ABSTRACT

POLICY ANALYSIS OF THE CALIFORNIA FOSTERING CONNECTIONS TO SUCCESS ACT

By

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This study is a policy analysis of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act (2012). The policy was intended to address the negative outcomes associated with the over 4,000 youth leaving foster care yearly in California. Findings from this analysis indicated that former foster youth were found to struggle with homelessness, unemployment, low education attainment, poverty, incarceration and dependence on government assistance to a greater extent than their peers. States that extended foster care past age 18 demonstrated benefits that were not necessarily sustained on a long term basis in comparison to states that ended care at age 18. This study concluded that while extending foster care to youth offers temporary support, common practice should involve early interventions like teaching discipline, goal setting, independence and accountability as well as fostering nurturing connections and relationships with significant individuals in the child's life. Permanent adult connections were found to play significant roles in youth's attaining self-sufficiency.

POLICY ANALYSIS OF THE CALIFORNIA FOSTERING CONNECTIONS TO SUCCESS ACT

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Approximately 25,000 youth who are in the foster care system in the United States leave care at age 18 each year and are left to fend for themselves without family support, and often end up homeless, incarcerated, and unemployed (Krinsky, 2010). In 2008, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act was passed by President Bush in an attempt to resolve this problem. This policy aimed at "supporting relative caregivers with the hopes of improving the outcomes of children in the system, providing incentives for adoption, and making tribal adoption and foster care available" (Shin, 2012, p. 5). This Act includes an amendment signed on October 1, 2010, "allowing states to extend foster care to young adults past their 18th birthday" (Shin, 2012, p. 2). On September 30, 2010, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law the California Fostering Connections to Success Act, also known as Assembly Bill 12 (AB 12; Lemley, Dow, Schwartz, Heimov, & Elliot, 2011), which was implemented by the Department of Children and Families throughout California on January 1, 2012.

Problem Statement

Like any legislation, the California Fostering Connections to Success Act was passed to address certain problems or deprivations. The needs of foster care youth are not just a California problem but also a national problem. The California Fostering Connections to Success Act stemmed from the Fostering Connections to Success and

Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 which was passed at the national level. The California Fostering Connections to Success Act passed into law to address the issues affecting more than 4,000 young adults leaving their foster homes every year in California and in need of education, vocational training, and housing. More than half of them do not have a place to go and have no support system or family network available to help them find affordable housing and supportive services.

Los Angeles County has the largest child welfare department in the nation. If the issues for transitioning foster youth can be effectively addressed and the challenges overcome there, the model has the potential to be disseminated to other large urban areas. A significant published study of the conditions of Los Angeles County transitioning youth was conducted by Culhane et al. (2011). This research reported some staggering statistics on youth who either aged out or exited the foster care or probation system with outcomes that can likely be addressed or reduced with the implementation of the terms of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act. This Act was designed with the hope of improving outcomes for emancipated foster youth who have been found to have lower educational achievement and be more likely to experience homelessness, unemployment, unplanned pregnancies, involvement with the legal system, and lack of support from family or other responsible adult.

Culhane et al.'s (2011) findings included information about the economic insecurity, criminal justice involvement, mental and physical health, and educational and housing challenges faced by young adults who were once wards of the juvenile dependency or delinquency systems, or were crossover youth, meaning that they had been part of both systems. They documented that 68% of former foster youth and 82% of

crossover youth relied on government aid within the early years of adulthood. Culhane et al. (2011) also found that these youth were less likely to have any earnings of their own between the ages of 18 and 24. At least a third of the former foster youth and crossover youth experienced financial hardship and were considered poor or earning a below average income. Shin (2012) found similar outcomes nationally; 50% of youth who exited from either juvenile justice system or child welfare system or both experienced high rates of unemployment within 5 years of exiting. Among those youth who were employed, their reported average earnings were far below the national poverty level. Hook and Courtney (2010) also found that foster youth who age out of care are less likely to be employed and earn lower wages than other youth, even when compared to demographically similar low-income youth. The employment situation and income status of foster youth based on these studies are not surprising and can well be anticipated due to various factors that affect this population. Hook and Courtney (2010) described foster youth's employment problems as stemming from a lack of human capital (e.g., the education and skills needed for employment). A number of foster youth lack this human capital due to their experiences of multiple school changes, poor oversight of their individual educational needs, and limited social and financial capital.

A lack of educational achievement is a significant barrier to self-sufficiency. Culhane et al. (2011) reported that less than half of former foster youth and crossover youth in Los Angeles enrolled in higher education, but only about 2% completed an Associate's Degree. This parallels Shin's (2012) findings that less than half of all former foster youth have graduated from high school, less than 10% enroll in college, and only 1% of those who enroll actually graduate from college.

Another barrier to employment for foster youth as described by Hook and Courtney (2010) is lack of social capital, which refers to the personal relationships such as those with responsible adults who can provide guidance in getting employment. Many foster youth have had multiple placements and thus different caregivers without necessarily building a strong relationship with any, have no contact or strong relationship with their birth families, and are on their own without guidance. Hook and Courtney (2010) also included personal capital as having an effect on employment outcomes among foster youth. Personal capital, as described by Hook and Courtney (2010), refers to the behavioral characteristics that influence youth's motivation and capacity for work, such as delinquency and mental health issues. These factors can become barriers for foster youth in terms of following through with obtaining and maintaining employment.

Culhane et al. (2011) determined that dealing with crime committed by young adults is costly for taxpayers. Nearly two thirds of crossover youth had a jail stay in early adulthood, compared to a quarter of former foster youth. The average cumulative cost of incarceration for young adults was $18,430 for child welfare youth and $33,946 for crossover youth. According to Shin (2012), population studies have shown that within the first 2 years of aging out of the foster care system, 25% of these older youth will be incarcerated.

In terms of housing, Shin (2012) reported that approximately two thirds of youth leaving foster care have no housing prospects upon exiting and almost half will become homeless within 18 months. To place this in perspective, 27% of the homeless population across the nation consists of individuals who have spent time in the foster care system. For example, in April 2011, it was reported that former foster children have

overtaken veterans as the single largest population in homeless shelters in California (Shin, 2012). Even though this study is not inclusive, it can be disturbing to realize that a sizeable number of youth who are becoming young adults in such a highly populated part of our society are faced with such dilemma, which affects the general population. California Fostering Connections Act is a fairly new law and it may be too early to determine that it is actually addressing some if not all these problems. Studies have indicated that extending foster care in other states has yielded positive outcomes for youth emancipating from or otherwise exiting the child welfare system (Krinsky & Liebmann, 2011).

Purpose

The purpose of this thesis project was to analyze the 2010 California Fostering Connections to Success Act. This analysis explored the history leading up to its passage, its purpose, and how it has been assessed by others. The analysis explored other policies and legislation that attempted to address the problems faced by former foster youth before the passage of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act. It also considered the outcomes of the legislation for the child welfare system, and the young adults it was intended to help.

Definition of Terms

Age out: Refers to the termination of court jurisdiction over foster care youth, usually after reaching the age of 18 (Atkinson, 2008).

Crossover youth: Youth who exited an out-of-home child welfare placement between the ages of 16 and 21 and who also had a record of involvement with the juvenile probation system. In other words, all crossover youth were under the

supervision of both a Child Welfare agency and a Probation Department, although at different times (Culhane et al, 2011).

Human capital: Possessing the education and skills needed for employment (Hook & Courtney, 2010).

Transition jurisdiction: A non-delinquent status for minors who are ready to transition out of delinquency supervision but cannot return home, as well as for eligible non-minors who exited the delinquency system and are reentering foster care (Courtney, Dworsky, & Napolitano, 2013).

Personal capital: Refers to the behavioral characteristics that influence youth motivation and capacity to work, such as delinquency and mental health issues (Hook & Courtney, 2010).

Social capital: Refers to personal relationships such as those with responsible adults who can provide guidance in getting employment, also known as a permanent adult connection (Hook & Courtney, 2010).

Multicultural Relevance

Transitioning youth who are from African American, Native American, and Latino groups and those who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) are faced with unique challenges. Some of these challenges may stem from being disproportionally represented in systems of care, oppression, and discrimination (Needell et al., 2014). While in foster care, African American, Native American, and Latino as well as LGBTQ children are less likely to maintain connections and contact with a family member or find a permanent connection while in care. As a result, poorer outcomes become more prevalent among these youth when they transition

to young adulthood from foster care because they have been less likely to achieve permanence (Stott, 2013). Finding permanence and a responsible adult from whom a youth can receive guidance and support is very important for a successful transition. For the LGBTQ youth and the ethnic minority youth who are more likely than other youth to have experienced multiple placements and instability while in foster care, making those permanent connections becomes difficult. The California Fostering Connections to Success Act has the potential to provide some of the support that is missing from their lives.

Social Work Relevance

The social work practitioner plays an indispensable role in helping the foster youth navigate through foster care and the transition to young adulthood. From knowing where to get legal help and information to accessing available resources and services, foster youth rely on social workers for direction. It is helpful to the transitioning youth to be connected to a responsible adult before exiting the foster care system. Social workers can apply themselves in family finding efforts to develop and maintain social capital that can establish long-lasting connections to support the youth in this transition (Jones, 2014). This social capital may not necessarily be the youth's birth families but anyone with whom the youth has had a significant relationship or anyone willing and able to mentor and foster the social support the youth needs to thrive.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The passage of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act was an effort to provide solutions to the challenges faced by young adults who are exiting out of the child welfare system and foster care. This section explored the history of child maltreatment and how it permeates the society, resulting in the states' possession of children who may have relinquished all other forms of social support and are dependent on the state for total care until they reach the age of majority, age 18. Policies that have been implemented and amended over the years to mitigate issues of child welfare and to ensure the safety and well-being of children will also be explored in this section. There are also policies that were passed to support young adults transitioning from foster care to self-sufficiency that will be examined. This chapter also discusses the California Fostering Connections to Success Act as one of the most recent policies that was implemented to tackle the issues of social capital and human capital, which usually precede unemployment, homelessness, and incarceration among former foster youth.

History of Child Maltreatment and Foster Care

We may wonder how we got here in the first place. How do we end up having thousands of foster youth emancipating from the foster care system with little to no skills, support, or tools to enable successful transition to the next phase of life, adulthood. The child welfare and foster care systems were developed to protect children from

maltreatment and abuse. In the 1700s, children whose parents were deceased or children whose parents could not meet their needs were indentured which meant the children were sent to live and work for other families believed to meet the children's needs (Murray & Gesiriech, 2005). The society then focused on poverty as a preceding factor to meeting children's needs. Children were used as property and while they were poor and orphaned, they had to work to support their living in these family homes that were not monitored by any agency. This practice has evolved over the years, guided by several policies that have been implemented to protect children who have been abused, neglected, and determined to be unsafe in the care of their parents or guardians.

Closely related to this practice is the orphan train strategy pioneered by Charles Loring Brace in the early 1800s (Cook, 1995). This practice became the start of the foster care system, in other words, placing out or out of home care. Unlike the indentured practice, the orphan train strategy involved emigration of orphaned children or children who were abandoned, neglected, or homeless to live with families who wanted them so they could be educated and cared for and not used for work or paid for their labor (Cook, 1995). Children were transported in trains; hence the name *orphan trains,* from New York to the Midwest states and some southern and northeastern states to be placed with willing families who would care for them. The children had both parents or had at least one parent living had to get parental consent for the child in need of placement. The families who took these children had prearrangements with the placing agency or selected the child they wanted when the children were lined up at a public location at each stop of the train. Families were given the option to return a child they no longer wanted or if the child no longer wanted to be with that family, the child would return to the placing

agency for placement with another family or sent back to New York. Disabled children and children considered incorrigible were not considered for placement; neither were African American children because of prejudices and fear by the early foster care workers that it would be mistaken for slavery. Though there have been changes to this practice over the years and this strategy saw its end in the early 1900s at the wake of a new social work practice era, a lot of what is practiced in out of home care and child welfare today is very similar to the orphan train strategy.

One of the most memorable historical events that rose up awareness to the problem of child maltreatment in America is the case of Mary Ellen in the 1850s (Watkins, 1990). Mary Ellen was a young girl who was severely abuse by her caregivers. At that time, there were no laws or policies in place to protect children and to safely remove them from the maltreatment. In order to protect, Mary Ellen, Ms. Wheeler, a missionary and friendly visitor, advocated for the assistance of the Society for the Protection of Animal Cruelty, resulting in the court's intervention to remove Mary Ellen from her caregivers (Watkins, 1990). The Society for Protection of Animal Cruelty was later changed to the Society for Protection of Animal and Child Cruelty for the interest of children. Much has changed since this case. Our society has made efforts to protect and care for children who have suffered any form of maltreatment. In the efforts to meet these children's needs, several policies have been implemented, amended, and thrown out to create new ones as our society's attempts to keep children safe and help them become productive members of society.

Permanency Problems

When children are not raised by their birth families for whatever reason, issues of stability and permanency for the children can easily arise. Historically, America has made several efforts to tackle issues of child maltreatment, orphaned children, and even poverty among children. In efforts to protect and meet the needs of these vulnerable children, child welfare as we define it now has treated these issues with the indentured program, the orphan train strategy, and what we know today as protective custody or detention by the juvenile courts. This involves children legally removed from their birth families and assigned to a foster family or an institution to care for the child and meet the child's needs. While America has also dealt with issues of permanency and what happens to the child after removal from his or her birth family, permanency and instability continues to be a gnawing problem in American child welfare. Rosenfeld et al. (1997) found that after the Battered Child Syndrome became public and mandated reporting laws were enacted, involuntary placement of children in foster care grew. Moreover, inadequate resources for foster care and adoption resulted in large numbers of children moving from place to place without a permanent plan. Though several policies were in place to ensure either the safe return of children to their birth families or an alternative permanency plan was implemented, many children were left in foster care without stability with no permanent plan underway.

Atkinson (2008) explored problems of permanency in terms of the foster care drift which describes youth drifting from one temporary home to another without a timeline for reunification or permanency. Much like the orphan train strategy of the 1800s, foster parents were given the option to reject a child for almost any reason and at whatever time

they chose, resulting in this drift especially for the children exhibiting behavior problems or the children with health problems. Atkinson (2008) found that close to 50% of youth in foster care spent at least 2 years in out-of-home care and almost 20% spent at least 5 years in out-of- home care with the average youth in foster care having at least three different foster care placements. What was meant to be a temporary and brief placement until successful reunification had been achieved with birth families or legal guardians had become a permanent way of life for many youth in foster care.

Why do we care about permanency for youth in foster care anyway? In a study conducted by Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, and Painter (2007), foster youth in their words reported that a connection with a support person or network was paramount to their successful transition into adulthood. The participants in this study perceived that while their independence was sought after, their interdependence gave them the jolt needed to reach that goal of independence (Scannapieco et al. 2007). With youth drifting from home to home, and placement to placement, it becomes almost impossible to build and nurture the connection and social networks needed to develop interdependence and successful transition to adulthood.

Hook and Courtney (2010) also found that a connection to an adult who can guide and support a youth could help in gaining employment. There are many things that are not innately a part of human beings. Applying for a job, preparing for a job interview, the ethics of interviews and maintaining a job are some of those things. When youth in foster care do not have permanent connections from which they draw patience and guidance to employment issues and more social issues of survival and independence from, they have

difficult transitions to adulthood creating issues that are more difficult for themselves and the society they live in.

Children in Care

In order to better understand the needs of youth exiting foster care and the rationale behind the extended foster care legislation, an understanding of their experiences precipitated by their trauma, grief and the behaviors manifesting is helpful. Zima et al. (2000) found a disproportionate number of children living in out-of-home care among other social issues display behavior problems that are obvious results of history of abuse and neglect, extreme poverty, homelessness, and parental substance abuse.

Burns et al. (2004) found that the lives of youth and families who are the subjects of reports of maltreatment investigated by child welfare are characterized by problems such as abuse, neglect, poverty, domestic violence, and parental substance abuse—problems that are recognized risk factors for the development of emotional and behavioral problems. Townsend, Hignight and Rubovits (2008) found that emotional and behavioral problems are likely to be prominent among children who have a history of abuse and neglect, are living in foster care and even more with longer stays in foster care. It is not surprising to find that children who have been abused and neglected are most likely to display behavioral and emotional problems as these conditions are not a part of a normal developmental process for children. Child abuse and neglect cause stress for those experiencing it and they are likely to react to it by acting out in socially unacceptable behavior or displaying mild to severe emotional and mental symptoms. Townsend et al. (2008) further found that children displaying emotional or behavioral

issues may be less likely to be returned home quickly and in turn become likely to drift in foster care without positive permanency results.

Barriers to Reunification or Adoption

When children have been placed in out of home care, the usual practice in child welfare entails working collaboratively with parents to remove the barriers to reunification to ensure the successful reunification of the children and their families (Choi & Ryan, 2007). The goal, therefore, is to ensure that parents and children are offered services to reduce or eliminate the risk that threatened the safety and well-being of the children in the first place. The success of reunification can be viewed as a joint effort between the parents and the child welfare agencies offering the needed services to mitigate the risk factors and ensure safety for the children when returned home. While federal legislation enacted in the 1980s was geared to shortening the timeframes of permanency decisions for children in out of home care to prevent children from drifting, this became a barrier to reunification for parents with substance abuse and mental health problems (Risley-Curtiss, Stromwall, Hunt, & Teska, 2004).

Substance abuse, mental illness, and other co-occurring social problems like poverty, housing, unemployment, and domestic violence are issues that may not be resolved in the periods allotted by law to reunify. For instance, if a child has been placed in out of home care due to emotional and physical abuse; and there is an issue of domestic violence in the home where the parent victim is unemployed and relies on the perpetrating parent or partner for housing and financial support. Several steps need to be taken for the parent who is a victim of domestic violence to ensure the risks are eliminated to offer a safe environment for a child to reunify to the timeline for a parent

who is a victim of domestic violence. For some parents, 18 months is long enough to resolve the issues of income and housing; for others it may take longer as there are also court mandates for visitation, remedial services, and court dates which the parent needs to comply with in addition to tackling their personal needs to resolve housing and income issues. Choi and Ryan (2007) expressed the need for the child welfare agency workers while assessing the risk of the families and developing individualized service plans to offer services in a timely manner to give the parent opportunities to address the issues immediately.

Townsend et al. (2008) also found that the children's age at entry into foster care, their race, the type of abuse resulting in child welfare intervention, the length of time spent in out of home placements and the number of placements, parental substance abuse and/or co-occurring mental illnesses, poverty, family functioning, and child emotional and behavioral problems are all factors that become barriers to reunification. It is likely that the parent of the child who was physically abused has better chances of reunifying with their child than the parent who abuses substances. Substance abuse, like most mental illnesses, has multiple co-occurring problems that may take longer to resolve making it difficult for the parent abusing substances. In this light, Townsend et al. (2008) state, "many studies have shown that children who have been physically abused are more likely to be reunified with their parents, and at a faster rate, than children born with substance dependency or a history of neglect" (p. 62).

Foster Parent Training

While foster parents have been an invaluable resource in child welfare, there appears to be a need to offer more training to foster parents to ensure they are providing

the needed support and nurturing to help the youth in foster care thrive. Price et al. (2008) state that based on social learning theory, various treatment models can be used to provide parent management training to create positive outcomes for youth with behavior problems stalling placement disruptions and other emotional problems. Foster parents need to develop skills to deal with mental and emotional problems that result from child maltreatment, separation, and attachment issues which are commonly experienced by youth in foster. With training and additional support, foster parents can be better equipped to offer a nurturing and supportive home for the youth.

Case Worker Workload

Reunification and permanency for children in foster care are a joint effort by the parents whom the child was removed from and the child welfare agency responsible for placement and offering reunification services to the families. As it becomes challenging for parents to meet their legal mandates for reunification, the child welfare agencies have their share of challenges as well. Yamatani, Engel, and Spjeldnes (2009) reported that child welfare agencies were overwhelmed with high caseloads and workloads that resulted in high turnovers and inefficiency in fulfilling their mandates to ensure the safety of the children who are assessed or offered services by the child welfare system. More like the families who are expected to meet legal mandates in a short period of time while meeting their personal obligations to maintain a livelihood and a conducive home for their children to return to, child welfare workers are overwhelmed with mandates and workloads that are unrealistic. In a study by Tao et al. (2013), the lengthy stays in out of home care placements for children were likely caused by high turnover and lower levels

of education of child welfare workers. This makes service delivery a challenging task and the families who encounter the child welfare system at a disadvantage.

Key Legislation

In 1935, the Social Security Act made the first provision to offer federal funds to state governments for child welfare (Murray & Gesiriech, 2005). These provisions were offered to enable individual state governments to develop programs that will meet the needs of children. Several amendments have been made over the years to the Social Security Act making provisions for various services to benefit child welfare, including transition services for youth.

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)

In 1974, Congress enacted the first major federal legislation addressing child abuse and neglect. Murray and Gesiriech (2005) noted that in exchange for federal funding for child abuse prevention and treatment, CAPTA requires states to establish child abuse reporting procedures and investigation systems. Goldman et al. (2003) provided the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act's (CAPTA) definition of child maltreatment or child abuse as, "any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation which presents an imminent risk of serious harm" (p. 13) to any child under the age of 18 who is not emancipated. This policy shaped the child welfare system, defining procedures for interventions and the practices adopted to ensure child safety.

Along with the expansion of the foster care program, states' implementation of mandatory reporting laws in response to CAPTA resulted in rapid growth in the number of children who were removed from their homes and placed in foster care (Murray &

Gesiriech, 2005). While this policy was intended to prevent child maltreatment from occurring and permeating the society, the unintended effects included the large number of children who became wards of the Court and became the responsibility of the states until adulthood. These children did not necessarily develop permanent connections that they could rely on as they transition to adulthood, nor did they develop the skills and knowledge needed to care for themselves after foster care.

Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)

In 1997, the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) was passed into law by the federal government. The main goal of AFSA was to encourage and increase the timeliness of adoption and permanency for foster children. ASFA was meant to reduce the child welfare system's reliance on out of home care as an alternative to family reunification (Murray & Gesiriech, 2005). Instead of remaining in foster care without timely exit to permanence, ASFA required timelines for reunification with birth families, as well as a concurrent plan for adoption or legal guardianship in the event that reunification with birth families was unsuccessful. This legislation provided a chance for child welfare workers to attempt to offer foster children the opportunity to develop a permanent adult connection that will hopefully be stable and support their emancipation and transition into adulthood.

John A. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999

Another piece of legislation implemented to mitigate problems faced by emancipating youths was the John A. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999. The Chafee Foster Care Independence Act's main goal was to offer states additional funding to execute programs that promote emancipation from child welfare to

independence for foster youth (Delgado et al., 2007). The provisions of this legislation allowed states to offer educational support, vocational training, and other supportive services for transition age youth. The research on the outcomes of this legislation offers no compelling evidence of effectiveness (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). Overall, the findings for transitioning youth have been dismal.

Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008

An important legislation that inspired the California Fostering Connections to Success Act is the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008. This legislation was the federal law signed by President, George W. Bush, which made provisions to allow states extend foster care until age 21, develop a transition plan with and for the youth's benefit with educational stability and health care oversight and coordination (Day & Preston, 2013). This law was in response to the issues brought to the attention of the government affecting foster youth aging out of foster care without stable transition plans, the skills to create a meaningful adult life, and the support to enable the transition to be smoother. This law allowed each state to individually implement these provisions as it would suite them, while keeping in mind the best interest of the emancipating youth as these provisions included mandates for each state to implement. This then inspired California to develop and pass the Assembly Bill 12, the California Fostering Connections Act in 2012.

California Fostering Connections Act

Atkinson (2008) found that California has the largest number of children in foster care with statistics showing that 1 in 5 children in foster care live in California. The need to implement programs and services to contain the large population of youth in foster

care, especially those emancipating, should be top priority for Child Welfare agencies in California. The California Fostering Connections Act passed in 2012 is one of the most recent measures taken to contain the child welfare problems facing youth in foster care. The California Fostering Connections Act aimed at addressing the challenges faced by foster youth emancipating from the California child welfare system, which are not by any means unique to their peers around the nation. While preceding legislation made provisions to enable permanency planning for foster children, the California Fostering Connections Act has provisions to finance those permanent connections past the age of 18.

The California Fostering Connections Act reflects the same eligibility criteria as the requirements of the federal Fostering Connections, which require that the youth must be working on completing high school or its equivalent, enrolled in a higher education program, participating in a program to enhance employment opportunities, be employed, or become incapable of the doing the above due to a medical condition (Delgado 2013, p. 2).

Those youth who are able to meet at least one of the five criteria are offered services under the provisions of the California Foster Connections Act, also known as extended foster care. This means that although a youth turns 18, he or she does not have to leave the umbrella of support and services from the state. The youth is offered extended foster care services for an additional 3 years with the goal of offering the support needed to develop educational, vocational, and employment skills to become self-sufficient. Extended foster care is optional and affords those youth whose cases have been terminated an option of re-entry before their 21st birthday.

The provisions of the California Fostering Connections Act allowed subsidy for funding for kinship care, non-related guardianship care for youth and their caregivers until the age of 21(Assembly Bill 12 Primer, 2014). These provisions were not available prior to this policy. Youth who were once stable with a guardian or relative sometimes lose that support and stability when they turn 18 and the caregiver is unable to support them financially without the state's assistance.

These provisions come with the hope of making a difference in the lives of youth leaving foster by removing barriers to self-sufficiency, promoting self-advocacy, and creating a footing for the future for youth who have little or no reliable family or support systems.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Research Design and Policy Framework

The policy underlying AB 12, the California Fostering Connections to Success Act, was analyzed using Gil's (1992) approach to policy analysis. Gil's (1992) Policy Analysis Framework was adapted to focus on issues and relevant outcomes for emancipated foster youth who have been found to have lower educational achievement; are more likely to experience homelessness, unemployment, unplanned pregnancies, and involvement with the legal system; and are without support from family or other responsible adults. The framework has two primary objectives: First to understand the issues surrounding the California Fostering Connections to Success Act and second to identify the effects or consequences for all the relevant stakeholders that occurred as a result of the implementation of the policy.

In order to achieve these objectives, this policy analysis utilized three sections of the framework. The first section examined the problem California Fostering Connections to Success Act was intended to solve by exploring the nature and scope of the issues.

Causal theories were identified and discussed. The overt and covert objectives of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act were documented and the values that are underlying these objectives were examined including the theoretical perspectives of the policy. The targeted population was described and the actual intended and unintended

effects of the policy were explored. Finally, the analysis documented the changes regarding resources, services, and rights and how these impact social change.

Sampling

This analysis gathered both primary and secondary data regarding the California Fostering Connections to Success Act. Primary sources included the actual Act.

Secondary sources included books, journal articles, government agency documents and publications, and law reviews regarding outcomes for emancipated foster youth.

CHAPTER 4

POLICY ANALYSIS

Section A, Issues Dealt With by the Policy: Nature and Causes of the Problem

Nature, Scope, and Distribution of the Issue or Problem

The importance of social capital, especially a permanent adult connection, cannot be overemphasized as it relates to young adults, particularly emancipating foster youth. Young people usually need the support of a parent or other parent figure as they transition from childhood to adulthood. Sometimes the support needed may be guidance on job applications, applying for financial aid to attend college, or co-signing to lease an apartment. The need to develop human capital, which is the acquired skills for employment among these youth, should not be underestimated. Most people are not able to support themselves and live independently if they have do not have the skills needed to obtain and maintain employment. This is why funding to support education, mentoring, health care, housing, and independence is vital to promoting successful emancipation for foster youth.

Krinsky (2010) states that while the average age of financial independence in America is 26 years, current policies and practices act on the presumption that foster youth can somehow attain financial and emotional independence by age 18. It was not until 2008 when President Bush signed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act offering youth in foster care an option to remain in care and benefit from some support instead of being left to fend for themselves at an age when

their peers may still be getting parental support. The California Fostering Connections to Success Act was intended to address unemployment, poverty, education deficits, incarceration, housing, and the need for social support among the over 4,000 youth in foster care emancipating from the California child welfare system each year.

Issues Dealt with by the California Fostering Connections Act

Housing. In a study by Atkinson (2008), 65% of youth who exited foster care were without tangible housing which irreversibly placed them on a perpetual road to failure. Without secured housing, stability in other areas such as employment, education, and health care becomes difficult. Prior to the enactment of the California Fostering Connections Act, once a youth left foster care, especially without building and maintaining a supportive adult connection, doors shut to a place to stay. Delgado (2013) pointed out that youth leaving foster care at age 18 often left with trash bags that had their belongings, with no place to go but directions to a shelter and if fortunate, their important documents. The California Fostering Connections Act is intended to avoid leaving these youth homeless with little or no skills or direction and support to develop a successful transition to adulthood.

Education. Obtaining a higher education is one of the most essential foundations for a successful and productive adulthood. For about half of the youth exiting foster care, obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent is far-fetched (Delgado et al., 2007). Delgado et al. (2007) further found that of the 50% of youth in foster care who obtain a high school diploma, 20% pursue a higher education. Without a high school diploma or its equivalent, youth are unable to pursue higher education and their human capital remains low, placing them at greater risk for unemployment, criminal activity leading to incarceration, poverty, and homelessness.

Unemployment. It is not surprising that unemployment becomes an issue with youth emancipating from foster care. If education and skill building which are the basis for employment are lacking among these youth, the high rate of unemployment is almost inevitable. Shin (2010) found that 50% of youth who emancipated foster care experienced high rates of unemployment within the first 5 years after leaving care. While it is not expected that most 18 year olds, whether foster youth or not, should be employed and financially self- sufficient, the deficits in education, social support, and employment skills needed for employment are usually a challenge among youth in foster care.

Crime and incarceration. Studies have shown that 1 in 4 youth who have left foster care will be incarcerated within the first 2 years of becoming emancipated (Shin, 2010). While there should be no justification for criminal activity, youth who leave foster care without support and resources are likely to engage in criminal activity for survival. Imagine being 18, with no housing, no family to turn to, no prior work experience or employment, and no food to eat. A youth in this situation is likely to either beg on the streets or shoplift just to satisfy the hunger. Even though all this youth needed at that moment is a single meal or a snack to satisfy the hunger, this could be the beginning of life of incarceration if prosecuted.

Physical and mental health. Delgado (2013) found that youth who have been in foster often have disproportionately high occurrences of physical and mental health problems as a result of abuse, neglect, or abandonment as compared to non-foster care youth. This should not come as a surprise as child maltreatment is not a practice that will create a healthy, nurturing, and thriving atmosphere for children. Children who have been maltreated may suffer a variety of health issues from depression, anxiety attacks, and sometimes other chronic health conditions as adults (Delgado, 2013).

Causal Theory Concerning the Dynamics of the Issue or Problem

There has been some research on the issues faced by youth in foster care by exploring underlying theories. Stein (2006) explored attachment theory as it relates to the young adult who experienced placement disruption from his or her primary caregiver to subsequent placement changes during care. According to Dykas and Cassidy (2011), attachment theory postulates an innate tendency for infants to develop connections to available caregivers and use those caregivers as secure bases to develop and discover their environment. These connections are successfully formed when the infant or child can always rely on this available caregiver to continuously meet their needs.

Inconsistency and disruption of this pattern can lead to unsuccessful connections or in other words, unsuccessful attachments. In this study, Stein (2006) found that youth who had difficulty, building healthy relationships, utilizing help, who were extremely independent or over dependent suffered from separation from their family of origin.

These youth also suffered from maltreatment leading to the separation from their families of origin as well as placement disruption while in foster care. The results of these experiences become dire as children grow into adulthood and become unprepared to face the responsibilities of adulthood and the social expectations of the society.

Avery and Freundlich (2009) explored emerging adulthood as a period between the ages of 18 and 30 when the individual's brain experiences a remarkable development of its cognitive structure. Although our society expects that at the age of 18 people are able to make sound judgment and clear decisions, developmental theory offers a perspective on the continuous development of the human brain even after age 18. Giedd (2004) states that during young adulthood, the part of the human brain known as the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for weighing repercussions of one's

decisions and controlling impulses, prioritizing, and planning for the future, is still developing. This finding shows how unprepared an 18 year-old youth may be to take on the adult tasks and roles of solidifying independence and self-sufficiency. While brain development may differ from one individual to another, and some may act more mature than their peers that it is important to keep the developmental theory in mind. The society's expectation of youth exiting care at 18 to know and be mature to take on the adult role on their own may be unrealistic.

Avery and Freundlich (2009) concurred with this finding, indicating that the transition from adolescence to adulthood has nothing to do with one's chronological age; rather cognitive, behavioral and social maturity is usually achieved at almost 30 years of age. Research shows that although classified as adults at age 18, young adults are still developing in maturity and cognitive structures. It is expected that a lot of irrational decisions are made that could lead to negative consequences that may or may not be permanent. Avery and Freundlich (2009) concluded that youth in foster care who have experienced various forms of maltreatment, trauma, and psychological problems are basically not developmentally mature and equipped to step into the adult role on their own during those emerging adult years. While the society places the responsibilities and expectations of meeting one's needs on the emancipating youth, it is not surprising to find youth in the early adult years making costly mistakes that affect the individual and the society. Whether this theory can become an excuse for these youth or not, it gives the impression that youth in early adulthood could benefit from guidance and support from their family, a permanent adult connection, or someone else who has more experience and maturity.

Section B: Objectives, Value Premises, Theoretical Positions, and Effects of a Specified Social Policy

Policy Objectives

The California Fostering Connections to Success Act had the overarching goal of having participants of the program achieve the outcomes that are found in young adults of the same age who have not experienced foster care. The five specific objectives of the policy are for participants to acquire and maintain stable housing, achieve a degree from a post-secondary school or certification from a vocational school leading to marketable skills, obtaining stable employment with earnings that allow for self-sufficiency, have access to healthcare, and avoiding contact with the criminal justice system (Delgado, 2013).

Value Premises

The American society places importance in independence and the value of self-sufficiency. Although its definition and interpretation may vary from place to place and culture to culture, "self-sufficiency has been posed as the ideological answer to dependency" (Morgen, 2001, p. 748). The value premise of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act is simply to thwart youth who are exiting foster care from depending on the society indefinitely and enable them to become self-sufficient productive members of the society. The provisions of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act relate to the value of self-sufficiency and self-productivity. This is a fundamental value for Californians and the United States and it drives the premise of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act. Since our society strives to encourage self-sufficiency instead of dependency, Courtney (2009) found a growing concern that extending foster care to young adults may lead to dependency for these

young adults who may not participate in the activities necessary for becoming self-sufficient offered in the provisions of the Fostering Connections Act.

Theoretical Positions

The entire premise of out of home care for children in the child welfare system in the United States is derived from the principle of *parens patriae*, the concept that assigns corporate parenting of at-risk children to the state. *Parens patriae* offers the state a duty to intervene on behalf of children who do not have the ability to care for themselves when their safety and well-being are not ensured in the care and custody of their parents and guardians; to protect and provide for them (Pennell, Shapiro, & Spigner, 2011). Under this principle, the state inadvertently takes on the role of the parent, as vague as it may appear, since the state is not a single person with feelings of attachment, nurturing and stable commitment to these children. This parental role has become a subject of much discussion, especially when the children under state's care continue to drift from placement to placement without developing permanent connections that are vital in preparing the children for transition to adulthood after foster care.

The theoretical perspective of *in loco parentis* derived from *parens patriae* drives the idea of extended foster care after age 18, hence the Fostering Connections to Success Act's strategy. Courtney (2009) proposed that the state as a corporate parent should continue to act as a good parent would, by offering the youth the support that is necessary during the transition years into adulthood and self-sufficiency. As noted earlier, Krinsky (2010) acknowledged the fact that most of us would not turn our backs on our 18 year-olds with no place to stay, minimal life skills, and no employment or some form of financial support; however, current operating policies function under the premise that

youth leaving foster care should be shut out from the state's support even though the state had served as the youth's parent prior to his or her 18th birthday.

While being 18 years old means the beginning of adulthood and the ability to take on legal responsibilities without the consent and intervention of a parent, parenting does not necessarily end there for many parents. Parents tend to continue to support their children through guidance, and often financial support past the age of 18 nearly into the third decade of the child's life. Courtney (2009) further postulated that the Fostering Connections to Success Act signified a philosophical move from the premise that youth leaving foster care at 18 require continued responsibility of the corporate parent, the state.

The Concrete Provisions of the Policy

The Assembly Bill 12 Primer (2014) outlines the specific provisions of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act, which allows California to benefit from elements of the federal Fostering Connections to Success Act by offering its emancipating youth:

> (1) 50% subsidy to the California's Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (Kin-GAP), (2) Provide foster care benefits for eligible youth up until the age of 21, (3) Provide extended Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program assistance or assistance to eligible youth up until age 21, provided the California's Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program payments began or the initial Adoption Assistance Program agreement was signed when the youth was age 16 or older; (4) Provide California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids benefits to eligible foster youth up until the age of 21 when the foster youth is placed with an approved relative and is not eligible for federal Aid to Families with Dependent Children-Foster Care benefits and (5) Provide extended foster care benefits up to age 21 to youth living with a non-related legal guardian when the guardianship was created by the juvenile court (regardless of the age of the youth when guardianship was ordered). (p. 5-6).

Target Segment(s) of Society—Those Intended to be Directly Affected by the Policy

Demographic, Biological, Psychological, Social, Economic, Political, and Cultural Characteristics

While we consider youth exiting the foster care system as the primary beneficiaries of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act, this policy is intended to address the social issues that easily beset these youth. Osgood, Foster, and Courtney (2010) classified these youth into seven systems: "the mental health system, the foster care system, the juvenile justice system, the criminal justice system, special education, the health care system (for youth with physical disabilities and chronic illness), and (though these youth really have no comprehensive system of care) runaway and homeless youth" (pg. 210). In each of these systems, youth in foster care have been highly represented. While there have been policies that preceded the California Fostering Connections to Success Act to avert youth in foster care from becoming vulnerable and susceptible to these systems, the numbers have been on the rise for these youth facing one or more encounters with the seven systems addressed in this study.

Pennell et al. (2011) found disparities among children in out of home care whereby Black children, and Native American children as well as Latino children were more likely to be removed from their homes and remained longer in care than their White counterparts. The long term effects of this finding are obviously that children of color become the dominant population receiving out of home care without positive permanent exit plans from foster care. These youth then become the target population exiting out of care with no support, life skills, or guidance that the California Fostering Connections to Success Act is designed to support.

Numerical Size of Relevant Groups, Projected Over Time

Data from the Child Welfare Outcomes (2014) reported that approximately 4,000 to 5,000 youth who exited California foster care over a period of 4 years. In 2009, 37.5% of children who entered foster care at age 12 or younger exiting the foster care system by emancipation, with 39.0 % in 2010, 37.4 % in 2011 and 30.5 % in 2012. These data do not include children who otherwise exited foster through adoption, or guardianship or reunified with their families. These data are significant as they identify the numbers of children who are at higher risk of social ills requiring extended foster care intervention.

This is also significant as it signifies that these children leave the umbrella of the state's parenting with little to no other stable permanent social support to hold onto while taking on adult roles on their own.

The Child Welfare Outcomes study (2014) also shows similar data for children exiting foster care on their own who entered foster care at the age of 12 or older in the same period 2009 to 2012. In 2009, 62.5 % of these children exited foster care, 61.0% in 2010, 62.6 % in 2011, and 69.5% in 2012. While the age at entry is valuable to evaluate outcomes and intervention strategies to meet each group's needs, it is helpful as we consider the prevalence of vulnerable youth exiting out of foster who may benefit from the provisions extended foster care which the California Fostering Connections to Success Act offers.

Delgado et al. (2007) found that 65% of youth in foster care leave care without a place to live; hence, they account for 40% of the homeless population living in shelters and a disproportionate percentage of the prison population. A little more than half of youth exiting foster care are usually unemployed and less than 3% have attempted to obtain a college education.

Short- and Long-Range Effects of the Policy on Target and Non-Target Segments of the Society: In Demographic, Biological, Psychological, Social, Economic, Political, Cultural, and Ecological Spheres

Extending foster care through the California Fostering Connections to Success Act (AB 12) stemmed from the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008. These two policies came as a result of the growing concerns that youth leaving foster care were ill prepared and lacked the support needed to live independently, resulting in numerous negative outcomes. While the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act offered provisions to states to implement extending foster care support past age 18, states were also offered options for its implementation.

The California Fostering Connections to Success Act was heavily inspired by the results and outcomes of foster care extension implemented by other states, specifically, Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin, as found in the popular Mid-West Study (Delgado, 2013). While these policies are fairly new and the results on short and long-range effects are not extensive, the Mid-West study sheds some light on some outcomes of extending foster care past 18. California also records some positive and negative outcomes so far. Youth with extended foster care were likely to enroll in a higher education program and reported less homelessness compared to those youth whose care ended at age 18.

Delgado (2013) reports that the implementation of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act has impacted the already high caseloads of social workers as re-entry from detention as well as extended foster care is becoming more prevalent. The increase in case loads for workers may defeat the promise of the policy if the youth are unable to benefit from the support of social workers. If workers are overwhelmed with tasks, they cannot efficiently commit to offering guidance and support, which ideally

should be on a one to one basis. Many of these youth do not have any other permanent adult connection for support (Delgado, 2013). High caseloads for social workers continues to call on the dire need to hire more qualified workers and provide them with training to equip them to offer services and support especially to this new population of foster youth who are no longer minors yet in need of continuous support and supervision.

Intended Effects (Policy Objectives)

The five specific objectives of the policy are for participants of extended foster care services under auspices of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act to acquire and maintain stable housing, achieve a degree from a post-secondary school or certification from a vocational school leading to marketable skills, obtain stable employment with earnings that allow for self-sufficiency, have access to healthcare, and avoiding contact with the criminal justice system (Delgado, 2013).

In a survey of youth who received extended care services in California, Delgado (2013) found that youth who participated in extended foster care services appreciated the opportunities it afforded them to continue pursuing their educational goals and get housing support.

Unintended Effects

While extended foster care has become popular in California since the passage of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act in 2012 and participants were excited about the opportunities it afforded them to pursue educational goals. The Midwest study which focused on transition age youth leaving foster care and their outcomes, showed that youth who were routinely offered extended care in other states did not demonstrate any more success in completing from college than their counterparts who did not receive extended care (Dworsky & Courtney, 2010). The youth who did not

report homelessness during the period of extended services, reported homelessness after extended services ended at age 21 (Dworsky & Courtney, 2010). This illustrates another unintended effect of extended foster care. There is a tendency that youth depend solely on this support and do not plan or build towards life after the three years of extended care. When the support ends, they are likely to leave school without completing it, not sustain employment or alternative sources of income that will support their lifestyle as well as housing.

Overall Costs and Benefits (Including Economic and Social Costs and Benefits)

In review of the short and long term effects of implementing the California Fostering Connections to Success Act, Delgado et al, (2007) found a potential for significant fiscal costs to California in terms of reliance on public assistance, homeless aid, health care costs and loss of taxable income, and incarceration by the youth leaving foster care if extended services are not offered to them. Based on the previous research identified in this report, studies have indicated a staggering number of youth leaving foster who have heavily relied on these systems to support themselves and as alternatives to receiving support from family or continuous support from the state, their corporate parent. While there may be a number of these former foster youth who have become an invisible part of our society and others who have resiliently overcome and became self-sufficient and independent, it is likely that we will spend money on public assistance and incarceration for those youth who did not overcome obstacles or obtained other forms of support.

While there may be long-term financial benefits for extending foster care through the California Fostering Connections to Success Act which is funded 50% by the federal government, it is estimated to cost the state approximately $38,000 for each participant

with a return of at least $2 for every dollar spent directly benefitting the participant (Shin, 2012). Though the objectives and value premises of extending foster care through the California Fostering Connections to Success Act are motivated by reducing the dependency on public assistance while increasing opportunities for growth and self-sufficiency, the short-term financial costs may be discouraging, especially for states and counties that cannot comfortably afford the other 50% of the cost that is not provided by the federal government.

In consideration of overall societal costs, Delgado et al. (2007) explored the potential for California to lose an educated and skilled workforce that could benefit the state's economy if extended foster care and support to build those skills is not offered to youth leaving foster care. Although extending foster care to youth leaving care does not guarantee that participants will successfully build the educational and employment skills needed to offer growth to California's workforce, extending foster care affords youth the option to build those skills whereas previously youth would have been cut off from any and all support that could potentially lead them in that direction.

Section C: Implications of the Policy for Social Structure and the Social Policy System

Changes in the Development of Life-Sustaining and Life-Enhancing Resources, Goods and Services

While it may be too soon to tell the life-sustaining and enhancing difference the California Fostering Connections to Success Act has made as it is a fairly new policy that started its initial roll out 2 years ago, the popular Midwest study points to important data that informs our evaluation of potential outcomes. In the Midwest study, researchers found that while Illinois, had been extending foster care for youth, there were no

significant difference on the homelessness rate of youth after age 21 in comparison to Iowa and Wisconsin whose youth leave foster care at age 18 (Delgado, 2013).

Quantitative changes. Dworsky and Courtney (2010) report that 16.2% of Illinois' former foster care youth reported experiencing homelessness by age 21 compared to 20.8% in Iowa and Wisconsin who left care at age 18. While some claim can be made on the 4.0% difference made, keep in mind that from age 18, Illinois youth in foster care received extended services till age 21 therefore it gave them a better chance of avoiding homeless for that 3 year period. The key point is, was investing in the youth for the 3 year period sustainable? These participants were evaluated at age 23-24 and 28.9% of former foster youth in Illinois reported being homeless with 29.9% recorded for their counterparts in Iowa and Wisconsin (Dworsky & Courtney, 2010). Evidently, extending foster care for Illinois former foster care youth did not prove a sustaining impact on homelessness.

Educational outcomes also show that similar outcomes with even a less percentage of Illinois youth exiting foster obtaining a college degree at a 5.3% compared to a 7.3% degree attainment for other states whose youth left care at the age of 18 (Dworsky & Courtney, 2010).

As discouraging as these data may be of former foster youth in the Midwest, they demonstrate hope for California as youth who received extended services were also found to complete at least a year of college which in turn resulted in higher wages than those who did not receive extended care (Delgado, 2013). Ideally, significant changes and differences in outcomes for youth would make this policy worthwhile; however, every step forward can signify a potential for life-sustaining change.

Changes in priorities. Prior to the implementation of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act, youth turning 18 in foster care were expected to be

independent and face the demands of becoming an adult on their own. This policy is signifies the society's change in priority as this vulnerable group is offered support as would their peers who may have parental involvement leading up the third decade of their lives (Krinsky, 2010). Whether these youth take advantage of this support or not, it is offered to them with hope that those willing and able to take advantage of this support will benefit from it, leading to sustainable outcomes.

Changes in the Allocation, to Individuals and to Social Units, of Specific Statuses within the Total Array of Tasks and Functions

The extension of foster care through the Fostering Connections to Success Act has created a different role and status for both the non-minor dependent and the service team responsible for the implementation of the policy to benefit the youth. The service team here refers to the social workers, attorneys, judges and the foster parent or caretaker. To put this in perspective, Delgado (2013) posed a gnawing question, "Does the attorney represents the expressed wishes of his/her client or does the attorney represent the best interests of the child?" (p. 30). This is a concerning question as typical California practice among dependency attorneys for minor children entails the attorney's assessment of a child's wishes, weighing them with the best interest of the child. With the non-minor dependent, how does one decipher the best interest of an adult that has autonomy to their life's decisions? This same question applies to the social worker's and foster parent's roles which Delgado (2013) also describes as shifting from a supervisory role to an advisory role. The status of the youth changed and so did the function and tasks of those supporting the youth change to meet the varying needs and demands of the non-minor dependent.

Although the non-minor dependent holds the autonomy to his or her life's decisions, he or she has the option to remain in extended foster care, and is held accountable to the five criteria of extended care, the social worker are also held accountable. The social worker is expected to demonstrate to the dependency court reasonable efforts made to ensure that the non-minor dependent meets the criteria for extended care. A parent's role is to teach, guide, and nurture a child to grow into a responsible adult and though the role may change when a child becomes an adult, adults are held responsible for their decisions and are accountable to their actions.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this project was to conduct a policy analysis of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act –AB 12. The policy and its implementation aimed to address the problems faced by over 4,000 youth in California who exit care and supervision of the state without positive permanent plans of reunification with birth families, adoption, or legal guardianship. This analysis utilized data from journal articles, government reports, and publications to analyze the goals, objectives, and implementation of the policy. The researcher adapted Gil's (1992) Policy Analysis Framework to focus on issues and relevant outcomes for emancipated foster youth who have been found to have lower educational achievement; are more likely to experience homelessness, unemployment, unplanned pregnancies, involvement with the legal system; and are without the support from family or other responsible adult.

Summary

This analysis found overwhelming data indicating the negative outcomes associated with youth who leave foster care without a permanent plan that includes some form of social support in terms of a biological parent, adoptive parent, or legal guardian. Osgood, et al. (2010) identified significant overrepresentation of these youth in seven systems: "the mental health system, the foster care system, the juvenile justice system, the criminal justice system, special education, the health care system (for youth with

physical disabilities and chronic illness), and (though these youth really have no comprehensive system of care) runaway and homeless youth" (p. 210). California Fostering Connections to Success Act was implemented in an attempt to address these unpleasant outcomes affecting not only the youth but the society as a whole.

While an analysis of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act is important, this analysis reviewed the history of child welfare and how we got here in the first place for a better understanding of the problem. There was a need to protect children in the society who are deemed unsafe in the care and custody of their custodians and required the state's intervention. Murray and Gesiriech (2005) described the emergence of child welfare in the form of indentured children in the 1700s whose parents were deceased or children whose parents could not meet their needs. This was as a response to the society's cry for help to protect children from maltreatment and abuse. This analysis also explored various policies that have preceded this policy and the efforts made to deter the negative outcomes associated with youth exiting the foster care system.

In this analysis, the researcher analyzed the objectives of this policy, including the value premise of the policy which basically is directed towards overcoming the negative outcomes of for youth exiting foster while equipping them to become self-sufficient. Developmental and attachment theories were also explored, shedding light to the ideology of the need for extended care past the age of 18.

This analysis, through a review of the literature, also found that youth left to start adult life on their own at the age of 18 are not equipped with the developmental maturity, educational or employment skills, and wherewithal to successfully provide for themselves and thrive as adults. Krinsky (2010) pointed out that not many parents will turn their

children away from any and all guidance and support, be it emotional, mental, or financial, on their 18th birthday or even 6 to 8 years after, yet states continue to do that for the youth they have parented. The implementation of this policy signifies the state's acknowledgement that these youth, like their peers with no foster care experience, need support past age 18.

An analysis of the fiscal and societal costs of this policy was done, pointing to an assumption of long-term fiscal and societal benefits, which will be at a high price in the short term. While the youth suffer, the society which these youth live in suffers as well. Taxpayers funds are used to support the youth and the society would like to see a positive return from these funds.

Limitations

This analysis of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act (2012) faced some challenges and limitations. The policy is fairly new and although similar policies that have the same objectives and goals as the California Fostering Connections to Success Act have be implemented in other states for a while, this analysis lacked sufficient research to determine intended and unintended outcomes for this policy. Although evaluation of current beneficiaries of this policy can be done to analyze the potential of success of the policy, ongoing research needs to be done to determine that the potential long-term benefits of the policy are likely to be achieved.

Implications for Social Work Practice

While it is clear through the literature review of the problems and negative outcomes associated with youth exiting foster care, the implementation of this policy should not be the only intervention for these problems. Social workers should work on

collaborative efforts with families and their social networks of support, service providers, schools, attorneys, and judges to offer preventative measures to reduce out of home care and foster care drifting, and to offer services that will empower families to resolve their problems with less state intervention. While this effort may be daunting, social workers should rely less on cookie cutter approaches, treat each family and individual as unique, and customize case plans that are family-centered and individualized.

Implications for Policy and Research

The California Fostering Connections to Success Act (2012) is fairly new and it is in its initial roll out stages. The review and evaluation of its outcomes and effectiveness are limited at this time. Instead of proposing a new policy, researchers should focus on evaluating the intended and unintended outcomes of this policy and make recommendations with the goal of improving outcomes for youth leaving foster care. While this policy points to some promise of improving outcomes for the youth, it serves as a band aid for the wounds that have been created in many youth during foster care as minors**.** Policy makers, researchers, and practitioners should look at some of the older policies and practices in child welfare that have negatively impacted the quality of care and services to foster youth and their families while California waits on the results of the California Fostering Connections Act. Child welfare policies old or new should focus on improving reunification outcomes and building effective personal relationships for foster children and significant individuals who will be there to support and guide the children as they grow up into adults.

The significance and dire need for permanent adult connections for youth cannot be overemphasized. Current policies should work on eliminating obstacles to maintaining

familial and significant relationships for children in foster care. These relationships become significantly important to the emotional and developmental needs to these young adults and help in overcoming the negative outcomes of growing up in foster care.

Conclusion

Like many policies, the California Fostering Connections to Success Act was a well thought-out policy backed by research and a potential to successfully deal with the problems faced by youth exiting foster care. While it is serving a purpose of providing support to young adults who otherwise do not have the support of a parent or another responsible adult, and encourages the path to self-sufficiency, it serves as a cover-up for what should have been done prior to the youth reaching the age of majority. If a youth is not guided and taught the importance of discipline, goal setting, independence, and accountability at a younger age, the youth is highly unlikely to apply these skills at 18 even if all the support and provisions of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act were made available. These skills are not handed out like a gift but are acquired through practice and use and sometimes take time to be acquired. It is also likely that individual traumatic experiences may impact the acquisition of these skills and access to resources to help improve outcomes for youth leaving care, practices should also include early assessment and treatment of mental health, supportive educational services, and mentoring for youth during the first few months of child welfare intervention and annual reviews as needed.

Child welfare agencies should expand family finding efforts and mentoring programs for all children requiring protective services intervention. Whether a child remains in the care of his or her birth family or is raised in out of home care, child welfare

practices should encourage building long-lasting relationships with significant people in the child's life who will foster nurturing environments while teaching them the basic skills of life that lead to self-sufficiency which in essence is the main value premise of the California Fostering Connections Act.

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