

# Examining how Parental and Caregiver Closeness Influence Violent Delinquent Behaviors and Arrests Among Foster Youth

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## ABSTRACT

Children involved in the child welfare system have a history of parental neglect, abuse, or exploitation. One of the greatest risks for this population is the correlation between spending time in the foster care and juvenile justice systems. The present study aimed to examine possible protective factors and the ability for maternal, paternal, or caregiver closeness to combat the likelihood of former foster youth to engage in violent offenses, or to obtain an official arrest record.

## INTRODUCTION

- Seventy percent of youth in juvenile detention centers across the United States have spent time in the child welfare system (Baugh et al., 2018).
- Without proper support, guidance, and stability, it is likely that children who have experienced childhood adversities, involving foster care, will continue to have their lives uprooted in detrimental ways, while at risk for participating in self-negligent behaviors (Fox et al., 2015).
- The purpose of this study is to examine how parental and caregiver closeness influence violent delinquent behaviors and arrests among current or former foster youth.
- This study is guided by the following research question: How does parental and caregiver closeness influence involvement in the juvenile justice system among current or former foster youth? More specifically, how do these variables impact foster youths' arrests and the likelihood of committing a violent offense?
- The following hypotheses were presented: Foster youth with a history of close parental or caregiver relationships will be less likely to engage in violent criminal behavior. Foster youth with a history of close parental or caregiver relationships will be less likely to have an arrest record.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Juvenile Offending Among Foster Youth

- A study examining adverse childhood experiences, and serious, violent, chronic offenders, determined that violent juvenile offenders are disproportionately victims of childhood trauma. Ninety percent of juvenile offenders report undergoing at least one traumatic event during childhood (Fox et al., 2015).
- Experiencing abuse during childhood increases the likelihood of juvenile arrests by 59%, and those crimes are 30% more likely to be violent (Baglivio et al., 2016).

### Foster Care – to – Prison Pipeline

- Although the intention of placing a child in foster care is to avoid immediate risk and harm; foster care placement frequently leads to further instability (Wildeman & Emanuel, 2014).
- Little to no support or stability allows more room for children to engage in higher risk behaviors with offending individuals; and foster youth are more likely to find the support they are lacking within offending crowds (Yamat, 2020).

### Parental and Caregiver Closeness

- Early relationships define how children perceive themselves and interact with others throughout their development. A history of maltreatment often results in youth whose early relationships may have resulted in insecure attachments to caregivers (Baetz & Widom, 2019).
- A relationship with a supportive adult can enable children, specifically foster youth, to experience a more secure attachment and form healthier relationships. Serving as a protective factor, healthy adult relationships can diminish the association between maltreatment and juvenile offending (Johnson et al., 2011).

### Mann-Whitney U test

- No significant difference was found regarding maternal closeness and foster youth with an official arrest record.
- No significant difference was found regarding paternal closeness and foster youth with an official arrest record.
- Youth with an official arrest record had lower caregiver closeness scores compared to youth that did not have an official arrest record.
- No significant difference was found regarding maternal closeness and foster youth who committed violent offenses.
- No significant difference was found regarding paternal closeness and foster youth who committed violent offenses.
- No significant difference was found regarding caregiver closeness and foster youth who committed violent offenses.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

- The current study is a secondary analysis of data from the Midwest Study of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth, carried out from May 2002 to January 2007.
- The original study sought to examine behavior among former foster youth transitioning from out-of-home care to adulthood, and their criminal justice system involvement (Courtney et al., 2010).
- The current study's focus was on the influence of parental and caregiver closeness, on violent criminal behaviors and arrests among foster youth.

### Sampling Method

- Participants consisted of youth between 17 and 18.
- The sample included 380 females and 352 males.
- The racial demographics were diverse with (n=417) Black, (n=63) Hispanic, (n=226) White, and (n=89) other.
- The sample size included 732 foster youth.

### Measures

- There are three independent variables for the current study: maternal, paternal, and caregiver closeness. Participants were asked to rate their maternal, paternal, and caregiver closeness as either not close, not very close, somewhat close, or very close.
- There are two dependent variables for the current study: violent criminal behavior and arrest history. Respondent arrest history was measured by official arrest records. Violent offenses were measured by whether participants had deliberately damaged property, gone into a house or building to steal something, hurt someone badly enough to need medical care, used or threaten to use a weapon to get something, taken part in a group fight, pulled a knife or gun on someone or shot or stabbed someone.

## RESULTS

### Logistic Regression

- A logistic regression analysis was performed to identify the effects of caregiver closeness on the likelihood of having been arrested among foster youth, after controlling for the number of foster care placements and gender.
- Results showed that the overall model was significant.
- Higher scores of caregiver closeness were related to a decrease probability of having been arrested.
- More placements were related to an increase probability of having been arrested.
- Males were significantly more likely to have been arrested.

*Logistic Regression Analysis for History of Arrest (N = 723)*

	B	SE	OR	Sig.
Caregiver Closeness	-.154	.069	.857	.026
Number of Placements (ref = Less than 5)				.000
5 or more	.625	.162	1.869	
Gender (ref = Female)				.000
Male	1.218	.160	3.381	
Constant	-.561	.250	.570	
-2 Log likelihood	912.547			
$\chi^2$ (3)	85.86			
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.150			



## DISCUSSION

### Major Findings

- Parental relationships were insignificant in combatting against the likelihood for foster youth to commit violent offenses or be arrested. Children become part of the child welfare system as a result of some form of abuse or neglect, by one or both parents. This provides evidence as to why these relationships may or may not be strained, and therefore do not positively influence youth behaviors.
- Youth with an official arrest record had lower caregiver closeness scores compared to youth that did not have an official arrest record. This means the closer the relationship with a caregiver, the less likely an individual was to have been arrested. This supports the finding that protective and impactful bonds are not limited to parental relationships.

### Limitation

- Although being a foster youth does create greater risk for hardship and exposure to recklessness, having spent time in the child welfare system does not equate the experiences of all former foster youth.

### Social Work Implications

- These study results emphasize the need for child welfare agencies to support the caregiver role.
- It is vital that these roles are taken on by strong, prepared, supported, and sustained individuals who value their responsibility.

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