



Homelessness, Substance Abuse, Educational and Employment Attainment Outcomes for Foster Youth Transitioning out of the Child Welfare System

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Abstract

The child welfare system serves as the main home for many foster youth. Their economic, educational, emotional, physical, and psychological well-being is intended to be supported by the child welfare system. However, foster youth tend to find themselves in precarious situations once they transition out of the system. Foster youth have little to no financial support, are at higher risk of homelessness, substance abuse, and their educational and employment attainment is far below that of their peers who did not go through foster care.

Purpose & Hypothesis

The purpose of this study is to understand the relationship between the services foster youth receive while in the child welfare system and outcomes such as homelessness, substance abuse, educational and employment attainment. The hypothesis for this study is that those who received support services will have better outcomes than those who did not receive services.

Methods

The study used a national sample. The project utilized secondary data collected from the services and outcomes surveys in the National Youth in Transition Database. The study involved two cohorts and 32,700 participants overall. The cohorts were self-selected non-probability samples from the baseline population in 2014 and 2017 respectively. The study focused on cohort 1 when the participants were 19 in 2016 and cohort 2 when they were 19 in 2019. The demographic variables and the project's dependent and independent variables were examined as part of the descriptive statistics. Chi-square tests were used to examine the relationship between services and outcomes. The relationships under study included the connection between health services and substance abuse, educational support services and educational attainment level, employment services and employment status, and finally housing education and homelessness.

Introduction & Literature Review

Each year, more than 20,000 youth emancipate or transition out of the child welfare system. The federal government and the state of California have gone to great lengths to address the problems transitional age youth (TAY).

Foster youth transitioning out of the child welfare system continue to experience negative outcomes despite these federal and state intervention.

Homelessness

- 36% of foster youth had been homeless before the age of 26 at least once; 9 times more than the national average.
- In California, 25% of foster care youth by the age of 21 had experienced homelessness.

Substance Abuse

- Youth in foster care are twice as likely to use illicit drugs and more than five times as likely to be drug dependent compared to non-foster care youth.

Educational Attainment

- TAY in the child welfare system have a higher rate of educational deficits such as low test scores in reading and math, and have an increased probability of repeating a school grade and being placed in special education programs.

Employment Outcomes

- Foster youth transitioning out of the child welfare system earn lower wages and are less likely to be employed compared to non-foster youth

Results

Demographic and Study Variables (n=32,702)

Race and Ethnicity	n	%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1,083	3.3
Asian	460	1.4
Black or African American	11,263	34.4
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	212	0.6
White	13,401	41
Hispanic or Latino	6,839	20.9

Gender	n	%
Male	16,408	50.2
Female	16,294	49.8

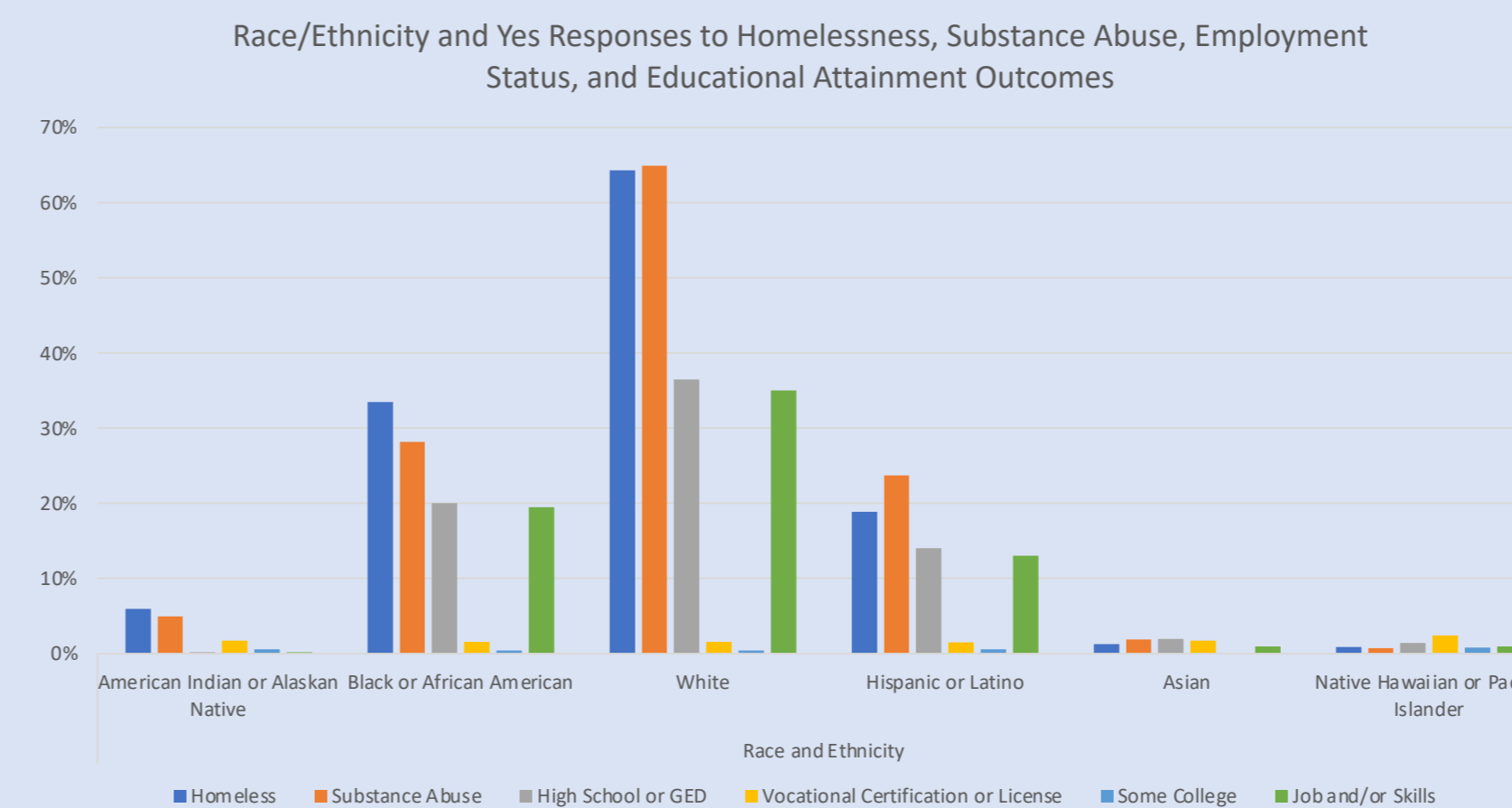
Services Received	n	%
Health Education and Risk Prevention Services	13,326	40.7
No Health Education and Risk Prevention Services	19,253	58.9
Employment Related Services	21,058	64.4
No Employment Related Services	11,521	35.2
Education Services	19,314	59
No Education Services	13,268	40.6
Housing Education and Home Management Services	16,389	50.1
No Housing Education and Home Management Services	16,191	49.5

Outcomes	n	%
Substance Abuse Issues	2,346	7.2
No Issues with Substance Abuse	14,903	45.6
Employment (Part-time/Full-time Job or Skills)	9,771	29.9
No Job or Skills	7,309	22.4
Education (High School Diploma and more)	10,767	33
No High School Diploma or Higher Degree	6,503	19.9
Homeless	3,590	11
Not Homeless	13,700	41.9

Table 1-Chi-Square Results
Cohorts and Homelessness, Substance Abuse, Educational Attainment, and Employment Outcomes

Outcomes*	Cohorts	
	2014	2017
Homeless: Yes	1,761 (10.7%)	1,829 (11.3%)
Homeless: No	6,824 (41.4%)	6,876 (42.4%)
Substance Abuse: Yes	1,218 (7.4%)	1,128 (7%)
Substance Abuse: No	7,341 (44.5%)	7,562 (46.6%)
High School or GED	4,997 (58.9%)	5,396 (61.4%)
Vocational Certification or License	156 (1.8%)	122 (1.4%)
Some College	51 (0.6%)	45 (0.5%)
No Job or Skills	3,773 (44.3%)	3,536 (41.3%)
Job and/or Skills	4,751 (55.7%)	5,020 (58.7%)

*Significance for all results on this table: p<.05



Discussion

- Participants who received "Housing Education and Home Management Training Services" were less likely to experience homelessness following their departure from the child welfare system than those who did not receive the services. However, like other studies show, it seems like the rate continues to rise despite the amount of services being offered.
- There was no significant relationship between receiving health education and risk preventative services and having substance abuse issues. Race and ethnicity showed significant results, but the relationship was weak. The relative weakness in race and ethnicity and substance abuse falls in line with other studies showing that variables like age, sex, and race and ethnicity do not provide significantly strong results.
- Foster youth who received employment type services such as employment programs or vocational training and career preparation were more likely to have a job or possess job skills training than those who did not receive any services. The present study also showed a significant relationship between the 2014 and 2017 cohorts and employment outcomes. Even though the rate of employment increased from one cohort to the next, the rate is still far below the national average (Macomber et al., 2008).
- There was no significant relationship between receiving education services and educational outcomes. There was also no significant relationship between being in either the 2014 or 2017 cohort and educational outcomes. This is consistent with Berliner & Lezin (2012) who argue for more research-based strategies to improve education outcomes for youth in foster care.

Future Implications

- Sexuality and gender are avenues that can be explored for future research. Identifying as LGBTQ+ puts foster care youth at higher risk of homelessness and substance abuse and have a lower rate of employment and educational attainment.
- Future research could also assess the quality and effectiveness of state services being offered which would allow for greater improvement into the quality of care and support.
- Future studies can help social workers focus on these areas to improve the outcomes of foster care youth. This study can also help with the creation of policies to address the need for more state level services and interventions.