

UC Merced

UC Merced Undergraduate Research Journal

Title

Factors that Influence Resiliency among Foster Youth

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/35c1n7pc>

Journal

UC Merced Undergraduate Research Journal, 12(2)

Author

Garcia Barrera, Karla

Publication Date

2020

DOI

10.5070/M4122045422

Copyright Information

Copyright 2020 by the author(s). This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Peer reviewed|Undergraduate

Karla Garcia

Dr. Moncovich

Writing 117

2 April 2019

Factors that Influence Resiliency among Foster Youth

Introduction: What is a Foster Youth?

Foster youth are generally associated, within research conventions, as negative outcomes for example, the perception often alluded to foster children and youth are as damaged, traumatized, and troubled children. In addition, are troubled youth that often are unable to successfully proceed in their respective environments. To explain, foster youth are children, teens, and young adults who are placed in varying institutions due to lack of parental care such as neglect, mental, and/or physical abuse.

The most prevalent cause of their displacement into government provided institutions, is neglect which according to the article, "Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care as a Preventive Intervention to Promote Resiliency Among Youth in the Child Welfare System," by Leslie Leve et al. states, "inadequate child supervision; failure to attend a child's emotional, physical, and education needs; spousal abuse in the child's presence; parental drug or alcohol use that interferes with parenting abilities; and inadequate medical care for the child" (p.1870). As a result, foster youth have encountered differing forms of adversities that affect their daily life. Oftentimes, the abuse these children and youth encounter stems from traumatic experiences or events. Other reported trauma can be a combination of mental abuse, (16%) physical abuse, (9%) sexual abuse, and (7%) psychological abuse (p. 1872). As

a result, their lives are altered and therefore affect their long-term functioning domains. Most often, foster youth have difficulty in demonstrating emotional connectivity to others or detecting them. The research that will be discussed are the factors that influence a positive outcome on the prevalence of resiliency among foster youth. Some of the factors discussed will be external and internal factors that are included but not limited to: behavioral, social, and cognitive developments as well as, social relationships and external institutional support. Therefore, the addressed research of this literature review is focused on: What factors lead to resilience?

Defining Resiliency:

Defining the word 'Resiliency' is rather subjective depending on the way it is used. This word contains broad subjects and concepts that adapt various categorical functioning domains of adversity to put simply, for this review, resiliency is beating the odds. It is a development of diversity as well as successful adaptation of developmental tasks during childhood that later transcends to youth.

Most research among resiliency is conducted on children, youth, and adults that have encountered hardships, or a variety of. According to the Oxford English Dictionary resilience is defined as, "the quality or fact of being able to recover quickly or easily from, or resist being affected by, a misfortune, shock, illness, etc.; robustness; adaptability." Thus, for the purpose of this study resilience will be based on foster youth's ability to recover or adapt to their adversities. Although foster youth face multiple hardships that affect their lives throughout their whole lifetime some Foster youths have expressed resiliency and strength by overcoming the challenges that perpetuate their daily lives.

Background:

The most prevalent cause of foster youth displacement into government-provided institutions, is neglect. According to the AFCARS Report of 2018, accounts neglect within 62% of cases (AFCARS, 2017, p. 3). Moreover, foster youth have encountered differing forms of adversities that affect their daily life. The abuse these children and youth encounter is traumatic. The rise of foster children entering the Foster Care system has significantly increased over the past 10 years.

According to the U.S Department of Health and Human Services for Children and Families (AFCARS) report, as of September 30, 2017 there are 442,995 in Foster Care. Among them 48% of them are female and 52% are male, with a median of 7 years old. Moreover, the predominating ethnicities in the Foster Care system are 44% white, 23% Black or African American, and 21% Hispanic (of any race). Therefore, the data demonstrates that approximately 443,0000 children were in Foster care as of 2017. Furthermore, the report expresses that there are more males than females entering the system that are approximately 7 years old. This does not include children who are awaiting adoption; thus, there may be more unaccounted numbers. Predominantly there are more White, Black or African American, and Hispanic (of any race) that are placed within the system. This may be due to the overall predominant ethnic races in the United States.

Research: Internal & External Influencers

Some studies suggest that children as young as the ages of 4 and 6 express resiliency within certain domains according, to specific studies. As such the research, "Adversity, Maltreatment, and Resilience in Young Children," by Howard Dubowitz et al.

indicates, “the ages between four to six years are of particular importance for identifying patterns and predictors of resilience...” (p.234). Part of the research also focuses on areas of successful development in terms of education, transitioning stages, and relationships. As I have stated previously, most prevailing research expresses the negative problems of foster youth. Other research results express that “61% [sample of children] demonstrated significant health problems, adrenal/hormonal imbalance in neurocognitively, and a heightened vulnerability of stressors that can exacerbate negative outcomes...” (Young Children in Foster Care and the Development of Favorable Outcomes, Healey and Fisher, p. 1821). Within these domains of imbalances, it is also concluded that foster children and youth struggle in academia and are below their peers. Moreover, traumatic events such as verbal or physical abuse, abandonment, lack of parental involvement, or cause of are such adversities that these foster children face for the duration of their lives.

Education

Part of the Foster Care System’s job is to give a relatively stable terminal care depending the severity of cases. Upon terminal care, foster youth attend the same or different schools depending on the stability of their foster homes, or placements. Research has demonstrated that the progression of foster youth in education, at first, are below the range of their peers. Therefore, an educational gap is evident. Especially when youth are not in a stable home. Resiliency is the ability to function despite past hardships. Resulting in meeting a successful lifestyle as part of society. Across the domains of society and cognitive ability is education following rules of conduct, and social relations among peers. Previously the research conducted by Howard Dubowitz

et al on, "Adversity, Maltreatment, and Resiliency in Young Children," expressed that young children demonstrate resilience with positive functioning among specific domains or age. This research was conducted to identify the varying types of competencies and resiliencies in young children, as opposed to youth, or adults. The context research addressed the differing adversities and factors that are associated with pliability. The children among the studies ranged from four to six years old and were examined upon three domains that are affected by childhood maltreatment: behavioral, social, and cognitive development (p. 234). Also, the research included family-level factors and its relation to resiliency among the affected children.

The sample expressed statistics from the Longitudinal Studies of Childhood Abuse and Neglect (LONGSCAN). These specific studies focus on collaboratively developed protocols of five states. The sample consisted of families with high risk of maltreatment and involvement (or prior) of agency Child Protective Services (CPS). The sample size consisted of 1,354 families out of this sample 943 (70%) had completed data for these analyses. The procedure dated from 1990 to 1995 within children from 4-6 years of age. The data from the sample collected from various regions across the United States (East, Midwest, South, Southwest, and Northwest). These results were analyzed under the operationalization of the three domains discussed previously and categorized the children's performances in comparison to the standard norms. Under the ambiguity of defining "resiliency," the study considered competency of children performing adequately across the three domains in behavioral, social, and cognitive development.

Overall, the results expressed that among the LONGSCAN sample half of the

children tend to have resiliency. Around 48% of maltreated children were resilient and thus expresses that children exposed to adversity and maltreatment can overcome them, and therefore is much more prevalent than most negative outcomes express. Most children that showed resilience were six-year-old children. Some of the reasons could be due to age differences and coping capabilities. Moreover, it was found that a key component was caregivers. Around half of caregivers had clinical depressed symptoms. Which in turn, resulted in the high-risk nature of sample among children that are inadequately cared for. Correlation of such symptoms associated with children's inability or less likely to meet criteria for behavioral and social domains.

Factors that influenced greater resiliency are due to parental or caregivers' well-being (not depression). Limitations of this study are host risks, protective factors, genetics, and psychological interventions. All these limitations that were not addressed could have influenced outcomes of such children. However, that is not to detain from the maltreated children that did express resilience. Another limitation is the definition among competencies and three broad domains. As such, other factors that are worth considering are those of physical and behavioral health. In addition, the LONGSCAN study sample is a high-risk sample that includes abuse, neglect, poverty, and community violence. Moreover, children who appeared resilient, that were unscathed by maltreatment or other adversities, would still express better functioning if they had better environments.

Moreover, research suggests that supportive systems help foster youth form resilient characters. As such, research states that, "84% of cited persons who provided various forms of social support...like biological families, others reported therapy, foster

family members” (Hass & Graydon, p. 459). In effect, having a support system social, familial, even biological allows for successive outcomes within the lives of foster youth. Among those aspects, some also reported environmental support from their institutions and programs that service underserved youth. Other contributing factors that lead youth to obtain resiliency are group therapies. Thus, research indicates, “most children who participated in TGT (group therapy) demonstrated significant decline in anxious/depressed, rule-breaking, and aggressive behavior... (Craven & Lee, p.222). Overall, combinations of support through institutions, foster parents, biological parents, self-motivation, religious faith, and therapies have contributed to foster children and youth’ ability to improve their respective circumstances.

Similar research has suggested that stability and positive relationships like peers and mentors affect transition to education and higher in other words, post-secondary education. The study, “A Mixed Method Study on Educational Well-being and Resilience Among Youth in Foster Care,” conducted by Jessica Strolin-Goltzman et al. demonstrates, through research methods of youth led collaborative research among them surveys and interviews, a path of resiliency. First, the researchers described their defined term of educational resilience which is, “a heightened likelihood of school success despite adverse environmental conditions, is enhanced by family engagement and school relationships (2016, p.31). After defining the sample method of their research data included a total of 120 former foster youth ages 15-21 years old. Around 40% were male and 60% were female (90%) Caucasian. Within the method a total of 54 questions were asked in subscales categorization. It is important to note that interviews were enrolled in a post-secondary education.

Furthermore, the subscales that were divided to support resilient traits or character were: (1) Teacher-student relationships (2) Peer support and (3) future goals (2016, p.31). Moreover, another method was interviews that are recorded with permission of interviewee. Their overall findings suggested above 100 youths only 46 met study criteria for educational resiliency. Those that met the criteria, about 90% attended public schools, 13% were homeschooled, and 35% were in alternative settings. The results also expressed students who rated teacher student relationships higher by 1 point were eight times more likely to express educational resiliency after controlling stable factors (age, gender, placements). Among the Qualitative interviews proved that among 50% of the interviewees experience in their foster care placements. In sum, those who encountered assisted transition between schools and homes, also provided a sense of stability and therefore educational success (2016, p.33). Such relative experiences aid in the success and resiliency among foster youth. Among experiences, positive peer influences also resulted as an inspiration for youth in foster care to obtain a sense of options and motivation.

In continuation, the most impactful influence over educational resilience was positive adult-youth relationships. Basically, adults that were active in educational and emotional support of foster youth allowed for better outcomes. According to Strolin-Goltzman et al. influences can range from foster parents, caseworkers, teachers, or school officials (p.34). Overall, foster youth experience instability, thus proves a challenge for them educationally succeed. However, data from this study has expressed the external and internal factors that influence foster youth resiliency and educational mobility like post-secondary attendance. The research suggested that

positive influences and relationships with mentors and peers can ease transitions related to placement changes. This could possibly lead to reinforce emotional connections, and in turn reduce impact of trauma, while allowing advancements in educational success (p.34). This research provided insight to positive outcomes in foster youth who become resilient and in education.

Despite these insights, they did address limitations to their studies which are: lack of diversity, sample size, and foster youth post-secondary intent. Moreover, it is a sample that cannot be applied to the general youth or other ethnicities therefore, it is not consistent across foster youth populations. Also, participants of the study had already thoughts or in postsecondary education. That is not to say that this research is not relevant; in fact, it is important to note the findings that could be applied to other foster youths across the U.S. These methods and research applied could help future youths obtain better placement stability like policies that could be implemented through federal laws.

A common factor that has significantly increased resilient characteristics are positive relationships. The study, "The Influence of Social and Family Backgrounds on College Transition Experiences of Foster Youth," conducted by Joaquin Franco and Nathan Durdella indicated the importance of positive support systems that help Foster youth express resilient characteristics and the importance of higher education. As Franco and Durdella further contend, "who enroll in post-secondary institutions, only 3-11% [of foster youth] actually earn a degree, making them among the lowest achieving identifiable groups in higher education" (p.69). Thus, foster youths' ability to obtain a degree is often difficult due to adversities and instability within their respective foster

homes. Moreover, foster youth expressed little knowledge and preparation of college transitions.

The study conducted was to understand how foster youth transition into college and influences of support systems shape foster youth experiences. The framework consisted of interview-based questions of first year foster youth under an examined lens of family and social contexts (p.71). A final group of 8 participants from the college of Southern California University were interviewed with a mean age of 23. The foster youth participants interview compromised questions on their perceptions of social and familial influences their ability to transition into college. Furthermore, the questions were audio-recorded and analyzed to explore patterns of foster youths' experiences and success. First, placement among foster youth seemed to express an early influence that further shaped their lives. Some cases foster youth described that longer length of time in a foster care system and more frequent placements created a sense of less preparedness for college. Furthermore, they reported lower levels of college bound resources and lack of college transitioning support (p.72).

However, those who expressed stability within their foster care placements experienced a constructive and supportive environment, helped them better prepare for college. Second factor that correlated within the previous environmental experiences, were of familial support or influences. For example, some participants conveyed that parents, siblings, or even biological caregivers helped in their transitioning into higher education. Therefore, the presence of such support facilitated ways for foster youth's ability to realize their needs and achieve their educational endeavors (p.73).

Another significant support system were social workers that posed challenges or

support depending on each foster youth's experience. For some, social workers were able to provide connections to higher education and financial resources. Others expressed their relationships as strictly professional with no guidance in obtaining higher educational pursuits. The final factor that helped foster youth were high school experiences in precollege preparations. Teachers or counselors who established a mentor type relationship further encouraged participants with connections and further foster care campus assistance within campuses (p.74).

Overall, the research study helped determine factors that influence foster youths' abilities to pursue higher education. Positive factors that help youth were foster care stability, supportive social influences (e.g. familial, siblings, foster parents, and teachers), and social workers. While the study helped identify factors that lead to the pursuit of higher education and successful resilience, there are limitations. The sample size consisted of only 8 participants which cannot express a generalized scale of what all foster youth factors. Furthermore, the study mentioned diversity, however, sample size and demographics predominantly express limited diversity. Despite these limitations, this study, although small, adds to previous research on influences that greatly affect foster youth's abilities internally and externally.

In addition, the study, "Sources of Resiliency Among Successful Foster Youth," conducted by Michael Hass and Kelly Graydon, express that foster youth have reportedly been one of the most vulnerable members of society that face challenges even after they exit from the foster care system and transition towards adulthood. In addition, it has been documented foster youth suffer varying degrees of mental illnesses, educational disabilities, and financial insecurity than the general population

(p. 457). Therefore, significant services are those that help youth transition after the exiting of foster care. Each year about 20,000 foster children exit the system in the U.S. (457). As a result, little support is received in transitioning stages and outcomes are poor. Thus, the study conducted was to examine the internal and external forces that aided foster youth in their success and express resilient outcomes. Furthermore, post-secondary attainment is much more difficult to achieve given the circumstances that foster youth face.

Despite all the difficulties, the Hass and Graydon study also reveals a defining sense of resiliency and survey of questions targeted to Foster youth in participating programs. The research consisted of around 149 Foster Youth from Orangewood County, that have expressed successful outcomes in education through varying factors. The methods applied to the study were: the 5- or 7- point Linkert scale with open ended questions with narrative response, GQ-6 a 6question measured for emotions, and the (Antonsky) SOC or sense of coherence scale. In total, the survey consisted of 29 questions. Overall, the 149 participants with a total response of 44 (32%) were analyzed with received rewards of \$5 Starbucks card (459). Moreover, the study expressed ethnically diverse participants: 16% Caucasians, 16% African Americans, 11% Latinos, and 16%. As previous research states, most of the data correlates within the predominant races in the United States.

Overall, the youth who participated in the study were successful academically. The results expressed 24 (52%) have graduated from a post - secondary institution. Other research has expressed academic success as a factor of resilience. Much of the questionnaire responses demonstrated that support systems play a significant factor.

The support systems are varying; they may include biological family, mentors, and professors (461). In other words, they are categorized as turn-around people since they aid Foster youth in their ability to better understand themselves and their strengths (461). In addition, these support systems resulted in positive influences. Whether through academic or cognitive ability, foster youth participants also drew positive support from the environment.

The limitations from Hass and Graydon study were that the participants of the study were already enrolled in a post-secondary education, therefore, they are successful and express resilient factors. Moreover, the sample size was small and cannot be representative of all foster youth. In addition, none of the foster youth had reported any mental illnesses. Another limitation was the inability to specifically identify which support systems sources and how they were obtained. The data collected was also self-reported therefore the limited definition of success was by academic achievement (462). Therefore, more general, and broadened research needs to be applied across the foster youth population for inclusive statistics.

Discussion

This literature review focused on the factors that influence resilient characteristics within the foster care population. In conclusion, research expressed various factors that are both internal and external. Specific factors that influence a youth ability to express resiliency are support systems like teachers, foster parents, friends, and peers. Furthermore, a linking factor to resiliency is that of post-secondary education. Which therefore also leads to a significant increase in the ability to perform when foster youth transition towards aging-out. In effect, support in all mediums like

education and emotional can help youth obtain a life that is linked to resilience. Therefore, allowing foster youth to obtain brighter futures.

The transitional phase of foster youth is a period that, without external and internal factors, creates a discord and may create negative problems in the future of foster youth. Moreover, these transitional periods are usually not progressive in actual aid for youth. Causing youth to enter the adult world without any means of support towards assimilation. Therefore, areas the foster care program could aspire to change in policies are increasing support systems of foster youth, increase awareness of the benefits of post-secondary education, and create a program geared towards the transitional period of aging out. This would further aid in the gray areas that other youth have encountered on their own. Moreover, these implications may improve the overall well-being of foster youth. These changes through time and policies will significantly improve the foster care system's aid and express positive social impacts. And therefore, increasing awareness for the needs of foster youth can allow them to prosper alongside everyone.

Works Cited

- “Children's Bureau (CB).” ACF, www.acf.hhs.gov/cb. 10 August 2018, p.1-3. Accessed: 21 April 2019.
- Bruskas, Delilah. “Children in Foster Care: A Vulnerable Population at Risk.” *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2008, pp. 70–77, onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1744-6171.2008.00134.x.
- Craven, A. Patricia & Lee, E, Robert. “Transitional Group Therapy to Promote Resiliency in First-Time Foster Children: A Pilot Study.” *Journal of Family Psychotherapy*. Vol. 21. 2, September. 2010. 213-224.
- Dubowitz, Howard, et al. “Adversity, Maltreatment, and Resilience in Young Children.” *Academic Pediatrics*, Academic Pediatric Association, 9 Feb. 2016, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1876285915003782. Volume 16, Number 3, April 2016.
- Franco, Joaquin, and Nathan Durdella. “The Influence of Social and Family Backgrounds on College Transition Experiences of Foster Youth.” *New Directions for Community Colleges*, vol. 2018, no. 181, 2018, pp. 69– 80
- Hass, Michael, and Kelly Graydon. “Sources of Resiliency among Successful Foster Youth.” *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 31, no. 4, 22 Oct. 2008, pp. 457–463.
- Healey, Cynthia V., and Philip A. Fisher. “Young Children in Foster Care and the Development of Favorable Outcomes.” *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 33, no. 10, 12 May 2011, pp. 1822–1830.
- Leve, Leslie D., et al. “Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care as a Preventive

Intervention to Promote Resiliency Among Youth in the Child Welfare System.”

Journal of Personality, vol. 77, no. 6, 2009, pp. 1869–1902.

"Resilience, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March

2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/163619. Accessed 11 May 2019.

Strolin-Goltzman, Jessica, et al. "Children and Youth Services Review." Vol. 70, Pages

1-428. *Elsevier*, 2 Sept. 2016, www.sciencedirect.com/journal/children-and-youth-services-review/vol/70/suppl/C.