population by researchers supports the focus on this concern as a social problem.

Some research studies have attempted to identify common individual characteristics of this group that may play a part in disrupting their success in educational achievement (Courtney et al., 2001; Courtney et al., 2007; Dworsky et al., 2013). Federal funding and data collection through the NYTD are indications of governmental attempts to measure the effects of systemic efforts to improve outcomes for foster youths. With this growing body of knowledge, additional efforts are needed to continue to address the factors associated with poor outcomes for foster

youths and to mitigate the course of derailment. The challenging aspects of transitioning to adulthood presented by scholars are amplified for foster youths, as described in the literature. Additional evidence and analysis are valuable for understanding the factors that interfere with academic achievement for foster youths and practices that are most effective for overall educational success.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents a description of the research methodology used in this study. Utilizing the framework of life course theory, the purpose of this study is to examine the effect of independent living services on educational enrollment among foster youths. The study participants are described along with the data source and the methods used to analyze the data. The research questions and research design will also be discussed. Table 1 presents the key variables and operational definitions utilized in this study.

Research Objectives

This explanatory study investigates the effect of the ILP on enrollment among foster care youths. The overall research objective is to identify relationships of ILP services and educational enrollment for foster youths after the age of legal emancipation. Educational enrollment status is recorded within federally mandated NYTD datasets in three waves, beginning when a youth is age 17. Logistic regression analysis of this data is used in this study to determine how receiving certain ILP services is associated with a youth being enrolled in education at age 19. Controlling for demographic and life outcome risk factors, relationships between access to ILP services and the educational enrollment status of a national sample of foster youths are explored. Further, the ethnicity and gender of the sample (N = 2,109) are examined.

The following research questions and hypotheses are proposed to support the objective.

Research question 1: What is the relationship between foster youths' access to academic support services and enrollment at age 19?

Hypothesis 1: Foster youths who receive academic support services while in foster care are more likely to enroll in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses in comparison to foster youths who do not receive academic support services.

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between foster youths' access to academic support services while in foster care and their enrollment in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses.

Research question 2: What is the relationship between foster youths' access to budgeting and financial management services and enrollment at age 19?

Hypothesis 2: Foster youths who receive budgeting and financial management services while in foster care are more likely to enroll in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses in comparison to foster youths who do not receive budgeting and financial management services.

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between foster youths' access to budgeting and financial management services while in foster care and their enrollment in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses.

Research question 3: What is the relationship between foster youths' access to mentoring services and enrollment at age 19?

Hypothesis 3: Foster youths who receive mentoring services while in foster care are more likely to enroll in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses in comparison to foster youths who do not receive mentoring services.

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between foster youths' access to mentoring services while in foster care and their enrollment in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses.

After exploration of the data sample, logistic regression analysis was completed to examine the effects of the key independent variables on the dependent variable.

Operationalization of Terms

This study utilizes survey data for the NYTD with predefined terms. The NYTD Codebook is provided with each dataset from the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN). The following descriptions operationalize the key terms in this study.

Outcomes/Barriers. The NYTD collects data for certain outcomes related to dimensions of well-being, financial circumstances, and educational status of foster care youths (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2013b). The outcomes in this study are examined as risk factors presenting barriers to success for this population.

Services. Services in this study refer to activities conducted and funded by the ILP to provide youths with education, training, and skill building in several aspects of adult life (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2013b). The NYTD reports on services that are provided by states under the CFCIP.

Emerging Adulthood. The period of being in between adolescence and young adulthood and in the process of reaching adulthood but not there yet, generally spanning the ages from 18 to 25 (Arnett, 2004).

Foster Youths. Children who are in foster care and have reached the eligible age to receive independent living services from the foster care system.

Former Foster Youths or Foster Care Alumni. Adults who were previously in foster care, are eligible to receive ILP services, and are no longer voluntarily or involuntarily in foster care.

For this study, the following variables will be examined.

Dependent Variable

Current enrollment. The NYTD collects information on the educational enrollment status of foster youths. This term is the dependent variable of interest for this study in connection with youths' pursuit of legitimate means of self-sufficiency during emerging adulthood. Current enrollment is a variable defined as the youth's response at the time the survey is completed regarding whether the youth is enrolled in and attending high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2014b). A youth is considered to be enrolled if the educational program is out of session for routine breaks (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2014b).

Independent Variables

Several independent variables were included in the binary logistic regression and multivariate model for examination of their relationships to the dependent variable. The variables of interest in this study are (a) academic support services, (b) budgeting and financial management services, and (c) mentoring services.

Academic support services. These services are defined by the NYTD as services that are intended to assist the foster youth complete high school or the GED (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2013a). These services include activities such as tutoring, study skills training, and academic counseling. It is noted that this variable does not include attendance in high school (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2014a).

Budgeting and financial management assistance. This variable is recorded by the NYTD for each youth who received budgeting and financial management services paid for by the state welfare agency (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2013a). Budgeting

and financial management assistance includes training for the foster youth during the reporting period in any of the following areas: living within a budget; checking and savings account management; checkbook balancing; shopping skills; consumer awareness; and credit, loans, and taxes education (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2014a).

Mentoring services. Mentoring means that the youth has been matched with a screened and trained adult for a one-on-one relationship that involves the two meeting on a regular basis. Mentoring can be short-term, but it may also support the development of a long-term relationship. While youths often are connected to adult role models through school, work, or family, this service category only includes a mentor relationship that has been facilitated, paid for, or provided by the state agency or its staff (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2014a).

Control Variables

Foster care status services. This variable refers to whether the foster youth was in foster care during the reporting period. The youth may be released from foster care at the time of the survey response but have been in foster care at some point during the reporting period.

Presence of children. In this study, the presence of children is a variable that is defined by the NYTD to include a youth who has given birth or fathered any children (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2014b). For the focus of this study, this data element captures the response concerning the youth's experience for the last 2 years only. The occurrence of children prior to this period is not considered yes for wave 2 and wave 3 responses (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2014b). The NYTD defines the presence of children as applying to biological children only (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2014b).

Incarceration. This variable is defined as a foster youth having the experience of confinement in a jail, prison, correctional facility, or juvenile detention center as a result of an accusation of committing a crime (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2014b). For the wave 2 respondents, the data collected reflects the youths' experiences in the past 2 years only.

Ethnicity. Ethnicity is answered as a dichotomous variable in the survey with several categories of race/ethnicity provided and the option to respond yes or no for each category. The youth or the youth's parents indicate their ethnicity by responding as to whether the category applies or does not apply to the foster youth (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2014a). The racial categories offered on the survey include (a) American Indian or Alaska Native, (b) Asian, (c) Black or African American, (d) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, (e) White, (f) Unknown, (g) Declined, and (h) Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2014a). Each category provides the youth with a description of the ethnicity.

Gender. Gender is responded to by the youth as a dichotomous variable indicating yes or no for the categories of male and female.

Table 1*Variables and Operational Definitions*

Variable	Description
Dependent	
Current enrollment	At the time of the survey, the youth is enrolled in and attending high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses.
Independent	
Academic support services	These services are intended to assist the foster youth to complete high school or a GED They include activities such as tutoring, study skills training, and academic counseling.
Budgeting and financial management services	These services include training for the foster youth during the reporting period in any of the following areas: living within a budget; checking and savings account management; checkbook balancing; shopping skills; consumer awareness; and credit, loans, and taxes education.
Mentoring/connection with an adult	The youth has been matched with a screened and trained adult for a one-on-one relationship that involves the two meeting on a regular basis. Mentoring can be short-term, but it may also support the development of a long-term relationship. While youths often are connected to adult role models through school, work, or family, this service category only includes a mentor relationship that has been facilitated, paid for, or provided by the state agency or its staff.

Variable	Description
Control	
Foster care status services	This refers to whether the foster youth was in foster care at any time during the reporting period.
Presence of children	The youth has given birth to or fathered children for the last 2 years only.
Incarceration	The youth has experienced confinement in a jail, prison, correctional facility, or juvenile detention center as a result of an accusation of committing a crime in the past 2 years only.
Ethnicity	The youth or the youth's parents indicate their ethnicity by responding to questions on a series of ethnicity options. The ethnicity categories for this study are reduced in the data to: White, Black, Hispanic, and Other.
Gender	Gender is responded to by the youth as a dichotomous variable, indicating yes or no for the categories of male and female.

Data Collection

This study is constructed from a secondary analysis of the 2011 cohort of foster youths in wave 2 from the federally mandated National Youth in Transition Database. Collected in 2013, wave 2 measures the activities of the surveyed youths at age 19. The researcher is interested in the enrollment of foster youths after the age of 18 due to the termination of the legal jurisdiction for foster youths at this time. Data used in this study are collected in accordance with Public Law 106-169, which established the CFCIP under Section 477 of the Social Security Act. States first began collecting data in 2010 to capture information about foster youths nationally (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). The datasets include two components for reporting, with one consisting of outcomes reported by former foster youths and the second consisting of service provision data as delivered by the ILP of the child welfare system. The services component of

the data reflects information collected every 6 months for services provided by a state for all youths, regardless of age. The information was obtained in two separate datasets, as described above, from general release data from the NDACAN, which is maintained by Cornell University.

The present study focuses on baseline data from the Fiscal Year 2013 wave 2 survey. All youths in foster care who were age 17 in Fiscal Year 2011 were eligible to complete the outcomes follow-up survey at age 19 in Fiscal Year 2013. Datasets were requested by the researcher from public release NDACAN data archives and prepared for valid treatment by the software package. For the utilized outcome data in wave 2 gathered from 19-year-old current and former foster youths, a total of 2,109 eligible survey responses were examined.

Data Preparation

The researcher obtained four general release datasets from the NDACAN, including two sets in wave 2 (age 19) for the cohort of foster youths. The datasets included responses for several outcomes reported by foster youths at age 19 and another set consisting of ILP services provided to youths at age 19. Thirty-eight states reported data in the 2013 wave 2 NYTD survey. The included foster youths were identified in each individual dataset by a unique numeric identifier. In preparation for this study, the researcher merged the original datasets into one dataset for examination. The final dataset comprised responses for foster youths who completed wave 2 of the survey, with the researcher ensuring no duplicates were included. The independent variables of interest were included in the merged dataset. Additional variables were eliminated, leaving responses for the independent variables in the total survey. The independent variables of interest included in the datasets are (a) received academic support services, (b) received budgeting and financial management services, and (c) received mentoring services. Control

variables were also included in the final dataset. Invalid responses consisting of blanks and declined responses were eliminated, which reduced survey respondents to 2,109.

The final dataset was created to include the 2,109 individual foster youths who responded at 19 years of age and left no blank or declined responses to key questions concerning the dependent variable and independent variables of interest. Each independent variable was examined in preliminary exploratory analysis. As a final action, the researcher merged the updated services dataset and the newly restructured outcomes files into one file containing the data for each youth, with only one record for each youth.

Analytic Procedures

This study will utilize descriptive statistics and logistic regression to examine the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable, enrollment, while controlling for common life outcomes for foster youths.

Multivariate Analysis

Multivariate statistics are involved when there are three or more variables being examined at one time. Multivariate statistics are concerned with whether there is causation between one variable and another. In some scenarios, there may appear to be causation between two variables, but the cause may be a result of a third variable. Multivariate applications allow for more than one variable to be entered simultaneously into a single equation to determine which of these most affects a dependent variable (Rosenthal, 2012). For the present study, numerous ILP services and life outcomes commonly known to occur for foster youths are recorded in national data. Multivariate analysis allows all the variables to be tested for relationship to the educational enrollment of these youths, with multiple factors examined at the same time and with consideration of more than one variable. This statistic is an improvement

from bivariate analysis, which only conveys relationships between one independent variable at a time. Multivariate analysis further allows the additional control variables, such as ethnicity and gender, to be explored in combination with various life event and service variables for the study.

Regression analysis is the most widely used statistical technique in social research due to its ability to predict an outcome based on more than one independent variable. The method of regression is selected with consideration of the number of independent variables in the equation and a variation in the interpretation of the slope or regression coefficients (Hanneman et al., 2012). Since the predictive association between the variables being studied does not always follow a plotted straight line, logistic regression is used to study a relationship between a binary-response dependent variable against independent variables. The logistic regression model is used in this study due to its ability to predict a binary-dependent variable by an independent set of variables. The binary variable of current enrollment is the dependent variable for this analysis.

For this study, regression models were tested. After completing descriptive statistics, the researcher completed tests using logistic regression. The independent variables, which include budgeting and financial management services, academic support services, and mentoring services, were first tested alone for relationships with the dependent variable for the sample. Next, multivariate analysis was completed for each independent variable along with the control variables to determine whether they predict the dependent variable of enrollment. Odds and probabilities were also calculated for each independent variable. A model including all variables was also analyzed.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

This chapter provides an overview of the findings for this study of foster youths receiving services from the Independent Living Program (ILP) at age 19. This point in time is notable in the life of foster youths due to the termination of mandatory authority over their individual decision making at age 18. Life course theory illuminates the developmental process of humans in the context of the environment. Using the life course theory as a theoretical framework, this study examines the unique experience of the foster youths in relation to their enrollment. For this study, enrollment is defined as a youth's enrollment in and attendance of high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses.

This study examines relationships between specific ILP services and educational enrollment for foster youths while controlling for life outcomes that may present barriers. The research questions that guided this explanatory study are: What is the relationship between foster youths' access to academic support services and enrollment at age 19? What is the relationship between foster youths' access to budgeting and financial management services and enrollment at age 19? What is the relationship between foster youths' access to mentoring services and enrollment at age 19? To answer these questions, three hypotheses were developed and tested. The analytical strategy for this study first involved exploration of descriptive statistics for the dependent and independent variables analyzed. Next, logistic regression analysis was utilized to examine relationships between the factors that may influence a foster youth's enrollment. The results from regression analysis are presented in the following sections. A discussion of findings is presented in Chapter V.

Descriptive Statistics

Foster Youth Population Description

As previously discussed, the demographic traits shared by this population include youths who were involved in the foster care system in the United States at age 19 in Fiscal Year 2013. This dataset represents the first collection of data for a foster youth cohort utilizing the National Youth in Transition Database. Thirty-eight states reported during two waves of data collection for this group at the time of the study. The data used in this study was collected during wave 2 for the cohort.

Table 1 previously outlined variables and operational definitions in Chapter III, Methodology. In addition to examining relationships between access to ILP services and enrollment among foster youths, the researcher explored the demographic attributes of the study group, as reflected in Table 2 and Table 3. The ethnic groups considered in this study include White; Black; Hispanic; and Other, which includes all other ethnicities. Youths who identified their ethnicity as White or Black made up most of the participants in this study. White and Black youths made up 70% of the sample, with White youths being the largest category of respondents. The third-largest category making up the sample was Hispanic youths, at 21.2%. Foster youths in the category labeled Other made up less than 10% of the sample. For the gender of the youths in the study, it is noteworthy that the sample was composed of nearly equal shares of male and female youths. There were slightly more female foster youths surveyed, at 55.1%.

Table 2*Ethnicity of Study Sample*

	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
Frequency	848	618	447	196
Percentage	40.2%	29.3%	21.2%	9.3%

Table 3*Gender of Study Sample*

	Male	Female
Frequency	947	1,162
Percentage	44.9%	55.1%

The foundation of the ILP includes the life skills training services and basic needs assistance provided to foster youths involved with the foster care system. A summary of all variables examined in the study and their frequencies in relation to the sample group were observed. Descriptive statistics for all the variables considered in this study are presented in Table 4 and Table 5 below.

Table 4 shows that the majority of the foster youths surveyed in the Fiscal Year 2013 cohort were enrolled in an educational program at age 19. This variable includes enrollment in and attendance of high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses at the time of the survey. Almost 40% of the foster youths in the sample were not enrolled by age 19. Male foster youths were enrolled at 44.9% compared to female youths at 55.1%. Most youths in the sample indicated they voluntarily remained in foster care (foster care status), a control variable in this study, at a rate of 58.1%. These young people opted to remain in the care of their state foster care system beyond the legally mandated age for foster care.

For the current study, receipt of various foster care ILP services by foster youths was counted in the survey sample and then compared to their enrollment statuses. The services examined include academic support services, budgeting and financial management services, and mentoring services. For these independent variables, mentoring services were found to be received by most of the youths in the sample, at a rate of 93.8%. Nearly all the youths in the sample reported receiving formal mentoring from the ILP during their time in foster care. The instances of this independent variable accounted for more than the total instances of the other services combined. This finding is displayed in Table 4. For academic support services (tutoring, study skills training, academic counseling), approximately a third of the youths in the sample reported receiving this service, at a rate of 38.6%. Similarly, budgeting and financial management services were received by 33.8% of the youths surveyed.

In addition to services received, certain life outcomes were treated as control variables for this study to determine their relationships to the youths' enrollment status at 19. These statistics are presented in Table 5. The frequencies shown provide an overview of the population being explored, and these characteristics will be further analyzed later in this chapter for association with enrollment.

Table 4*Summary of Dependent Variable and All Independent Variable Frequencies*

Variable	Response	Frequency	Percent
Academic support services received at 19	Yes	815	38.6%
	No	1,294	61.4%
	Total	2,109	100.0%
Budgeting/financial management services received at 19	Yes	713	33.8%
	No	1,396	66.2%
	Total	2,109	100.0%
Mentoring services received at age 19	Yes	1,979	93.8%
	No	130	6.2%
	Total	2,109	100.0%
Current enrollment	Yes	1,309	62%
	No	800	38%
	Total	2,109	100%

In addition to the primary independent variables, this study also considers several control variables that represent barriers to enrollment for foster youths. It is well documented that foster youths commonly experience barriers to their educational pursuits that are unique to their involvement with the child welfare system. The control variables used in this study were chosen based on the scholarly literature on this topic.

The outcomes included as control variables represent established barriers to enrollment for this sample group, as measured by the NYTD and found in supporting research. The findings of this examination found a small percentage of foster youths who experienced incarceration while in care. Table 5 indicates the percentage of youths involved in ILP at age 19 in this sample who were incarcerated as 17.1% of the sample. Another barrier to educational enrollment is the presence of children, defined as a foster youth who has fathered or given birth to a child prior to completing the survey. Only 9.2% of the 19-year-old youths surveyed reported the presence of children. This finding does not indicate a large portion of the sample population. The study group consists of nearly equal shares of male and female youths and largely White and Black

youths. The frequencies outlined in Table 5 provide an overview of the population being explored. Further, Table 6 outlines descriptive statistics for all the variables beyond frequencies and percentages in the sample, including a) N (total observations), b) mean for each variable, c) standard deviation, d) minimum value, and e) maximum value. These characteristics will be further analyzed for association to enrollment.

Table 5

Summary of All Control Variable Frequencies

Variable	Response	Frequency	Percent
Foster Care Status (remains in care) at age 19	Yes	1,225	58.1%
	No	884	41.9%
	Total	2,109	100.0%
History of incarceration at age 19	Yes	360	17.1%
	No	1,749	82.9%
	Total	2,109	100.0%
Children (Fathered a child/given birth by age 19)	Yes	194	9.2%
	No	1,915	90.8%
	Total	2,109	100.0%
Male	Yes	947	44.9%
Female	Yes	1,162	55.1%
	Total	2,109	100.0%
White	Yes	848	40.2%
Black	Yes	618	29.3%
Hispanic	Yes	447	21.2
Other	Yes	196	9.3%
	Total	2,109	100%

Table 6*Descriptive Statistics for All Variables*

	N		Mean	Std. Error of Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
	Valid	Missing					
Gender	2109	0	1.55	.011	.498	1	2
Ethnicity	2109	0	2.00	.022	.993	1	4
Foster Care Status	2109	0	.58	.011	.494	0	1
Academic Support Services	2109	0	.39	.011	.487	0	1
Budgeting/Financial Management Services	2109	0	.34	.010	.473	0	1
Current Enrollment	2109	0	.62	.011	.485	0	1
Mentor Services	2109	0	.94	.005	.241	0	1
Incarceration	2109	0	.17	.008	.376	0	1
Children	2109	0	.092	.0063	.2891	0	1

Logistic Regression Analysis

Regression analysis is the most widely used statistical test in social research due to its ability to predict an outcome based on more than one independent variable (Hanneman et al., 2012). This technique is used to study a relationship between a binary response dependent variable and independent variables. Logistic regression was selected for this study as the preferred statistical technique due to the nature of the included variables. Logistic regression was used to examine multiple independent variables and a binary dependent variable. Current enrollment is the dependent variable for this analysis.

Research Question 1

The first research question for this study is: What is the relationship between foster youths' access to academic support services and enrollment at age 19? The following hypothesis and null hypothesis were tested to provide answers to this query:

Hypothesis 1: Foster youths who receive academic support services while in foster care are more likely to enroll in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses in comparison to foster youths who do not receive academic support services.

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between foster youths' access to academic support services while in foster care and their enrollment in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses.

The findings displayed in Table 7 show the results of logistic regression for this research question. Logistic regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between academic support services and enrollment of foster youths at age 19 using a 95% confidence level. The alpha value is 0.05. The variable, academic support services, is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis can be rejected. This finding demonstrates there is a statistically significant relationship between foster youths' access to academic support services while in foster care and their enrollment at age 19. The model predicts that the odds of enrolling in and attending high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses are 1.570 times higher for foster youths who received academic support services than those who did not receive such services.

Table 7*Academic Support Services*

Variable	B Values	Standard Error (S.E.)	Wald	Df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
Academic Support Services	.451	.094	22.96	1	.000**	1.570	1.305	1.888
Constant	.324	.056	33.14	1	.000	1.383		

***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05

Multiple logistic regression analysis was conducted, simultaneously entering the independent variable, academic support services, along with control variables into the model. A full model including the independent variable, academic support services, along with control variables is presented in Table 8. The Nagelkerke R Square indicated approximately 2% of the variance in enrollment was accounted for by the independent variables overall. With the addition of the control variables, academic support services remained statistically significant at $p < 0.05$; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Based on the EXP(B) of 1.511, foster youths who received academic support services from the ILP are 1.511 times more likely to be enrolled in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses at age 19 than those who did not receive this service. Among the control variables, youths with current foster care status had the highest odds ratio. Foster youths who continue to have an active foster care status revealed an EXP(B) of 1.965. Youths in this category are 1.965 times more likely to be enrolled, making this status an important factor for these young people and their involvement with education beyond age 18.

Although the number of youths in the sample who indicated they had a history of incarceration was minimal, the analysis found an EXP(B) of 0.700. The odds for youths with a history of incarceration are lower by a factor of .700 compared to youths with no history of incarceration. This means the odds of being enrolled were .700 times smaller, or 30% lower, for youths with past incarceration experiences. Similarly, youths who had children had decreased odds of enrollment (EXP(B) .826) ($p < 0.05$). The exponentiated coefficient of .826 for youths who had children indicates that their odds of enrollment are 17.4% lower than for youths who had no children. Therefore, foster youths who had not been incarcerated had greater odds of enrolling in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses at the age of 19, as did youths who did not have children. For the ethnicity categories, Black and Hispanic youths had similar results compared to White youths. Foster youths reporting Black ethnicity had an odds ratio of EXP(B) 1.543 ($p < 0.05$). This shows that the odds of enrollment were 54.3% higher for Black youths. A similar outcome is found for Hispanic foster youths, with an EXP(B) of 1.354 ($p < 0.05$). For Hispanic youths, this indicates that the odds of enrollment were 35.4% higher than for non-Hispanic youths. For foster youths with other ethnicities ($p > 0.05$), a statistically significant relationship was not found; however, their odds of enrollment were 4.9% higher in comparison (EXP(B) =1.049). As for gender, a statistically significant relationship between a youth's gender and enrollment was indicated. The analysis produced an EXP(B) of 1.276 ($p < 0.05$) for female foster youths. Female youths had 1.276 times higher odds of enrollment in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses compared to male foster youths. These results are outlined in Table 8.

Table 8*Academic Support Services and Control Variables*

Variable	B Values	S.E.	Sig.	EXP(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
					Lower	Upper
Independent Variable						
Academic Support Services	.413	.097	.000***	1.511	1.250	1.827
Control Variables						
Foster Care Status	.675	.096	.000***	1.965	1.628	2.371
Incarceration	-.357	.123	.004**	.700	.550	.891
Children	-.504	.160	.002**	.604	.442	.826
Ethnicity						
Black	.434	.113	.000***	1.543	1.235	1.927
Hispanic	.303	.128	.018**	1.354	1.054	1.740
Other	.048	.165	.770	1.049	.760	1.449
Female	.244	.097	.012**	1.276	1.055	1.543
Constant	-.252	.112	.025	.778		

***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05

N= 2,109; -2 Log likelihood=2776.272; Cox & Snell R Square=.011; Nagelkerke R Square=.015

To further explore the variables, the researcher examined the odds, probabilities, and odds ratios for each of the predictors. For academic support services, the model predicted that the odds of enrolling in postsecondary education are 1.511 times higher for foster youths who received academic support services than those who did not receive such services. Foster youths who do not have access to academic support services are only .777 times as likely to enroll in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses. Further, the analysis showed 54% of foster youths who received academic support services were likely to enroll compared to 44% of foster youths who did not receive academic support services.

The odds of enrollment for foster youths who remained in foster care increased 1.965 times in comparison with foster youths who were no longer in care. The foster care status variable increased the probability of enrollment by 60%. In addition, foster youths who reported not having a history of incarceration who received academic support services were .777 times as likely to be enrolled. Similarly, those with no children were 44% more likely to be enrolled. Upon examination of ethnicity and gender variables, the analysis showed the odds for Black youths, Hispanic youths, and youths with other ethnicities had higher odds of enrollment when receiving academic support compared to White youths. Black foster youths had the highest odds ratio, being 1.543 times more likely to be enrolled in and attending high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses compared with White youths. Black foster youths were 55% more likely to be enrolled compared to other ethnicities. The analysis also showed a significant relationship between gender and enrollment, with female youths being 27.6% more likely to be enrolled than male youths. These results are displayed in Table 9.

Table 9*Odds, Probabilities, and Odds Ratios for Academic Support Services*

Variable		Odds	Probabilities	Odds Ratio
Academic Support Services	Yes	1.175	0.54	1.511
	No	0.777	0.44	
Foster Care Status	Yes	1.527	0.60	1.965
	No	0.777	0.44	
Incarceration	Yes	0.544	0.35	0.7
	No	0.777	0.44	
Children	Yes	0.470	0.32	0.604
	No	0.777	0.44	
Ethnicity	Black	1.200	0.55	1.543
	Hispanic	1.052	0.51	1.354
	Other	0.815	0.45	1.049
	White	0.777	0.44	
Gender	Female	0.992	0.50	1.276
	Male	0.777	0.44	

Research Question 2

Research question 2 aimed to investigate the relationship between budgeting and financial management services and enrollment. The research question is: What is the relationship between foster youths' access to budgeting and financial management services and enrollment at age 19? Following are the hypotheses used to test this research question.

Hypothesis 2: Foster youths who receive budgeting and financial management services while in foster care are more likely to enroll in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses in comparison to foster youths who do not receive budgeting and financial management services.

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between foster youths' access to budgeting and financial management services while in foster care and their enrollment in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses.

As displayed in Table 10, logistic regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between budgeting and financial management services and enrollment with a 95% confidence level. The alpha value is 0.05. Budgeting and financial management services was not statistically significant, at $p > 0.05$. For this variable, the null hypothesis is affirmed. No statistically significant relationship was found between budgeting and financial management services and enrollment high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses for the youths.

Table 10

Budgeting and Financial Management Services at age 19

Variable	B Values	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
Budgeting/Financial Management Services	.177	.096	3.405	1	.065	1.193	.989	1.439
Constant	.434	.055	62.626	1	.000	1.543		

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$

Upon the addition of the control variables, the relationship between budgeting and financial management services and enrollment became statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), as shown in Table 11. Based on the EXP(B) of 1.280, foster youths were 1.280 times more likely to be enrolled in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses. The Nagelkerke R Square indicated 7% of the variation in enrollment was explained by the

independent variables included in the model. Logistic regression analysis results showed a statistically significant relationship between enrollment in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses and all the control variables examined in this analysis except for youths within the Other ethnicity category who received budgeting and financial management services.

Again, although the number of youths in the sample who indicated they had a history of incarceration was minimal, the analysis found an EXP(B) of .703. The odds for youths with a history of incarceration are lower by a factor of .703 compared to youths with no history of incarceration. This means the odds of being enrolled were .703 times smaller, or 29.7% lower, for youths with past incarceration. Similarly, youths who had children had decreased odds of enrollment, (EXP(B) = .596) ($p < 0.05$). The exponentiated coefficient of .596 for youths who had children indicated that their odds of enrollment were 40.4% lower than for youths who had no children. Therefore, foster youths who had never been incarcerated had greater odds of enrolling in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses at the age of 19, as did youths who did not have children. For the ethnicity categories, Black and Hispanic youths had similar results compared to White youths. Black foster youths had an odds ratio of EXP(B) 1.581 ($p < 0.05$). This shows that the odds of enrollment were 58.1% higher for Black youths. A similar outcome was found for Hispanic foster youths, with an EXP(B) of 1.390 ($p < 0.05$). For Hispanic youths, this finding indicates that the odds of enrollment were 39% higher than for non-Hispanic youths. For foster youths with other ethnicities ($p > 0.05$), a statistically significant relationship was not found; however, their odds of enrollment were 8.5% higher in comparison, (EXP(B) = 1.085). As for gender, a statistically significant relationship between a youth's gender and enrollment was indicated. The analysis produced an EXP(B) of

1.263 ($p < 0.05$) for female foster youths. Female youths had 1.263 times higher odds of enrollment in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses compared to male foster youths. These results are outlined in Table 11.

Table 11

Budgeting and Financial Management Services at age 19 and Control Variables

Variable	B	S.E.	Sig.	EXP(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
					Lower	Upper
Independent Variable						
Budgeting/Financial Management Services	.247	.099	.013**	1.280	1.054	1.555
Control Variables						
Foster Care Status	.706	.095	.000***	2.027	1.681	2.444
Incarceration	-.352	.123	.004**	.703	.553	.895
Children	-.518	.159	.001**	.596	.436	.814
Ethnicity						
Black	.458	.114	.000***	1.581	1.266	1.976
Hispanic	.329	.128	.010**	1.390	1.081	1.786
Other	.082	.164	.618	1.085	.787	1.498
Female	.234	.097	.016**	1.263	1.045	1.527
Constant	-.208	.113	.067	.813		

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$

N= 2,109; -2 Log likelihood=2680.931^a; Cox & Snell R Square=.055; Nagelkerke R Square=.074

To further explore this variable, the researcher examined the odds, probabilities, and odds ratios for each of the predictors. For budgeting and financial management services, the model predicted that the odds of enrolling were 1.040 times higher for foster youths who received budgeting and financial management services than those who did not receive such services.

Foster youths who did not have access to this service were only .812 times as likely to enroll in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses. Further, the analysis showed 51% of foster youths who received budgeting and financial management services were likely to enroll compared to 45% of foster youths who did not receive budgeting and financial management services.

The odds of enrollment for foster youths who remained in foster care increased 1.645 times compared to foster youths who were no longer in care. The foster care status variable increased the probability of enrollment by 62%. In addition, foster youths who reported having no history of incarceration were .812 times as likely to be enrolled. Similarly, those with no children were 45% more likely to be enrolled. Upon examination of ethnicity and gender variables, the analysis showed the odds for Black youths, Hispanic youths and youths with other ethnicities had higher odds of enrollment when receiving budgeting and financial management services compared to White youths. Black foster youths had the highest odds ratio and were 1.284 times more likely to be enrolled in and attending high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses. Black foster youths were 56% more likely to be enrolled compared to other ethnicities. The analysis also showed differences between genders and enrollment, with female youths being 51% more likely to be enrolled than male youths. These results are displayed in Table 12.

Table 12*Odds, Probabilities, and Odds Ratios for Budgeting and Financial Management Services*

Variable		Odds	Probabilities	Odds Ratio
Budgeting/ Financial Management Services	Yes	1.040	0.51	1.28
	No	0.812	0.45	
Foster Care Status	Yes	1.645	0.62	2.027
	No	0.812	0.45	
Incarceration	Yes	0.571	0.36	0.703
	No	0.812	0.45	
Children	Yes	0.484	0.33	0.596
	No	0.812	0.45	
Ethnicity	Black	1.284	0.56	1.581
	Hispanic	1.129	0.53	1.39
	Other	0.882	0.47	1.085
	White	0.812	0.45	
Gender	Female	1.026	0.51	1.263
	Male	0.813	0.45	

Research Question 3

For the third research question, mentoring of foster youths is explored. The third research question is: What is the relationship between foster youths' access to mentoring services and enrollment at age 19? The hypotheses and results of testing are outlined below.

Hypothesis 3: Foster youths who receive mentoring services while in foster care are more likely to enroll in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses in comparison to foster youths who do not receive mentoring services.

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between foster youths' access to mentoring services while in foster care and their enrollment in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses.

The researcher contended that mentoring services are an important factor in the enrollment status of foster youths due to evidence from the literature indicating that mentors can provide a connection to a caring adult. Logistic regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between mentoring services and enrollment of foster youths in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses at age 19 using a 95% confidence level. The alpha value is 0.05. The findings of the analysis for mentoring services and enrollment are displayed in Table 13. There was no statistically significant relationship found for mentoring services ($p > 0.05$). Foster youths who received mentoring services from the ILP were not found to be more likely to be enrolled in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses at 19 in this analysis. For this variable, the null hypothesis was accepted. These results are shown in Table 13.

Table 13

Mentoring Services at age 19

Variable	B		Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I for EXP(B)	
	Values	S.E.					Lower	Upper
Mentoring	.058	.186	.099	1	.753	1.060	.737	1.525
Constant	.438	.180	5.935	1	.015	1.549		

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$

After adding the control variables, the relationship between mentoring services and enrollment in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses was still not statistically significant, at $p > 0.05$. There was no significant relationship between enrollment and mentoring services when controlling for life outcomes that present barriers to enrollment for these youths. However, each of the control variable categories had a statistically significant effect on the odds of enrollment ($p < 0.05$) for youths except one ethnicity category

(Other). Again, the variable of foster care status had the highest odds ratio and a statistically significant relationship with enrollment ($p < 0.05$) for foster care youths. The odds for being enrolled in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses at age 19 while remaining in foster care was 2.027 times higher for these youths, with an EXP(B) of 2.027.

For those youths who reported a history of incarceration or having children prior to the survey, the results were similar to the previous test results. Although the number of youths in the sample who indicated they had a history of incarceration was minimal, the analysis found an EXP(B) of .710. This finding means the odds for youths with a history of incarceration were lower by a factor of .710 compared to youths with no history of incarceration. This finding also shows the odds of being enrolled were .710 times smaller, or 29% lower, for youths with past incarceration. Youths who had children also had decreased odds of enrollment (EXP(B)= .596) ($p < 0.05$). The exponentiated coefficient of .596 for youths who had children indicated that their odds of enrollment were 40.4% lower than for youths who had no children. Therefore, foster youths who had never been incarcerated had greater odds of enrolling in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses at the age of 19, as did youths who did not have children. For the ethnicity categories, Black and Hispanic youths had increased odds compared to White youths. Black foster youths had an odds ratio of EXP(B)= 1.545 ($p < 0.05$). This shows that the odds of enrollment were 54.5% higher for Black youths. A similar outcome was found for Hispanic foster youths, with an EXP(B) of 1.347 ($p < 0.05$). For Hispanic youths, this finding indicates that the odds of enrollment were 34.7% higher than for non-Hispanic youths. For foster youths with other ethnicities ($p > 0.05$), a statistically significant relationship was not found; however, their odds of enrollment were 8.5% higher in comparison, with an

EXP(B) of 1.085. As for gender, a statistically significant relationship between a youth's gender and enrollment was indicated. The analysis produced an EXP(B) of 1.264 ($p < 0.05$) for female foster youths. Female youths had 1.264 times higher odds of enrollment in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses than male foster youths. These results are outlined in Table 14.

Table 14

Mentoring Services and Control Variables

Variable	B Values	S.E.	Sig.	EXP(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
					Lower	Upper
Independent Variable						
Mentoring Services	.065	.192	.733	1.068	.733	1.556
Control Variables						
Foster Care Status	.706	.095	.000***	2.027	1.681	2.443
Incarceration	-.343	.123	.005**	.710	.558	.902
Children	-.518	.159	.001**	.596	.436	.814
Ethnicity			.001**			
Black	.435	.113	.000***	1.545	1.238	1.929
Hispanic	.298	.127	.019**	1.347	1.049	1.728
Other	.082	.164	.619	1.085	.786	1.497
Female	.235	.096	.015**	1.264	1.047	1.528
Constant	-.176	.213	.410	.839		

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$

N=2109; -2 Log likelihood=2687.086^a; Cox & Snell R Square=.052; Nagelkerke R Square= 0.71

For mentoring services, the model predicted that the odds of enrollment were 1.068 times higher for foster youths who received mentoring services than those who did not receive such services. The analysis showed little difference in probability. The probability of enrollment in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses was 0.47 for foster youths who received mentoring services compared to 0.46 for foster youths who did not receive mentoring services.

The odds of enrollment for foster youths who remained in foster care increased 1.699 times in comparison with foster youths who were no longer in care. The foster care status variable increased the probability of enrollment by 63%. In addition, foster youths who reported having no history of incarceration were .839 times as likely to be enrolled. Similarly, those with no children were 46% more likely to be enrolled. Upon examination of ethnicity and gender variables, the analysis showed the odds for Black youths, Hispanic youths, and youths with other ethnicities had higher odds of enrollment when receiving mentoring services compared to White youths. Black foster youths had the highest odds ratio and were 1.296 times more likely to be enrolled in and attending high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses. Black foster youths were 56% more likely to be enrolled compared to other ethnicities. For gender, female youths were 51% more likely to be enrolled compared to male youths. These results are displayed in Table 15.

Table 15*Odds, Probabilities, and Odds Ratios for Mentoring Services*

Variable		Odds	Probabilities	Odds Ratio
Mentoring Services	Yes	0.895	0.47	1.068
	No	0.839	0.46	
Foster Care Status	Yes	1.699	0.63	2.027
	No	0.839	0.46	
Incarceration	Yes	0.595	0.37	0.71
	No	0.839	0.46	
Children	Yes	0.500	0.33	0.596
	No	0.839	0.46	
Ethnicity	Black	1.296	0.56	1.545
	Hispanic	1.130	0.53	1.347
	Other	0.910	0.48	1.085
	White	0.839	0.46	
Gender	Female	1.061	0.51	1.264
	Male	0.839	0.46	

A final examination of the variables included an additional model with all three independent variables and all control variables. In this model, academic support services was the only independent variable found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). The findings indicated that foster youths were more likely to be enrolled in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses when specific factors were present. Foster youths who had access to academic support, remained in foster care beyond 18, and were of Black ethnicity were most likely to be enrolled at age 19. For each of these variables, the odds factors were determined to be greater than one. Of these, foster care status was the variable with the highest odds of all the variables included, at 1.384. An odds factor less than one was observed for the remaining variables. This finding shows academic support services, foster care status, and Black

ethnicity increase the odds of enrollment in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses for foster youths.

When comparing the odds ratios, again, foster care status was the variable with the highest odds ratio. Foster youths who remained in foster care at age 19 were 1.971 times more likely to continue education by being enrolled in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses compared to those who left foster care. The odds ratios for each of the services variables indicated youths were more likely to be enrolled when receiving these services compared to those youths who did not receive such services. Academic support services, budgeting and financial management services, and mentor services each produced an odds ratio that was greater than one for youths who indicated they received the service. For ethnicity and gender comparisons, the findings demonstrate Black youths have higher odds of being enrolled compared to other ethnicities. The category for Black ethnicity was the only ethnicity category with an odds factor greater than one. When observing the odds ratio, Black foster youths were 1.571 times more likely to indicate they were enrolled in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses during the study. In addition, all other ethnicities included were more likely to be enrolled compared to White foster youths. For gender, the odds of enrollment of both female and male genders were observed to be lower than 1. However, when observing the odds ratio, female foster youths had higher odds than male foster youths. The odds ratio for female youths was 1.274, indicating enrollment for female youths was 1.274 times more likely than for male foster youths. These findings are outlined in Table 16 and Table 17.

Table 16*All Independent Variables and Control Variables*

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Academic Support Services	.377	.100	14.338	1	.000***	1.458
Budgeting/Financial Management	.157	.102	2.370	1	.124	1.171
Mentoring Services	.056	.193	.083	1	.773	1.057
Foster Care Status	.679	.096	49.955	1	.000***	1.971
Incarceration	-.359	.123	8.484	1	.004**	.698
Children	-.504	.160	9.950	1	.002**	.604
Ethnicity			17.863	3	.000***	
Black	.452	.114	15.627	1	.000***	1.571
Hispanic	.324	.129	6.355	1	.012**	1.383
Other	.056	.165	.115	1	.735	1.058
Female	.242	.097	6.232	1	.013**	1.274
Constant	-.354	.218	2.622	1	.105	.702

***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05

Table 17*Odds, Probabilities, and Odds Ratios for All Independent Variables and Control Variables*

Variable		Odds	Probabilities	Odds Ratio
Academic Support Services	Yes	1.023	0.51	1.458
	No	0.702	0.41	
Budgeting/Financial Management Services	Yes	0.821	0.45	1.171
	No	0.702	0.41	
Mentoring Services	Yes	0.742	0.43	1.057
	No	0.702	0.41	
Foster Care Status	Yes	1.384	0.58	1.971
	No	0.702	0.41	
Incarceration	Yes	0.490	0.33	0.698
	No	0.702	0.41	
Children	Yes	0.424	0.30	0.604
	No	0.702	0.41	
Ethnicity	Black	1.103	0.52	1.571
	Hispanic	0.970	0.49	1.383
	Other	0.742	0.43	1.058
	White	0.702	0.41	
Gender	Female	0.894	0.47	1.274
	Male	0.702	0.41	

Summary

The intended purpose of this study is to examine ILP support services that are significantly associated with educational enrollment for foster youths while controlling for life outcomes that may represent barriers to this goal. For the current study, foster youths provided survey responses about their current enrollment status at age 19, in addition to their experiences during their foster care journey. The data source includes enrollment in high school, GED classes, and postsecondary vocational training or college courses as the dependent variable. In addition, life outcomes and demographic characteristics were included to gain a better

understanding of the factors influencing educational enrollment for foster youths. After review of scholarly literature, it was clear that foster youths fare poorly in educational measures as a group. The researcher hypothesized ILP services aimed at assisting foster youths in obtaining independence would positively impact their enrollment at age 19 while controlling for life outcomes that may create obstacles. The null hypotheses were rejected when controlling for life outcomes for two of the three services analyzed.

Examination of control variables that have been documented as barriers for foster youths when they are seeking to complete education programs were included in this study. Factors that have long been recognized as social problems for this population, such as teen pregnancy and incarceration, were incorporated into this analysis. Descriptive statistics revealed small numbers for foster youths in the sample who experienced incarceration or had children while in foster care. History of incarceration was found to be present in 17.1% of the youths surveyed, and those youths who reported having children made up 9.2% of the sample. These variables were each found to decrease the odds of enrollment for youths at age 19. This study also examined the foster care status of youths as well as demographic traits in relation to their enrollment.

Hypothesis 1 asserted ILP services aimed at increasing academic performance would positively impact enrollment in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses for foster youths. Research overwhelmingly places emphasis on environmental and systemic circumstances as causes of failure to complete education for these youths (Unrau et al., 2011). Academic support services are directly aimed at increasing student academic performance and their overall chances for success. For this ILP service, logistic regression revealed a statistically significant relationship between academic support services and enrollment when tested alone and remained positive when adding control variables. Neither of the other

services produced a statistically significant relationship with education without controlling for other variables. An examination of odds for this variable revealed academic support services had the highest odds ratio compared to the other service variables. Foster youths who received academic support from the ILP were 45.8% more likely to be enrolled. Researchers have long established that foster children and youths generally have high rates of special education statuses, low reading ability, and overall lower grades and grade point averages throughout their educational courses (Pecora et al., 2009). Bearing these facts in mind, the findings for this variable place particular emphasis on the importance of providing academic support services for foster youths during their years of eligibility for the ILP.

When analyzing the effect of ethnicity and gender on enrollment for this ILP service variable, statistically significant relationships were found for youths with certain demographic traits. Compared to White foster youths, Black youths and Hispanic youths had comparable results in significance testing. Both ethnic groups were more likely to be enrolled in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses while receiving academic support services. The odds ratio for Black foster youths was slightly higher than the odds ratio for Hispanic youths. Foster youths with other ethnicities showed no significant relationship in this analysis. Foster youths who identified as female in the survey were also more likely to enroll in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses beyond the age of 18 when they received academic support, compared to males. The findings for this hypothesis raise awareness for the need to continue to provide ILP support to youths through academic services during their time in foster care and beyond age 18.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 focused on budgeting and financial management services and mentoring services and possible relationships to educational enrollment among foster youths.

For budgeting and financial management services, the results of logistic regression analysis confirmed a statistically significant relationship with enrollment when controlling for life outcome factors. When tested for a statistically significant relationship with enrollment alone, the null hypothesis was accepted. However, foster youths were found to be more likely to be enrolled in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses at age 19 when receiving budgeting and financial management services from the ILP, when controlling for life outcome variables.

It is noteworthy that in the current study, mentoring services were received by almost every youth in the sample. Youths also received mentoring services more often than the other two services combined. This finding was not unexpected given the value placed on this resource for children in foster care by the child welfare system. Considerable research establishes the importance of a connection to an adult for young people in foster care nearing transition to adulthood for improving outcomes in multiple areas of life (Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011; Harden, 2004; Havalchak et al., 2009; Munson & McMillen, 2009; Pecora et al., 2006; Salazar, 2012). Mentoring services are offered to youths through the ILP as a strategy to provide this connection. Despite this, the current study found mentoring to be the only service variable tested that had no statistically significant relationship when tested alone or with the control variables. For youths receiving this service, the odds did increase for youths who were currently in foster care, were of Black ethnicity or Hispanic ethnicity, or were female. There was no statistically significant relationship between ILP mentoring services and enrollment found for foster youths.

As discussed, when considering gender and ethnicity for this ILP service, disparities were revealed in relation to enrollment. Prior research found in review of the literature also reflected this finding. Studies investigating differences in performance by gender and ethnicity support

higher educational achievement for female and White students in the general population with no history of foster care (Kena et al., 2015). This finding is consistent with the current study.

Enrollment was determined to have statistically significant relationships for the female foster youths in all areas tested. Hispanic and Black youths revealed similar results in all analyses when compared to White foster youths. However, youths of other ethnicities were found to have no statistically significant relationship to enrollment with any ILP service included in this study. These results further highlight the importance of continued ILP service provision for foster youths who share these demographic traits as well as the need to further examine the effects for youths of other ethnicities.

This section presented a summary of the findings for logistic regression testing on ILP services in relation to enrollment of foster youths. The findings are promising for Independent Living Program services aiming to support youths in enrollment. Further discussion on these findings will be presented in Chapter V.

Chapter V

CONCLUSION

Introduction

The goal of this study was to examine relationships between Independent Living Program (ILP) services and the enrollment status of the foster youths at the critical time of emerging adulthood. Further, an examination of the effects of life outcomes that commonly present barriers to education for foster youths were explored through three research questions. This chapter includes a discussion of the major findings of this study as well as connections to the review of literature on the educational outcomes of foster youths. The findings of this study represented a positive relationship for the services provided by ILPs and the enrollment of youths at age 19. The ILP services examined included academic support, budgeting and financial management services, and mentoring services. Informed by a review of literature, research questions and hypotheses were developed for each service and were analyzed for relationships with the enrollment status of the youths utilizing logistic regression testing. Additional analysis was conducted to include control variables representing barriers to enrollment. In each analysis, academic support services were found to have a statistically significant relationship with the enrollment of foster youths. This finding was further supported compared to the other services. The odds of enrollment for youths receiving academic support services were notably higher than for the other services analyzed. Budgeting and financial management services were found to have a statistically significant relationship to enrollment when controlling for life outcome variables. While mentoring was the most widely received service by youths in the sample, the findings did not produce a statistically significant relationship for mentoring in relation to enrollment for youths. For additional awareness on the needs of this population, the researcher

also examined control variables and relationships of demographic traits of youths with enrollment. Differences in enrollment of foster youths related to ethnicity and gender were revealed.

This study sought to address the needs of foster youths in their pursuit of successful outcomes in adulthood specifically related to education. It is based on the assertion that education is an important determinant for success and that foster youths face special challenges in their pathway to obtaining education. The literature review revealed foster youths are a population of young adults who are demonstrating poor outcomes in the areas of education during and following involvement with the foster care system, and particularly, during the transitional period occurring at the termination of legally mandated foster care. Foster children leaving care are described as among the country's most vulnerable emerging adult population (Courtney et al., 2007; Kim & Sobczyk, 2004).

The research questions in this study inquired about the effect of the support provided by the child welfare system through ILP services on educational enrollment as one measure of independent living. Independent Living Programs have made great efforts to offer relevant and effective services for foster care youths, including the creation of the National Youth in Transition Database. This instrument compiles data regarding the service provision and life outcomes of foster youths and was the primary source of data for analysis in this research. This study utilizes the NYTD data to illuminate the circumstances of youths following their mandatory foster care experiences and to discover relationships between these circumstances and ILP participation with enrollment. The literature review established that many of the challenges of foster youths are related to their past traumas and involvement with the foster care system itself. As a result, the path of this study is framed by life course theory, which highlights the

importance of time and social influences in the lives of individuals as they develop. This chapter concludes with a discussion of limitations of the study and implications for future research.

Interpretation of Findings

Research Question 1

The current study hypothesized that academic support would be a significant factor for enrollment in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses for youths emerging from foster care, despite obstacles that often present for the population. The literature is clear that academic achievement is substantially impeded for children who have experienced foster care. Researchers consistently present early difficulties with educational activities as a factor leading to low academic performance throughout primary and secondary school (Unrau et al., 2011). Many themes were repeatedly recognized in studies seeking to learn about the poor academic outcomes for children and youths. These themes included barriers to learning stemming from maltreatment and past traumas, separation from caregivers, frequent placement moves with school changes, and subsequent poor coordination between schools. Researchers also widely identify disruption of the child's primary group and home as a substantial factor in poor academic performance (Fisher et al., 2009; Mech & Fung, 1999; Rios & Rocco, 2014; Salazar, 2013; Unrau et al., 2011). The guiding theory for this study resonates in cumulative research findings. Life course theory argues that human development is influenced by changes in the environment particularly related to timing of the change (Elder, 1998). Under this premise, foster youths experiencing multiple changes in the environment during their formative years may be unable to attain the tools needed for continued academic growth. The ILP service academic support includes subject tutoring, overall study skills training, and academic counseling specific to youths in foster care to improve their academic performance. It

was expected that academic support would strengthen the odds of continued engagement in education for foster youths. The results of the current study confirmed that a statistically significant relationship existed for youths who received academic support services and their enrollment at the age of 19. This relationship remained statistically significant when controlling for life outcome factors in each analysis. Academic support was found to increase the odds of enrollment by greater odds than the other ILP services analyzed in this study.

Research Question 2

Budgeting and financial management services as a factor influencing enrollment was also examined. Financial instability presents obstacles for the pursuit of education and other areas of independent living. Multiple researchers found foster youths to be at greater risk of housing instability and homelessness immediately following their separation from foster care (Boldis, 2014; Courtney et al., 2007; Dworsky et al., 2003; Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011; Kim & Sobczyk, 2004; Salazar, 2013; Schelbe, 2011; Szilagyi et al., 2015). The review of the literature found evidence that foster youths who received life skills training in the areas of money and credit management and consumer skills had better outcomes for independence than those who received no training (Cook, 1994). Considering the literature review, the researcher hypothesized budgeting and financial management services are a factor influencing enrollment for the foster care youth population. The findings of the current study confirmed the findings of Cook after controlling for life outcomes. With the inclusion of the control variables, foster youths were found to be more likely to be enrolled in an educational program at the age of 19. An examination of odds for this service revealed receipt of this service increased the odds of enrollment for foster youths. The foster care status control variable increased the odds of enrollment substantially when youths were also receiving this service. In most foster care system

structures, foster youths who choose to remain in foster care beyond their eighteenth birthday retain additional financial support from their state. They also retain the supervision of adults who ensure they are managing their finances to meet their basic needs while working toward educational goals. In these cases, foster youths have ongoing assistance with their budgeting and a consistent income stream to sustain them. Youths who remained in care were found in this study to be twice as likely to be enrolled in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses while receiving budgeting and financial management services. This anticipated result affirms the impact of financial education and assistance for emerging adults in their stability and decision making as it pertains to enrollment.

Research Question 3

Study findings for mentoring services as a factor influencing the odds of enrollment in the current study yielded unexpected results. Child welfare agencies have long recognized the importance of a connection to a caring adult for foster youths and have incorporated this knowledge into policy and practice. Based on research, the mentor-mentee relationship is shown to provide this adult connection for foster youths with many positive outcomes (Goldner & Ben-Eliyahu, 2021). Formal mentoring services are a strategy employed by the child welfare agency to ensure youths who are often living independently have social support. As anticipated, the number of foster youths in this study who received mentoring services was more than the combined total of youths receiving the other services examined. Cumulative studies in the literature review point to this factor as perhaps the most important support need for youths in foster care (Freundlich & Greenblatt, 2011; Harden, 2004; Havalchak et al., 2009; Munson & McMillen, 2009; Pecora et al., 2006; Salazar, 2012). The connection to an adult often provided through mentoring services is found to improve outcomes in all facets of life for youths in foster

care, according to available research reviewed for this study. In the realm of education, one study specifically found evidence that a stable placement with a supportive caregiver increased the odds of high school graduation for foster youths (Havalchak et al., 2009). Further evidence of the value of a connection to an adult is found in research of brain neuroplasticity. Freundlich and Greenblatt (2011) found evidence that connection to a caring adult can essentially aid in the repair of harmful effects to the young adult's brain resulting from child maltreatment trauma . The research of Freundlich and Greenblatt also draws attention to the detrimental influence of emotional instability on achievement of independence for transitioning youths. Foster youths who are navigating the challenges of gaining independence are often hindered by poor emotional health. The repair of damage in the brain caused by child maltreatment trauma can strengthen youths' chances of success in day-to-day functioning, including academic performance. Notwithstanding existing research, the results of the current study did not find a statistically significant relationship between mentoring services provided to the youths in the sample and enrollment. The probability of enrollment was approximately the same for youths who indicated they received mentoring services compared to those who did not.

The resolution to this inconsistency may lie in the nature of the various mentor program structures and the individual mentors provided to the youths in this study. Further, discovering whether the relationship resulted in a connection as described in the literature for these youths would be useful. The current study examines the effects of formal mentoring services provided to foster youths by the ILP on their enrollment. Austin et. al. (2020) examined how a mentoring approach to youths' social connections relates to well-being outcomes. In their research, three mentoring profiles were described with differing relationships to youth outcomes. These mentoring profiles included (a) Status Quo Mentors, who reported low to moderate levels of

closeness to their mentee; (b) Close Connectors, who reported moderate to high levels of closeness; and (c) Connector-Mediators, who reported moderate levels of closeness (Austin et. al., 2020). The youths who were mentored by “Close Connectors” were found to have the most improvement in various well-being outcomes. Other studies exploring the beneficial effects of mentoring for adolescents and young adults indicate the best results occur when there is a strong relationship between the mentor and mentee. However, researchers agree there is little substantiation on what fosters closeness in these relationships (Austin et. al., 2020; Dubois et. al., 2011; Schenk et. al., 2019). The sample participants in the current study span many jurisdictions across the United States, operating within the confines of federal program delivery and administration guidelines. The individual mentoring program elements for each youth in this study were unknown.

It may also be prudent to consider whether the results of this hypothesis are of practical significance, if not statistical significance. Practical significance moves beyond statistical findings to consider whether findings are meaningful in real-world settings. Peeters (2016) described three methods for gathering evidence for practical significance. To build further evidence, a researcher may compare effect sizes to general interpretation guidelines, compare effect sizes to existing research in the literature, or determine the minimally important difference while comparing this to the effect size (Peeters, 2016). Further research could be conducted utilizing effect sizes to gain more understanding of this variable. For example, a benchmark study could investigate the influence of mentoring on enrollment as well as the effectiveness of program characteristics to discover theoretical and practical implications. In addition to the current study, a researcher could identify existing studies that represent various mentoring program interventions. The researcher would then compute effect size estimates for program

characteristics and possible enrollment outcomes. This would enable the researcher to compare effect sizes and examine how the effects of various mentoring programs compare with those from previous studies for similar interventions and outcomes. This meta-analytic approach would best answer questions about how the effects of an intervention compare with those from previous studies for similar interventions and outcomes in addition to which programs work best. Exploring the answers to these questions would move beyond discovering whether programs work in general and may provide more insight into the real-world influence of mentoring on youth enrollment.

Additionally, it is also noted that many other factors related to mentoring not included in this study may influence the results if examined additionally. Factors such as the mental health of the youth or quality of the mentoring service may provide more clarity for this research finding. As discussed previously in the literature review, foster youths commonly develop debilitating mental health disorders, often along with substance abuse disorders. These factors could potentially affect the youth's ability to bond to a caregiver or mentor, thereby impeding the benefits of that relationship (Courtney et al., 2001). Quality of the mentor service could also be considered in future research. This variable refers to elements of the mentoring service such as length of time for the mentor relationship, dosage, and consistency of the service provider. If the mentor provider is not committed long-term to the youth or consistently providing services during their years in care, for example, the connection of the youth to the adult may not be effective. The importance of determining the impact of ILP services for these youths is critical for the continued efficacy of the ILP, and the models in this study are not inclusive of the complexity of the factors influencing enrollment for individual lives of foster youths.

Life Outcome Variables

This study included an examination of the effects of life outcome variables on the enrollment of foster youths receiving services from the ILP. Foster youths who had children and youths with a history of incarceration were explored as variables that substantially derail educational endeavors, based on review of the literature. Within the framework of life course theory, these factors in the lives of foster youths pose profound obstacles. These are obstacles that would presumably alter the pathway of a young person facing life-changing disruptions in their environment during development (Elder, 1998). The findings of this study indicated past incarceration was a factor that decreased the odds of enrollment in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses for foster youths.

For the current study, a small percentage of the youths in the sample reported having experience with the criminal justice system. History of incarceration was found to be present for only 17.1% of the youths surveyed. While these are small numbers and viewed as a positive observation, it should also be noted that the youths who completed the survey were age 19 and had voluntarily decided to remain involved with the foster care system. Youths who left foster care prior to the survey were not represented in the sample. This presents questions about the standing of those young people who are no longer in foster care and the influence of their incarceration experiences. For the youths who remain connected to formal foster care supports, additional resources are afforded to them in collaboration with their state's ILP after age 18. The findings of this study suggest that most of the youths remaining engaged in education and their foster care system have little history of incarceration.

The same consideration can be given to the youths who had children while in foster care. Youths who indicated they had children had decreased odds of enrollment in high school, GED

classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses at age 19. For the current study, only 9.2% of the youths in the sample had children. While this number can be viewed as minimal, there are uncounted young people who are no longer in foster care who had children during their foster care journey. Lieberman et al. (2015) estimated girls in foster care have babies twice as often compared to girls not in foster care. Foster youths in care who have children may be placed in maternity group homes where they can parent their children while pursuing educational goals with the support of the ILP. Other foster youths who are parenting have the support of a foster family in a foster home, while others are separated from their children for various reasons. In the Midwest Study of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth, childcare responsibilities were found to be a barrier to continuing education for a third of the former foster youths surveyed (Courtney et al., 2011). In the same study, nearly half of the youths cited childcare responsibilities as the reason for dropping out of a postsecondary program of study (Courtney et al., 2011). The findings of the current study establish that the youths who remained engaged with foster care supports and education at age 19 are unlikely to have children. The 9.2% of young people with children who are represented in this study have overcome obstacles and taken advantage of resources to assist them in the continuation of their educational goals. This is a positive finding of this study in itself.

In any circumstance, one variable was found to have an impact on the continued enrollment for foster youths in all areas. In each analysis, including analyses of control variables, foster care status had the highest odds ratio as a factor influencing educational enrollment for youths. Compared to all the variables in the study, the odds of being enrolled in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses were 97% higher for youths who indicated their status as currently in foster care. This variable represents whether the foster

youths remained voluntarily in formal foster care while receiving services during the NYTD reporting period. Youths who voluntarily remain in foster care past the legally mandated age of 18 continue to receive consistent support through housing, meals, caregiver guidance/supervision, and other domains from their ILP that may not be afforded to youths who chose to leave foster care. Youths who leave foster care generally provide their own living arrangements and subsistence, but still may have received services from ILP and completed the survey used in this study.

Demographic Traits

Another important consideration of this study was the interactions among ethnicity and gender with enrollment and the control variables. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and findings from the literature review demonstrated a pattern of differing educational outcomes for ethnic and gender groups during emerging adulthood (U.S. Department of Education, 2020; U.S. Department of Education 2021). In measures of enrollment in the general population, the NCES reported that of the 16.6 million undergraduate students enrolled in college in the fall of 2019, 8.5 million were White, 3.5 million were Hispanic, and 2.1 million were Black (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Young people aged 18 to 24 who were enrolled in college in 2018 were 37.6% male and 44.3% female (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Exploration of the differences in the academic achievement of specific demographic groups of youth is especially important since education is found to be highly correlated to income level. Also, the 2018 Census found that 18.8% of Black people living in the United States were living below the poverty level compared to 15.7% of Hispanic people and 7.3% of White people (Berzin, 2008; Jones, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

For foster youths, the trends in ethnicity, gender, and educational outcomes resemble those of the general population. The research of Courtney et al. (2011) concluded that male foster youths generally trail behind their female counterparts in educational achievement measures. In their study findings, male foster youths earned a high school diploma less often compared to female youths. This pattern was also found to be true for the completion of at least 1 year of college by the age of 26. Further, female foster youths were found to have completed 4-year degrees more often than male foster youths (Courtney et al., 2011). The same study also examined the types of postsecondary educational programs in which foster youths were enrolled. At age 19, twice as many foster youths were enrolled in a non-degree-granting schools or training programs compared to colleges. Of those enrolled in college, the youths in the study were most frequently enrolled in 2-year colleges (Courtney et al., 2011). For the general population, NCES data sources showed the types of educational programs youths are enrolled in by gender, for comparison. In 2018, 43% of male youths and 57% of female youths were enrolled in degree-granting 4-year institutions. Female youths were also enrolled at higher rates in degree-granting 2-year institutions. Additionally, female youths were enrolled more often in non-degree-granting institutions requiring less than 2 years for completion. The one program type that included a higher number of males (52.7%) than females was 2-year non-degree-granting institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The NCES described 2-year non-degree-granting programs as those that include occupational, vocational, and certificate programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

In the current study, a statistically significant relationship was found for enrollment of female youths in each area tested. Female foster youths were found to be more likely than male foster youths to enroll in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college

courses, with access to ILP services. This finding, coupled with educational outcome data, emphasizes the importance of continued ILP service provision for female foster youths. It also provides insight into the types of programs that young men and women are most likely to pursue. These insights could shape the appearance of ILP service provision in aiming to prepare male and female youths for postsecondary education.

Trends in ethnicity are also seen in NCES data for enrollment of youths in the general population. The enrollment percentages for youths in the general population aged 18 to 24 in the fall of 2018 in degree-granting postsecondary institutions were 52.4% for White students, 13.1% for Black students, 18.5% for Hispanic students, and 16.1% for other students (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). The data records have maintained this trend over the past few decades. The current study found a statistically significant relationship between Black and Hispanic ethnicities and enrollment in each analysis, compared to White youths. While the results revealed similar findings for Black and Hispanic foster youths, there was a lack of a statistically significant relationship in all areas for youths with ethnicities categorized as other. Of all the ethnicities, Black foster youths had the highest odds of enrollment when tested with all variables in the study.

Limitations

The aim of this study was to explore effects of ILP services on the enrollment status of foster youths at the time when they may legally exit foster care, while controlling for factors that could be barriers. First, the results are limited to the variables included in the study but are not inclusive of all possible explanations for the relationships discovered. The data were obtained from the NYTD survey of foster youths. Many of the variables used were self-reported by foster youths. Inaccurate information may compromise the validity of the study results. Foster youths

may inaccurately report their history of involvement with the criminal justice system, for example, and affect the results.

Another limitation is the non-reporting of foster youth survey information by several states. For this cohort, only 38 states reported in wave 2 of the survey. Considering this was the first cohort of the study, the lack of reporting may be due to systemic difficulties related to states' adjustment to a new process. In addition to non-reporting, there were large numbers of incomplete data responses, which caused deletion of all youth surveys with missing responses. After deletion, the total sample size was still adequate, but the ethnicity categories had to be collapsed to the four categories included, which limited the study's ability to compare enrollment among all the different ethnic groups.

In addition, the study was based on data that were obtained from foster youths who were still involved with ILP in the 6-month reporting period captured by the NYTD. The youths who left foster care were not surveyed, despite some of these youths receiving ILP services. The current enrollment status for these youths could not be determined; therefore, many foster youths were uncounted.

Future Research

This research study represents analysis of survey responses from the first cohort of foster youths who responded to wave 2 of the NYTD in their state. The results are limited to the variables included. Future research studies could include additional services and outcome variables to gain a larger picture of the enrollment status of youths. Other methodological considerations would be to include other waves of data from the cohort and then to compare the standing of the youths over time.

Some of the notable findings from this study could inform future studies and be expanded upon for a more comprehensive picture. First, this study consistently found statistically significant relationships with increased odds of enrollment for youths who remain in foster care after age 18. This variable was found to considerably increase the odds of enrollment for these youths. This finding reinforces the benefits of continued foster care status for a youth considering leaving foster care. Future research could investigate the reasons youths leave or remain in foster care and what strategies could be used in policy and practice to retain transitioning foster youths. In the area of ILP services, mentoring was not found to have a statistically significant relationship with enrollment in this study. Future research should seek to control for additional variables to better understand this relationship. Factors not included in this study may influence the results if examined additionally. The NYTD contains many other outcome and services variables that could influence study findings. The control variables for this study were selected after a review of the literature for this topic.

As discussed previously, more information about factors related to the mental health of the foster youths and the nature of the mentor service would be important to consider in future investigations. Data involving quality of services and program formats affecting the degree to which a connection was formed were not available. Additionally, future research could seek to find practical significant relationships between ILP mentoring services and the enrollment status of youths in addition to the statistical significance.

Another area of future research should seek to further understand the differences in gender and ethnicity brought out in this study. Foster youths who identified as female in the study showed increased odds of enrollment when receiving ILP services. This finding is consistent with previous educational research emphasizing the performance of girls compared to

the performance of boys in the general population as well as among foster youths. Coupled with data on the types of programs most often pursued by differing genders, research with a focus on gender in educational outcomes for foster youths would provide added knowledge to this aspect of child welfare practice. These discoveries could shape the appearance and substance of ILP service provision in aiming to prepare male and female youths for postsecondary education. Specifically, the increased likelihood of male foster youths to enter 2-year non-degree-granting programs informs ILP service providers of the need to focus academic support services to strengthen vocational areas of study for young men or, conversely, to close academic subject gaps as indicated.

Another area for future research of demographic traits of foster youths would be the effect of ILP services on enrollment of foster youths of other ethnicities. The current study did not find statistically significant relationships with any of the services and enrollment for youths of ethnicities other than White, Black, and Hispanic. Of all the ethnicities, Black ethnicity was found to most increase the odds of enrollment in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses at age 19. Future research could focus on the influence of culture in foster care placement settings in addition to the relationship with educational pursuits of youths in foster care.

Policy and Practice Implications

This study focused on the enrollment of foster youths in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses at age 19 and the receipt of support services from the ILP. States employ strategies to assist youths with their transition to adulthood, including supportive services intended to prepare them for continued education after the termination of mandatory foster care. Laws, policies, and practices were developed over time to

further strengthen initiatives aimed at increasing the odds of success for transitioning foster youths. The findings of this study can inform both policymakers and practitioners about effective practices for this population of young people.

From this research, various implications for policy are evident. First, educational success of foster youths should be an integral theme of policy. The immeasurable value of education for young adults has been discussed as essential for successful independent living. The ultimate goal of any ILP reform should target increasing the odds that foster youths will enroll in and complete an educational program of study to enable them to earn a living wage. While structures of ILPs are vitally important, policymakers must keep in mind that the intended goal of child welfare reform for the foster youth population is success for all youths. Any trends observed in measures of educational achievement related to individual traits should become an added focus for enhanced program designs. In addition, policies should be directed at linking foster youths with resources within the child welfare system and the local community that strengthen student success. Policies, at all levels, must support partnerships, since the child welfare system operates at the federal, state, and local level.

At the local level, education agencies, along with community stakeholders, can empower foster youths and strengthen partnerships with the child welfare agency through clear definitions, regulations, guidance, and communication. Educational institutions should become knowledgeable about the trauma-informed approach employed by child welfare practitioners when seeking to provide resources to youths who have experienced abuse and/or neglect. In addition, increased knowledge about the opportunities and constraints of ILPs within the foster care system in their state would enable institutions to maximize the possibilities for foster youths seeking to complete their educational goals. Local boards of education should align their policies

with the child welfare agency in their jurisdiction. Local boards should also implement additional supports for youths who are navigating the foster care system to increase engagement and academic success in schools. The child welfare agency can further promote local cooperation by implementing agreements and local protocols that align with this goal. Multidisciplinary approaches and regular meetings and communication between stakeholders can further support local cooperation.

At the state level, further examination of the resources available to address barriers identified in this study should be a focus for policymakers. Services that target supporting foster youths who have had children and youths who have had experience with incarceration should be developed and implemented. Evidenced-based practices that focus on prevention and supporting youths with these experiences should be explored. States should also examine strategies to further support youths with differing demographic traits in their jurisdictions, as indicted by this study. Another implication of this study on the state level is that policymakers should implement strategies to strengthen the engagement of youths who are facing the decision of leaving care. Additionally, the divergence in outcomes among ethnicity and gender should be addressed, in accordance with the unique attributes of states, within federal policies.

Federal implications include the adherence to policies that follow evidence-based practices and research-based knowledge. Researchers should continue to explore variables that improve odds of success for foster youths. Moreover, policymakers should continue to implement policies that are broad enough to enable states and local agencies to enhance partnerships and supports that are individualized to the meet the needs of youths within their jurisdictions. Lawmakers should also adequately fund the resources and supports that are identified in states to best support their populations.

For practice implications, establishing and maintaining support systems to overcome the challenges faced by foster youths is essential. The aforementioned local partnerships are an important part of this strategy. Within the child welfare system, training for practitioners can further promote reform at the micro-level for the youths they serve. Guided by research, training for practitioners that emphasizes the needs of foster youths based on their individual needs should be mandated. Agencies should employ instructional designers and curriculum writers who develop training based on research that addresses the individual needs of foster youths. Strategies that address gaps for subpopulations of youths, such as those discovered in this study, should be implemented and incorporated into training programs.

Additionally, child welfare systems should implement policies and practice that strongly encourage foster youths to voluntarily remain in foster care as they complete their programs of study. Agencies should investigate the reasons youths exit foster care in local jurisdictions and implement policies and incentives that counteract these occurrences. As highlighted in this study, remaining in foster care substantially increased the odds of enrollment beyond age 18. Practitioners working at the micro-level should be made aware of these findings. Child welfare agencies should incorporate training modules designed to inform practitioners about this important variable. Training should educate child welfare staff on strategies to work with youths one-on-one to encourage continued foster care status beyond 18. Practitioners putting learning into practice while reflecting on effective strategies in professional development settings would be an effective strategy to implement change. Developing policies and practice, establishing campus and community resources, and supporting new ideas can facilitate strong partnerships at all levels.

Conclusion

Young adults are more likely to succeed in many life outcome measures when they obtain postsecondary education. Youths emerging from foster care face unique challenges in their pursuit of educational goals, necessitating additional support from stakeholders. An expansive amount of public funding and resources has been directed to state ILPs to ensure youths in foster care are assisted during their transition to independence. Child welfare practitioners and policymakers face the need to assess delivery approaches of services that are reflective of the changing needs of youths to give them the best chance at success. This research is intended to be explanatory to inform social policy and practice. The findings revealed factors that are prevalent in determining what ILP services, life outcomes, and demographic traits impact foster youths' educational enrollment at age 19. The conclusions and interpretation of the findings in this study are supported by existing research and grounded in the structure of life course theory.

The findings of this study largely provide evidence of the positive impact of ILP supports on the enrollment of foster youths. Results suggest foster youths are more likely to be enrolled in an educational program at 19 after receiving ILP services such as academic support and budgeting services. Additionally, the findings uncovered differences in gender and ethnicity in relation to enrollment. Young women are more likely to enroll in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses after age 18 when they have been afforded certain ILP support services. Hispanic and Black youths were found to have similar associations with ILP services and enrollment compared with White youths; however, foster youths of other ethnicities were not found to be more likely to be enrolled with the assistance of the ILP. Although foster youths who receive mentoring were not found to be more likely to enroll in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college courses at age 19, this study

revealed that most youths in foster care were connected to a caring adult at age 19 through the efforts of the ILP. This finding is reassuring, given the considerable evidence of the benefits of such connections for foster children in the literature. However, the degree to which connections are formed through mentoring programs requires further investigation. A final important finding of this research was that youths who voluntarily remained in formal foster care placements were notably more likely to continue to pursue educational goals after the age of 18. This finding supports the advantages of remaining in foster care beyond the legally mandated age. Of all the variables, foster youths who remained in foster care beyond 18, had access to academic support, were of Black ethnicity, and were female had increased odds of enrollment in high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training or college courses. History of incarceration and having children were each found to decrease these odds.

Indications of the supportive value of ILP services and the foster care system for continued education of foster youths found in this research are encouraging. Research that further expands on these results would provide even more insight into the needs of foster youths and the design of service delivery programs. It is important for child welfare policymakers and practitioners to be aware of the relationships revealed in this study and to explore why some variables were influential while others were not. Postsecondary educators and administrators would also benefit from further examination of the needs of this population who is entering their institutions. Increasing the odds of educational achievement for foster youths can help strengthen their chances for success in all aspects of independent living and improve societal well-being overall.

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