A descriptive study of the educational success or failure of teenagers in foster care

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ABSTRACT

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Wooden-Smith, Constance Elaine B.S. Georgia State University, 1982

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF TEENAGERS IN FOSTER CARE

Advisor: Dr. Gale Horton

Thesis dated May, 1995

This research was to examine the relationship between the placement of teenagers in foster care and their educational success or failure. The research was to look at the variables of teenagers in foster care and whether their placement increased their chances of not completing high school or completing high school.

The research used the Ecological Theory in relationship to environment. The effects that the environment places on whether a person can function successfully. This relates to the displacement of the teenager into foster care and the support that he or she may receive in this adjustment, as well as the various forces from school environment and policies that govern the child welfare system.

The findings revealed that fifty percent of the respondents were ages 17-18, and the majority were African-American. Seventy percent remain in high school, but felt they were better students prior to placement in foster care, despite the fact that most of the respondents were B or B+ students prior to placement.
A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF TEENAGERS IN FOSTER CARE

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY

CONSTANCE ELAINE WOODEN-SMITH

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
MAY 1995
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The author would like to give thanks and praise to God for giving me the knowledge and strength to endure. Also, I wish to thank my husband and daughter for enduring this educational process along with me. I especially wish to thank my sister for her support and encouragement. Thanks to Dianne Hamilton for coming through and being the most patient person I know. A special thank you to Dr. Gale Horton for being my thesis advisor. I would also like to thank Dekalb County Department of Family and Children Services for their support of my working to further educate myself.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Foster Care is seen as a preventive or protective measure for children who are the victims of child abuse. The abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional or neglect. Whatever the means of abuse, the child is in need of protection. Children are removed from their home or away from their caretakers or abusers. These persons can be a parent, relative or familiar/significant other. No matter what the case, the child is the person who must suffer neglect in a system that is overwhelmed in numbers. It is reported that in 1991, there were over 400,000 children in foster care and the number of foster parents had decreased by 25 percent, from 134,000 in 1984 to 100,000 in 1991.1

This crisis has more effect on the successful placement of children and the outcome of their future. With the increase in numbers comes increased caseloads and very little time for case managers to be effective in planning for these children. The lack of planning can affect the lives of the children in the way they respond to foster care. Many children need extra support in order to adjust to placement and specific types of placements to help them adjust. Because the chances for them returning to their own homes becomes less likely. Despite the enactment of Family Preservation Programs, the number of children in foster care is still too high.

The concern of this paper is to address the educational success of these children. Do these children, specifically teenagers ages 15-21 achieve educational success? This

1Kenneth Jost, "Foster Care Crisis," CQ Researcher 1, no. 20 (September 27, 1991): 707.
paper will look at a specific group in this population and examine their educational status. Because the rate of dropouts in America has soared to an all time high, the concern is if children in foster care are part of this statistic. Do these children have a greater chance of academic failure due to their placement in foster care? Very little data has been found in this research that is specific to children placed in foster care. Therefore, this author will look at the area of foster care and related topics and the issue of dropping out of school.

**Historical Perspective**

Foster care was seen as a means of developing success among the economically disadvantaged. The children were sent to live with other families as an apprentice or to help them further educate themselves. According to Langsam, The Children's Aid Society, rested on three common nineteenth century assumptions -- the idea of self-help, the gospel of work, and the panacea of education.2

The Foster Care System of the 1800's was not as we know it today. This system was known as the "placing-out" of children and began in the 1870's. It was part of the movement toward the West to ease the great economical problems of the cities.3 The system was not limited to children, but placed adults as well to be laborers.

The Children's Aid Society was begun by Charles Brace.4 When the process of "placing-out" began, there was no idea as to what this system would grow into. Even that

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3 Ibid, p. 25.

system had its flaws, and was without solution to the ever increasing numbers. That system placed 92,292 children and adults during the first thirty-seven years.  

The current foster care system is regulated by the government, and is assisted by non-profit, as well as for-profit agencies. Today's system is funded primarily by federal and local governments to meet the needs of children who are victims of abusers, or defined as deprived by the Juvenile Court System. These children are removed from their parent or caretaker after reasonable efforts have been made to prevent removal, and that the removal is "in the best interest of the child" for protection. Only a Judge can make the decision of whether to place a child in the custody of the Child Welfare System or another responsible and acceptable caretaker. Usually, the child is placed with the local Child Welfare System. In the State of Georgia, with the removal of that child, comes a plan developed with the parent to work toward reunification. This plan is called the 30-day Case Plan. At anytime after the parent has met the goals set forth, and there is no further risk to the child, the social service worker can ask the Judge to return the child's custody to the parent or caretaker.

Unfortunately, many parents and caretakers are not able to meet these goals due to various reasons, such as failure to maintain sobriety, refusal to work with the system, lack of mental stability and lack of interest in parenting. The plain truth is that many parents lack the ability to parent effectively and fail to address that need.


6Jost, p. 708.
Statement of the Problem

Foster care is a system that is to be a protection for children who are at a disadvantage, to protect themselves from abuse. Despite the abuse, pain of separation, and loss for children, their families and foster caretakers have always been a hallmark of foster care. Removing children from their connective persons (i.e. parents, relatives, etc.) can be most traumatic. Children do not reject their abusers as parents or caretakers in the manner that the government has defined them. The major concern of the child is that they do not have a familiar person who they are accustomed to being around.

This change in environment can have various effects upon the behavior of a child to adjust. The lack of stable, permanent relationships with adults and lack of security they feel, because they do not know with whom, and where they will grow up, often make them so anxious that they are not able to master the skills needed to be competent and stable adults. These children are expected to have the same abilities to perform academically as children in an appropriate home with a parent or caretaker. This expectation is unfair and not unbiased.

Children who have to make such adjustments should be given a great amount of support in order to adjust. This is particularly true for teenagers, because of all the emotional changes that occur during adolescence, this group is more prone to facing other issues that will complicate their already complicated world. This group encounters great

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peer pressure, internal adjustments due to hormonal changes, sexual frustration and self-esteem issues. They are more conscious as to who they are, or how others perceive them to be, and therefore, need more supportive means to give them stability. There has not been enough extensive research in this area to delineate the nature and extent of emotional problems, so that researchers can characterize the most beneficial clinical techniques or identify practitioners who are adept at working with this population.9

The major concern of this research is to look at the placement of teenagers in foster care, and how it affects their educational success. Is this population part of the ever growing number of high school dropouts, or do they continue their education and complete high school, as well as attend college or other technical programs? Completing high school can also mean obtaining a GED. A study in California showed that thirty-three percent of the children at the California Youth Authority and sixty-nine percent of the inmates of the prison system have been in foster care or institutional placement.10

Significance and Purpose of the Study

Having been employed in Child Welfare Services for eight years, and having worked in foster care, this author has often questioned the good that foster care does to make children, especially teenagers, become successful adults. Many children came into this system at a very early age and they stay beyond their eighteenth birthday. Many leave the system prior to their eighteenth birthday, and do not receive a high school diploma or


GED. Many are very intelligent and have great potential, but somehow are overcome by personal frustrations and internal, emotional turmoil that makes it impossible for them to function in an educational environment.

This study will look at the current status of foster care and current issues related to dropping out of school. Since there is very little research available on the relationship of this study, the variables will be viewed individually and then in correlation to each other.

Therefore, it is hoped that this study lends to the area of social work, specifically Child Welfare, in relationship to what can be done to better the chances of educational success of teenagers in foster care. The question proposed in this study will look at whether the placement in foster care effects the educational success or failure of teenagers in foster care. This author will examine the teenage population in placement and their feelings on how foster care has affected their educational success or failure.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Foster Care System has very little research to show what relationship exists between the placement of teenagers and their academic performance. There has been speculation by Child Welfare workers, but there is little research to support their speculations. The research instrument that could be used to address the problems is the Child Well-Being Scales which was developed by Magura and Mose (1986). This instrument could only be used to measure certain functions that may relate to academic performance. It could not be used as a sole resource of measurement to answer this research question.

The research question requires further evaluation of the current child welfare system and the educational programs. This would verify other variables that affect academic performances of teenagers in placement. Since there is little research showing relationship, this review of literature will examine the areas of foster care and high school dropouts.

The Foster Care System

This history shows that the foundation of foster care was not as well planned or organized to meet all the needs of the children as originally planned. Our current literature shows that children in foster care come from a neglectful, abusive, or chaotic family in

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which the parent-child relationship is distorted and dysfunctional.²

According to Kate, et al, the intrapsychic need of a foster child, therefore, represents a developmental emergency that often requires immediate psychotherapeutic intervention.³ This literature clearly addresses the problem with interpersonal network and the ideology of "rescuing" the child. The network of professionals must use a therapeutic approach that includes "the child's entire network, involved to empower its members to help the child and the family."⁴

Fein examines the functioning of children in foster care. According to her studies, foster children in clinical settings have been characterized as lacking the ability to form relationships, having inadequate parental images (either glorified or denigrated) to serve as a basis of socialization.⁵ In this article she addresses many areas of specific concerns. One area addressed is how race and ethnic groups are affected differently by foster care. She shares that twice as many minority children are in long-term foster care and that they do not function as well academically.⁶


³Ibid, p. 584.

⁴Ibid, p. 590.


Jost's report on the Foster Care Crisis in 1991 reports that the reasons for the increase and crisis in foster care are:

- Increase started in 1974 by federal mandate that teachers, doctors and others are to notify authorities of any suspected abuse or neglect.
- Increase of alcohol and drug abuse among women, especially the use of "crack cocaine."
- Aids and the number of children born exposed to the Aids virus, specifically the children who are abandoned at birth.
- An increase in the number of children born to teenage mothers.
- An increase in the number of children born to unmarried mothers.  

Even with all the reasons the increase has a major effect, it keeps hurting the children that it is supposed to help. This is caused by the continuous decrease in funding by the federal government. This article examined the various federal fundings for foster care which are Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, Title IV-B of the Social Security Act, and Title XX of the Social Security Act.  

The question of who is responsible for families and children is addressed by Kagan. Kagan looks at the history of how Americans began to care for families and the separation of family and government. The family was responsible for itself, but in the time of social need, the government accepted responsibility for the "well-being of children and families".  

This article looked at the response that has occurred over the years by government to remove itself from child care services and family support. It was not until 1993, that the

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7Kenneth Jost, "Foster Care Crisis," CQ Researcher 1, no. 20 (September 27, 1991): 707.

8Ibid, p. 708.

Family Support and Family Preservation Act were enacted to recognize the value of family support and prevention as a strategy toward preservation.\textsuperscript{10}

Lindsey wrote about the discrepancy related to children placed in foster care due to income, which are mostly neglect cases. "It is estimated that by 1995, more than a half million children in the United States will be in foster care".\textsuperscript{11} This article looked at the reasons for placement and the correlation between placement. According to this researcher, placement of children with inadequate income is higher than other groups.

In recent years, the government has taken care to look into the placement status of teenagers and how they can be more effective in assisting them to develop a stable future. Sims talks about the Independent Living Services for teenagers. Statistics show that in 1988, 16,000 adolescents were released from foster care because they had reached their majority (age 18/sometimes 16).\textsuperscript{12} She looks at the various programs that have come about with government support to assist in developing the future of this group. There are several opportunities to help this population in their discharge to adulthood. Some of these are: support groups, scholarship programs and supervised group homes.\textsuperscript{13}


\textsuperscript{12}Anne R. Sims, "Independent Living Services for Youths in Foster Care," Social Work 33, no. 6 (November 1988): 539.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid, p. 540.
The major focus of these programs are to develop the skills of adolescents that they may be empowered to fight their own battles. The author does suggest that Child Welfare agencies develop volunteer programs to further expand and support these adolescent's in their becoming self-sufficient.

The issue of placement of children and permanency planning are continuous cycle of foster care. This process and the effects are examined by Kagan and Schlosberg. Their article addresses the pain of transgenerational cycle of loss, abandonment, crises, and trauma. Due to the repetitive history of placement of families that lack the knowledge or skills to provide a safe and nurturing environment, the authors looked at statistics related to placement in 1985, and stated that nationally, children spend just under three years in foster care with a larger number of them remaining in foster care throughout their childhood. Much of this research was done in the early 1980's when foster care was just becoming an increasing problem related to government spending.

School Dropouts

The recently increasing number of high school dropouts has caused many states to enact new rules to prevent dropping out. Some states have started laws such as no driver's license without a high school diploma. The State of Georgia raised the issue of raising the dropout age to 18. This is to deter the increasing number of children who leave school before their eighteenth birthday.


Economics and Race Relationship to Dropping Out

According to Tidwell, in 1979, among students from age 14 to 21, eleven percent were high school dropouts. The dropout rate for Whites was ten percent, but the minority dropout rate was substantially higher, fifteen percent for Blacks, and twenty-five percent for Hispanics.16 The causes of dropping out of high school before graduation include poor school performance, dislike of school, expulsion, desire to work, financial difficulties, home responsibilities, pregnancy, and marriage.17

William's study, "A Comparative Study of Black Dropouts and Black High School Graduates in an Urban Public School System", found that in relationship to family characteristics, the suggestion of the parent as a role model in regard to high school completion or disengagement, and the effect of the parental educational level on the incidence of high school completion, differentiates the two groups in this study.18 Her study did examine the factors such as economics in relationship to dropping out. The population was from a school of majority Blacks (80%) and Hispanics (19%). She concludes that the black high school dropouts and graduates from a low socio-economic environment are similar in relation to a number of demographic/personal characteristics.


17 Ibid, p. 940.

and family characteristics.¹⁹

According to DeRidder, suspensions and expulsions tend to speed up the dropping out process. He also states that students who drop out have five times more discipline incidents than those who do not dropout.²⁰ His study finds that Blacks and Hispanics, regardless of social class, become "resistors" who are unwilling to accommodate hidden curriculum that does not meet their needs. The most important factor found in this paper is the information received about the Supreme Court in Goss vs. Lopez. This case clearly stated that students have both property and liberty rights to public education.²¹

Ms. Franklin's article, *Family and Individual Patterns in a Group of Middle-Class Dropout Youths*, states clearly that there are no reliable statistics on the dropout rate. This article states that the most reliable dropout statistic is 25%.²² The article focused on middle class dropouts, but has important insight to issues that affect any socio-economical class. Issues are teacher attitudes toward students-at-risk, and harassment by school personnel by use of extensive disciplinary policies such as three strikes and you are out. These students are made to feel as if they do not have a chance, because they do not feel a sense of support from the school system.


²⁰Lawrence DeRidder, "How Suspension and Expulsion Contribute to Dropping Out," *Education Digest*, 56, no. 6 (February 1991): 44.

²¹Ibid, p. 47.

In conclusion, the article states that there is a need for a total integration of educational, social services, and clinical practice delivery system.\textsuperscript{23}

The study done by Ensminger and Slusarcick followed 1,242 Black first graders from an urban community who were at high risk for dropping out of school. Their study states clearly that need for a diploma is a critical requirement for poor youths or students of various racial backgrounds.\textsuperscript{24} The researchers found that factors such as socio-economic status, race, and early parenthood were associated with early dropout rates. Their research was extensive and delivered many findings related to the rate of dropping out. They did make a clear assessment that family relations do affect the rate of dropping out.

**Statistics of Dropout Rate in Georgia and Dekalb County**

In 1990, the United States had six states with dropout rates of thirteen percent and above. These states were: California, Nevada, Arizona, Georgia, Tennessee and Kentucky. Also, Maryland was not highlighted, but they had a thirteen percent dropout rate.\textsuperscript{25}

Specifically, Georgia had a dropout rate of fourteen point one percent compared to a larger state of California with fourteen point two percent. This alone is a startling rate

\textsuperscript{23}Cynthia Franklin, "Family and Individual Patterns in a Group of Middle Class Dropout Youths," *Social Work*, 37, no. 4 (July 1992): 343.


of dropouts in a high school setting. It appears that these states are also facing an increase in juvenile delinquency and children in foster care. This study will look specifically at Dekalb County, a local county in Georgia and the relationship of foster care to educational success of children in placement.

A recent study done by Georgians for Children stated that in Dekalb County, sixty-eight point six percent of the youth completed high school of those enrolled in high school three years earlier (1990-93). This rate is per 100 students (population 17,747).\(^{26}\) This percentage is considered well in a nation that has seen such an increase in juvenile crime, and poverty among children. It is not the ninety-five percent rate that would have shown great success, but considering the states dropout rate in 1990, it is positive.

Levine's article "I'm Outta Here" addresses the growing dropout rate on a national level. He states that nearly a half million students leave school each year.\(^ {27}\) One of the alarming problems is that rate is various among racial groups. According to this article, sixty percent are White and do not live in urban cities, but Hispanics have a rate twice the national average.\(^ {28}\) This article was very informative about statistics for what is considered the high risk group. Those things which the Department of Education cites as putting teens into a high risk group are: having a sibling who drops out, single-parent households, households with an income below $15,000 per year, being home alone for


\(^{27}\)David Levine, "I'm Outta Hear," Seventeen 51, no. 3 (March 1992): 192.

\(^{28}\)Ibid, p. 192.
more than three hours a day, not speaking English very well, and having a parent who did not complete high school. 29 These are the reasons cited by the government, but do not cover all the possibilities of why teenagers dropout. The article does address various efforts being made to prevent the increase in dropouts. There are two organizations that are helping to prevent the increase in the dropout rate, they are Cities In School and the National Dropout Prevention Center.

Bowditch completed an extensive article on the factor of being a high school dropout in relationship to disciplinary procedures. The article views many of the aspects that result from discipline procedures and the increase in dropping out of high school. Because many teenagers are seen as troublemakers, the risk of them dropping out increases. Therefore, as the discipline becomes more of a problem, and the policies encourage administrators, such as social workers, to "get rid of" students that are "troublemakers". 30

The interesting factor of this study is that it does mention those topics of controversy, such as there is little examination of how schools "selectively label and respond to student actions". 31 This relates to how youth are often labelled and do not have a chance to succeed due to the odds against them. This article is very extensive and

29 David Levine, "I'm Outta Hear," Seventeen 51, no. 3 (March 192): 192.


covers many areas that are crucial to the understanding of how disciplinary actions can increase the chances of a teenager dropping out.

Theoretical Framework

In the view of social work and specific to Child Welfare Services, there is always the concern of the environment and its effect upon the individual's well being. This is especially crucial to the placement and adjustment of children in foster care. Therefore, this author will use the Ecological Theory in this research. Because this research looks at the effect of foster care placement on teenager's educational success. The ideology of this theory will also relate to school social work to view the relationship in the school setting. The Ecological Theory has looked at various factors in the persons environment and how they impact the persons development and adjustments in that environment. Since the placement in foster care changes the environment and various elements of that environment, it is important to understand the effects of the environment on the teenager's adjustment to that placement and that effect upon the educational status. The social work perspective has always been a dual focus of the individuals and the impinging environment.32

The view of Ecology for this research relates to the adaptability of the individual to the environment. It also includes the coping skills of the individuals to the environment. Many teenagers adapt to foster care, but their ability or inability to cope can come out in

behaviors that are not seen as appropriate for the social environment. This is sometimes what happens with disciplinary problems at school. The emotional aspect of adjusting to the environment according to Gumuin and Gitterman:

"Ecology seeks to understand the reciprocal relation between organism and environment: how organisms shape the environment to its needs and how this shaping enhances the life-supporting properties of the environment."33

The methodology of this theory in relation to this research gives way to further understanding the relation of educational success of teenagers in placement. It will assist in answering the research question of whether the environmental change to foster care, support or does not support the teenager in receiving a positive environment to continue or complete his/her educational goals.

**Statement of Null Hypothesis**

There is no statistically significant relationship between the placement of teenagers in foster care and their completion of high school.

**The Variables**

The independent variable is the placement of teenagers in foster care. The dependent variable is the chance of completing high school or dropping out of high school.

**Terms and Definitions**

**Foster Care:** Certain types of placement for children who are in custody of the Department and are in 24-hour care outside their own home.34

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**Deprivation:** When a child lacks appropriate parental care to meet his/her emotional, mental, or physical needs or protect the child from such abuse.

**Parent or Caretaker:** Biological or adoptive parent and legal guardians.

**Teenagers:** Adolescents between the age of 15 - 21.

**Placement:** A surrogate type home, group home, or shelter.

**Significant/Familiar Person(s):** Person that has taken the responsibility of parenting or providing a parental role.

**High School Dropout:** Anyone who has removed him/herself from high school without completing twelfth grade.

**GED:** General Equivalency Diploma.

**Institutional Placement:** Provide group home or group residential childcare for a child who is unable to benefit from or contribute to family life.\(^{35}\)

**Child Welfare System:** A social service system that is responsible for the investigation, placement and permanency planning of children that are abused or neglected by their responsible parent or caretaker.

**Minorities/Race:** Persons of various ethnic groups and racial backgrounds.

\(^{35}\)Georgia. Social Service Manual (1992), Chapter 1000:3.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The Research Design utilized will be the Descriptive Design. The Descriptive Design is appropriate for this research because it allows the author the ability to answer questions concerning the current status of subjects of this study. The Descriptive Design is most appropriate in seeking information not readily available concerning the population in question.

This population will be consisting of teenagers in various types of foster care placements that attend Independent Living Support Groups. The group is a part of the Federal Government’s requirement for teenagers ages 15-21 that are in foster care. The group meets the researchers desired population for this sample.

The sampling design is considered a non-probability sampling frame, since the author looked at use of judgmental sampling. The judgmental or purposive sampling allows the researcher to use his/her own judgement.¹ This research sampling design is based on appropriate and available sampling units. The sample came from the group of those teenagers who came and participated in that particular support group. The group has a required 100 or more teenagers who are to attend. The number needed for this sample was thirty teenagers.

Instrument Design

The author has chosen a questionnaire to obtain the data necessary for this research. The questionnaire was developed by this author and administered by this author. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The answers were in multiple choice form.

The first part of the questionnaire was for basic demographic information related to age and race. The second part was to address the foster care status of the teenagers. It asks four questions about current placement status, type of placement and age at the time of placement. The third part of the questionnaire asks nine questions related to current educational status, grade point average and plans to complete or not to complete educational programs, such as high school, GED, College or technical school. The questionnaire was designed to look at this population and whether they viewed foster care as a help or hinderance in their educational plans.

The Sample

The sample consisted of thirty teenagers who range in age from 15-21, and are currently in foster care placement within Dekalb County, Georgia. Respondents are teenagers that attend a Independent Living Support Group. They are from various economic backgrounds and types of abuse. Some are in foster homes, relative's homes, shelters, and college dormitories. The population lends to a variety of backgrounds with various types of abuse. Mostly, the population lends to the availability of a student population as well as being in foster care.
The questionnaire was administered at the end of a group session. It was self-administered by the respondents and returned upon completion to the author. This was done within that day and during that group session. This questionnaire was administered during the month of March 1995.

**Method of Analysis**

The method of analysis that was used for this research was of descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics in this research consisted of frequency distribution and the inferential statistics utilized correlation analysis, Pearson "r". The correlation analysis use of the Pearson "r" was to determine if a relationship exists between the dependent and independent variables, that was measured at interval levels. The data analysis was conducted by entering the data into a computer and using the computer program of the *Statistical Package For the Social Sciences*.²

CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS
FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTIONS

Frequency distributions were utilized to show percentage of responses in each category. See Table I.

Table I

Demographic Data
(N = 30)

Demographic Data was asked in two areas: Age and Race.

1. Age?
   - 40.0% 15-16
   - 50.0% 17-18
   - 10.0% 19-20
   Mean: 1.700  Std. Dev.  .651

2. Race
   - 83.3% African-American
   - 6.7% Euro-American
   - 6.7% Other (unspecified)
   Mean: 1.276  Std. Dev.  .797
### Table II

Foster Care Related Data  
*(N = 30)*

Foster Care Related Data- In Reference To Placement Status.

1. Are you currently in a foster care placement?  
   - 73.3% Yes  
   - 26.7% No  
   
   Mean: 1.267  
   Std. Dev.: .450

2. What type of placement are you in?  
   - 23.3% Regular foster care  
   - 16.7% Relative foster care  
   - 23.3% Group home  
   - 30.0% Emergency Children's Shelter  
   - 3.3% College dorm room  
   - 3.3% Living on your own  
   
   Mean: 2.833  
   Std. Dev.: 1.367

3. How long have you been in foster care?  
   - 13.3% 1 month or less  
   - 13.3% 1 - 6 months  
   - 16.7% 6 months - 1 year  
   - 10.0% More than 1 year  
   - 3.3% More than 2 years  
   - 40.0% More than 2 years (specific)  
   - 3.3% No response  
   
   Mean: 4.000  
   Std. Dev.: 1.946

4. At what age were you placed in foster care?  
   - 10.0% 6 or younger  
   - 6.7% 7 - 9 years of age  
   - 13.3% 10-12 years of age  
   - 43.3% 13-15 years of age  
   - 26.7% 16-18 years of age  
   
   Mean: 3.700  
   Std. Dev.: 1.236
Table III

Educational Concerns
(N = 30)

The questions in this area are related to educational concerns.

1. Do you currently attend school?
   - 76.7% Yes
   - 23.3% No
   - Mean: 1.233
   - Std. Dev.: .430

2. What type of school or educational program do you attend?
   - 70.0% Regular public school
   - 6.7% GED Program
   - 13.3% School program in a shelter
   - 3.3% College
   - 6.7% Missing/No Response
   - Mean: 1.714
   - Std. Dev.: 1.301

3. If not in school, which of the following best applies to you?
   - 13.3% GED
   - 6.7% High school diploma
   - 3.3% Further educational training
   - 20.0% No further educational training
   - 56.7% Missing/No response
   - Mean: 3.692
   - Std. Dev.: 2.359

4. If not attending school, what is the last grade you completed?
   - 16.7% 8th grade
   - 3.3% 9th grade
   - 20.0% 10th grade
   - 3.3% 11th grade
   - 3.3% 12th grade
   - 53.3% Missing/No response
   - Mean: 3.429
   - Std. Dev.: 1.284

5. What was your grade point average when you stopped attending school?
   - 3.3% A- A+
   - 23.3% B- B+
   - 20.0% C- C+
   - 13.3% D- D+
   - 40.0% Missing/No Response
   - Mean: 2.722
   - Std. Dev.: .895
Table III continued: The questions in this area are related to educational concerns.

6. Do you feel that foster has:
   - Helped your educational achievement: 36.7%
   - Did not help my educational achievement: 26.7%
   - Had no effect on my educational achievement: 13.3%
   - Somewhat helped my educational achievement: 23.3%
     Mean: 2.233
     Std. Dev.: 1.194

7. Were you a better student prior to placement in foster care?
   - Yes: 70.0%
   - No: 26.7%
     Mean: 1.276
     Std. Dev.: 0.455

8. What was your grade point average prior to placement?
   - A- A+: 6.7%
   - B- B+: 46.7%
   - C- C+: 30.0%
   - D- D+: 10.0%
   - F: 6.7%
     Mean: 2.633
     Std. Dev.: 0.999

9. What are your current educational plans?
   - Complete high school: 33.3%
   - Get a GED: 13.3%
   - Attend a technical school: 13.3%
   - Attend college: 40.0%
     Mean: 2.600
     Std. Dev.: 1.329
Frequency Distribution

The frequency distribution in Table I was the demographic portion of the questionnaire. It received a one hundred percent response rate in the areas of age and race. The age range of 15-16 was forty-percent of respondents, 17-18 age range was fifty percent of respondents and age 19-20 was ten percent of respondents. The population majority was age 17-18. The frequency distribution for race shows that eighty-three percent were African-American, seven percent were Euro-American, and seven percent were unspecified.

The frequency distribution for Table II were in relationship to foster care. Seventy-three percent are in foster care and twenty-six percent are not. The "no" answers were a misinterpretation as to placement source. All respondents are in the custody of the Department of Family and Children Services. This is a requirement for participation in the independent living group. Twenty-three percent are in regular foster homes, seventeen percent are in relative foster homes, twenty-three are in group homes, thirty percent are in emergency children shelters, three percent are in college dorms and three percent are living on their own.

The length of stay in foster care showed that thirteen percent had been in care for one month or less, thirteen percent for one to six months, seventeen percent for six months to one year, ten percent for more than one year, three percent with two years or more and forty percent with more specific number of years, above two years. Three percent were missing a response to the question.

In response to "At what age were you placed in foster care". Ten percent were placed
at the age of six or younger. Six percent were placed between the ages of seven to nine. Thirteen percent were placed at ages 10-12, forty-three percent were placed between the ages of 13-15. Twenty-eight percent were placed between the age of 16-18.

Table III contains responses concerning the area of education. Seventy-six point seven percent are attending school and twenty-three point three percent were not in school. Seventy percent attend regular high school, six percent are in a GED program. Thirteen percent attend a school program in a shelter. Three percent attend college. Seven percent gave no response to the type of educational program they were attending. The question "If not in school, which of the following best applies to you?" The responses were thirteen percent have a high school diploma. Three percent had further educational training. Twenty percent had not gotten any further educational training. Fifty-six percent had no response, as this question did not apply to them.

In response to the question "If not attending school, what is the last grade you completed?" Seventeen percent completed eighth grade. Three percent completed ninth grade. Twenty percent completed tenth grade. Three percent completed eleventh and twelfth grade. Fifty-three percent did not respond, since this question did not pertain to their status.

The respondents answer to the question: "What was your grade point average when you stopped attending school?" Three percent had a A- A+ average. Twenty-three percent had a B- B+ average. Twenty percent had a C- C+ average. Thirteen percent had a D- D+ average. Forty percent did not respond since the question did not pertain to their status.
The question: "Do you feel that foster care has..." Thirty-seven percent feel that foster care has helped their educational achievement. Twenty-seven percent felt that foster care did not help their educational achievement. Thirteen percent felt that foster care had no effect on their educational achievement. Twenty-three percent felt that foster care had somewhat helped their educational achievement.

Seventy percent of respondents felt that they were better students prior to placement in foster care. Twenty-seven percent felt that they were not better students prior to placement in foster care.

Seven percent had a A- A+ grade point average prior to placement. Forty-seven percent had a grade point average of B- B+ prior to placement. Thirty percent had a C- C+ grade point average prior to placement. Ten percent had a D- D+ grade point average prior to placement. Seven percent had a F grade point average prior to placement.

The question: "What are your current educational plans?" Thirty-three percent plan to complete high school. Thirteen percent plan to get a GED. Thirteen percent plan to attend a technical school. Forty percent plan to attend college.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable:</th>
<th>Pearson's &quot;r&quot; Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel that placement in foster care affects your educational success?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Are you currently in a foster care placement?</td>
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<td>2. What type of placement are you in?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. How long have you been in foster care?</td>
<td>.023</td>
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<td>4. At what age were you placed in foster care?</td>
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<td>5. Do you currently attend school?</td>
<td>.304</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. What type of school or educational program are you attending?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. If not in school, do you have a...</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. If you are not attending school, what is the last grade you completed?</td>
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<td>9. What was your grade point average when you stopped attending school?</td>
<td>.362</td>
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<td>10. Do you feel placement in foster care has...</td>
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<td>11. Were you a better student prior to placement?</td>
<td>.168</td>
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<td>12. What was your grade point average prior to placement?</td>
<td>.198</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. What are your current educational plans?</td>
<td>.481</td>
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p = .05
The Findings of the Bivariate Analysis

The findings of the Bivariate Analysis of the Dependent and independent Variables showed that there is no correlation between the respondents placement in foster care and the effects upon educational success or failure. It does not show that the placement of being in foster care effects whether these respondents continue school or dropout. There is no significance as to the type of placement or the amount of time in placement as the completion of high school.

The Bivariate Analysis did show a correlation in the type of educational program that the teenagers were attending. The majority attended high school or a education program while in placement. This does show that the placement in foster care can be effective in assisting or encouraging completion of education.

The majority of respondents in placement showed some plan to continue their educational plan. This does mean that foster care can be the appropriate environment to encourage furthering their education pass high school. This can relate to the type of support that may be received while in placement.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

There are various discussions in research about foster care, but there is little available research on the relationship between foster care and whether placement effects completion of high school. Most of the research available about completing high school involves the general population. There are several studies about African-Americans and Hispanics, which is helpful to understanding the differences for persons of racial minority. The implications in most of the research on high school dropouts outs is prevention.

The majority of respondents in this study are African-Americans. They are late adolescents who have very little time before reaching their age of majority. Most of this sample group was between the ages of 17 to 18, and placed in care between the ages of 13 to 15. Most were placed at a very crucial stage of development, both physically, as well as emotionally.

This study showed that there is no significant correlation between the placement of teenagers in foster care and their educational success or failure. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted for this research.

Theoretical Implications

The Ecological theory looks at the individual and his/her reaction to the environment. This can be in how the individual adapts or copes to changes in his environment. This research shows that the placement change to foster care had no relationship on the educational success or failure of teenagers. It did show that the type of placement can have some effect on the educational success or failure. Those in shelters
were less successful than those in regular foster homes.

The environment of a family setting may be more productive to some teenagers than others. The environment of the home, as well as the school are very important. If the teenager does not feel supported by the placement, then there may be more rejection to continuing school. This would be a coping response showing very little adaptability.

In this research, the Ecological Theory assists to see if placement can be effective or ineffective toward educational success or failure. The Ecological Theory attempts to place value in the person and their environment, and how that environment can change a person's ability to adapt or cope.

**Implication for Social Work Practice**

The purpose of this research was to determine whether the placement in foster care affected the educational success or failure of teenagers in placement. The research did not show an correlation, but did show that most of the respondents have plans to continue their education, and that they remain in high school.

Social service agencies such as Child Welfare and School Social Workers should make every effort to track this population and provide as much support as possible. This population needs a support system that is educational, supportive and resourceful. Social Service workers in Child Welfare should make sure that the teenager is referred to the Independent Living Program and that those programs are supportive and resourceful to the teenager. The School Social worker should follow up on these students and make the Child Welfare worker aware of these students, their needs and support programs available through the school system.
There should be more research done in this area by the School Social Workers in coordination with Child Welfare to develop a framework for practice. Since the research is so limited in this area, it would be most effective to develop for placement planning for teenagers.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of the research must be limited to the population that was sampled. Since there are various Child Welfare agencies throughout this nation, it would be inappropriate to generalize the findings to all teenagers in foster care. This research was limited to the thirty teenagers who were present at the Independent Living Group for Dekalb County Department of Family and Children Services in Decatur, Georgia. The group would not be considered sufficient or diverse enough of a population for a study of all teenagers in foster.

The placement of teenagers in foster care is sometimes most necessary. Many teenagers do not have any other option, such as other family members to take them in. Therefore, they have to adapt to foster care and make the best of the situation. Some are very successful and go forth to college, or technical programs, and have a very rewarding future. Many choose the military and find support in those programs. Placement in foster care does not mean doom, but this population does need a tremendous outpouring of support to keep them from falling between the cracks. Most research has shown that, even teenagers in regular families need support to complete their education. Therefore, teenagers in foster care need more support.
Summary and Conclusion

The research can only be considered for the group that participated in the questionnaire. The research instrument could have been extended and included further questions related to demographics, such as sex of respondents. The instrument could have had more extensive questions related to self-esteem, such as how the respondent feels about his or herself or the Hudson's Scale for self-esteem could have been administered along with the author's questionnaire.

The author does not feel that the research was as extensive as it could have been, but was surprised at the number of respondents who felt that placement in foster care was supportive toward their academic success. This was not expected from this population. Further research should be done to look at the type of placements and the relationship to educational success and failure. This will be helpful in placement planning for teenagers.
APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Part I. Demographic Data: Please complete the following items by circling your response.

1. What is your current age?
   a. 15-16
   b. 17-18
   c. 19-20
   d. 21-22

2. What is your race?
   a. African American
   b. Euro-American
   c. Hispanic\non-white
   d. Other (specify)___________

Part II. Foster Care related information: Please circle the correct answer to the best of your knowledge.

1. Are you currently in a foster care placement?
   a. Yes
   b. no

2. If, so what type of placement are you in?
   a. A regular foster home
   b. A relative home
   c. A group home
   d. A Emergency Children's Shelter
   e. A College Dorm Room
   f. Living on my own or other (specify)_________________

3. How long have you been in foster care?
   a. 1 month or less
   b. 1-6 months
   c. 6-months to a year
   d. more than 1 year
   e. more than 2 years
   f. if more than 2 year, how many years ________
4. At what age were you placed in foster care?
   a. 6 or younger
   b. 7-9 years of age
   c. 10-12 years of age
   d. 13-15 years of age
   e. 16-18 years of age

Part III. Educational Concerns: Please circle the answer that is closest to your response.

1. Do you currently attend school or an educational program?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2. If you are currently attending school or an educational program, what type of school or educational program is it?
   a. Regular public school
   b. Alternative School Program
   c. GED Program
   d. A school in a shelter program
   e. College
   f. Technical School
   g. Other (specify) __________________________

3. If you are not in a school or educational program, do you have a
   a. GED
   b. High School Diploma
   c. Technical School Diploma
   d. Any further educational training (specify) __________________
   e. College degree
   f. No further educational training.

4. If you are no longer attending school, what is the last grade you completed?
   a. 7th grade
   b. 8th grade
   c. 9th grade
   d. 10th grade
   e. 11th grade
   f. 12th grade
5. What was your grade point average when you stopped attending school?
   a. A-A+
   b. B-B+
   c. C-C+
   d. D-D+
   e. F

6. Do you feel that your placement in foster care
   a. helped your educational achievement
   b. did not help your educational achievement
   c. had no effect on your educational achievement
   d. somewhat helped your educational achievement

7. Were you a better student prior to placement in foster care?
   a. Yes
   b. No

8. What was your grade point average prior to placement?
   a. A-A+
   b. B-B+
   c. C-C+
   d. D-D+
   e. F

9. What are your current educational plans?
   a. To complete high school
   b. To get a GED
   c. To attend a technical school
   d. To attend college
   e. No educational plans
BIBLIOGRAPHY


