

ABSTRACT

There are several challenges and barriers that foster youth encounter while transitioning into adulthood and independent living. Transitionally aged foster youth are at a risk for negative outcomes (i.e. homelessness, unemployment, incarceration, and poverty) compared to youth not in foster care. Research suggests that participation in an independent living skills program produces more successful outcomes for foster youth. The objective of the current study is to explore the effects of participation in an independent living skills program on foster youth's level of preparedness. The current study is a secondary analysis of the data from the Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs (Chafee Independent Living Evaluation Project), which included data used from a classroom-based life skills training program in Los Angeles County, California. The sample size was 413 (163 males and 250 females). Participants were 16 years and older and resided in out-of-home placements, including youth currently on probation. Data was collected mainly by surveys and interviews. The current study was longitudinal and included a pre-test and post-test as well as intervention and control group. The results of the study showed that participation in an independent living program significantly affects foster youth's level of preparedness at accessing community resources. Also, the findings indicate that time is a significant factor and affects several domains of independent living including home life skills, accessing community resources, and educational/career obtainment. The findings suggest that future research and practice should aim at creating, implementing, and improving independent living skill programs to produce more favorable outcomes for foster youth.

INTRODUCTION

Research Questions

1. Is there a difference in the level of readiness for home life skills among foster youth that participated in the Independent Living Program?
2. Is there a difference in the level of readiness for utilizing community resources and health care services among foster youth that participated in the Independent Living Program?
3. Is there a difference in the level of readiness for career and educational pursuits among foster youth that participated in the Independent Living Program?

Hypotheses

1. Foster youth who have participated in the Independent Living Program will perceive themselves as more prepared for home life skills than those who did not participate in the program.
2. Foster youth who have participated in the Independent Living Program will perceive themselves as more prepared for utilizing community resources and health care services than those who did not participate in the program.
3. Foster youth who have participated in the Independent Living Program will perceive themselves as more prepared for career and educational pursuits than those who did not participate in the program.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effects of Independent Living Program

- Foster youth who participated in an independent living program were more likely to live independently compared to those who did not participate in an independent living program
- Participation in an independent living program was associated with favorable employment outcomes in foster youth

Skill Acquisition Theory

- People learn through explicit processes and with enough practice moves towards implicit processes
- Implicit processes are more automatic whereas explicit processes require conscious effort
- Three stages of learning: declarative knowledge, proceduralization of knowledge, and automatizing of knowledge

Gaps and Limitations

- There is a lack of research supporting effectiveness of Independent Living Programs in all domains
- There are currently no known studies that have focused on independent living skills and resources on a national level

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Data Collection Procedures

- This study utilized secondary analysis of the data collected from the Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs, 2001-2010.
- The study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of Independent Living Programs established under the John Chafee Foster Care Independence Program
- The MEFYP Attitudes and Expectations [adapted from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997, the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth, and the Outcomes of Independent Living Project] was used
- Data was collected mainly using surveys and interviews, as well as developmental testing, behavioral observations, and physical measurements.

Sample and Sampling Method

- The sample was collected between September 2003 and June 2004 using purposive sampling.
- Data from a classroom-based life skills training program in Los Angeles County, California was used
- Participants consisted of male and female foster youth
- Participants were 16 years and older and resided in out-of-home placements, including youth currently on probation
- Participants were randomly assigned to the treatment and control groups.

Measures

- The first dependent variable was home life. There were six questions examining home life readiness.
- The second dependent variable was career and education. There were six questions assessing career and education.
- The third dependent variable was community resources. There were a total of six items in the community resource category.
- The independent variable was whether the participant was placed into the treatment.
- Participants in the study were placed into either the intervention or control group. Those who were placed in the intervention group participated in the independent life skills training program, while those in the control group did not receive this intervention.

RESULTS

Mixed-Design ANOVA

- A mixed-design ANOVA was used to determine the within-subject factors showing the dependent variable scores at pre-and post-intervention and between-subjects factors table presenting categories of the independent variable (treatment). The results of the mixed-design ANOVA can be observed in tables 1 and 3.
- For home life readiness, a 2 (Time) x 2 (Treatment) mixed-design ANOVA revealed that the main effect for time was significant $F(1,411) = 54.514, p = .000, \eta^2 = .117$. However, a significant Time x Treatment interaction effect was not obtained, $F(1, 411) = 2.015, p = .157, \eta^2 = .005$.
- For career readiness, a 2 (Time) x 2 (Treatment) mixed-design ANOVA revealed that the main effect for time was significant $F(1,411) = 20.807, p = .000, \eta^2 = .048$. However, a Time x Treatment interaction effect was found to be insignificant, $F(1, 411) = 2.498, p = .115, \eta^2 = .006$.
- For community resource readiness, a significant Time x Treatment interaction effect was obtained, $F(1, 411) = 9.034, p = .003, \eta^2 = .02$. This interaction was a small effect ($\eta^2 = .02$). The interaction effect can be observed in Figure 1.

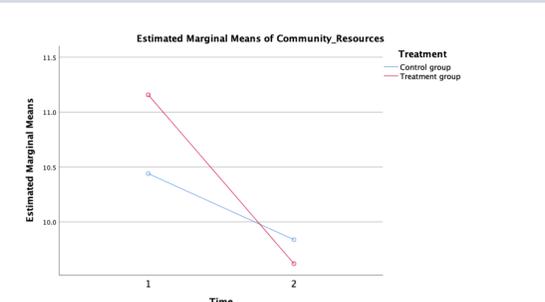


Figure 1. Estimated Marginal Means of Community Resources. This graph shows a significant interaction effect between time and treatment.

	f	%
Treatment		
Control	216	52.3
Treatment	197	47.7
Final Gender		
Male	163	39.5
Female	250	60.5
Race		
American Indian or Alaskan Native	41	9.9
Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	9	2.2
Black or African American	183	44.3
White	142	34.4
Hispanic		
Don't know	5	1.2
No	229	55.4
Yes	179	43.3
Language		
Don't know	1	0.2
English	332	80.4
Spanish	76	18.4
Other	4	1.0
Born in US		
No	30	7.3
Yes	383	92.7

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of Dependent Variables by Treatment and Testing Times

	Pretest		Posttest	
	M	SD	M	SD
Treatment Group				
Home Life Readiness	9.90	2.888	8.66	2.284
Career Readiness	9.37	2.839	8.50	2.417
Community Resource Readiness	11.16	2.956	9.62	2.677
Control Group				
Home Life Readiness	9.59	2.610	8.75	2.507
Career Readiness	8.82	2.370	8.40	2.405
Community Resource Readiness	10.44	3.046	9.84	2.771

Table 3

Mixed-Design Analysis of Variance Results for Community Resource Readiness by Treatment and Time

Variable and Sources	df	MS	F	p	η^2
Between subjects					
Treatment	1	12.821	1.119	.291	.003
Error 1	411	11.457			
Within subjects					
Time	1	235.904	47.196	.000	.103
Treatment X Time	1	45.154	9.034	.003	.022
Error 2	411	4.998			

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

- The main effect for time was found to be significant in the home life readiness domain, however, a significant time and treatment interaction effect was not obtained meaning that the intervention did not significantly alter participant's responses in the post-test. These findings are inconsistent with previous research that implied that independent living program participants would be more prepared to live independently at home compared to treatment as usual (Lindsey & Ahmed, 1999).
- The main effect for time was found to be significant in the career/educational readiness domain, however, a significant time and treatment interaction effect was not obtained, meaning that the intervention did not significantly alter participant's responses in the post-test. These findings were inconsistent with previous research that associated participation in independent living services with more favorable education outcomes (Kim et al., 2019). Although it was not the impact of the intervention that revealed this change, participants did change over time. These results may also be related to the fact that control group is "treatment as usual" as opposed to "no treatment." Participants in the "treatment as usual" group may receive services outside of the program, which could potentially minimize the difference between their post-test scores and the post-test scores of participants in the intervention group.
- The main effect for time was found to be significant in the community resources readiness domain and a significant time and treatment interaction effect was obtained, meaning that the intervention was a significant factor in influencing the participant's responses in the post-test. This finding also supports previous research that found that independent living program participants were more likely and more prepared to live independently and access community resources than those who had not participated in an independent living program (Lindsey & Ahmed, 1999).

Implications for Research and Practice

- Future practice should focus on creating and implementing more effective independent living skills programs for foster youth.
- Future research should measure progress at additional data points. The differences observed in the current study may have been dependent on the time that was measured. While the data points in the current study measured progress one year and two years after participation in the independent living program, it would be helpful to observe the long-term progress over several years and additional data points.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths:

- Large sample size for longitudinal intervention study
- Low attrition rate
- 2 x 2 pre/post-test design

Limitations:

- Limited data points (one and two years later)
- Singles out limited questions from the survey

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Lee for her patience and guidance in this process. I would also like to thank my family and friends for their encouragement and support throughout the program.