

Predictors of Educational Outcomes for Foster Youth Receiving Independent Living Services

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BACKGROUND

- There are currently 12,276 children in Indiana's child welfare system (Indiana Youth Institute, 2010)
- Between 11-38% of foster youth leave the system without a high school diploma or GED
- Less than 2% graduate with a four year degree by age 25
- Poor education outcomes can result in homelessness, poverty, unemployment, increased likelihood of involvement with criminal justice system (Stott, 2012)

RESEARCH QUESTION

Which state-provided foster care services are predictors of educational achievement for youth in the Indiana foster care system?

METHODS

Data for this study are derived from the 2013 National Youth in Transition Database (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2014). The analytic sample consisted of foster youth who were receiving supervised independent living services and were enrolled in foster care in Indiana at the time of data collection ($N = 1,859$). Everyone in the sample was 19 years of age. Supervised Independent Living refers to guidance on activities such as paying bills and working with a landlord for youth who live independently.

Measures

Educational Level: Categorical Outcome

- The current study recoded the measure for highest level of completed education into six categories indicating (1) 8th grade or less, (2) 9th grade, (3) 10th grade, (4) 11th grade, (5) 12th grade, and (6) post-secondary or college.

Services Received: Dichotomous Predictors (0 = no)

- **Health Education & Risk Prevention:** Information such as hygiene, nutrition, health care resources, sex education and substance abuse.
- **Academic Support:** Help a youth complete high school or obtain a general equivalency degree (GED) including study skills training, help with homework, and assistance applying for the GED.
- **Mentoring:** Mentor relationship with screened and trained adults and youth meet on a regular basis.
- **Employment and Vocational:** Vocation or career skill-building such as internships and apprenticeships in areas including auto mechanics and cosmetology.
- **Special Education:** Programs to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.
- **Post-Secondary Educational Support:** Services to help youth enter or complete post-secondary education such as test prep, financial aid and scholarship information, and college and loan application assistance.

Demographic & Psychosocial Indicators:

Controls

- **Biological sex:** (1= male)
- **Race:** Recoded into 5 categories: White (1), Black (2), Native American/Alaskan Natives/Pacific Islanders (3), Hispanics (4), and Bi or Multi-Racial (5).
- **Adjudicated Delinquency:** Whether the youth has ever been adjudicated as a delinquent. (0=no)

A Multinomial Logistic Regression was conducted to test the following model:

TABLE 1. Analytic Sample Descriptives

Variables	n (%)
Sex (female)	963 (51.8)
Adjudicated (yes)	641 (34.5)
Race	
White	980 (53.9)
Black	608 (33.4)
Hispanic (any race)	135 (7.4)
Multi-racial	70 (3.8)
Other (Asian, American Indian, Pacific Islander)	26 (1.4)

TABLE 2. Multinomial Regression Modeling

Variables	Model fitting criteria -2 log likelihood of reduced model	Likelihood ratio test		
		χ^2	df	p
Health Education	2646.76	5.27	5	.384
Mentoring	2674.20	37.70	5	<.001**
Special Education	2679.11	37.62	5	<.001**
Academic Support	2705.29	63.80	5	<.001**
Post-Secondary Educational Support	2774.06	132.58	5	<.001**
Employment programs and vocational training	2658.534	17.05	5	.004*
Adjudicated Youth ⁺	2647.38	5.896	5	.316
Sex ⁺	2658.42	16.93	5	.005*
Race ⁺	2680.73	5.896	20	.006*

Note. *p < .05, **p < .001. ⁺control variable. Model $\chi^2(60) = 377.171$, p < .001. $\Delta R^2 = .197$

TABLE 3. Parameter Estimates

Predictors	B	SE	Exp(B)	p
Completion of 8 th grade or less ^a				
Health Education	.048	.394	1.049	.903
Mentoring	-1.205	.415	.300	.004
Special Education	-.057	.404	.945	.888
Academic Support	-1.475	.420	.229	<.001
Post-Secondary Educational Support	2.043	.392	7.714	<.001
Employment programs and vocational training	.454	.388	1.574	.243
Completion of 9 th grade ^a				
Health Education	-.242	.303	1.274	.424
Mentoring	-.984	.294	.374	.001**
Special Education	-.764	.307	.466	.013*
Academic Support	-1.141	.314	.319	<.001**
Post-Secondary Educational Support	1.651	.291	5.211	<.001**
Employment programs and vocational training	.457	.303	1.579	.132
Completion of 10 th grade ^a				
Health Education	.377	.256	1.458	.141
Mentoring	-1.187	.244	.305	<.001**
Special Education	-.472	.273	.624	.084
Academic Support	-1.166	.264	.312	<.001**
Post-Secondary Educational Support	1.413	.245	4.107	<.001**
Employment programs and vocational training	.671	.258	1.957	.009*
Completion of 11 th grade ^a				
Health Education	.434	.252	1.544	.085
Mentoring	-1.280	.240	.278	<.001**
Special Education	-.014	.276	.986	.960
Academic Support	-1.261	.261	.283	<.001**
Post-Secondary Educational Support	1.426	.241	4.163	<.001**
Employment programs and vocational training	.335	.254	1.398	.187
Completion of 12 th grade ^a				
Health Education	.448	.240	1.566	.062
Mentoring	-1.223	.225	.294	<.001**
Special Education	.327	.270	1.387	.226
Academic Support	-.263	.245	.769	.284
Post-Secondary Educational Support	.270	.231	1.310	.244
Employment programs and vocational training	.051	.243	1.052	.835

Note. The reference category is: Completion of College or more, ⁺dummy coded, *p < .05, **p < .001.

RESULTS

Demographics

- Both sexes were approximately equally represented.
- The majority of the sample (54%) was White.
- More than 1/3 of respondents had juvenile criminal history

Multinomial Regression

- Health education, mentoring, special education, academic support, post-secondary educational support, employment programs and vocational training were found to influence educational outcomes for foster youth $\chi^2(60) = 377.171$, p < .001. The model accounted for 19.7% of the variability in educational outcomes for foster youth.
- At age 19, when compared with respondents whose highest level of educational was college or more:
 - Youth who received mentoring, academic support, and post-secondary educational support services were more likely to have completed all levels of education (aside from 12th) by the age of 19, compared to those who did not receive those services.
 - Foster youth who did not receive post-secondary educational support were 7.7 times more likely to have completed only 8th grade or less, 5.2 times more likely to have completed 9th grade, and about 4 times more likely to complete 10th and 11th grades, compared to those who did not receive those services.
 - Those who did not receive employment or vocational training were nearly 2 times more likely to graduate 10th grade than those who did receive the service.
 - Youth who received mentoring were 3.4 times as likely to complete the 12 grade as those who did not receive the service. Mentoring was the only service which increased likelihood of graduating 12th grade when compared to those who did not receive mentoring services.

DISCUSSION

- Receiving mentoring services significantly increased the likelihood of graduation at all levels for foster youth. This is in line with previous research, which suggests a connection with an adult is related to positive outcomes for foster youth.
- Receiving vocational training negatively impacted completion rates, possibly because those who received vocational training saw no need to complete formal education.

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