

Youth Aging Out of Foster Care and Homelessness in the US and Other Developed Nations

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Overview

- The problem of homelessness has only become “visible” in the past 10-20 years
- Little discussion on how to prevent homelessness has occurred in the research literature
- Particular groups “at risk” for homelessness

Youth “Aging Out”

- Studies find that 20-40% of adult homeless were once in formal care (e.g., foster care, orphanage, psychiatric center)
- Problems of youth “aging out” of the formal care system have been increasingly recognized in the last 20 years in many nations
- Much remains to be done to understand the needs of those aging out and to design effective interventions for them

“Aging out youth” in the USA

- Almost 40% of the 530,000 youth in “foster care” are age 13 or older
- Despite increasing emphasis on adoption and family re-unification, 19,000 youth “age out” of the foster care system each year
- These youth have been shown to be at high risk for problems in multiple domains critical to successful development in adulthood
 - e.g., educational, vocational functioning, housing

Aging Out in Other Developed Nations

- In most nations, as in the US, youth are forced out of care around age 18
- And, in most nations, policy-makers are beginning to recognize the needs of these youth after aging out
- Collaborators in Poland (data to be presented later), France, Canada, and Portugal

Michigan Aging Out Study

■ Methods

– Record Review

- All cases that closed in 2002 and 2003 who were 18 years or older
- Southeast Michigan (Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb Counties)
- Population = 816 cases

– Structured 30-minute phone interviews

- Sample of 264 of these youth (32%)

Interview Sample (N=264)

- Most (84%) from Wayne County (including Detroit)
- Average age = 21 years old
- 52% Female
- 78% African-American, 21% Caucasian
- 36% were parents

- Average age at entry into foster care = 13.2
- Average age at exit = 17.2
- Average number of placements = 5.8
(over an average of 4.0 years in care)
- Average Time Since Leaving Foster Care
(at follow-up) = 3.6 years

Housing

- 17% had been “literally homeless” at least one day since leaving foster care
- An additional 33% had experienced “precarious housing” (e.g., temporarily staying with friends)
- So, 50% met federal guidelines for “homelessness”

Employment

- Most respondents had worked since leaving foster care
- However, on average, respondents were unemployed only 48% of the time since leaving foster care
- Average monthly income when working = \$598

Education

- 41% graduated high school
- Another 16% received GED
- 25% took at least one class beyond high school (most often vocational training, a few took community college courses)

Psychopathology

- High levels on Brief Symptom Inventory, even when compared to a low income sample
- Especially high means on Psychoticism and Paranoid Ideation (scores about double, as compared to norms)

Youth leaving Orphanages and other State Care In Poland

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Children in 4 Types of Care in Poland

	<u>2000-01</u>	<u>2004</u>
■ Orphanage	17,857	14,218
■ Formal Foster Care	1,248	1,777
■ Family Care	50,122	48,432
■ Crisis Shelter	2,988	1,956

Situation in Poland

- Orphanages are still common in Poland
- Many orphanages are large, housing 80-100 children. Trends are to divide them into smaller units (following western nations)

Problems for Foster children entering adulthood

- The children from such institutions are unprepared for self-dependence
- They often become homeless or unemployed

18% of homeless adults in Poland were once in foster care (14% in Detroit)

Nation * Any Institution as Child Crosstabulation

			Any Institution as Child		Total
			No	Yes	
Nation	Detroit	Count	189	30	219
		% within Nation	86.3%	13.7%	100.0%
		% of Total	55.9%	8.9%	64.8%
Poland		Count	98	21	119
		% within Nation	82.4%	17.6%	100.0%
		% of Total	29.0%	6.2%	35.2%
Total		Count	287	51	338
		% within Nation	84.9%	15.1%	100.0%
		% of Total	84.9%	15.1%	100.0%

Follow-up of Youth Aging out in Poland: Preliminary Findings

- N=92 (150-200 in final sample)
- Methods used similar to those in Michigan (except none in “formal foster care”)
- Average age at entry into orphanage/foster care = 10 years old
- Average number of foster care placements = 1.6 (range: 1-4)

Polish Follow-up: Preliminary Findings

- 40% male, 60% female
- Average age at follow-up: 23.5 years
- Average time since leaving placement = 4.4 years
- 20% have their own children (32% of these were unmarried (single) parents)
- 70% completed high school

Polish Follow-up: More Preliminary Findings

- 15% spent some time literally homeless during 4.4-year follow-up period (17% in Detroit over shorter 3.6-year period)
- High levels of psychopathology based on Brief Symptom Inventory (similar to aged out sample in Detroit)

Discussion

- Aging Out in Poland vs. the US & Other Nations
- Policy Implications
- Plans for international collaboration (France, Quebec, & Portugal so far)

Plans for a Comprehensive Intervention in the US and Other Nations

- Engage youth at age 17, one year prior to expected “aging out”
- Provide financial and emotional support for many years during the transition to adulthood