



**Young Black Women's Social Support Needs While Transitioning Out of Foster Care:
A Case Study**

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Abstract

Young Black women aging out of the foster care system encounter significant challenges as they transition to adulthood. This qualitative exploratory single case study examined whether the social support services provided to young Black women transitioning from the North Carolina foster care system were effectively matched to their perceived needs. Optimal Matching Theory served as the guiding framework for the study. Participants included four young Black women who had aged out of foster care and nine stakeholders with professional experience supporting this population. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the alignment of perceived needs and services. The young women were asked whether the support they received met their needs, while stakeholders were questioned about their perspectives on service alignment. Thematic analysis of interview data revealed eight themes: four from each participant group. Themes from the young Black women included: (1) participation in social support programs, (2) social support needs, (3) relationships with support personnel, and (4) unaddressed needs. Stakeholder themes included: (1) available social support services, (2) determining support needs, (3) engaging with young women to meet their needs, and (4) challenges in service delivery. Findings indicate the need for personalized and culturally responsive services. Recommendations include cultural competence and trauma-informed training for providers, exploration of culture-specific trauma responses and attachment patterns, addressing substance use as a coping mechanism, and supporting young women recovering from human trafficking. The study highlights the importance of using culturally sensitive assessment tools, personalized interviews, and strong stakeholder relationships to identify and address needs effectively. A holistic, integrated approach, emphasizing stable adult relationships, culturally informed and mental health services, can foster a successful transition to adulthood for young Black women.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The foster care system is a program that provides temporary housing for children from newborn to 18 years old who are at risk and need a safe place to reside. The transition to foster care would be challenging even for children from stable households, but the children in need of foster care are rarely characterized as such. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS; 2020), approximately 62% of foster children are removed from their families due to neglect. The lack of care for the children can be caused by an unexpected tragedy, such as a physical or mental illness or the incarceration of the parent responsible for providing care. Additionally, 36% of parents abused substances and were unaware of their obligations as parents; 14% of foster children are placed into the system due to parenting challenges that their parents were unable to cope with; for instance, the child may possess cognitive or physical impairments; and 13 % were removed due to physical abuse (USDHHS, 2020). Furthermore, poverty exacerbates the circumstances that require the placement of children in foster care.

The concept of foster care began as organized welfare in New York by Charles Loring Brace as the New York Children's Aid Society. New York Children's Aid Society started the Orphan Train Movement in 1853 to help orphaned, homeless children on the streets of New York (Jalongo, 2010). The orphan trains moved the children from living on the crowded streets in the cities to employment by families living in the rural areas around the country. From 1853 to 1929, the orphan trains moved approximately 120,000 children to foster homes around the United States (Jalongo, 2010). However, the families who were fostering the children were not vetted, and there were no systems of follow-up to check on the welfare of the children. Consequently, in 1885, individual states began to recognize the problem. They tried to remedy

the situation by requiring every family who wanted to foster children to be licensed by the state to facilitate supervision. Furthermore, in 1935, the federal government joined the solution by establishing the Social Security Act, which provided the first grants for child welfare services to assist families who were fostering children (Lindner & Hanlon, 2023). In the years following the Social Security Act, several other agencies were developed: the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 established federal regulations for children entering foster and the Adoption and Same Families Act in 1997 outlined the concerns with children's health and safety versus reunification with their biological family (Administration for Children and Families: Children Bureau [ACFCB], 2021; Lindner & Hanlon, 2023).

Today, the foster care system has grown into an essential agency under the Department of Social Services umbrella governed by the USDHHS (n.d.). The mission remains the same: to protect children who are homeless, abused, or orphaned, and the agency exists in every state. The foster care system includes foster homes, therapeutic foster homes, and group homes and partners with stakeholders such as social workers, case managers, mental health providers, and physicians to provide children in foster care with holistic care (ACFBC, 2021)

According to the ACFBC (n.d.), 391,000 children and youth are currently in the foster care system. The National Foster Youth Institute (NFYI; 2022) approximated that 250,000 children enter the foster care system yearly in the United States, and an estimated 23,000 young adults transition out of the foster care system annually. Per the NFYI (2022), of the young adults transitioning out of the foster care system, 20% become homeless instantly, and only one out of two youth aging out of the foster care system became employed by 24 years old. Youth transitioning out of the foster care system experience challenges such as lack of employment and low income (Liu, 2020), homelessness and maintaining stable housing (Armstrong-Heimsoth et

al., 2021), incarceration (Lee et al., 2022), lack of higher education (Hernandez & Jaegoo, 2020), increased mental health and lack of emotional support (Narendorf, 2021; Packard & Benuto, 2020), and lack of financial literacy (Bendeck & Moore, 2022). Additionally, Bendeck and Moore (2022) documented that when transitioning young adults fail to receive support, it results in 25% experiencing homelessness, 30–70% having low-income and public assistance, and only 8% attaining higher education.

According to ACFCB (2021), several social support services are available to young adults transitioning out of the foster care system. The support system includes various services offered to young adults 18 to 21 years old and includes developing a transition plan with a youth service counselor. Some of the programs provided to young adults include rental vouchers, grants for life skill training, medical and mental health issuance through Medicaid, financial literacy training, and education and employment training services to facilitate the transition to independent living (ACFCB, 2021). Furthermore, there are additional independent social support services such as the NC LINKS Program, which assesses the youth's strengths and weaknesses to develop a personalized plan; Youth Villages, which offers the LifeSet Program that assists young adults with building healthy relationships, obtaining housing, employment, and education; and the NC Reach Program which focuses on the young adults' higher educational needs. Generally, the support services are readily available to the transitioning youths, but unfortunately, not all young adults are matched with the optimal services that they need.

Consequently, when young adults' social support needs are unmet while transitioning to independent living, the community's economy is negatively affected, costing taxpayers \$30,000 to \$50,000 per person per year (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness

[USICH], 2018). Furthermore, about 30% to 60% of foster care young adults experience mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (Engler et al., 2022; Sapiro & Ward, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to optimally match young adults transitioning out of foster care with the social support services needed to ameliorate some of the challenges these youth face as they transition to independent living (Bald et al., 2022). Without a better understanding of the challenges young adults transitioning face when exiting the foster care system from their perspective, social support providers may continue to lose these young adults to homelessness, perpetual poverty, academic underachievement, and mental health issues, thus depriving communities of productive citizens and costing taxpayers a tremendous amount of money (NFYI, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study is the appropriate matching of social support services to the perceived needs of young Black women while transitioning out of the foster care system. For example, challenges include abrupt changes or loss of social worker support, mental health services, medical care, knowledge to manage higher education, employment, housing, and transportation needs (Verulava & Dangadze, 2021). Consequently, 28% to 60% of young adults transitioning out of foster care experience homelessness (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021; Liu, 2020), 42% had trouble finding work, 24% were at risk of incarceration (Cudjoe et al., 2022; Park & Courtney, 2023), 50.8% had academic underachievement, and 66% met mental health criteria (Narendorf, 2021).

Although the transition problems of young adults aging out of the foster care system are well documented, there is a gap in the literature. According to Liu et al. (2022), additional qualitative research into young adults' transition out of foster care. In this connection, Packard

and Benuto (2020) recommended replicating their case study on young adults aging out of foster care in other geographical areas. Additionally, Packard and Benuto (2020) also noted that their case study underrepresented women, indicating a demographic disparity. Young Black women were 1.8 times more likely to enter foster care than the general population (Harp & Bunting, 2020).

I propose to fill the gap highlighted by Packard and Benuto (2020): "Future research should focus on exploring implications of these findings. For example, duplication of this study in another geographic area would help in validating these findings" (p. 67). Two additional recommendations informed this proposed research: 1) Packard and Benuto (2020, p. 68), "Participants were mainly male. Gathering data from more female participants may have added another level of understanding regarding perception." 2) Liu et al. (2022, p. 67), "Qualitative data may also be collected to explore the experiences of youth during their transition to independence." Therefore, the proposed study examined whether young Black women's social support services were adequately matched to their stated needs upon aging out of foster care to ease their transition to independence.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single case study conceptual replication was to determine whether the social support services received by young Black women were effectively matched to their perceived social support needs when transitioning out of the North Carolina (NC) foster care system to independent living. Conceptual replication of a study includes using different implementations, elements, methods of research, or participants to evaluate the validity of the theory proposed in the original study (Derksen & Morawski, 2022; Hudson, 2023). According to Derksen & Morawski (2022), a conceptual replication study aims

to investigate and develop the theory rather than solely aiming to falsify it. Therefore, conceptual replication of a study aims to uncover new knowledge and explore new ideas over confirming existing knowledge from the original research (Derksen & Morawski, 2022).

Megawati et al. (2023) asserted that Karl Popper's falsification methodology postulated that scientific theories are defined by their ability to generate predictions that might potentially be proven false by future research. Therefore, when a theory is disproved, Popper suggests that researchers modify or discard the original theory in favor of a competing theory (Megawati et al., 2023). However, Flyvbjerg (2006) addressed the misunderstanding that the value of general theoretic knowledge is more significant than that of specific case studies. Flyvbjerg (2006), posited that when studying matters concerning humanity, practical case knowledge is of greater worth than the futile pursuit of universals and predictive theories.

I used the case study design to explore how social supports were optimally matched to emerging adults. The bounded system that was explored in the proposed single case study was how effectively young Black women were matched with social support, and the case boundaries included (a) young Black women that have transitioned out of the foster care system in Eastern NC; (b) stakeholders such as social workers, mental health providers, case managers, and transitional counselors; and (c) North Carolina Child Welfare 2020–2024 Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan documentation and the State of North Carolina Independent Living Services for Foster Children information from the NCDHHS website.

I obtained site permission from a local counseling center in NC to get access to young Black women who are transitioning or who have transitioned from foster care services and stakeholders such social worker, mental health providers, house parents, case managers, and transitional counselors.

According to Yin (2018), participants are recruited based on the nature and purpose of the case study. I used purposive sampling to recruit six to 12 young Black women between 18 to 25 years old who were in foster homes and group homes and who received social support when transitioning out of the foster care system in NC. I also used purposeful sampling to recruit six to 12 stakeholders who support the young Black women as they transition out of foster care. Additionally, I obtained the North Carolina Child Welfare 2020–2024 Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan documentation and the State of North Carolina Independent Living Services for Foster Children information from the NCDHHS website.

I collected data using open-ended interview questions to interview the young Black female adult who emerged out of the foster care system, as well as the stakeholders who provided social support to them. I reviewed the North Carolina Child Welfare 2020–2024 Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan documentation and the State of North Carolina Independent Living Services for Foster Children information to analyze the fundamentals of the support systems.

Introduction to Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this qualitative exploratory single case study conceptual replication was the optimal matching theory (OMT), which was used in the original study by Packard and Benuto (2020). Cutrona and Russell (1990) developed the OMT as a multidimensional model for optimal matching between stress and social support for specific stressful situations. Accordingly, OMT tenants house the following dimensions: desirability, controllability, and life domains (specifically assets, achievement, social roles, and relationships). These tenants inform an individual's stressors, challenges, and needs which determines the individual's social support needs (Curona & Russell, 1990). Young Black women

transitioning out of the foster care system encounter distinct obstacles and require specific social support to transition to independent living successfully.

Therefore, by employing the OMT as a framework, emerging foster young Black women will be optimally matched with the specific social supports needed for constructive transition (Sulimani, 2019). The use of OMT as a guide will assist social support systems such as DSS and social support personnel, including social workers, case managers, mental health counselors, and group home managers, with matching the transitioning youth with personalized support services and resources that are customized to the unique circumstances, abilities, and requirements of each young Black women. Hence, young Black women aging out of foster care can be matched with suitable support services, including housing, education, vocational training, employment, and mental health counseling services to efficiently navigate the transition to independent living (Packard & Benuto, 2020).

Therefore, applying the OMT to provide social support for young Black adults transitioning out of the foster care system provides a variety of benefits. The OMT acknowledges that each young person transitioning out of foster care has distinct needs, backgrounds, and abilities. Tailoring social supports to closely match the qualities and needs of young Black women may enhance the likelihood of successful transitions to adulthood and foster self-confidence and empowerment within the transitioning foster youths (Curona & Russell, 1990). Furthermore, providing support to young Black women using the OMT may serve as an aid in recognizing and resolving obstacles that these adults may potentially face. Additionally, the OMT may assist with adjusting the services provided to this vulnerable population to help them successfully exit foster care and enter independent living.

Introduction to Research Methodology and Design (Nature of the Study)

A qualitative research methodology and an exploratory design was used to explore the research study. Qualitative research is a comprehensive method for studying social phenomena and is primarily rooted in a constructive or critical viewpoint; it is commonly conducted in real-world situations, emphasizes the surrounding circumstances, and is characterized by its dynamic and developing nature (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). A qualitative methodology was used in the replication study because it was used in the original study.

A qualitative methodology and an exploratory case study design are ideally suited for exploring the social support needs of young Black women undergoing the transition from foster care to independent living due to the intricacies involved in matching the youths with optimal social support services. According to Stake (1995), a case study examines an individual case's unique characteristics and intricacies to comprehend its functioning within significant contexts. A case study is characterized as a research method that examines a current occurrence in its real-world setting, mainly when the distinction between the phenomenon and its environment is unclear and depends on several data sources (Yin, 2018).

Therefore, case studies, like other qualitative research methods, offer a comprehensive, holistic perspective of their setting. Furthermore, Yin (2018) proposed three distinct categories of case studies. Based on the study topic, case studies can be classified into exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory categories. If the research primarily focuses on "what" issues, it may require an exploratory study that addresses "how" or "why" concerns. A case study was utilized due to its use in the original research study.

A bounded system, including young Black women, stakeholders, and North Carolina Child Welfare 2020-2024 and Independent Living Services for Foster Children documentations,

is preferred to determine whether the social support received by young Black women effectively matched their perceived social support.

The use of the qualitative method and single case study design enables the ability to conduct a comprehensive, in-depth examination of the complex and diverse experiences encountered by this vulnerable population (Bjangu et al., 2023; Surawy-Stepney et al., 2023). The qualitative method is a flexible research method that allows the use of a variety of techniques to collect data for the bounded system of the single case study design, including the use of open-ended interview questions, documentation, and observations (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

Thus, by conducting in-depth interviews using open-ended questions, group interviews, and archival data analysis, the exploratory single case study approach provided a comprehensive view of the effectiveness of the social support systems and the gaps that required improvement. Yin (2018) explained that case studies are utilized to extend theory through "analytical generalization" and non-statistical generalization. He highlights five elements that are essential to case study design: "a case study's questions; its propositions, if any; its case(s); the logic linking the data to the propositions; and the criteria for interpreting the finding" (Yin, 2018, p. 27).

Therefore, the qualitative exploratory single case study approach aided me in exploring and answering the research questions with depth and sensitivity. The research findings led to helpful information surrounding the impact that optimal matching of young women with the appropriate social support had on their successful transition from the foster care system into independent living.

Research Questions

The bounded system determines whether the social supports received by young Black women were effectively matched to their perceived social support received when transitioning out of the North Carolina foster care system to independent living. I formulated the following questions to guide the study in better understanding the bounded system being explored.

RQ

How did the social support services provided to young Black women match their perceived needs?

RQa How did young Black women transitioning from foster care describe their social support needs to stakeholders?

RQb How did stakeholders determine the social support needs of young Black women transitioning out of foster care?

Significance of the Study

Every year, about 23,000 emerging youths age out of the foster care system, however, not all of them age out successfully (NFYI, 2023). Consequently, a large percent experience adverse outcomes such as becoming homeless, lacking employment, getting incarcerated, suffering with mental health issues, and not obtaining higher education (Bendeck & Moore, 2022). Current study indicates that social support may improve the emerging youth successful transition to adulthood (Packard & Benuto, 2020). Unfortunately, it is not always clear what social support is needed to assign the emerging youths. Employing the OMT can match emerging youths with unique situations to the precise social support necessary for them can significantly improve their successful transition (Sulimani, 2019).

The proposed research is significant because it built upon Packard and Benuto (2020) research and address a gap to further investigate the effectiveness of social support systems of female youths emerging from foster care. Also addressed was the recommendation of conducting the research in another geographical location. The clearer our understanding of the specific social support needs of emerging youth, the more effectively support systems can be designed and implemented to meet those needs. Using the OMT to match the emerging young women can potentially eliminate or reduce some of the challenges related to homelessness, unemployment, incarceration, pregnancy, and mental health issues.

Definitions of Key Terms

Department of Social Services (DSS)

DSS provides direct services to families in poverty, families experiencing violence and exploitation. DSS employs programs to prevent abuse, neglect and exploitation of vulnerable children, individuals, and families while cultivating independence and self-efficacy (NCDHHS, n.d.).

Young Adults

Young adults refer to emerging young adults transitioning or aging out of the foster care system (Hokanson, 2020).

Foster Care System

Foster care system relates to an out of home placement, a temporary service provided by the state for minors who are unable to remain home with their families for various reasons (NCDHHS, n.d.).

Group Home

Group home is defined as a residential facility that provides children and adolescents who

are removed from their biological families due to neglect, abuse, or parental incapacity with a temporary placement option (Verulava & Dangadze, 2021).

Social Support

Social support refers to the resources needed to provide support to young adults transitioning out of the foster care system (Jones, 2023).

Social Worker

Social worker refers to a licensed professional who is responsible for the care, safety, and protection of the minor children in their care; they provide support, guidance, and advocate for the needs of youth transitioning from foster care who chooses to remain in additional support services (Stoicov, 2023).

Summary

Foster care youth are consistently aging out of the foster care system and transitioning into independent living. When youth emerge out of the foster care system, they often face challenges such as unstable housing (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021), struggles with finding and keeping employment (Liu, 2020), a higher probability of being incarcerated (Cudjoe et al., 2022; Park & Courtney, 2023), lower academic performance (Liu et al., 2022), and mental health problems (Narendorf, 2021).

When young adults fail to transition to independent living effectively, their lives are significantly impacted. Often, young individuals lack the fundamental life skills needed to achieve independence (Barnett, 2020) and are not financially stable enough to provide for their basic needs (Heyman et al., 2020). Using OMT to provide social support to young adults effectively may potentially assist them with navigating the transition without facing challenges like homelessness, unemployment, and other related difficulties (Sulimani, 2019).

Previous researchers provided several recommendations for the future. I addressed the identified gap emphasized by Packard and Benuto (2020), which calls for future research to replicate their research findings in another geographical location to collaborate their findings. Further recommendations focusing on female participants rather than male participants were highlighted. Hence, I conducted a qualitative exploratory single case study on the social support provided to young women and explore the challenges young women encounter with social support systems when transitioning out of the North Carolina foster care system to independent living.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single case study conceptual replication was to determine whether the social support services received by young Black women were effectively matched to their perceived social support needs when transitioning out of the NC foster care system to independent living. For stakeholders to begin helping young Black women optimally match with the social support services needed, it is imperative that the young Black women identify their needs. The North Carolina Child Welfare identified the following as part of social support services for youth aging out of foster care: obtaining adequate housing, higher education or trade school, suitable employment to meet financial needs, a personal support network, and access to physical and mental health services (NCDHHS, 2024).

This section began with a brief overview of the foster care system. Following the overview, an organized and structured review of the literature was conducted to investigate the existing research that addresses the social support needs of young adults transitioning out of foster care. Then a presentation and discussion related to the optimal matching theory (OMT), the framework that sustained the proposed research study, was provided. Finally, a summary of the review of the current research on the social support need of young adults transitioning out of the foster care system was provided.

Research Parameters

The following databases were used to thoroughly research and evaluate the existing literature social support needs of young adults transitioning out of the foster care system. I focused the literature research on young Black women who exited the foster care system. I used numerous resources to access information for the literature review to include books, National University's Library services, and peer reviewed journal articles from the following databases:

ERIC, EBSCO, SAGE Publications, CINAHL Complete, ProQuest, Google Scholar, and Research Gate. Additionally, I searched the following terms to access studies relevant to the presenting research study: *social supports, social support network, support systems, department of social services, housing and homelessness, independence and independent living, emancipation, employment and stable income, higher education, academia, trade school, general education development (GED), youth transitioning out of foster care, foster care, foster care system, collateral support, department of human resources, emerging Black women transitioning out of foster care, women exiting foster care, African American women exiting foster care system, and ethnical and racial disparity in foster care system*. In addition, the following words were searched for the theoretical foundation: *optimal matching theory* and *match theory*. Studies related to optimal matching theory as a foundation or framework were also investigated.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that informed this qualitative exploratory single case study conceptual replication is the optimal matching theory (OMT). The OMT is an instrumental framework in the fields of psychology and social science that investigates the interaction between people's needs and the specific forms of social support they receive. OMT proposes that social support is most impactful when it is customized to address the individual needs of the recipient, instead of increasing the number of services. OMT focuses on the significance of providing high quality assistance that is suitable for the situation. OMT may be used to address improvement in mental health, physical health, overall well-being, and coping strategies in many settings. The theory was used in the original research that this study is replicating (Packard & Benuto, 2020) and was used to inform the proposed study.

History of the OMT

Social support is a critical determinant of health and well-being. A large body of research has demonstrated that social support enhances psychological resilience, reduces the negative impacts of stress, and improves overall life satisfaction (Berzins et al., 2024; Taylor et al., 2024; Yan et al., 2022). For instance, social support has been linked to lower levels of depression and anxiety, particularly in vulnerable populations (Tsai et al., 2024). Moreover, studies have shown that individuals with strong social networks tend to have better immune functioning, lower rates of chronic illness, and longer life expectancy (Muigg et al., 2024). Social support also promotes healthier behaviors, such as regular exercise and proper nutrition (Lieber et al., 2024).

Very early on, research have shown the importance of social support. Hamilton (1964) asserts that the notion of social support is deeply rooted in development. Throughout the earliest phases of development, humans, being social animals, have depended on living in groups and cooperating with one another to ensure their survival. The establishment of social connections was vital in guaranteeing mutual protection, sharing of resources, and reproduction. Evolutionary theories, such as inclusive fitness and kin selection, propose that behaviors that enhance social cohesiveness and support within communities are favored by natural selection due to their ability to enhance the survival of humanity (Hamilton, 1964).

Furthermore, anthropological research has demonstrated that early human civilizations had intricate social systems founded on the principles of reciprocity and collaboration. Thus, social relationships played a crucial role in ensuring survival, particularly in hunter-gatherer civilizations when resources were distributed among the group and cooperation was essential for activities such as hunting, gathering, and protecting against predators (Dunbar, 1998). The exchange of social support, whether by means of distributing sustenance or providing security,

played a fundamental role in the development and advancement of human societies.

Thus, several social support theories have been developed over the years. In the mid-20th century, the notion of social support became prominent in the field of psychology, specifically in relation to stress and coping. Sidney Cobb (1976) an influential contributor to this field defined social support as the perception or experience of being cared for, valued, and connected to a network of mutual duties. Cobb's (1976) research highlighted the psychological advantages of social support, namely in mitigating the impact of stress.

In addition, during the 1970s and 1980s, researchers initiated a systematic investigation of the processes by which social support impacts health and well-being. In 1985, Cohen and Wills proposed the "buffering hypothesis," which posited that social support alleviated the adverse impacts of stress by offering emotional comfort, information, and practical aid. The "buffering hypothesis" concept was instrumental in influencing future research on the beneficial function of social support in several areas of life, such as mental health, physical health, and occupational stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Furthermore, by the late 20th century, the health sciences integrated social support, and research has shown that it has a substantial influence on both psychological and physical health outcomes. For example, Berkman and Syme (1979) conducted a significant study which shown that persons with greater levels of social support had lower death rates over a nine-year period, when all other risk factors accounted for. This study provided strong empirical data about the positive impact of social support on health and incited further research in the field.

Subsequently, social support emerged as a crucial factor in the field of health psychology, with numerous research investigating social support impact on improving recuperation from disease, psychological well-being, and overall quality of life. Researchers also investigated the

significance of social support in certain groups, including caregivers, cancer patients, and those with chronic illnesses and highlighted its importance in social and health care settings (House et al., 1988).

Thus, from these early investigations, several theories were founded to include but not limited to stress and coping theory, social network theory, and attachment theory. One of the very first social support theories was established by John Bowlby in 1969 was the attachment theory. The attachment theory focuses early caregiving bonds that influences the person's ability to establish and maintain relationship throughout their lifespan. The attachment theory classifies three types of attachments: secure, anxious, and avoidant. These types of attachments represent a person's belief about the availability and reliability of social support. Therefore, persons with a secure attachment are more likely to pursue and offer social support than persons with anxious or avoidance attachments (Bowlby, 1969). The limitation of the attachment theory lies in the notion that early attachment to caregiver determines reception of social support.

Another theory, social exchange theory, established by George Homans (1958) and was expanded upon by Peter Blau (1964). The authors viewed social relationships as transactions where people exchange resources based on a cost-benefit analysis. The theory posits that individuals engage in social exchanges to maximize rewards, such as emotional support and companionship; and minimize costs, such as time, effort, and potential conflict (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958). Therefore, social support is regarded as a resource that persons exchange in a relationship which determines the quality for relationship by its cost and benefits. The perceived cost and benefits create an imbalance in exchange and perpetuates dissatisfaction in support.

In 1984, Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman developed the stress and coping theory, and the theory has become one of the most influential frameworks for understanding social

support (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to the authors, social support plays a critical role in stress management. The authors suggested that social support can function as a "buffer" between stressful life events and the psychological or physiological impact of those events on an individual.

Per the authors, the theory differentiates between two types of coping mechanisms: problem-focused coping which endeavors to modify the stressful situation, and emotion-focused coping which endeavors to regulate emotional response to the situation. When employed, social support may facilitate both forms of coping by providing resources, advice, and emotional comfort. The buffering hypothesis within this theory posits that social support is particularly beneficial in high-stress situations, reducing the negative effects of stress by strengthening the person's ability to cope (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The limitation of this theory is that its primary focus is on the management of stress and may not apply to every situation.

Despite the efforts to provide effective support, the traditional approaches commonly focused on the quantity of social support as the key factor in determining results such as decrease in stress and improvement of well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985). However, these models failed to adequately account for the intricacy of individual needs or capture the contextual significance of various forms and types of social supports. Consequently, the OMT was developed as a solution to the limitations found in existing social support models.

The OMT was initially developed by Cutrona and Russell (1990), in order to fill these gaps. In their empirical study, the authors reasoned that providing direct support, advice, encouragement, company, and expressing affection have been linked to beneficial outcomes for individuals who are dealing with a diversity of challenges and difficulties in life. Thus, the authors concluded that it is crucial to identify the specific types of support that would be most

effective in each adverse situation. Therefore, it is essential to align the features of a distressing event that an individual is experiencing with the specific forms of social supports that would be most advantageous in the given situation.

Existing Research Using the OMT

The OMT remains a vital framework for understanding the impact of customized social support on well-being in numerous areas. Notably, the healthcare industry continues to be one of the most important sectors where OMT is applied, specifically when managing chronic illnesses. In their study, Ginter and Braun (2019), examined the effects of providing cancer patients with care that is best tailored to their needs. The results of their research showed that matching the type of social support (emotional, informational, or instrumental) with the unique needs of the patients resulted in decreased psychological distress and improved quality of life. The result of the study affirms the concept that not all forms of social support are equally effective; instead, efficacy the support provided relies on the exact alignment with the recipient's need (Ginter & Braun., 2019).

Expanding upon the theory's applicability, Goodyke et al. (2022) conducted studies specifically targeting individuals with heart disease. The study revealed that patients who received personalized informational support corresponding to their specific stage of disease progression showed better compliance with treatment regimens and reported greater satisfaction with their healthcare (Goodyke et al., 2022). The research strengthens the concept that social support should be dynamic, developing in tandem with patients' shifting needs throughout their treatment process.

Research shows that OMT has been increasingly used in the workplace to manage stress and productivity. This is evident is a study conducted by van Zoonen et al. (2021) during the

COVID-19 pandemic to investigate the ways in which organizations could optimized social support to address employee stress. The authors found that individuals who received appropriate support from supervisors and peers, that match their needs, had increased job satisfaction and less burnout. The social support received varied depending on the employee need and came in the form of emotional support during periods of high anxiety or instrumental support while encountering workload issues (van Zoonen et al., 2021).

In addition, a study conducted by Adams and Webster (2021), the authors examined the impact of remote work settings, in which the physical distance between individuals increased the demand for matched social support. The results of their research showed the significance of digital platforms in providing optimal support. Employees experienced improved mental well-being outcomes when virtual check-ins were customized to address their individual needs, such as emotional support or guidance on adapting to new remote work technologies and skills. OMT is increasingly present in social work and mental health arenas.

The research by Pope et al., 2022 highlighted the importance of social and emotional support for foster parents to reduce stress and anxiety of new foster parents. The study findings showed the value of matching the mentors and mentees according to the foster parent mentee's needs. This fostered a strong relationship between seasoned foster parents and new foster parents, which facilitated communication, particularly during crises, and regular, structured check-ins. Such mentoring relationships was found to be crucial in reduction of placement disruptions and supporting foster parents in their roles.

OMT and Social Support Services

Young women aging out of foster care face a multitude of challenges as they transition into independent living, such as unemployment, housing instability, a lack of educational

opportunities, and mental health issues. Research shows that Black youth, particularly young Black women, are disproportionately represented in the foster care system, often due to systemic inequities such as poverty, racial bias, and inadequate social support services (Dworsky & Courtney, 2020). This overrepresentation contributes to a succession of disadvantage that persists even after they age out of the system.

Housing insecurity is a prominent issue for this population, as many young women face eviction or homelessness shortly after leaving foster care. A report by the Urban Institute found that over 40% of former foster youth experienced homelessness within the first two years of aging out (Morton, 2018). Additionally, former foster youth are more likely to suffer from mental health disorders, such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, due to the instability and trauma they may have experienced during their time in the system (Salazar et al., 2019). These challenges are exacerbated for Black women, who often face additional barriers rooted in racial and gender discrimination.

Social support is a critical factor in helping young Black women transition successfully out of foster care. Support systems can come from formal sources, such as caseworkers, mental health professionals, and educational counselors, as well as informal sources like family, friends, and mentors. However, the type of support provided must be appropriate to the specific needs and context of the individual. Thus, OMT becomes an essential framework.

OMT posits that the effectiveness of social support is contingent upon the "match" between the type of support provided and the specific needs of the recipient (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). For instance, when individuals face emotional stress, emotional support may be most effective. Conversely, when dealing with practical challenges, instrumental support, such as help with housing or job placement, may be more beneficial. Mismatches between the support

provided and the recipient's needs can lead to ineffective or even counterproductive outcomes. Applying OMT to young Black women transitioning out of foster care suggests that support systems must be flexible and adaptive, considering the exclusive experiences of these women.

Dimensions of OMT

The OMT framework categorizes several types of social support, such as emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal assistance. Emotional support entails demonstrating empathy and comprehension, whereas informational assistance entails offering counsel or instruction. Instrumental support refers to concrete forms of assistance, such as providing financial aid or helping with specific activities. On the other hand, assessment support involves giving feedback that helps individuals evaluate themselves and make informed decisions (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Furthermore, the OMT posits that the effectiveness of each type of support is maximized when it aligns with the specific needs of the recipient. For example, when dealing with bereavement, emotional support can be more effective, whereas in a difficult scenario, informational assistance may be more applicable for making decisions.

Furthermore, Cutrona and Russell (1990) identified five fundamental support dimensions: emotional support, social integration or network support, esteem support, palpable aid or support, and informational support. These five fundamental support dimensions served as a road map for the current study (see Table 1 for definitions). It is important to highlight that the OMT was not developed as a linear model but as a multidimensional one to clearly demonstrate the relationship between stress and social support in specific stressful situations (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Hence, the OMT dimensions are comprised by the following tenants: controllability, desirability, and life domains (specifically: assets, achievement, social roles, and relationships) and guide the individual's need for specific supports. Cutrona and Russell (1990) further asserted

that an individual's social support requirements are contingent upon their stressors, challenges, and needs outlined in the tenants.

Table 1

Five Fundamental Support Dimensions

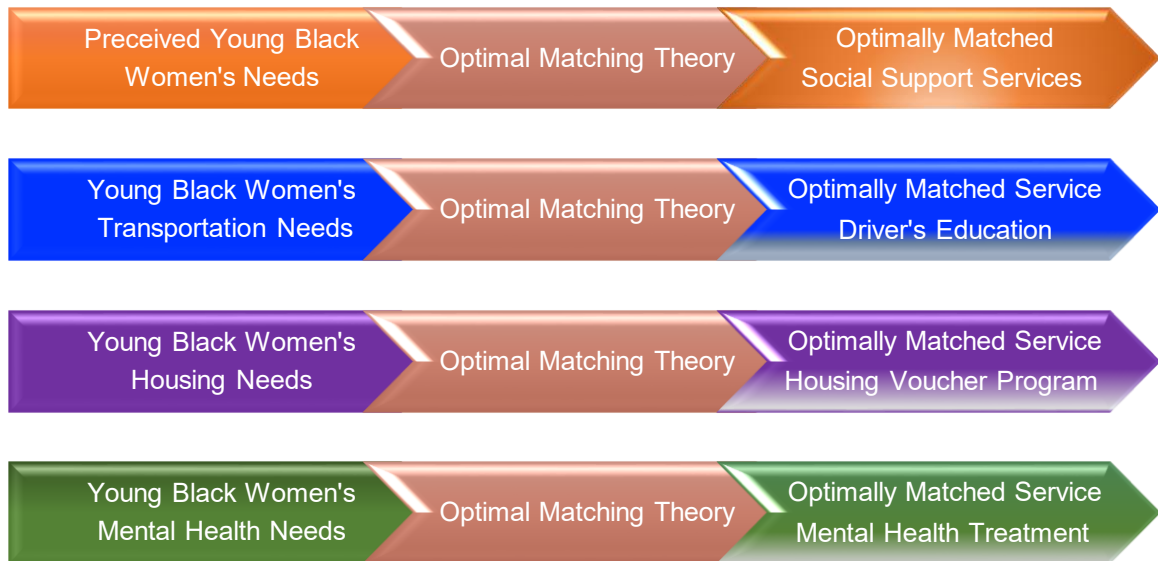
Dimensions	Definition of dimensions (Cutrona & Russell, 1990)
Emotional Support	The capacity to seek consolation and security from others during periods of stress.
Social Integration or Network of Support	The sense of belonging to a group whose members share common interests and concerns.
Esteem Support	The positive feedback by others to enhance an individual's perception of competence or self-esteem.
Palpable Aid or Support	Concrete instrumental assistance provided to an individual in a stressful circumstance, including financial and physical support.
Informational Support	The advice or guidance to an individual regarding potential solutions to a problem.

Young Black women who are transitioning out of the foster care system face unique challenges and necessitate specific social support to successfully transition to independent living. Based on the postulations made by Cutrona and Russell (1990) in their empirical research, when implemented, the use of OMT by stakeholders will help ensure that young Black women emerging from foster care are optimally matched with the specific social support needed. Therefore, based on these premises, the use of OMT as a guide has the potential to assist social support systems such as social workers, case managers, foster parents, group home managers, mental health counselors, and medical professionals with matching the transitioning young Black women with personalized social supports and resources that are tailored to their unique

circumstances, abilities, and requirements. Although becoming an adult is complex, the transition to independence can be facilitated by matching young Black women with the appropriate support services needed.

Thus, the use of OMT as a guide is valuable for deciphering and fulfilling the specific social support needed by each young Black women to help them successfully transition to adulthood. Using the premises of the OMT can also assist stakeholders with recognizing the transitioning young adults' unique abilities, strengths, and weaknesses that need to be taken into consideration to provide them with the type of social support they require. When social support services are closely aligned to the characteristics and require needs, young Black women have the potential to successfully transitions to adulthood. Consequently, successful transition will in turn assist them with developing self-confidence and empower them to be successful in life and improve their overall quality of life (Cutrona & Russell, 1990).

Lastly, using the OMT as a framework is the perfect fit for the proposed qualitative exploratory single case study conceptual replication research. I used the OMT dimensions and the NC Child Welfare requirements as a guide while conducting and analyzing my research study to determine whether the social supports received by young Black women were effectively matched to their perceived social support when transitioning out of the North Carolina foster care system to independent living. Figure 1 was created as a visual representation of the premises of OMT described by Cutrona and Russell (1990). Figure 1 illustrates how OMT was used to match young Black women with optimal social support services as they transition to adulthood.

Figure 1*Young Black Women's Social Support Needs and OMT*

Literature Review

The foster care system provides temporary housing for at-risk children between the ages of newborn to 18 years who require a safe place to live. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that neglect accounts for an estimated 62% of foster children separation from their families for various tragic reasons. Presently, there are 391,000 children and adolescents in the foster care system and an estimated 23,000 young adults leave the foster care system annually (NFYI, 2022). As young adults transition out of foster care, they are afforded several social support services such as rental vouchers, grants for life skill training, medical and mental health issuance through Medicaid, financial literacy training, and education and employment training services to facilitate their transition to independent living (ACFCB, 2021). However, without the necessary social support, young adults aging out do not always transition well (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021).

Existing research has illustrated the influence that social support has on young adults transitioning to independent living in the areas of obtaining work and having financial stability (Cudjoe et al., 2022; Dumais & Spence, 2021), obtaining stable housing (Farmer et al., 2021; Hernandez & Jaegoo, 2020), pursuing higher education or trade school (Rosenberg & Kim, 2018), developing a personal support network (Verulava & Dangadze, 2021), and having continued access to physical and mental health (Narendorf et al., 2021; Sapiro & Ward, 2020).

Thus, the review of the literature has the potential to highlight the benefits of social support and the need to continue to improve social support systems. The themes in the existing studies being reviewed directly correlate to the social support needs outlined in the North Carolina Child Welfare 2020–2024 Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan, Requirement 8-Ensuring Transition Plans Meet the Health Need of Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

(NCDHHS, 2024, pp. 25–27). Therefore, a thematic structure was used to review existing literature regarding the social support needs of young adults transitioning out of the foster care system.

State Requirements When Aging Out of Foster Care

The North Carolina Child Welfare 2020–2024 Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan (NCDHHS, 2024), outlines the essential social support services requirements for young adults exiting the foster care system as follows financial/employment, safe and stable housing, academic and vocational/educational, avoidance of legal system, avoidance of early parenthood, as well as physical and mental health services (see Table 2 for further description). The North Carolina Child Welfare social support requirements is a blanket of the possible supports that a young adult needs to transition. However, not all young adults transitioning requires support in all the aforementioned areas. For example, while some young adults may have a need for stable housing, others may be returning to live with a stable family member. Another young adult may be financially secure due to a trust fund established by a deceased parent, while others have no means of financial supports. These examples and more portray the diversity in young adults exiting foster care.

Table 2*North Carolina Child Welfare Requirement 8*

Definition of Requirement 8
1. All youth leaving the foster care system shall have sufficient economic resources to meet their daily needs.
2. All youth leaving the foster care system shall have a safe and stable place to live.
3. All youth leaving the foster care system shall attain academic or vocational/educational goals that are in keeping with the youth's abilities interests.
4. All youth leaving the foster care system shall have a sense of connectedness to persons and community. This means every youth, upon exiting foster care, should have a personal support network of at least 5 responsible adults who will remain supportive of the young adult over time.
5. All youth leaving the foster care system shall avoid illegal/high risk behaviors.
6. All youth leaving the foster care system shall postpone parenthood until financially established and emotionally mature.
7. All youth leaving the foster care system shall have access to physical and mental health services, as well as a means to pay for those services.

Employment and Financial Stability

Secure employment and being stable financially are essential when transitioning into independence. Young adults exiting the foster care system have more complicated experiences than those of young adults transitioning with their biological or adoptive parents. When young adults living with their parents transition to independence, they are often surrounded by a host of social support such as grandparents, extended family members, church, and other supportive community. The young adults' tangible and emotional social support systems often provide a level of economic security, stable housing, as well as access to medical and mental health care (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019). Hence, obtaining employment immediately following graduation from high school is optional and not mandatory. However, young adults aging out of foster care often do not have such effective support systems (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019; Liu, 2020).

Adequate social support facilitates meaningful employment opportunities for young adults undergoing transition, empowering them to overcome previous challenges and navigate the transition to adulthood with confidence (Cudjoe et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022).

Current research proposes that young adults raised in the foster care system have lower rates of employment and earnings compared to their counterparts. Liu et al. (2022) surveyed 65 young adults in a welfare institution in China and found that the employment rate among the transitioning young adult was 17.5%, which was below the employment rate of 33.8% among young adults in general population. Similarly, Rome et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative phenomenological study with 19 youths in their first year following their transition out of foster care and found that the young adults were more likely to be unemployed as compared to their counterparts. Rome et al. (2019) reported 46% of foster care young adults who were employed at 26 years old and most of them relied on government assistance due to not earning enough to meet their basic needs. Consequently, young adults transitioning out of foster care face difficulties in obtaining employment beyond jobs that need minimal skills and pay poor wages. These jobs lead to frequent changes in employment and financial instability. Having stable employment that provides a consistent source of income is crucial for young adults as it allows them to provide for their fundamental needs, save for the future, and invest in their personal growth.

Obtaining suitable employment and establishing financial stability are essential for transitioning to independent living when exiting the foster care system. Research on employment and young adults emerging from foster care has evolved during the last decade to be more holistic and focused on independence and quality of life. For example, young adults who struggle with finding employment and financial stability are often challenged in all areas of life and

frequently experience poor quality of life (Dumais & Spence, 2021; Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021). Dumais and Spence (2021) stated that youth aging out of foster care potentially adopt a survival approach towards their lives and future. Dumais and Spence (2021) interviewed 19 young adults in college and reported participants are more likely to succeed with appropriate financial support.

Likewise, Furey and Harris-Evans (2021) conducted qualitative phenomenological research in the United Kingdom with six young adults participating in work internship program for six months prior to transitioning out of foster care. The study also included seven supervisors who were supervising the young adults and who had previously supervised young people. The authors collected data via interviews with the young adults and the supervisors. The results from interview with the supervisors revealed that the young adults required a great amount of emotional support and encouragement to develop self-confidence. However, results denoted that young adults who participated in the internship program were led to employment or further training, which assisted them with gaining financial freedom.

Hence, obtaining suitable employment often affords young adults' financial stability, which promotes personal growth, a sense of independence, and inclusion into their respective communities. In turn, this provided them with a chance to develop autonomy, obtain essential life competencies, and nurture a constructive self-perception. Furthermore, Häggman-Laitila et al. (2019) conducted a systematic review of data from 13 quantitative studies on young adults transitioning to independent living between 2010 and 2017. The authors reported employment continues to be the standard for independence and safety as the studies showed between 40% to 80% of emerging youth were promptly seeking employment.

Likewise, Liu (2020) stated young adults who received financial and social support with

higher education were expected to succeed academically. The data was retrieved from the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) and included 5633 young adults who exited the foster care system and were surveyed at 17 and 21 years old. Research results reveal 58 % of young adult who received support with independent living and higher education were mostly likely to secure employment.

Thus, there is a correlation between employment and education. Higher education is typically necessary to secure viable work that can effectively fulfill the needs of transitioning young adults. The relationship between employment and education is reciprocal, with education exerting a substantial influence on the young adult's employment prospects, and conversely, employment serving to acquire higher education (Dumais & Spence, 2021; Jackson & Cesaroni, 2021). As a result, those with greater levels of education often have access to higher paying job prospects with benefits. Equally important is the influence that employment has on the stability of housing.

Cudjoe et al. (2022) found a positive correlation between employment and housing stability. Therefore, adequate and consistent employment often allowed young adults to find and sustain stable, long-term housing (Kelly, 2020; Verulava & Dangadze, 2021). Accordingly, the accessibility and cost of housing has an influence on the ability of young adults to maintain employment when transitioned out of foster care (Leathers et al., 2023; Prince et al., 2019). Furthermore, social support plays a vital role in assisting adults who are transitioning find employment opportunities (Packard & Benuto, 2020). Young adults undergoing transition require supportive social networks that can provide emotional support, guidance, and practical counsel. An effective support system can aid young adult in overcoming workplace issues, handling tension, and enhancing job satisfaction (Blakeslee & Best, 2019; Packard & Benuto,

2020).

In general, research emphasizes the significance of employment for young adults transitioning out of foster care, as it cultivates self-reliance, personal growth, and economic stability (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021; Arnau-Sabates et al., 2021). Employment provides transitioning young adults with autonomy, essential abilities, and development of interpersonal relationships skills (Hokanson et al., 2019; Liu, 2020). Having a stable place to live is essential for overall well-being, while receiving social assistance is necessary for finding employment and to successfully deal with difficulties in the workplace (Verulava & Dangadze, 2021). Pursuing higher education is frequently necessary for securing employment, and consequently, the choice of job has an influence on educational decisions (Dumais & Spence, 2021).

Education and Academic Achievement

Of equal importance as employment are the educational choices young adults make when emerging from foster care. There is a direct correlation between obtaining higher education and employment opportunities available to emerging young adults. Prior studies highlighted the impact of education on enhancing young adults' quality of life through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities (Hanson et al., 2023, Salazar & Schelbe, 2021). Higher education yields numerous positive results, including enhanced job prospects and economic security (Bae, 2020; Jackson & Cesaroni, 2021), diminished homelessness (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021), heightened financial stability (Jackson & Cesaroni, 2021), improved problem-solving skills, providing personal satisfaction, and attaining an overall enhancement in quality of life (Avant et al., 2021).

Additionally, young adults who dropped out of high school or who failed to obtain their GED often become homeless (Hatch et al., 2022; Lindquist-Grantz, 2022). These young adults

often do not have adequate social support and have limited opportunities for employment. Consequently, the transitioned young adult may engage in nefarious activities including prostitution, stealing, drug dealing, selling blood and panhandling to obtain income and survive (Hatch et al., 2022, Rosenberg & Kim, 2018). Often, there is a direct relationship between higher levels of education and increased access to career possibilities, higher earning potential, and enhanced job security. Education equips individuals with pertinent skills, information, and qualifications, hence enhancing their career prospects and ensuring financial stability (Avant et al., 2021; Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019).

Of equal importance is financial education on an individual's income potential and overall economic welfare. Study findings revealed a positive correlation between higher levels of education and increasing income (Salazar & Schelbe, 2021). Financial education provides students with the essential skills and information to obtain higher-paying employment opportunities and progress in their professional lives (Avant et al., 2021; Jackson & Cesaroni, 2021). Furthermore, young adults who obtain higher education frequently have a greater understanding of budgeting, investing, and debt management, which may contribute to improved financial decision-making (Porto & Xiao, 2021). The intricate correlation between education and homelessness poses that the lack of higher education can perpetuate homelessness, just as homelessness can greatly hinder the ability of young people to access education (Porto & Xiao, 2021; Villagrana et al., 2020).

Lastly, research studies examined the association between social support and obtaining higher education. Study findings suggest a strong correlation between education and social support, indicating a multifaceted relationship between the two (Schelbe et al., 2022; Watt & Kim, 2019). To minimize the negative effects of educational gaps, decreased academic

performance, and dropout rates from higher education programs, it is crucial to provide appropriate social support that aligns with the needs of young individuals (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021, Porto & Xiao, 2021). Obtaining higher education often provides young adults with the chance to cultivate social skills, participate in collaborative activities, and establish connections with both peers and mentors. Consequently, possessing a supportive social network can enhance academic achievements. The presence of a caring social support personnel is essential for obtaining higher education and improve transitioning young adults' overall quality of life. (Packard & Benuto, 2020, Watt & Kim, 2019).

Education is a crucial component for young adults who are transitioning out of foster care. The above studies highlight the substantial impact education has on enhancing persons' quality of life through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities. This, in turn, results in better work prospects, financial security, and personal satisfaction. Increased levels of education are associated with higher income potential, job stability, and improved financial decision-making (Schelbe et al., 2022; Villagrana et al., 2020). However, when young adults exit the foster care system without appropriate and affordable housing, they have the potential to become homeless. Homelessness can impede access to education, thereby keeping the young adult stuck in a vicious cycle (Avant et al., 2021; Hatch et al., 2022).

Housing and Homelessness

In the general population, often when young adults transition into adulthood, they continue to reside with their parents. However, that is not the case for young adults transitioning from foster care. Current research in the field of children and youth services emphasizes the significance of secure housing for young adults who are transitioning out of the foster care system (Farmer et al., 2021; Kelly, 2020). As young adults transition out of the foster care

system, having a secure and stable place to call home is crucial for their personal growth and development (Hedenstrom, 2021). A stable home offers a feeling of safety and belonging, which enables young adults in transition to concentrate on their education, job, and building a network of support beyond the foster care system (Verulava et al., 2020; Hernandez & Jaegoo, 2020). Social support services aimed at helping young adults find housing offer them a stable foundation on which to transition successfully (Best & Blakeslee, 2020).

In addition, education and housing correlates positively. Results from recent research indicated, when participants graduated high school, received their GED certificate or received a higher level of education, they typically did not experience homelessness (Hernandez & Jaegoo, 2020). However, the rate of homelessness increased among participants who dropped out of high school or who failed to pursue higher education. Hernandez and Jaegoo (2020) concluded that the availability of inexpensive housing options and the ability to achieve financial stability had an impact on the housing choices and options for young adults.

In a similar study by Leathers et al. (2023), the authors discussed 11% to 36% of 152 participants reported “couch surfing” or being homeless. Additional research findings indicated that having access to secure and affordable housing can significantly reduce stressors that would otherwise interfere with maintaining employment (Kelly, 2020; Liu, 2020; Prince et al., 2019). In addition, having stable housing enables young adults in transition to focus on their jobs and pursuing professional opportunities.

Likewise, previous studies conducted showed a connection between housing and education. Thus, stable housing is crucial for achieving educational goals (Leathers et al., 2023; Lindquist-Grantz et al., 2022). Therefore, offering social assistance to young adults who are transitioning out of foster care will empower them to locate and maintain a stable living

arrangement, obtain higher education, as well as foster connections with peers and relatives (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021; Farmer et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2022).

These studies highlight the complex connection between housing and several facets of the young adults' life, including employment, education, and financial stability. It is crucial to recognize and address these connections to develop comprehensive policies and interventions to enhance the well-being and quality of life of young adults who are transitioning into communities.

Physical and Mental Health Services

Often, young adults exiting from foster care face challenges that may include emotional and mental health issues that can impede their transition to independence. When young adults transitioning out of foster care are ill prepared for independence, it affects their mental health and their ability to pursue higher education, obtain financial security, and obtain stable housing (Sapiro & Ward, 2019). Current research studies reinforce the need for mental health services and interventions (Narendorf et al., 2020; Sapiro & Ward, 2019).

Engler et al. (2022) revealed that youth in foster care experience more mental disorders than youth in general population. These mental disorders include major depressive disorder, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, attachment disorder, conduct disorder, and oppositional defiant disorder. Since mental health disorders do not resolve themselves once young adults transition out of foster care, it is imperative that they continue to receive treatment for the disorders (Villagrana & Lee, 2020; Schelbe et al., 2024). Narendorf et al. (2020) indicated 66% of youth in foster care have a mental health diagnosis which follows them into adulthood. Similarly, Liu et al. (2022), found 52% of participants experienced stress due to self-expectation and 41.7% experienced stress due to economic hardship. Moreover, 16.9% of participants sought

help for stress, 58.3% withdrew from the stress while the remaining participants reported attacking others, complaining to others, engaging in excess drinking, and engaging in relaxation techniques (Liu et al., 2020).

Furthermore, a considerable number of young adults transitioning out of foster care experience varying levels of anxiety and depression because of the instability and trauma they have endured prior to and throughout foster care (Villagrana & Lee, 2020). The incidence of PTSD among these young adults is significantly elevated and is sometimes associated with prior instances of abuse or neglect (Engler et al. (2022).

Another prevalent mental health issue is the abuse and misuse of substances that impairs young adults' ability to maintain steady employment and housing (Schelbe et al., 2024). When young adults are stressed, depressed, or anxious, they often seek out substances such as alcohol and marijuana to self-medicate (Schelbe et al., 2024). The lack of a supporting network and coping methods might prompt young adults to resort to substance abuse as a means of managing their emotional distress (Best & Blakeslee, 2020).

Thus, engaging in mental health treatment to address mental health treatment is crucial for young adults transitioning to independence (Schelbe et al., 2024). However, many young adults lose Medicaid coverage upon aging out of the system, making it difficult to access necessary medical and psychological care (Sapiro & Ward, 2019). Therefore, limited access to healthcare, including mental health services, is a critical issue (Engler et al. (2022).

Consequently, the absence social support networks and the lack of access to mental health treatment, often increases the likelihood of former foster young adults becoming involved with the criminal justice system (Brisson et al., 2022; Park & Courtney, 2023). Although young adults may not actively seek to engage in criminal activities, behaviors leading to criminal

activities may arise due to being homeless, engaging in substance abuse, and not having stable work (Brisson et al., 2022; Park & Courtney, 2023).

Narendorf et al. (2020) emphasized the need for mental providers to simplify the intervention and skills provided to young adults aging out of foster care to promote engagement in mental health treatment. Previous research focused on the negative consequences of young adults not seeking mental health service. Controversially, Batista et al. (2018) highlighted the positive outcomes when young adults aging out of foster care are empowered to manage their mental health issues. However, the emerging young adults' social support network continues to be an important piece for successful transition independent living (Batista et al., 2018).

Social Support Network

Exiting foster care frequently results in social seclusion, specifically when transitioning young adults lack familial support or mentors to depend on. Therefore, relationships with social support personnel become essential for connectivity and assistance with basic needs (Villagrana & Lee, 2020). Social support networks for emerging young adults may consist of family, friends, social workers, foster parents, case managers, mental health providers, teachers, healthcare providers, and mentors who can offer essential emotional support, guidance, and direction. Furthermore, social support systems can aid young adults in overcoming challenges and pressures related to housing, employment, and educational path (Packard & Benuto, 2020; Verulava & Dangadze, 2021). Hence, the provision of optimal social support and services has the capacity to create a favorable atmosphere for pursuing higher education, attaining adequate housing, and experiencing successful transition to independent living (Best & Blakeslee, 2020).

Emerging young adults do not all share the same concerns and mental health issues. Therefore, providing them with the same blanket solution will not benefit them. Matching the

young adult with the social support services that are unique to their needs will help to ensure a successful transition to independent life (Blakeslee & Best, 2019; Verulava & Dangadze, 2021). An effective network of assistance can greatly aid young adults as they move out of foster care and smoothly navigate their journey into adulthood. Young adults may have any combination of the following support personnel in their Circle of Support:

Family. Although contact with biological family maybe limited, connecting positively with family of origin may offer emotional and mental support. Furthermore, extended family member may occasionally provide emerging young adult with stable living environment, as well as emotional and financial support (Hokanson et al., 2019; Verulava & Dangadze, 2021). While the ability to maintain contact with biological family members may be restricted, it is important to sustain healthy family relationships. These connections frequently provide a sense of identity, acceptance, and belonging (O'Connor et al., 2019). Emerging into adulthood is a crucial developmental phase which involves exploration and instability.

Therefore, continued connection with family of origin can serve as a buffer and provide stability while reducing stress, and alleviating anxiety. Connection with family will provide the emerging young adult a psychological safety net and the ability to attain emotional resilience (O'Connor et al., 2019). Extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins can play a crucial role in offering additional support, especially when contact with parents are restricted (Samuolis et al., 2021). The support provided can be very beneficial during the transitional phase of emerging adulthood, when young adults are still in the process of establishing financial autonomy and may have uncertainty over home stability.

Studies results show that having access to assistance from extended family helps alleviate the stress that accompanies significant life changes, such as starting a job, finishing college, or

managing personal relationships (Swartz et al., 2020). Thus, extended family members have a vital role in supporting young adults by offering both emotional and material resources, which assist them with transitioning smoothly into adulthood.

Friends. Having close friendships or acquaintances may provide young adult with peer support, empathy and understanding, as well as give them a sense of belonging. Furthermore, peer interaction may be essential to assist young adult with navigating social obstacle by offering practical help (Hokanson et al., 2019; Leathers et al., 2019). These connections contribute to a sense of belonging, which is a fundamental need during the transitional period of young adulthood. Friendships provide a safe space where young adults can share experiences, process emotions, and receive validation, which can be essential for their emotional well-being (Fiori & Consedine, 2020). Close peer relationships can help young adults cope with stress and uncertainty, offering a source of comfort and reassurance that may not always be available from family members (Demir et al., 2019).

In addition to emotional support, peer interaction often provides practical help in navigating social obstacles. Friends can offer advice, share resources, and provide encouragement in dealing with challenges such as finding employment, managing relationships, or resolving conflicts (Seabrook et al., 2019). This social support network is particularly valuable as young adults encounter new situations that require problem-solving and adaptation. The shared experiences and mutual understanding within peer groups can reduce feelings of isolation and empower young adults to overcome hurdles in their personal and professional lives (Bokhorst et al., 2021).

Social Workers. The social worker is the young adult's caregiver and thereby has a crucial role in coordinating the necessary support services to ensure a successful transition. They

are essential in assisting young adults with obtaining life skills, accessing suitable housing, finding adequate employment and engaging in educational opportunities (Cudjoe et al., 2022; Hokanson et al., 2019; Ludeke, 2024).

Social workers are often responsible for ensuring that young adults, particularly those transitioning out of systems such as foster care or juvenile services, have access to essential resources and guidance. This role involves not only addressing immediate needs but also equipping young adults with the life skills necessary for long-term stability and success (Greeson et al., 2021).

In addition, social workers are instrumental in helping young adults secure employment by offering career counseling, connecting them with job training programs, and assisting with the job search process. Social workers facilitate access to educational opportunities, guiding young adults toward programs that fit their interests and abilities, including vocational training, college enrollment, or continuing education (Dworsky & Gitlow, 2020).

Furthermore, social workers make a significant impact in the development of life skills, such as financial literacy, communication, time management, and self-care (Blakeslee & Best, 2019). These skills are essential for young adults to navigate the complexities of adulthood independently. Social workers often conduct workshops, provide one-on-one coaching, and connect young adults with community resources that offer training in these areas.

Foster Parents. Foster parents assume a critical role in providing young adults with a secure and supportive home environment. As caregivers and mentors, they not only meet the immediate physical and emotional needs of these young adults but also contribute significantly to their long-term development and well-being (Blakeslee & Best, 2019; Leathers et al., 2019). Therefore, foster parents offer guidance, encouragement, and a sense of stability, which are

crucial during the formative years of adolescence and young adulthood. This mentorship is often key to helping foster youth develop the life skills, confidence, and resilience needed to navigate adulthood successfully.

The continued support of foster parents after a young adult transition to independent living can be especially vital (Blakeslee & Best, 2019; Salazar et al., 2020). Additionally, young adults leaving foster care face challenges such as housing instability, limited access to education or employment opportunities, and the absence of a reliable support system. Thus, foster parents who sustain relationships with young adults after transitioning out of the system care system can provide ongoing emotional support, advice, and practical assistance. This extension of support can help to mitigate the risks associated with the transition to independent living, such as homelessness or unemployment (Salazar et al., 2020).

In addition, foster parents also serve as a vital bridge to resources and services. They often help young adults connect with community resources, educational programs, and employment opportunities, ensuring that they have the tools necessary to thrive independently (Greeson et al., 2021; Okpych & Courtney, 2021). Of most importance is that the ongoing mentorship and support from foster parents can foster a sense of belonging and security, which is crucial for the successful transition to adulthood (Greeson et al., 2021).

Teachers. Teachers have the unique ability to offer academic support, encouragement, and motivation. Hence, a teacher's role often extends beyond the classroom, as they become mentors and advocates for students who are navigating the challenges in personal development and academic achievement (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019; Katz & Geiger, 2019). Oftentimes, teachers foster a supportive learning environment by assisting young adults develop critical

thinking skills, enhance self-confidence, and gain the motivation needed to pursue their educational goals (Hagenauer & Volet, 2020).

Frequently, teachers serve as mentors by providing personalized guidance and support catered to each student's individual needs and goals. Teachers can provide one-on-one mentorship, help students to set realistic life and educational goals, and offering advice on navigating higher education and career pathways. Thus, teachers also hold a crucial role in advocating for students, ensuring that they have access to necessary resources, such as tutoring, counseling services, and opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities (Gartland et al., 2019).

In many cases, teachers help bridge the gap between students and the broader educational system, guiding them through complex processes such as college applications, scholarship searches, and internship placements (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2020). Furthermore, the encouragement and belief that teachers instill in their students can be a powerful motivator, especially for those who are in foster care and lack support needed to excel (Wolley & Bowen, 2021). Research results show that positive relationships with teachers can lead to improved academic outcomes, higher levels of educational engagement, and greater resilience in the face of academic and personal challenges (Gartland et al., 2019; Hagenauer & Volet, 2020; Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2020).

Case Managers. Case managers often assist in the coordination of resources and services that are specifically designed to meet the unique requirements of young adults aging out of foster care. Case managers collaborate with social workers to create individualized transition plans, which are essential for addressing the specific needs and goals of each young adult (Cudjoe et al., 2022; Leathers et al., 2019). In terms of housing, case managers assist in securing stable,

affordable options, such as transitional housing programs or independent living arrangements. Salazar & Singer (2020) postulated that case managers often guide young adults through job search processes, connect them with job training programs, help them access employment services that can lead to long-term economic stability and provide educational support.

Case managers assist young adults with navigating the complexities of enrolling in higher education, accessing financial aid, and identifying scholarship opportunities (Blakeslee, 2020). Furthermore, case managers often ensure that young adults have access to healthcare services, including mental health support, by connecting them with community clinics, healthcare providers, and insurance programs (Salazar & Singer, 2020).

According to Osgood et al. (2021), the coordinated efforts of case managers are vital in ensuring that these young adults are not left to navigate the complexities of adulthood on their own. Case managers often help foster stability and resilience as young adults transition to independent living (Dworsky et al., 2019).

Mental Health Providers. Mental health providers offer counseling services and therapeutic interventions to treat stress, anxiety, depression, trauma, and other various psychological issues. They assist young adults with learning and implementing coping skill to manage their mental health and promote mental and emotional resilience (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019; Schelbe et al., 2024).

Therefore, mental health providers have a crucial role in providing support to young adults by offering counseling services and therapeutic interventions aimed at addressing a wide range of psychological issues. These issues including stress, anxiety, depression, and trauma. Young adults aging out of foster care often faces significant stressors as they navigate the transition to adulthood, which highlights the importance of having access to mental health

services (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019; Hollingworth et al., 2020). Mental health providers use evidence-based therapeutic approaches, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), trauma-informed care, and mindfulness practices, to help young adults manage their mental health challenges effectively (Lewis et al., 2019).

Lawrence et al. (2019) discussed that mental health providers are instrumental in helping young adults develop and implement coping skills that are essential for managing their mental health daily. By teaching strategies such as stress management techniques, emotional regulation, and healthy communication skills, mental health professionals empower young adults to navigate difficult situations more effectively (Lawrence, 2019). These coping skills not only help in managing acute mental health symptoms but also promote long-term mental and emotional resilience, enabling young adults to build the tools they need to thrive in various aspects of life.

Furthermore, mental health providers often collaborate with other support systems, such as social workers, case managers, and educators, to ensure a holistic approach to care. By addressing both the psychological and practical aspects of young adults' lives, they help foster a supportive environment that can significantly improve mental health outcomes (McGorry et al., 2021). This comprehensive support is essential for helping young adults not only cope with their current challenges but also develop resilience for the future.

Healthcare Providers. Healthcare providers deliver medical care to young adults to attend to their medical needs including preventative services as well as treatment for chronic medical conditions. They can offer information on health education and wellness (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019; Schelbe et al., 2024).

Therefore, healthcare providers play an important role in attending to the medical needs of young adults by delivering both preventative services and treatment for chronic medical

conditions (Park et al., 2020). According to Perrin et al. (2019), young adults face unique health challenges, such as navigating the shift from pediatric to adult healthcare, managing chronic illnesses, and maintaining overall wellness during this transitional stage. Thus, healthcare providers are essential in ensuring that young adults receive appropriate and timely medical care, including vaccinations, screenings, and regular check-ups that promote long-term health.

Preventative care is a vital aspect of healthcare for young adults, as it lays the foundation for healthy lifestyle habits that can reduce the risk of chronic diseases later in life (Perrin et al., 2019). Healthcare providers are concerned with the overall well-being of the young adults; therefore, they offer guidance on nutrition, exercise, and mental health. They often provide education on topics such as sexual health, substance use, and mental health, healthcare providers empower young adults to make informed decisions that promote wellness (Baldwin et al., 2021).

For young adults who managing chronic medical conditions, healthcare providers play a key role in offering treatment plans, monitoring health status, and providing education on self-management strategies (Lemly et al., 2019). The support provided by health care providers is crucial for maintaining a good quality of life and preventing complications. Additionally, healthcare providers help young adults understand the importance of regular medical care and how to navigate the healthcare system independently, which is essential as they transition to managing their own health (Perrin et al., 2019).

Mentors. Mentors provide direction, assistance, and serve as a positive role models. Thus, mentors also play a pivotal role in the lives of young adults. Through their mentorship, mentors provide young adults with the support needed to navigate the challenges of early adulthood, helping them cultivate self-confidence, set and achieve goals, and acquire the essential skills necessary for independent living (Leathers et al., 2023; Park et al., 2020). The

mentor-mentee relationship is often characterized by trust, encouragement, and a commitment to the young adult's personal and professional development.

Mentors assist young adults in building self-confidence by offering reassurance, constructive feedback, and encouragement. This support is particularly crucial during the transition to adulthood, a period marked by uncertainty and the need for decision-making (Greeson et al., 2021; Keller & Spencer, 2020). By modeling positive behaviors and sharing their own experiences, mentors help young adults develop a sense of self-efficacy, which is essential for facing challenges and overcoming obstacles.

In addition to boosting self-confidence, mentors play a significant role in helping young adults set and achieve their goals. This guidance can range from educational and career planning to personal growth and skill development. Mentors often provide practical advice on how to break down larger goals into manageable steps, offer accountability, and celebrate achievements along the way. This structured support can make a significant difference in helping young adults stay focused and motivated as they pursue their aspirations (Greeson et al., 2021).

Furthermore, mentors assist young adults in acquiring the skills necessary for independent living. These skills may include financial literacy, time management, effective communication, and problem-solving. By providing hands-on guidance and connecting young adults with resources, mentors ensure that their mentees are equipped with the practical tools needed to succeed independently. This mentorship can be especially valuable for young adults who lack strong family support systems or who are transitioning out of environments such as foster care or juvenile services (Roposa et al., 2019.)

Consequently, each of these social support personnel plays a vital role in assisting transitioning young adults with navigating the challenges they will face on their journey to

becoming independent adults. These social support personnel have the responsibility to provide emotional support and ensure young adults have access to necessary services (Blakeslee & Best, 2019; Hokanson et al., 2019).

Young Black Women

There were no available information concerning the transitional needs of young Black women. However, there were limited informative studies conducted on the disproportionate number of Black children in the foster care system. For instance, Kennedy et al. (2023) examined the racial differences in the welfare of youth both before and after their involvement in foster care. The authors conducted an analysis of 70 articles and 392 effect sizes to gather outcome data pertaining to racial disparities. Kennedy et al. (2023) conducted a meta-regression study using robust variance estimation (RVE) to calculate effects on four racial group comparisons across six domains. They reported no evidence of significant differences by race or ethnicity was found for educational achievement, high-risk and externalizing behavior, or justice system involvement. Results showed that Black foster care impacted persons (FCIPs) had a 20% lower chance of part-time or full-time employment or significant wages compared to White FCIPs. Additionally, Black FCIPs had 18% lower chances of experiencing mental health issues, to include accepting symptoms, mental health diagnosis, or participating in mental health treatment services in comparison to White FCIPs, and 16% lower chances of experiencing mental health issues when compared to non-Black FCIPs. However, Black FCIPs have 10% higher odds of experiencing homelessness than their Hispanic FCIPs. Kennedy et al. (2023) concluded that the negative outcomes for Black FCIPs minors are more pronounced compared to White FCIPs for minors who have left foster care. The authors admonished that it was important to note their conclusion was based on a limited number of studies (Kennedy et al. (2023)).

In a similar a study, Watt and Kim (2019) used the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) to conduct a longitudinal study of young adults out of foster care in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico to examine the education attainment, employment, homelessness and incarceration for White, African American, Hispanic and American Indian/Alaska Native youth exiting the child welfare system. The authors surveyed 9342 young adults at 17, 19, and 21 years old. Further participants represented in the study were composed of 44% White, 31% African American, 16.6% Hispanic, 1.7% were American Indian/Alaskan Native and 6.7% all other races. Results revealed that African American youth exiting the child welfare system are 36% more likely to enroll in higher education than their White counterparts, however, they are less likely to attain employment. However, 64% American Indian/Alaskan Native youth exiting the child welfare system are more likely to report having been incarcerated than African Americans. But African American youth exiting the child welfare system are five times more likely to be incarcerated than White young adults exiting foster care. Most importantly, the authors reported that Black young adults received the least of different types of services (Kim & Watt, 2019).

Harp and Bunting (2020) reported the rate of imprisonment for Black women who were in foster care, specifically in relation to substance use, surpasses that of Black men and the general prison population. The authors focused on pregnant Black women who transition out of foster care and reengage with the foster care system once their child is born. Harp and Bunting (2020) discussed that women of all races have similar rates of drug use during pregnancy, however Black women face more intense scrutiny and are subject to harsher punishments for substance use as compared to their White counterparts. According to the authors, Black women had a higher likelihood of receiving drug screens during pregnancy and were frequently tested

for substances following delivery. Thus, Black women face more severe consequences if their drug tests were positive, such as having their newborns placed in foster care immediately after birth. Consequently, this action propels Black women back into the foster care system (Harp & Bunting, 2020).

Although, the above research articles highlighted the racial disparity across several ethnicities, they did not focus specifically on needs of young Black women emerging from the foster care system. My proposed study investigated how the social support needs of young Black women were matched with their perceived needs.

Summary

In Chapter 2, I focused on exploring previous and existing research studies as a form of literature review to focus on investigating various aspects of social supports needs and support systems available to young adults transitioning out of the foster care system. I exercised due diligence to attain a better understanding of the lack of social support, education achievement, employment and financial stability, and housing and homelessness, and stakeholder involvement were reviewed (Harp & Bunting, 2020; Kim & Watt, 2019).

Lastly, I reviewed information concerning the disparity and over representation of Black youth in the foster care system (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021; Cudjoe et al., 2022; Farmer et al., 2021; Narendorf et al., 2021; Verulava & Dangadze, 2021). Due to the impact of social support on the successful transitioning of young adults from foster care, the topic has driven an increase in research. The North Carolina Child Welfare Requirement 8 has outlined the tenants of social support need requirements for young adults to transitioning out of foster care.

Some of the influences of social support on young women who are transitioning out of the foster care system in North Carolina are stakeholders and programs that follow the guidelines

presented in the NC Child Welfare requirement to help facilitate better employment opportunities, attain higher education or trade school, and obtain stable housing to prevent homelessness, mental and medical assistance. Providing young adults with the accurate social support plays a crucial role in helping young adults transition successfully.

Stakeholders are professionals and familial support who are equipped to assist the young adults with obtaining the social support services that best match their needs. The stakeholders are part of the young adults' support network and include a varying group of people. These stakeholders are invested in the young adults relationally and can influence them. Applying the OMT will assist the stakeholders with matching young adults with the support services that best fit their perceived needs to ensure their successful transition.

In Chapter 3, I presented justification for employing qualitative method and qualitative exploratory single case study for the suggested research investigation. Furthermore, I expounded on the selection of the study participants and attainment of the North Carolina Child Welfare transitioning from foster care documentation for evaluation. I discussed the coding process to include the use of the NVivo software to assist with analyzing and synthesizing the interview responses (Yin, 2018).

In addition, I provided the ethical values of justice, beneficence, and respect for participants' autonomy that would serve as the guiding principles for the proposed study. In Chapter 3, I detailed the necessary steps needed to obtain NU-IRB permission to move forward with the study. Next, conducting the study enabled me to acquire a wealth of data for analysis and results in Chapter 4. Lastly, the implications of the study, recommendations for practice and future research, and the conclusion from the study was discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Young adults transitioning out of the foster care system face various difficulties, including unemployment and limited financial resources, homelessness and the struggle to find stable housing, imprisonment, limited access to higher education, and increased mental health issues (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021; Hernandez & Jaegoo, 2020; Lee et al., 2022; Liu, 2020; Narendorf, 2021). Furthermore, existing research has highlighted that young Black women who transition out of the foster care system have greater social support deficit when compared to young adults of other ethnicities (Blocker, 2021; Kennedy et al., 2023; Watt & Kim, 2019).

Although a variety of social support services are available to young adults who are transitioning out of the foster care system, not all young adults are optimally matched with the services needed to facilitate transition to independent living (ACFCB, 2021). The problem addressed in this study is the appropriate matching of social support services to the perceived needs of young Black women while transitioning out of the foster care system. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single case study conceptual replication was to determine whether the social support services received by young Black women were effectively matched to their perceived social support needs when transitioning out of the NC foster care system to independent living.

Stakeholders such as social workers, mental health providers, case managers, transitional counselors, primary care providers, educators, foster parents, and house parents have the unique opportunity to serve young adults who are transitioning out of the foster care system. However, stakeholders may face obstacles related to providing effective support services to young Black women who are overrepresented in the foster care system (Cénat et al., 2021). Researchers have become aware of some the obstacles faced by stakeholders when addressing the social needs of

this disproportionate population and require matching young Black women to specific social supports to adequately meet their needs pertaining to housing, employment, education, and mental health (Rosenberg & Kim, 2018; Watt & Kim, 2019). Additionally, Packard and Benuto (2020) highlighted the benefits of using the OMT to optimally match transitioning young adults with the supports systems needed to meet their needs. Therefore, this study conceptually replicate Packard and Benuto's (2020) study in NC to explore the extent to which the social support services young Black women received aligned with their perceived social support needs during their transition out of the foster care system to living independently.

In the opening of Chapter 3, I introduced the problem that was addressed throughout the chapter. Henceforth, I discussed the methodology and design for the proposed research study. I provided a rationale for appropriateness of using qualitative methodology and exploratory single case study design for the study. Additionally in this chapter, I focused on describing and discussing the research population and sample selection, obtaining North Carolina's foster care transitioning documentation, materials and instruments that was used, the recruitment strategy, and defining the operational variables. I discussed the study procedures to include the data source, data collection, data analysis, and management of data. I reviewed the trustworthiness of the proposed research study, along with its assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. I addressed all ethical considerations by obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection and by outlining the potential risks associated with participation in the research study. Finally, I provided a summary of Chapter 3 which led to the data analysis and results in Chapter 4.

Research Methodology and Design

In keeping with the original study by Parker and Benuto (2020) that this study was

conceptually replicating, a qualitative research methodology and an exploratory case study design was used to investigate the problem in the proposed study. Qualitative research allows researchers to obtain a comprehensive knowledge of concepts by taking a holistic, inductive, and investigative approach to the interpretation of concepts through the participants' shared experiences, dialogue, and close observation of actions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Pratt, 2022; Yin, 2018).

Conversely, quantitative research does not facilitate the researcher's aim to gather a thorough and accurate depiction of participants' personal experiences, as the data in quantitative research is represented by numbers and not descriptive accounts (Castell et al., 2022; Silverman, 2018, Zilber & Meyer, 2022). Furthermore, quantitative research emphasizes enumerating observations and evaluating hypotheses using statistical tools to examine ideas rather than exploring the quality of participants' experiences (Chalmers & Cowdell, 2021; Zyphur & Pierides, 2020). As a result, researchers interested in conducting quantitative studies are concerned with establishing facts and creating predictions using confirmatory methods (Bansal, 2018).

It is noteworthy that qualitative research allows for a complete understanding of how people may interpret their experiences, leading to the meaning they attribute to their social realities (Köhler et al., 2022). I intend to explore the complexity of the social supports provided to the young Black women to capture the participants' meaning and interpretation of their experiences. Therefore, it is appropriate to use a qualitative methodology to conduct the proposed research study, as such an approach opens the door to using a case study design. Furthermore, a qualitative methodology and an exploratory case study design are well-suited for investigating the social support needs of young Black women who are transitioning from foster

care to independent living.

Qualitative research allows researchers to employ a variety of designs to investigate constructs (Cohen et al., 2017). Qualitative research designs may include grounded theory, ethnography, case studies, narrative inquiry, and phenomenological designs (Ahlstedt et al., 2020; Kekeya, 2021; Kennedy et al., 2022; Larsen, 2023; Silverman, 2018, Yin, 2018).

Therefore, it is advantageous to select the most appropriate design for the proposed study. Due to the nature of the proposed research, a grounded theory approach was not be appropriate for the study because I am not actively seeking to develop theories at the end of the study (Silverman, 2018).

Likewise, an ethnographic approach was not be appropriate for this study, as ethnographic investigations seek to recapture the historical context and cultural essence of ideas, people, and events to inform the present (Ahlstedt et al., 2020). Similarly, a phenomenological approach was not be appropriate for the proposed study, as it is an approach that seeks a deep understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions (Cypress, 2017; Howard et al., 2019; Larsen, 2023). Finally, a narrative inquiry design was not be appropriate because a narrative approach emphasizes shared stories to develop cohesive narratives or stories that recount or explain life occurrences (Kennedy et al., 2022).

I used a case study design to conduct my research. A case study is described as an empirical investigation of a case (the phenomenon) and addresses the how, why, and what of the case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Additionally, the case study is viewed as a bounded system and is bounded by events over specific periods of time and space. The bounded system can be defined as boundaries that surround a case, which contains the who, what, and when of the phenomenon being studied; this may be a business, program, society, or

people (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Moreover, a case study can be categorized into three separate classifications: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory types, depending on the topic of the study (Yin, 2018).

In addition, within the case study definitions provided by Merriam (1988), Stake (1995), and Yin (2018), it must be noted that a case study design does not merely describe the activities taking place within the bounded system but also takes into consideration the effectiveness of the phenomenon under investigation. It is important to highlight that case study research is abductive, meaning it is both inductive and deductive, distinguishing the case study from other qualitative approaches (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Furthermore, case studies were initially designed to evaluate the effectiveness of programs, interventions, and policies in situations where quantitative research was impractical or unethical (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Therefore, case study research incorporates an aspect of Popper's falsification method, in which a deliberate confrontation is choreographed between the theoretical framework and the actuality of the bounded system in an abductive manner (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Priya, 2020).

An example is provided to better understand Popper's falsification methods. If a local high school were to purport that all 12th grade students graduate with honors, but upon investigation two students in said high school did not graduate with honors, then the theory that all 12th grade students graduate with honors was falsified. However, effectively disproving all 12th grade students graduate with honors does not mean the theory is completely false; but rather, the case study discovered an additional finding. As a result, the case study not only describes the student's diverse graduation status, but also contributes to the refinement of the theory that all 12th grade students graduate with honors. The new theory would now propose that

most 12th grade students graduate with honors, but some do not.

Considering the above description and example, a case study design is an appropriate design for my research, as I investigated the social support needs of young Black women who are transitioning out of the foster care system. Additionally, a bounded system, defined as young Black women, stakeholders, and NCDHHS documentations on how the social supports services provided to emerging young adults, informed my case study.

Hence, a qualitative exploratory case study design is the best fit for the proposed study, as it offered valuable insights into the effectiveness of the optimal matching of young Black women with appropriate social support services on their successful transition to independent living when exiting the foster care system. Furthermore, the use of an abductive research approach assisted me in challenging the OMT theory and the actual support services young Black women were matched with while transitioning to independent living.

Population and Sample

The bounded system in the presenting qualitative, exploratory case study consisted of the following target population: (a) young Black women that have transitioned out of the foster care system to independent living in Eastern NC; (b) stakeholders including social workers, mental health providers, case managers, transitional counselors, primary care provides, foster parents, and house parents; and (c) NCDHHS documentations which outlined the process for young adults who are transitioning out of foster care. I emailed the recruitment flyers to a local counseling center in NC. The counseling center emailed the recruitment flyers to foster group homes and stakeholders. Stakeholders emailed the recruitment flyers to young Black women who transitioned out of the foster care system. I obtained the North Carolina Child Welfare 2020–2024 Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan documentation.

I used purposive and convenience sampling to obtain participants to conduct the research. Purposive sampling or subjective sampling is a technique that allows for researchers to rely on their own discretion using the inclusionary and exclusionary criteria when selecting a population of individuals to participate in studies (Campbell et al., 2020; Cash, 2022). Additionally, convenience sampling, also known as availability sampling, is a technique in which researchers select samples based chiefly on their accessibility (Bhardwaj, 2019). Consequently, I used convenience and purposive sampling to obtain participants, as it provided me with access to this vulnerable population and the ability to select participants that met the criteria for my proposed research.

I used a flyer to recruit six to 12 young Black women between 18 to 25 years old who were in a foster and group home and received social support when aging out of the foster care system in NC. I also used a flyer to recruit six to 12 stakeholders who supported provided social support to the transitioning young Black women. Additionally, I downloaded the North Carolina Child Welfare 2020–2024 Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan from the NCDHHS from their website. I emailed flyers to the foster group home directors and independent stakeholders, which provided me with access to the young Black women who transitioned out of the foster care system.

In summary, employing purposive and convenience sampling to obtain participants for my proposed study provided me access to a hard-to-reach population. Thus, this provided me with the ability to attain the minimum required sample size of six to 12 participants and ensure saturation when collecting data (Daniel, 2019).

Instrumentation

Several methods were used to facilitate data collection, to include individual interviews

with six to 12 young Black adult females, individual interviews with six to 12 with stakeholders, participant observations, and the North Carolina Child Welfare 2020-2024 Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan and the State of North Carolina Independent Living Services for Foster Children documentation. According to Yin (2018) exploratory case study interview questions should answer the “how” and “why” of the research. I constructed nine open-ended questions for each group of participants: the young Black women and the stakeholders.

The use of semi-structured, open-ended interview questions correlated with the research questions, to yield in-depth, textually rich material that helped produce data saturation (Alam, 2021). These semi-structured, open-ended interview questions addressed how social supports services provided to young Black women match their perceived needs, how young Black women who transitioned from foster care describe their social support needs to stakeholders, and how stakeholders determine the social support needs of young Black women who were transitioning out of foster care.

Furthermore, I asked two expert reviewers to evaluate and approve the data collection instrument, composed of 18 open-ended questions, which correlates to the study's research questions. The expert reviewers were professional individuals who reviewed the content of the interview questions to verify that the data collection instrument is appropriate, relevant, valid, and reliable to conduct the study. In addition, the expert reviewers validated that the content of the interview questions aligns with the study's research questions.

Study Procedures

Step 1

I emailed a recruitment flyer to the director of a local counseling center. The Clinical Director of the local counseling center emailed the recruitment flyer to the stakeholders (social

workers, mental health providers, case managers, transitional counselors, primary care providers, educators, foster parents, and house parents). The stakeholders forwarded a second recruitment flyer to the young Black women whom they serviced and that are potential participants.

Secondly, I obtained the document: North Carolina Child Welfare 2020-2024 Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan of the social support service for young adults who are transitioning out of foster care from the NCDHHS website.

Step 2

The recruitment flyers contained my contact information to allow potential participants to contact me directly if they would like to participate in the research. Once I received emails from potential participants, I contacted them and use a recruiting script to describe my research study to solicit their participation. Potential participants who were interested in participating in the research study were then screened to ensure they were appropriate for the study. I recruited four young Black women between 18 to 25 years old who received social support when they were aging out of foster care. I recruited nine stakeholders who supported the young Black women as they transitioned from care.

Step 3

Once the participants were selected, I scheduled a one-on-one interview session with each participant at their convenience. Each participant and I agreed on a time to meet virtually via Doxy.me. I assigned each participant a pseudonym, of their choice, to protect their identity.

Research Data Sources

Research Data Source 1

The first data source for the proposed research study included a 60-minute interviews with young Black women during which participants gave verbal consent. During the interviews,

I discussed the protocol with the participants while emphasizing topics such as confidentiality, voluntary involvement, and the ethical considerations associated with research studies. The participants were assigned a pseudonym of their choice to safeguard their identity. I focused on obtaining information about the participants' experience with how well their social support needs were met when exiting the foster care system. These individual one-on-one interviews were conducted via telecommunication using doxy.me. The ability to view participants was important in order to observe their actions, reactions, and associated behaviors to questions during the interviews. However, there were technical difficulties at with viewing participants. During those times, voice inflection and pitch as well as pauses were noted.

Research Data Source 2

During the second source of data collection for this study, I conducted individual one-to-one interviews with stakeholders, in which participants took part in a 60-minute interview using open-ended questions. The participants were assigned a pseudonym of their choice to safeguard their identity. The individual interviews allowed me to focus on obtaining the experiences of each participant and capturing vast amounts of data from each interview (Pagliarin et al., 2023). The use of open-ended questions facilitated conversations regarding the participants' experiences with social support needs of the young Black woman. These individual one-on-one interviews were conducted virtually using doxy.me to facilitate observation of reactions. The interviews were recorded for transcription.

Research Data Source 3

The third source of data collection for this study was the North Carolina Child Welfare 2020-2024 Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan and the State of North Carolina Independent Living Services for Foster Children (NCDHHS, 2024; NCDHHS, n.d.). The North

Carolina Child Welfare 2020-2024 Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan outlines the seven objects that detail the State's expectation for young adults aging out to foster care (NCDHHS, 2024). State of North Carolina Independent Living Services for Foster Children outlines the programs available to assist the young adults with transitioning to independent living as they exit the foster care system (NCDHHS, n.d.). These documents provided a basis for the processes in place for young adults exiting from the foster care system and provided me with valuable data that afforded answers to my research questions (Amin et al., 2024).

Additional Data Sources

Additional Data Source 1

In the third and last step, I conducted a member check with the participants by asking them to participate in 15-minutes review of their transcript summary. Using the concept of member checks ensures that researchers offer accurate representations of the participants during data processing (DeCino & Waalkes, 2019). In addition, I employed member checking to confirm that that I accurately reflected all the participants' perceptions concerning the social support needs of young Black women exiting out of the foster care system.

Additional Data Source 2

I collected an additional data source in the form of demographic information, including age, gender, ethnicity of participants, both stakeholders and the young Black women. The collection of personal information adhered to strict confidentiality protocols. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their personally identifiable information (PII) and ensure anonymity throughout the research process. Furthermore, I discussed the informed consent and confidentiality with the participants, which are mandated by laws that govern participation in research studies (Oye et al., 2019). I justified the collection of demographic data by

acknowledging that such information may shed light on the impact demographics may have on information provided by participants.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process was completed in multiple steps. These steps facilitated manual and electronic organization of the data collected. Additionally, the outlined steps facilitated systematic coding and categorizing of the analyzed data. The data analysis process for the proposed study was in concert with Yin's (2011) five phases to data analysis.

Step 1: Compiling Data

I compiled the data sources to include interviews, journals, and documents. I transcribed all the recordings systematically. Then, I read all the transcripts to identify and remove any errors. I also remove any repetitive statements, organizing recurring ideas, feelings, and thoughts into themes using quotes made by the young Black women, the stakeholders, and information from the NCDHHS documents. I bracketed and suspend my insight on the social support needs of emerging young adults, which helped me be objective and non-biased in the study (Charron & Singh, 2022).

Step 2: Disassembling Data

In this step, I sorted and coded the data while paying close attention to themes and responses to that informed my research questions. I segmented the data into smaller sections by being attentive to similarities and contrasts in responses to remain open to all the possibilities the data could bring. Using manual analysis of the data can afford me numerous opportunities to become closely acquainted with the data and to learn how to interpret the data by forming a close relationship with the responses provided by the participants (Roberts et al., 2019). I also used NVivo to import the data from multiple sources, as well as to store the recordings and

handwritten notes. Importing the data assisted me with transcribing, organizing, and coding the acquired data. This process allowed for the elimination of irrelevant and recurring statements, which assisted with data saturation.

Step 3: Reassembling Data

In this step, I analyzed the data using the theoretical proposition regarding the OMT, that social supports provided to young Black women matched their perceived needs. Data analysis consisted of context analyzing, pattern analysis, comparison, and rival explanation (Alam, 2021). Context analyzing was used to retrieve relevant details about the data collected (Yadav, 2022). Pattern analysis was used to discover patterns that match or rival the OMT (Nassaji, 2020).

Comparison was used to allow for comparing and contrasting the data to identify patterns and differences (Alam, 2021). Negative instances were used to discover outliers or the data that does not align to the emerging patterns (Johnson et al., 2020). Rival explanations were used to explain the rival patterns that did not match the theory (Priya, 2021). Using these steps to analyze data challenged, supported, or created new themes regarding the phenomenon being studied, the optimal matching of young Black women perceived needs to the appropriate social support services. These analysis steps provided rich data that answered the research questions to identify the needs and the need for continued investigations on the effectiveness of optimally matching these young adults.

Step 4: Interpretating

In this step, I employed empirical accuracy, fairness, value-added, credibility, description, and visual displays to interpret the data analysis outcome. Empirical accuracy relies on verifiable observable facts and aims at reaching conclusions that are based on the truth, thus eliminating personal biases from the study, and relying on real-world findings to draw

conclusions (Guest et al., 2020). Empirical Fairness entails using data in a manner that avoids the creation or reinforcement of bias and has the potential to be advantageous, enhancing our behavior towards others (Coleman, 2021). Value-added analysis is a method that enhances the value of knowledge generated by going beyond the superficial interpretations of data and can be used to generate new knowledge (Eakin & Gladstone, 2020).

Credibility in qualitative research refers to the level of confidence that may be attributed to the accuracy and truthfulness of the study findings (Kakar et al., 2023). Thus, member-checking is a crucial factor to clarify that participants' responses are accurate to ensure that the data presented is credible (Motulsky, 2021). Case analysis, a qualitative description refers to a comprehensive and full description of the bounded system which is constrained by the event, time, and space (Alam, 2021). Visual displays refer to the visual depiction of the data and can be represented by visualization tools such as charts, graphs, and maps to present data in a manner that is easily comprehended (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021).

Step 5: Concluding

In this step, I described future research, new concepts, substantive propositions, and contribution to the body of literature. Future research refers to the systematic investigation of potential future advancements, design alternatives, and what is required for their realization (Alam, 2021). Concepts facilitate recognizing patterns and themes in data, utilized to establish categories and enabling researchers to understand the collected material. New concepts serve as the fundamental elements for the creation of theory (Johnson et al., 2020). Substantive propositions are significant declarative assertions that serve to focus attention on the specific phenomenon that needs to be researched (García-Carpintero, 2021). The body of literature encompasses all scholarly works that investigate comparable research topics or concepts.

Additions to the body of literature requires research to be of high quality and adherence to the same rigorous standards as primary research in terms of rigor, clarity, and replication (Wood et al., 2020).

In summary, utilizing Yin's (2011) five steps to research analysis: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding assisted me with analyzing my research data using theoretical proposal that young Black women were optimally matched to their perceived social supports needs. Using that proposition as my guide, I was able to categorize the data into themes and code while focusing on responses that informed my research questions. I analyzed and interpreted the data while addressing rival patterns that did not fit my theoretical proposition. Finally, I discussed future research, new concepts that arose, and add my findings to the body of literature.

Assumptions

Assumptions are a distinctive characteristic of qualitative research. Assumptions exist when the focus of research is human participants and their perspectives (Tuthill et al., 2020). Researchers must acknowledge and account for assumptions in their studies (Durkin et al., 2020). My intent in the qualitative, exploratory case study conceptual replication research was to explore if young Black women perceived needs were optimally matched with appropriate social support systems while transitioning out of the NC foster care system to independent living. The following were assumed for the study:

- It is assumed that the participants are transitioned out of the foster care system as young adults.
- It is assumed that stakeholders assisted participants with social support needs when transitioning out of the foster care system.

- It was assumed that the participants responded openly and honestly during individual interviews without any concerns about confidentiality during interviews. I addressed confidentiality with the participants during the interview process by reviewing the ethical principles that guided the study.
- It was assumed that participants (young Black women) willingly provided thoughts and feelings regarding their experiences with transitioning out of the foster care system. The rationale for the assumption was driven by an expectation that the participants agreed to respond to the interview questions without coercion or pressure from the researcher.
- It was assumed that participants (stakeholders) willing provided thoughts and feelings regarding their experiences with assisting young Black women who transitioned out of the foster care system to independent living.

Limitations

Limitations are an inherent part of the design and methodology researchers utilize for research investigations and are often out of the control of researchers (Meißner et al., 2023). In general, the researchers in qualitative, case studies focus on a specific case using the bonded system and not on the quantity of experiences. Consequently, qualitative researchers are aware of the limitation of transferability inherent to the small number of participants and the nature of the study (Munthe-Kaas et al., 2019). Generally, findings of studies conducted via qualitative research are intended for specific population segments and may affect the potential transferability of research results to the general population of young adults transitioning out of the foster care system (Ferrando et al., 2019). I anticipate the following limitations:

Limitations of Sample Size

The sample size in the proposed study consisted of 12 to 24 participants in total. A small

sample may affect reproducing and generalizing of the proposed research study. To date, experts are not clear as to the ideal sample size needed for qualitative research (Alam, 2021).

Limitations of Self-Reported Data

Participants in the proposed study participated in in-depth individual interviews. Both the stakeholders and young Black women provided information from their perspectives which is considered self-reported and was hard to authenticate (Meißner et al., 2023). Bias may color the participants' experiences in the form of selective memory, exaggeration, or attribution, as they recount their experiences with the support system provided and received as young Black women while transitioning out of the foster care system.

Limitations of Sampling Strategy

Convenience sampling and purposive sampling. I used convenience and purposive sampling to recruit participants for the proposed research study due to accessibility reasons. A total sample of four young Black women and nine stakeholders were recruited from local Counseling Center. Convenience sampling is based on obtaining conveniently accessible participants and may potentially be biased (Bhardwaj, 2019; Scholtz, 2021).

Purposive or non-random sampling was also used to obtain participants who meet the criteria to inform the phenomenon of interest. Participants in the proposed study was recruited specifically due to their interaction with social support services as young Black women when transitioning out of the foster care system. Purposive sampling may potentially be prone to researcher bias because participants were chosen specifically for being subject matter experts (Campbell et al., 2020). I used convenience and purposive sampling to recruit participants from the Counseling Center located in NC.

Delimitations

Researchers use delimitation to deliberately choose boundaries to help define the scope of their research. Delimitations in research studies are often guided by the inclusionary and exclusionary criteria established by the limitations of the investigators of the studies (Sperling, 2022). I used the following delimitation in the presenting study:

- Convenience and purposive sampling were used to recruit the participants using the inclusionary and exclusionary criteria. Using convenience and purposive sampling ensured that the participants are a good fit for the study.
- The stakeholders included social workers, mental health providers, case managers, transitional counselors, educators, and house parents.
- Young Black women who transitioned out of the social care system to independent living.

Ethical Assurances

Before collecting data for this investigation, I obtained approval from the National University Institutional Review Board (IRB). In addition, I followed federal regulations to safeguard human research participants, as required in the Code of Federal Regulation (CFR), Title 45, Part 46, to ensure that participants' anonymity and well-being are followed throughout the research (USDHHS, 2021). Ethics in human research consist of fundamental principles of respect, beneficence, and justice, which are vital concerns when interacting with participants during the research (Peled-Raz et al., 2021). Therefore, researchers are responsible for addressing ethical considerations when conducting investigations to maintain confidentiality, respect for participants and research sites, and be transparent when reporting research results (Kapiszewski & Wood, 2021).

I respected participants by acknowledging their choice to participate in the research and

safeguarding their anonymity (Ibbett & Brittain, 2020). Per ethical guidelines, the participants were asked to verbally agree to an informed consent detailing the purpose of the study and the steps that were taken to preserve their identity. In addition, I discussed discretion and maintaining confidentiality of identity when sharing research results.

To protect the participants' confidentiality, I assigned each participant a pseudonym of their choice. In addition, I safeguarded the research data by encrypting it on a password-protected desktop, home computer, which was used for this study and accessible only to me. Furthermore, I placed all written research notes in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Lastly, I ensured that the data and notes are safeguarded for the next three years.

Researchers are responsible for the participants' do-no-harm by protecting the participants and the research site from potential harm (Favaretto et al., 2020; Storrod, 2023). In the study, I exercised beneficence by disclosing the study's goal and the risks and benefits associated with participation in the study to the participants. I also informed the participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any adverse consequences. I was respectful and courteous to the participants as I asked the interview questions.

Summary

In Chapter 3, the purpose of the qualitative exploratory single case study conceptual replication to explore the optimal matching of young Black women needs with the appropriate social support service while transitioning out of the foster care system to independent living was reiterated. I restated the problem statement, provided the research problem's background, and reviewed the research questions that helped answer the research problem. I provided a rationale for using qualitative methodology and qualitative exploratory single case study for the proposed research study. In addition, I discussed obtaining the research sample by using convenience and

purposive sampling to select the participants.

Additionally, I discussed recruitment of participants and obtaining the documentation that will be reviewed. I reiterated using multiple data sources using individual interviews and documentation outlining the procedure for transitioning out of the foster care system. Finally, I offered a detailed depiction of the data collection process and management, as well as the use of horizontalization, coding system: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding, and NVivo to analyze, synthesize, decode, and encode participants' interview responses (Yin, 2018).

Furthermore, I elaborated on the ethical principles of justice, beneficence, and respect for participants' autonomy that guided the study. I stressed the importance of obtaining NU IRB approval before recruiting participants and collecting data. Finally, I discussed using assumptions and delimitation to narrow the scope of research for better control and manageability. Chapter 3 provides fundamental information that guided me to systematically conduct the proposed research study following NU IRB approval to obtain rich data for analysis and results in Chapter 4. Lastly, in Chapter 5, the implications, recommendations for practice and future research, as well as the conclusion was discussed.

Chapter 4: Findings

Young adults exiting the foster care system encounter numerous challenges to include unemployment and inadequate financial resources, homelessness and the difficulty of securing stable housing, incarceration, restricted access to higher education, and heightened mental health concerns (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021; Hernandez & Jaegoo, 2020; Lee et al., 2022; Liu, 2020; Narendorf, 2021). Moreover, current studies indicate that young Black women exiting the foster care system experience a more significant social support deficit relative to young adults of different ethnic backgrounds (Blocker, 2021; Kennedy et al., 2023; Watt & Kim, 2019).

Despite the availability of several social support services for young adults migrating from the foster care system, not all individuals are effectively aligned with the necessary resources to aid their transition to independent life (ACFCB, 2021). The problem addressed in this study is the appropriate matching of social support services to the perceived needs of young Black women while transitioning out of the foster care system. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single case study conceptual replication was to determine whether the social support services received by young Black women were effectively matched to their perceived social support needs when transitioning out of the NC foster care system to independent living.

This chapter describes the results and assessment of the findings of the study organized according to the research questions. The participants responses were analyzed, compared, and contrasted by using Yin's (2011) five phase to data analysis of compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting and concluding (See Figure 2). The themes identified were derived from the young Black women participants and stakeholder participants response and were compared and contrasted to each other as well as to the NC Child Welfare 2020-2024 Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan Requirement 8 document.

The study was guided by the following research questions: RQ: How did the social support services provided to young Black women match their perceived needs? RQa: How did young Black women transitioning from foster care describe their social support needs to stakeholders? RQb: How did stakeholders determine the social support needs of young Black women transitioning out of foster care?

Demographic and Characteristic Information

Participant Recruitment

I recruited two groups of participants for this case study using purposive or availability sampling (Campbell et al., 2020; Cash, 2022). The first group of participants were young Black women between the ages of 18 to 25-year-old. Each participant was asked to provide history on their participation in the foster care system and the length they have been in foster care. The second group of participants were stakeholders from a variety of settings. This participant group was asked about their profession, length of time working with foster care and how they served young Black women who were transitioning out of foster care.

I encountered several challenges during the recruitment phase of the study, particularly in securing participation from young Black women who had transitioned out of the North Carolina foster care system. Initially, three to four individuals expressed interest in participating; however, despite multiple follow-up attempts via email and phone, they did not respond or follow through with the consent process. As a result, the final sample included four young Black women, all of whom were recruited from the same transitional group home. Because all participants shared a similar living environment and potentially similar support services, their experiences may not fully represent the diverse realities of young Black women aging out of foster care across different settings, such as foster homes or other foster group homes.

Out of the four participating young Black women, two participants were 20 years old, one was 19 years old, and one was 18 years old. Of note two of the participants had a child each. The participants voluntarily participated in the and received a \$30 gift card as compensation for their participation. The gift card was provided by the Counseling Center, the sponsoring site. All the Black women participants met the inclusion criteria for participation in the study (See Table 3).

Table 3

Young Black Women Demographics and Characteristics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Years in Foster Care	Aged out of Foster Care
Jada	Female	20	Black	4	Yes
Kayla	Female	18	Black	2	Yes
Naphia	Female	20	Black	6	Yes
Nova	Female	19	Black	5	Yes

Contrarily, recruiting the stakeholder participants was less challenging. Several of the initial stakeholders did not meet the inclusionary criteria and were unable to participate. I was able to accept nine stakeholders who met the inclusion criteria (See Table 4).

Table 4*Stakeholder Demographics and Characteristics*

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Credentials	Experience	Employed in NC	Provided Services to YBW
Angel	Female	White	Human Trafficking Group Home Case Manager	12 years	Yes	Yes
Beans	Female	White	School Administrator	4 years	Yes	Yes
Debbie	Female	White	Principal K-12	20 years	Yes	Yes
Dee	Female	Black	Licensed Social Worker	20 years	Yes	Yes
Eagle	Female	Black	Transitional Counselor	24 years	Yes	Yes
Jennifer	Female	White	Licensed Mental Health Counselor	3 years	Yes	Yes
Kevin	Male	White	Youth Villages Regional Supervisor	11 years	Yes	Yes
Melissa	Female	White	Youth Villages LifeSet Clinical Supervisor	4.5 years	Yes	Yes
Mirissa	Female	White	Group Home Houseparent	1.5 years	Yes	Yes

Of the nine participating stakeholders, eight were female and one was a male. Further, two stakeholders were Black and seven were White. The stakeholders were obtained via purposeful sampling and were accepted on a first come basis. The stakeholder all worked in North Carolina and were of varying careers such as counselors, administrators, supervisors, and houseparents; with experience ranging from 1.5 to 24 years. Each participant was asked about their experience with young Black women who were aging out of the foster care system, they employment, credentials, experiences, and length in their field.

My dissertation study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards to safeguard the rights and dignity of all participants. Prior to data collection, I thoroughly reviewed the

informed consent form with each participant, clearly detailing the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and their rights as research participants. I assured the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. To protect their privacy, each participant was assigned a pseudonym, which was used throughout the research process and in all written documents, thereby ensuring strict confidentiality and anonymity.

Data Collection Procedures

I used the 18 open-ended questions, nine questions each the young Black women participants and the stakeholder participants, to maintain the flow of the interview. All the participants engaged in the interview virtually. The questions allowed the participants to respond and freely present their views. The interview questions were strategically worded to gather data to answer the two sub-questions of how young Black women who were transitioning out of foster care describe their social support needs to stakeholders and how the stakeholders determined the social support needs of young Black women as they transitioned out of foster care. And answers to the sub-questions are designed to answer the main research question on how the social supports provided to young Black women match their perceived need.

Results of Data Analysis

The data analysis process was completed in multiple steps to support both manual and electronic organization of the collected data. These steps also facilitated the systematic coding and categorization of the analyzed data. The analysis process for the study was conducted in alignment with Yin's (2011) five-phase approach to data analysis: phase 1: compiling, phase 2: disassembling, phase 3: reassembling, phase 4: interpreting, and phase 5: concluding.

Phase 1: Compiling

Following Yin's (2011) first step in data analysis, I began by compiling data from multiple sources, including semi-structured interviews, personal journal, and official document, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan. All audio recordings were transcribed systematically and carefully reviewed for accuracy, with errors corrected and repetitive statements removed. Recurring ideas, emotions, and expressions were organized into meaningful themes, supported by direct quotes from young Black women, stakeholders, and state-level documentation. To ensure objectivity and minimize personal bias, I engaged in bracketing by consciously suspending my preconceptions about the social support needs of emerging adults (Charron & Singh, 2022).

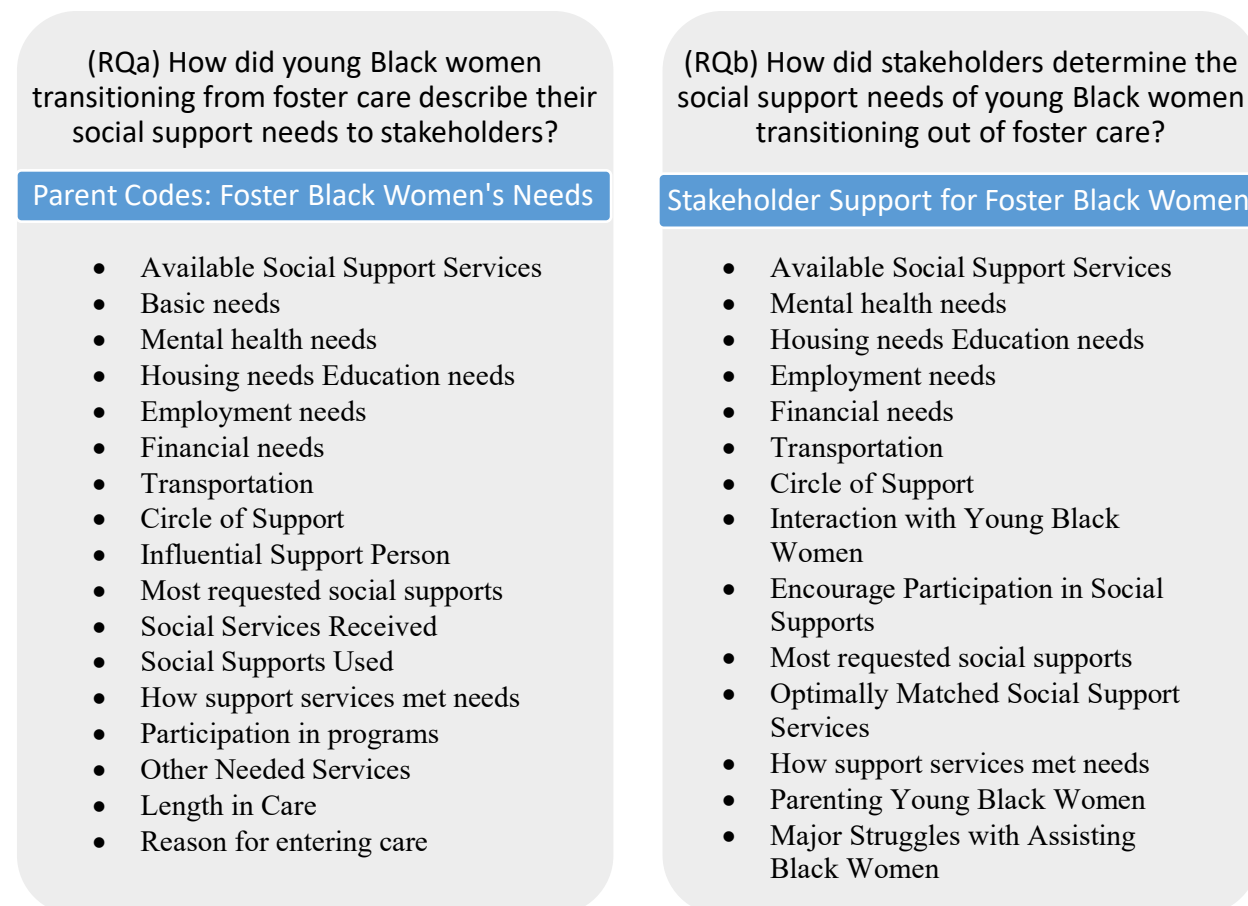
Phase 2: Disassembling

In this phase, I analyzed each transcript to identify significant data and placed the information in the appropriate code container. I used NVivo software to aid in organizing and coding the data. To begin sorting the data, I created two parent codes containers in NVivo to inform the sub-questions. For RQa: How did young Black women transitioning from foster care describe their social support needs to stakeholders? I created parent code container, "Foster Black women's support needs." And for RQb: How did stakeholders determine the social support needs of young Black women transitioning out of foster care? I created parent code container, "Stakeholder support for foster Black women." I used context analysis to create and placed the code under the parent code containers. Context analysis coding is necessary when codes are generated prior to analyzing the data (Yadav, 2022). This step involved identifying recurring patterns, similarities, and contrasts in participants' responses while remaining open to

emerging insights that could inform the central research questions (See Table 2 Generated Codes).

Figure 2

Generated Codes



Phase 3: Reassembling

Following Yin's (2011) third step of qualitative data analysis, I reassembled the disassembled data by aligning it with the theoretical proposition of OMT, which posits that social supports are most effective when they align with the perceived needs of the recipient. During this phase, I engaged in context analysis to extract meaningful details relevant to the

research questions (Yadav, 2022), followed by pattern analysis to identify recurring themes that either supported or challenged the theoretical framework (Nassaji, 2020). Additionally, comparative analysis and the consideration of rival explanations were used to evaluate variations across participant experiences and ensure analytical rigor (Alam, 2021). This process allowed for the reconstruction of the data into coherent categories that accurately reflected the lived realities of young Black women transitioning from foster care. From this step, emerged the eight themes that answered the research questions (See Table 5 and Table 6).

Table 5

Themes for Young Black Women

(RQa) How did young Black women transitioning from foster care describe their social support needs to stakeholders?	
Themes	Sub-themes
Theme 1: Participation in Social Support Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available social support services • Basic needs • Mental health needs • Housing needs • Education needs • Employment needs • Financial needs • Transportation
Theme 2: Social Support Service Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circle of Support • Influential support persons
Theme 3: Social Support Personnels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most requested social supports • Social services received • Social supports used • How support services met needs • Participation in programs
Theme 4: Unaddressed Social Support Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other needed services • Length in care • Reason for entering care

Table 6*Themes for Stakeholders*

(RQb) How did stakeholders determine the social support needs of young Black women transitioning out of foster care?	
Themes	Sub-themes
Theme 1: Available Social Support Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available social support services • Mental health needs • Housing needs • Education needs • Employment needs • Financial needs • Transportation
Theme 2: Determining the Social Support Needs of Young Black Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circle of Support • Interaction with young Black women • Encourage participation in social supports
Theme 3: Interacting with Young Black Women to Meet their Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most requested social supports • Optimally matched social support services • How support services met needs • Parenting young Black women
Theme 4: Challenges Encountered when Meeting Social Support Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major struggles with assisting Black women • Major Benefits when assisting Black women • Other findings

Step 4: Interpretating

In keeping with Yin's (2011) Phase 4 of data analysis, this stage focused on interpreting the meaning of the findings by emphasizing empirical accuracy, fairness, and value-added interpretation. The goal of this phase was to derive credible insights from the data by ensuring that the conclusions were grounded in observable, verifiable facts, thereby minimizing researcher bias and upholding the integrity of the study (Guest et al., 2020). Empirical fairness was also prioritized to ensure that data were represented equitably and without reinforcing stereotypes or

systemic bias, promoting a more inclusive understanding of participant experiences (Coleman, 2021). Additionally, value-added analysis was used to deepen the interpretation of the results, moving beyond surface-level descriptions to generate new and meaningful insights relevant to the transition experiences of young Black women aging out of foster care (Eakin & Gladstone, 2020).

Trustworthiness of the Data. Trustworthiness in qualitative research methods is equivalent to validity and reliability in quantitative research methods and encompasses four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Adler, 2022; Closa, 2021; Enworo, 2023). Each criterion contributed to the study's rigor and taken together, ensures the trustworthiness of the qualitative research. A high level of rigor is necessary for research studies to display legitimacy, which is achieved when qualitative research is conducted with total transparency (Batt & Kahn, 2021).

Credibility. Credibility refers to the truthfulness and confidence in the actual value of research findings based on a transparent reflection of an unbiased, accurate depiction of participants' replies and not that of researchers' personal beliefs or opinions (Kakar et al., 2023). I established the credibility of the participants' responses by using member checking method. The transcripts were emailed to the participants for review. Member checking provided the participants with the opportunity to verify the accuracy of their responses to maintain credibility in the research findings. Participants were encouraged to make the changes to ensure their views and beliefs were captured succinctly on the appropriate matching of social support services received by young Black women when transitioning out of the foster care system.

Transferability. Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of an investigation may be summarized and applied to a variety of situations or contexts (Roberts et

al., 2019). I achieved transferability in my study by providing detailed descriptions of the participants responses concerning the appropriate matching of social support services received by young Black women when transitioning out of the foster care system. This process was achieved by developing and asking open-ended questions which allowed participants to provide their responses with minimal interference from me. Furthermore, participant's spoken words in response to the questions were used to provide rich content in an endeavor to facilitate transferability of the results of the study to other states, counties or populations that provide young Black women with social support services as they age out of the foster care system.

Dependability. Dependability pertains to the reliability of the research process, stability of data over time, and documentation of the study that leads to the ability to reproduce the results (Bleiker et al., 2019; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In dependability, the aim is to ensure the results of qualitative studies are aligned with the raw data collected (Enworo. 2023). Dependability assists subsequent researchers to arrive to similar findings, interpretations, and conclusions.

Confirmability. Confirmability reduces bias and ensures neutrality and objectivity in research investigations by ensuring that researchers' thoughts, feelings, and subjective experiences do not guide the interpretation of participants' experiences (Antes et al., 2019, Korstjen & Moser, 2018). I achieve confirmability by bracketing my biases in the interpretation of data, via the assistance of NVivo coding, thereby suspending my personal ideas, prejudices, and experiences related to the appropriate matching of social support services received by young Black women when transitioning out of the foster care system. I asked follow-up questions to clarify the participants' thoughts and experiences to evaluate research findings. Furthermore, I emailed the transcripts to the participants to provide them with the opportunity to clarify their interview transcript.

Findings

The findings of the study are based on interviews with young Black women who have aged out of foster care and stakeholders responsible for providing social support services. The findings are organized by research questions and supported through thematic analysis, direct participant quotes, and document review. In keeping with qualitative research standards, credibility was established through member-checking to ensure the accuracy and truthfulness of participants' responses (Kakar et al., 2023; Motulsky, 2021). A case study approach guided the comprehensive description of the bounded system, shaped by time, context, and the specific experiences of the study population (Alam, 2021).

A total of eight theme emerged from the data. The following four themes answered the research sub-question of how young Black women who were transitioning out of foster care describe their social support needs to stakeholders: participation in social support programs, social support service needs, social support personnels, and unaddressed social support needs. The additional four themes answered the sub-question of how the stakeholders determined the social support needs of young Black women as they transitioned out of foster care: available social support services, determining the social support needs of young Black women, interacting with young Black women, and challenges and benefits of providing social supports. These themes collectively answered the main research question of how the social supports provided to young Black women match their perceived needs.

RQa: How did young Black women transitioning from foster care describe their social support needs to stakeholders?

Young Black women aging transitioning out of foster care view their participation in social support services and programs as helpful and at times limited. Some may appreciate the

guidance and assistance with housing, education, transportation, mental health counseling, mentorship, and other supports, while others may want to disconnect upon their 18th birthday. The participants in this study discussed the following social support themes to answer research sub-question.

Theme 1: Participation in Social Support Programs. All four young Black women discussed their participation in one or more social support programs as they transitioned out of foster care. Each participant referenced one or more programs, such as Youth Villages, LINKS, Job Corps, or the 18 to 21 Program, that provided essential services including housing, education, therapy, and life skills. Most participants indicated that these services matched their needs and contributed positively to their growth and independence. These findings are in accordance with the North Carolina Child Welfare 2020–2024 Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan (NCDHHS, 2024).

“Jada” (20 years old) described the support she received from Youth Villages: “They helped me apply to colleges, housing, different programs. I really wanted to do therapy; Youth Villages help me with it.” She further reported, “They helped me to get my license. They make transitioning out easier.” “Kayla” (18 years old) articulated similar thoughts concerning the group home and ongoing program use, “Children Home has supplies and networks and a place for us to live here. I can walk to the cafeteria and do my job... I still use Youth Villages, and I still use the 18 to 21 Program.”

Both young Black women, “Nova” (19 years old) and “Naphia” (20 years old) identified the 18 to 21 Program as a viable social support. “Nova” (19 years old) discussed being on her own immediately after transitioning, “I was with a bunch of people that weren’t good for me... I used the stipend from the 18 to 21 Program to help me get by.” “Nova” (19 years old) further

acknowledged, “Youth Villages and LINKS were definitely there for me throughout the whole thing. I’ve been clean for 10 months now. I’m happy. I’m not sad. I’m not depressed anymore. I’m better.”

Yet not all the young Black women reported favorable social support. “Naphia” (20 years old) reported mixed results: “I did go into the 18 to 21 Program... However, when I tried to apply for Youth Villages, they said that I was too much to handle, basically.”

Theme 2: Social Support Service Needs. Participants described a wide range of needs, including basic living necessities, housing, education, employment, transportation, and mental health support that were either met or partially met through social support services. The responses revealed the variety and depth of support required for a successful transition to adulthood. Each sub-theme below outlines these specific areas of need.

Basic Needs. Participants emphasized the importance of having their basic living needs met, such as food, clothing, and personal care. These foundational supports were viewed as essential for maintaining dignity and stability.

“Naphia” (20 years old) shared, “I have free transportation... clothing and food and nutrition. I’m given free meals. A clothing inventory is done once every few months to see what clothes fit, what clothes don't fit, what do I need more of... And so, we are able to go out to a salon or something, and get our hair flat ironed, and curled, and braided.” “Nova” (19 years old) and “Kayla” (18 years old) also expressed their basic need for “food, groceries, utilities” were addressed.

“Jada” (20 years old) highlighted her parenting-related basic needs, “I don't have to pay for diapers and wipes. And they watch my baby while I'm in school and provide daycare.”

“Jada” (20 years old) further reported, “If I need a break at the house or while I'm an

appointment, they take the baby. When the baby does have daycare, they take the baby back forth to daycare. And take her back and forth to the doctor.”

Housing. All participants confirmed receiving some form of housing support, primarily through the 18 to 21 Program and group homes. The current findings of this research on housing were similar to that of Farmer et al. (2021) and Kelly (2020). “Jada” (20 years old) explained that the Hope Center, an organization designed to help aged-out foster youth, supported her in securing housing. Similarly, “Kayla” (18 years old), “Naphia” (20 years old), and “Nova” (19 years old) identified the 18 to 21 Program as a key source of housing assistance and described their group homes as their current residence.

Education. Educational support was consistently noted among participants. The participants shared stories of receiving financial assistance and scholarships that helped them pursue or continue their academic goals. The findings of this study on education were similar to that of Bae (2020) and Jackson and Cesaroni (2021).

“Jada” (20 years old) mentioned receiving an education and training voucher, “ETV paid, they didn't pay for all of it, but they gave me, \$2500 for both semesters each... also helped me by explaining financial aid.” “Nova” (19 years old) highlighted multiple supports: “My group home partnered with my county and gave me a full scholarship... Youth Villages also gave me a \$1000 scholarship.” She reported this was possible through their partnership with community resources. “Naphia” (20 years old) added, “I was able to go back to school, using the scholarship. I obtained my certificate of completion for welding.”

Employment and Finances. Participants discussed the ways in which social support programs assisted them with gaining employment, job readiness, and financial responsibility. “Jada” (20 years old) explained, “I went to Job Corps for a year... Youth Village helped me with

resume building, business attire, and interview preparation.” “Nova” (19 years old) affirmed similar support: “Youth Villages financially helped me with finding a job.” “Kayla” (18 years old) noted, “I work at the cafeteria at the group home,” while “Naphia” (20 years old) described employment at a warehouse and an offer for a supervisory role. Both mentioned, “We are required to save 50% of our total income...” The current findings of employment and finances were similar to that of Cudjoe et al. (2022) and Liu et al. (2022).

Transportation. Access to transportation was highlighted as essential for completing daily tasks and working toward independence. All participants described relying on social programs for transportation. “Jada” (20 years old) noted, “They helped me to get my license... gave me a couple of resources for the driving test.” “Nova” (19 years old) added, “They helped with insurance... I’m hopefully getting insurance for a car soon.” “Kayla” (18 years old) described her participation in driver’s education and stated, “I didn’t pass the written test” and reported she was waiting for another opportunity.

Mental Health. Mental health support was another crucial area addressed by participants. While some reported beneficial therapeutic services, others indicated unmet mental health needs, particularly in relation to substance use recovery. The current findings of mental health care needs were similar to that of discussed by Häggman-Laitila et al. (2019).

“Naphia” (20 years old) shared, “I attend therapy sessions every week. And I speak with a very lovely, very wonderful therapist... I also go to Costal Carolina Neuropsychiatric Counseling for my psychiatry.” However, she pointed out gaps in service: “I quit cold turkey [substance use]... the only thing I was told was to chew gum... I wasn’t given any type of [substance use] counseling or resources.” “Kayla” (18 years old) noted, “I don’t have a therapist

or a psychiatrist... I already aged out of therapy... not going back.” She indicated limited benefits from prior sessions.

“Nova” (19 years old) praised Youth Villages: “They definitely help... getting me to therapy... I’ve bonded with my therapist.” “Jada” (20 years old) echoed the sentiment: “They helped me... gave me connections to therapy services... they gave me a couple of people to go to and also had a couple of people come to me.”

Theme 3: Social Support Personnels. Young Black women transitioning out of foster care often rely on a network of individuals, both personal and professional, to support them as they navigate the challenges of early adulthood. These individuals may include houseparents, therapists, coordinators, peers, or chosen family members. However, the availability and perceived effectiveness of such support varied greatly among participants. While some described strong connections, others conveyed feelings of isolation or a lack of dependable support. The results of the study on social support network were similar to that found in Bokhorst et al. (2021), Cudjoe et al. (2022), Greeson et al. (2021), Hagenauer and Volet (2020), Salazar et al. (2020), and Schelbe et al. (2024).

“Jada” (20 years old) shared her support system included, “My houseparents, my LINKS coordinator, my teacher, and my sister. She's older than me and she's like my mom, instead of my mom.” In contrast, “Kayla” (18 years old) stated, “What family? No one, not really. Nobody really. I don't really know.”

“Nova” (19 years old) reflected on the relationships that grounded her, stating, “I have to say that kind of goes back to the being in therapy, my therapist. She's my biggest supporter, my biggest help; especially when I'm upset... Definitely my LINKS coordinator. Anytime I call her, she's there... My fiancée, he's a huge support system.” “Naphia” (20 years old) explained, “I

want to say no one. Because at the end of the day, my mother had just passed away. I was going through very hard time mentally and I wasn't listening to anybody.” She then reflected, “There was this one person that I had met online. He has supported me emotionally. He's a very dear close friend of mine.”

Theme 4: Unaddressed Social Support Needs. Despite receiving some level of support, participants described areas where critical needs remained unmet, particularly in life skills training, mental health resources, and transitional housing. Their reflections revealed a desire for more practical, hands-on assistance in daily living and greater individualized guidance as they navigated early adulthood.

“Naphia” (20 years old) described the discipline structure in her group home as misaligned with adult needs, explaining, “Their punishment systems are made for minors and not actual adults... I feel like I shouldn't be punished by having the one necessity [referring to her cell phone] taken away.” She further elaborated on other unmet needs: “Like support as in basic living. If somebody or a group were to come out and teach me how to cook or how to do laundry. Or how to find public transportation, how to use public transportation. How to shop properly, how to go shopping. They actually take you out to a store and show you how to look and compare prices, how to look at the labels of cans, the nutrition labels and stuff like that. That would have definitely helped me out a whole lot... Another support that I feel would be beneficial, would have been like a self-defense class or something...”

“Jada” (20 years old) expressed that she would have benefited from more direct transitional housing support: “I would benefit from a program that directly provided transitional housing. I feel like they already have that though, but I just didn't benefit. I

didn't use it with like, housing. Like, not just looking for a place, but like have the actual place to stay. I feel like that would be really beneficial.”

“Kayla” (18 years old) responded less definitively, remarking, “I don’t know.” “Nova” (19 years old) shared uncertainty as well, noting, “Honestly, I'm not entirely sure. But I'm still getting used to the whole 18 to 21 Program and Youth Villages.”

RQb: How did stakeholders determine the social support needs of young Black women transitioning out of foster care?

Stakeholders, such as social workers, mental health counselors, transitional counselors, case managers, houseparents and other social supports, often recognize the importance of social support services for young Black women aging out of foster care; however, they express concerns with consistency, accessibility, and coordination of those services. Stakeholder interviews yielded the next four themes to inform research sub-question

Theme 1: Available Social Support Services. Stakeholders described a range of social support services currently available to young Black women transitioning out of foster care. These services addressed essential needs including housing, education, employment, financial support, transportation, mental health care, and parenting. Participants highlighted both the importance and limitations of these services, with a focus on cultural responsiveness and accessibility. The following sections group stakeholder responses by the primary support systems referenced: the 18 to 21 Program, Youth Villages, and other supplementary programs. The current findings of the availability of social support services are similar to that found in the North Carolina Child Welfare 2020–2024 Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan (NCDHHS, 2024).

The 18 to 21 Program, administered through the Department of Social Services (DSS), was the most frequently cited service. Participants emphasized its role in providing transitional housing, financial stipends, and educational support. Several participants described how this program offered young women some stability as they moved toward independent living. “Angel” (human trafficking case manager) explained, “There is a stipend that they can receive monthly for participating in the 18 to 21 Program, it’s usually about \$800 a month. There is assistance with college.” “Jennifer” (licensed mental health counselor) shared how the program operates in residential settings: “And this group home had this resource called the 18 to 21 Program.” Overall, the 18 to 21 Program was viewed as a vital foundation for meeting basic needs during the transition from foster care to adulthood.

The second most frequently cited service provider was Youth Villages, a national organization that offers intensive case management and transition support through its LifeSet program. Participants praised the organization’s hands-on approach and collaborative engagement with youth. “Kevin” (Youth Villages regional supervisor) provided an organizational overview, “Youth Villages is a national organization. It is an independent living transition age program, the biggest one for that transition age population is our LifeSet Program. It’s a semi-therapeutic mental health program designed to help them learn skills that would be an adult.” “Kevin” (Youth Villages regional supervisor) affectionally refers to the LifeSet Program as Adulting 101. “Melissa” (LifeSet clinical supervisor) describes the program as a lifeline, filling in the gap during the transition to young adult, “There’s nobody out there advocating for these youth. They’re just kind of left in the wind to their own devices... I tell them when I go in. “I’m not here to tell you what I think you need to do. I’m here to work with you to help you figure it out.” She explained how she encourages them to buy in, “But if we do it together and I

teach you these skills, you're gonna be like 'Ah, I can do this, this is ok, yeah.' And I love that moment. I love that moment, it's fantastic!"

"Debbie" (K-12 principal) reported, "I know a lot of our kids use Youth Villages as a source. And this kind of makes them take initiative on what they're going to do next." Similarly, "Beans" (school administrator) described Youth Villages' role in educational advocacy, stating, "Youth Villages is helping one of them enroll in college. They're setting up the FAFSA."

"Mirissa" (group home houseparent) highlighted how Youth Villages supports young mothers in group homes. "Eagle" (transitional counselor) reported that LifeSet community support helps young Black women meet their needs. Stakeholders emphasized the strengths of Youth Villages in assisting with education, housing, and independent living readiness.

In addition to the 18 to 21 Program and Youth Villages, participants identified numerous community and state-based resources that provide targeted support in housing, employment, counseling, and transportation. "Debbie" (K-12 principal) discussed workforce readiness efforts: "There's one group that comes in and does some vocational rehab. So, it works on resume building, works on getting them focused on different kinds of jobs they could have out in the community. And that's Employment Source." "Dee" (licensed social worker) highlighted a range of independent living resources and inclusive housing supports: "Independent living services such as Hope Center and Pullan which is in Wake County. LGBTQ+A resource. Housing resources through Life Skills Foundation or Hope Center at Pullan." "Melissa" (LifeSet clinical supervisor) listed additional programs: "LINKS Program... We have something here in town called Connections of Cumberland County... Wheels for Hope... Another thing for resources was the NC Reach as well." "Mirissa" (group home houseparent) also noted mental health and

parenting support services: “Mothers and Babies cottage has parenting classes... and counseling.”

Across all interviews, stakeholders described these services as crucial to promoting long-term stability and success for young Black women. However, they also noted that gaps remain, particularly in culturally competent care and sustained engagement, which were addressed in subsequent themes.

Theme 2: Determining the Social Support Needs of Young Black Women.

Stakeholders described the methods they use to determine the social support needs of young Black women aging out of foster care. These methods included formal assessments, interviews, and direct engagement. Through these interactions, stakeholders gained insight into the most frequently requested needs and priorities of the young women. The identified needs have been organized into the following categories: housing, education, employment and finances, transportation, mental health, and other supportive resources. The findings of the current research on determining the social needs of young Black women were similar to that of Avant et al. (2021), Engler et al. (2022), Kelly (2020), Leathers et al. (2023), and Verulava et al. (2020).

Housing. Stakeholders identified stable housing as the most frequently requested and most pressing need among young Black women transitioning out of foster care. They emphasized the importance of immediate access to safe, affordable, and long-term housing. “Dee” (licensed social worker) explained, “Most requested is definitely housing...Job Corps has free housing on campus.” “Melissa” (LifeSet clinical supervisor) shared, “Housing...A lot of them are looking to move out on their own.”

“Eagle” (transitional counselor) remarked, “[helping them] get their own apartments...Some may have family supports that they are being able to transition into their own

home.” “Kevin” (Youth Villages regional supervisor) reported, “What we tend to see the most need around is...sustainable housing.” “Mirissa” (group home houseparent) commented, “An apartment...their own home.”

Education. Education emerged as a significant domain where social support services were tailored to meet various academic goals, ranging from high school completion to college admission and vocational training. “Debbie” (K-12 principal) described the most requested and her response to the request, “How to go to school for certain things. So, we match them up with going to community college.” “Jennifer” (licensed mental health counselor) reflected, “Looking into a college career...Looking at different colleges. Was there a big aspiration that they had, or did they want to take a more practical route like a Community College route?”

“Kevin” (Youth Villages regional supervisor) discussed, “A close second for us, at least in our population is college application assistance.” “Kevin” (Youth Villages regional supervisor) further explained, “Specifically, because we have the Historical Black College here at Fayetteville State University. And so, there's a lot of them that have a lot of drive to go be a part of that institution.” “Beans” (school administrator) describe the most requested need, “Final report cards...Transcripts...Their SAT scores sent to colleges.” “Dee” (licensed social worker) discussed her response to young Black women’s when address their education needs, “You can get your diploma; you can get your GED, you can get a trade.”

Employment and Finances. Access to employment and financial resources was another recurring theme. Stakeholders reported helping young Black women find jobs, build resumes, gain interview skills, and develop money management habits. “Angel” (human trafficking case manager) who serves a unique population of human trafficking young Black women in foster care emphasized, “The biggest things that our girls want are jobs...life skills, a mentorship

program.” “Jennifer” (licensed mental health counselor) shared, “They say, ‘I want to find a job.’ [There are] plenty of individuals that work really hard in our communities that don't need a college education. [We help] building their self-esteem.”

“Debbie” (K-12 principal) added, “Students just kind of say, ‘you know, school was not right for me.’ So, we turned to look for a job. Ok, you don’t have to go to school right now.”

“Eagle” (transitional counselor) stated, “I introduced them to Work First. [I tell them] it is the Employment Office that will help you figure out what path that you want to be on, or what trade you would like to get involved with.” She further noted, “Then I can teach you how to manage your own money, get bank accounts, use an ATM.”

Transportation. Transportation was identified as both a barrier and an essential support area. Stakeholders discussed efforts to provide access to vehicles, insurance, and driver’s education. “Melissa” (LifeSet clinical supervisor) commented, “Housing and transportation would be the two big ones usually. When they come into services, a lot of them are looking to move out on their own or to get their driver’s license.”

“Dee” (licensed social worker) explained, “Transportation... Matching them with Wheels for Hope. Helping to pay for the first six months of car insurance, so that they can be financially free or financially able to afford insurance plus buy the vehicle at the around the same time.”

“Mirissa” (group home houseparent) reported a lot of the young Black women want “help with cars.”

Mental Health. Stakeholders emphasized the need for accessible and culturally competent mental health services, especially for those experiencing trauma, instability, or behavioral health challenges. “Jennifer” (licensed mental health counselor), a mental counselor, discussed her role is assisting the young Black women with their mental health needs, “My role

in providing therapeutic services. And so, helping them feel empowered to have autonomy. Helping people understand that they have the power to take control of what they need to take control of. Or manage their own emotions.”

“Melissa” (LifeSet clinical supervisor) explained, “A lot of our youth, we have to connect with their outpatient therapy. Some of them need like psychological evaluations.” “Angel” (human trafficking case manager), case manager for young Black women coming out of human trafficking, shared, “Typically the services are continuing with would be trauma therapy, whether it's the same therapist or therapist in their area.” She further elaborated, “And again, we have partners throughout the state that can, that have been trained... that could provide therapy specifically to those that have been trafficked and medication management.”

“Kevin” (Youth Villages regional supervisor) remarked, for mental health, “the biggest thing I see that we say, and we really need to do this and maybe they don't want is safety planning. That might be double locking the gun. Just to try and reduce the impulsivity and chances of suicidal ideation.”

Other Requested Needs. Beyond core services, stakeholders highlighted additional needs that were frequently addressed to support holistic development. “Eagle” (transitional counselor) described, “Many of them either have newborn or have or expecting or have toddlers...Daycare voucher...WIC and food stamp services.” “Jennifer” (licensed mental health counselor) reflected, “Helping them to feel strong and really self-aware.”

“Mirissa” (group home houseparent) and “Dee” (licensed social worker) mentioned, “The ethnic hair products.” “Angel” (human trafficking case manager) noted, “Life skills, and a mentorship program.” Beans shared, “We matched them with Service Source.” “Melissa”

(LifeSet clinical supervisor) stated, “Helping them get their kids into daycare.” And “Dee” (licensed social worker) reported, “Gift cards.”

A comprehensive list of all the resources discussed in the research with their description and contact information can be found in Appendix N.

Theme 3: Interacting with Young Black Women to Meet their Needs. Stakeholders’ interaction with young Black women as they age out of the foster care system is monumental. Participants in this research shared how they engage with young Black women to assess and meet their social support needs. Their approaches included empathy, empowerment, advocacy, availability, practical assistance, and personalized communication. The following excerpts reflect the relational and supportive practices stakeholders use to build rapport and respond meaningfully to each individual's needs. The current findings of interaction of social support network were similar to that of Best and Blakeslee (2020), Dworsky and Gitlow (2020), Leathers et al. (2023), Park et al. (2020), and Swartz et al. (2020).

“Kevin” (Youth Villages regional supervisor) emphasized the importance of empowerment and active listening in stakeholder interactions: “We’ve learned that the foster care population has been disempowered and disenfranchised already. We show our value by helping them in the things that are important to them.” He further discussed, “We work really hard to try and make sure they have control, and if they say ‘no.’ It’s no. So where is the ‘yes?’ Where can we find the ‘yes?’”

“Dee” (licensed social worker) highlighted her role in offering practical and emotional support: “Making sure they had the 18 to 21 stipend, going to certain programs with them. If they didn’t understand, I would explain it to them on their level. Definitely a lot of positive affirmations. Buying them little incentives, like gift cards.” “Beans” (school administrator)

described an open-door and direct communication approach: “My office door is always open. I try to be real with them, and open with them. I’m very blunt, and honest.” “Angel” (human trafficking case manager) discussed the importance of encouraging autonomy through structure and reflection: “We like to give suggestions of what would be helpful for them... Encourage them by showing them how they’ve thrived... They can set up similar structures for themselves; but they get to kind of call the shots.”

“Debbie” (K-12 principal) reflected on the significance of ongoing communication and access to support: “You can start off at community college. I always say, make sure you keep in close contact with us. We make sure that they have our contacts.” “Eagle” (transitional counselor) spoke about the value of lived experience and personal availability: “Let me help relate to you and figure out how to support you. Not about a checklist... What do you want to do and how can I help you get there... Encouraged them and empowered them.” “Jennifer” (licensed mental health counselor) emphasized hope-building and therapeutic relationships: “They’re looking for hope. That was a big goal in the therapy space... to make sure that mentally and in their own person they feel strong and resilient.” She emphasized, “It’s not been that they’ve not wanted the help. They wanted that extra boost of someone speaking up for them.”

“Melissa” (LifeSet clinical supervisor) described the highly individualized and hands-on approach her team uses: “We take them around to Social Security...the courthouse...DMV. We really get to know the youth, what’s important to them. Sometimes, it’s about finding that little piece of information... You’re paying attention, you’re listening attentively.” “Mirissa” (group home houseparent) explained how her team coordinates with case managers and offers ongoing availability: “We talk to the case managers, normally they’re supposed to come up with what

they [young Black women] need... We always tell them; they can call if they have any questions.”

Theme 4: Challenges Encountered when Meeting Social Support Needs. Stakeholders providing social support services to young Black women transitioning out of foster care encounter a variety of challenges. These challenges include systemic inequalities, a shortage of culturally competent services, and occasional barriers created by the young women themselves. Participants in this study detailed the difficulties they faced while attempting to meet the social support needs of this population. The responses have been grouped into categories including systemic barriers, individual resistance or disengagement, provider or agency limitations, and cultural and familial influences. The current findings regarding the barriers encountered when meeting the social support needs of young Black women were similar to that of Dworsky and Courtney (2020), and Salazar et al. (2019)

Systemic Barriers. Participants described systemic challenges that complicate service access and delivery, particularly in the areas of housing, mental health, and resource navigation. These barriers often result from structural inequalities, insurance limitations, fragmented support networks, and institutional racism.

“Kevin” (Youth Villages regional supervisor) explained the inequities in housing: “We recognize that there's a lot of inequalities when it comes to housing applications, housing interviews, and housing denials. They do not need a reason to say, ‘no I do not want to rent it to you.’” He further described an experiment, “We’ve had people put a fake name and get accepted. Then go and meet the person and then they are denied because of how they look.”

“Dee” (licensed social worker) highlighted the mental health system’s shortcomings, “I wish that one of the stipulations to remain in our program was mandatory mental health

support. Mental health has caused a lot of homelessness, joblessness... It's definitely very, very evident in a lot of our young adults that have experienced trauma.”

“Kevin” (Youth Villages regional supervisor) similar noted, “We know that being removed from the home is an automatic trauma experience. We know that every time you're being moved, it's a trauma experience. We know that it's a 60% to 70% likelihood that someone entering the foster care system is going to experience a new trauma while they're in foster care system. Whether it's physical, emotional, or sexual abuse... You can see an outpatient therapist, and still be abused, and never get rescued from it... I said it earlier and I will continue to say it, the odds are stacked against them.”

“Angel” (human trafficking case manager) highlighted issues related to Medicaid, “System-wise, Medicaid can be very difficult... across the state. Because depending on where they're at, it's difficult to find a provider that accepts their insurance.” She continued to explain the frustration with lack of support services, “They've got severe mental health issues and there's not a ton of support. So, they're just kind of out there surviving on their own.” “Jennifer” (licensed mental health counselor) observed, “It's almost as if there's too many things just scattered all about, then they get lost. People don't realize the resources that are out there.” She suggested resource centralization might help, “If we could just consolidate... in one place. That might be a website format, or it might be connected to the schools. I think that might would help some.”

Individual Resistance or Disengagement. Several participants described challenges stemming from the young Black women’s own disengagement or reluctance to participate in available services. These challenges were often attributed to trauma, mistrust, or perceived self-sufficiency.

“Eagle” (transitional counselor) reflected on missed opportunities: “That individual... decided that she still was not going to take that service. So, many of them end up back into just struggling... not taking advantage of that three years of services provided by 18 to 21 Program.” “Dee” (licensed social worker) shared her experiences with missed appointments: “I could schedule with them... and they would sometimes forget by the next week that we were meeting.”

“Jennifer” (licensed mental health counselor) commented on self-doubt and rejection of services, “Many of them just feel like they couldn’t do it... you can’t force someone into a service, so they may decline.” Beans remarked their biggest barrier include, “Them wanting to think that they can do everything on their own, and not necessarily thinking that they need help.” “Angel” (human trafficking case manager) provided insight, “I’ll give you a number, they say recidivism is huge with survivors of human trafficking in general. But they say it takes a girl or a woman coming out of trafficking seven times, before it sticks permanently.”

Cultural and Familial Influences. Stakeholders also pointed to the powerful influence of cultural norms and family dynamics on the young women’s decisions, goals, and receptivity to support services.

“Melissa” (LifeSet clinical supervisor) described a lack of personal support networks: “A really big one is no natural support for some of these youth. A lot of them they have professional supports coming out their ears.” She further discussed when she completes a support grid with them, “they’re just like, ‘I don’t have anybody. I don’t have family. I don’t have a mom. I don’t have a dad. Or no one I can depend on.’”

“Debbie” (K-12 principal) reflected on a negative familial message via a personal experience, “Working here, I had a child [who] went back home. And she was a very intelligent girl, she wanted to be a nurse. And she was all about her education and then

when she went home, her dad told her that college was for White people. And that we had her brainwashed to think that she was going to be better than what she was.” She reported the young Black woman did not pursue her career.

“Angel” (human trafficking case manager) described trends in human trafficking that she experienced, “I think that trafficking culture in general is more prevalent in our African American clients. It's present in our other [cultures] well, like Hispanic. But in African American it's very prevalent.” She reported seeing a different trend in different cultures, “Mostly in our Caucasian clients we're seeing a lot of drug abuse in their families.”⁰

Provider or Agency Limitations. Stakeholders acknowledged that institutional and agency-based limitations also affect the quality and consistency of support. These include poor coordination among service providers, scheduling conflicts, and failures in follow-through by foster care representatives.

“Kevin” (Youth Villages regional supervisor) described challenges with external stakeholders: “Transparently, one of the biggest struggles that we see is one, if they're still involved in group home care or foster care. Foster parents will not keep appointments. Foster parents will deny services.” “Kevin” (Youth Villages regional supervisor) went on to describe experiencing similar barriers with the group homes that are meant to connect the young adults to services. “They will deny requests. They will refuse to meet. They will not follow IEPs, 504, or even clinical recommendations.”

“Dee” (licensed social worker) emphasized communication breakdowns: “And sometimes professional agencies, we have a checklist. Everybody has checklist to check off. And everybody's worried about checklists. But not to say or belittle the checklist. Yes, it needs to be done, but that's not the most important thing. That's not the priority.

And you have this deficit in the support team, for each individual. Everybody's not on the same page, or everybody can't come to a compromising agreement. So, communication is not effective, and communication is not consistent.”

“Melissa” (LifeSet clinical supervisor) discussed the limits of structured programs such as the DSS 18 to 21 Program, “It's marketed like they are helping them with these things, but they don't always seem to... I'm gonna check on you once a month, I'm going to check some boxes and here's your check and see you in a month.” She further elaborates, “that leaves a lot of our youth feeling like, “ok well, you gave me money, but you know I need all these other things.”

On the other hand, “Dee” (licensed social worker) discussed her frustration with social workers in general, “I feel like a lot of season social workers are kind of burned out. So, they're not putting much into their population that they're serving.” Furthermore, she stated, “But I also feel that way about young social workers that's just like graduating college and they're just starting. It's like they're excited, but then they're also lazy at the same time.”

“Eagle” (transitional counselor) passionately describes the need for change, “We have services that are given. And I don't know what the disconnect is, in services that are provided and given. They're much needed. Intensive in-home is definitely needed for our families. Life Set is needed. So much other stuff is needed. But somewhere there's a disconnect. And, how to empower? Yes, we're housing them in group homes, we're housing them and servicing them with the foster care services. But something still-needs-to-channnggge!”

North Carolina Child Welfare Requirement 8

North Carolina Child Welfare 2020-2024 Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan Requirement 8- Ensuring transitional plans meet the health needs of youth aging out of foster care emphasizes that all young people aging out of foster care must be equipped with some fundamental tools for successful transition into adulthood. The document outlines specific resources that must be provided to the young person aging out to meet their basic daily needs. These resources include access to safe and stable housing, adequate financial resources, and the ability to pursue educational or employment opportunities that correspond with their interests and capabilities.

The requirement highlights the need of connectivity, stipulating that each young person must possess a personal support network of a minimum of five accountable people. Furthermore, young people are anticipated to refrain from engaging in high-risk activities, postpone motherhood until they are financially and emotionally prepared, and ensure consistent access to medical and mental health resources. These criteria together seek to enhance long-term stability, autonomy, and welfare for young people that transitioning out of the foster care system.

Summary

The main research question seeks to understand if the social support services provided to young Black women match their perceived needs. The findings of this study explored whether the social support services provided to young Black women aging out of foster care align with their self-identified needs. Drawing from interviews young Black women participants and stakeholder participants insight, the findings reveal both areas of alignment and significant gaps between available services and the experiences of these young Black women. This section presented key themes related to the types of support received, perceptions of adequacy and

cultural responsiveness, and the unmet needs that continue to impact their transition to independent adulthood.

Evaluation of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single case study conceptual replication was to determine whether the social support services received by young Black women were effectively matched to their perceived social support needs when transitioning out of the NC foster care system to independent living. This chapter presents findings aligned with the three guiding research questions of the study, the main research question and two sub-questions. The analysis includes perspectives from both young Black women who aged out of the foster care system and stakeholders providing social support services that population. These findings are situated within the policy and empirical context provided by the North Carolina Child Welfare 2020–2024 Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan (NCDHHS, 2024) and supported by recent scholarly literature.

Research Question (Main): How did the social supports provided to young Black women match their perceived needs?

Findings indicate that social support services largely aligned with participants' expressed needs in several critical areas: housing, education, employment, mental health, and transportation. However, participants also highlighted gaps in service delivery, including insufficient life skills training, limited culturally responsive mental health care, and inconsistent access to transitional housing.

Young women identified programs such as Youth Villages, the 18 to 21 Program, and LINKS as especially valuable. For example, participants like ““Jada” (20 years old)” and “Nova” (19 years old) described receiving therapy referrals, housing navigation, and college financial aid

support through these programs. Nevertheless, “Naphia” (20 years old) and “Kayla” (18 years old) reported limited or inappropriate responses to certain needs, suggesting mismatches between perceived need and services offered. The findings affirm that where services were well-matched, transitions were smoother, and participants expressed higher levels of satisfaction.

Sub-Research Question (RQa): How did young Black women transitioning from foster care describe their social support needs to stakeholders?

Participants described a diverse range of social support needs aligned with categories identified by NCDHHS (2024). Participants such as “Naphia” (20 years old) emphasized the importance of access to food, hygiene items, transportation, and clothing inventories. Stable housing was a top priority for the participants. “Jada” (20 years old) credited the Hope Center and Youth Villages for helping her secure housing, while others like “Nova” (19 years old) relied on group home placements. “Nova” (19 years old) and “Jada” (20 years old) highlighted support from Youth Villages and group homes in securing scholarships, financial aid, and college resources.

Several participants obtained jobs through Job Corps or received resume and interview preparation assistance. Both “Kayla” (18 years old) and “Naphia” (20 years old) described having to save 50% of their income per group home policies. Their participant experiences varied widely. “Nova” (19 years old) reported building a strong therapeutic alliance through Youth Villages, while “Kayla” (18 years old) felt therapy was ineffective and discontinued it. Even when participants conveyed their needs clearly through program applications, counseling sessions, and informal discussions with staff. Still, the effectiveness of communication and responsiveness varied across service providers.

Sub-Research Question (RQb): How did stakeholders determine the social support needs of young Black women transitioning out of foster care?

Stakeholders employed a variety of methods to determine needs, including formal assessments, therapeutic engagement, document reviews (e.g., support grids and school records), and direct communication with the young women. They categorized needs into several sub-themes. Stakeholders like “Kevin” and “Melissa” identified sustainable housing as the most urgent and frequently requested need. School staff such as “Debbie,” “Beans,” and “Eagle” noted frequent requests for help with FASFA, college applications, transcripts, and vocational training.

Stakeholders such as “Angel” and “Dee” supported employment readiness and financial literacy, often guiding participants through job searches, resume development, and budgeting. Many emphasized the importance of therapy, psychological screenings, and trauma-informed services. Yet, systemic gaps (e.g., Medicaid access, overburdened therapists) hindered consistent support. Stakeholders such as “Jennifer” suggested a centralized support services resource list.

Stakeholders acknowledged systemic inequalities, individual disengagement, and familial or cultural pressures as obstacles to effective support. The collective stakeholder perspective confirmed that while many services are in place, their accessibility and cultural sensibility and responsiveness remain inconsistent.

Summary

In alignment with Yin’s (2011) fifth step of qualitative data analysis, this phase involved drawing final conclusions based on the patterns, themes, and insights that emerged throughout the study. The purpose of this step was to synthesize the findings in a manner that not only captured the participants’ lived experiences but also addressed the overarching research questions. By integrating empirical observations with the conceptual framework of OMT, I

summarized the key findings regarding how social supports optimally matched the perceived needs of young Black women transitioning out of foster care, and how these needs were communicated to and interpreted by stakeholders.

The research findings illustrate partial alignment between available social supports and the perceived needs of young Black women transitioning from the foster care system into adulthood. While programs like Youth Villages and the 18 to 21 Program offer essential services, gaps remain in providing comprehensive, individualized, and culturally responsive support. These findings affirm the critical need for continuity in care, expansion of life skills programming, and more proactive stakeholder engagement.

Participants stressed the importance of consistent, individualized support. While some young Black women reported benefiting from strong networks of professionals, family, and peers, others experienced isolation or inconsistent assistance. Stakeholders highlighted systemic barriers, such as inequitable housing, limited mental health care, fragmented resources, and client disengagement, further compounded by cultural dynamics and agency constraints.

These results align with current literature emphasizing the importance of integrated, developmentally appropriate support systems in ensuring successful transitions from foster care to adulthood (Cudjoe et al., 2022; Verulava & Dangadze, 2021; Narendorf et al., 2020).

The perspectives presented highlight a significant issue regarding the disproportionate challenges encountered by young Black women in the foster care system, especially at the point of exit. This population persists in facing systemic inequities, limited access to opportunities, and inadequately customized services. This chapter's themes and sub-themes illustrate layered experiences and contribute to the discussion and implications outlined in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Young adults transitioning from foster care to independent living in the United States encounter unique challenges. The problem addressed in this study is the appropriate matching of social support services to the perceived needs of young Black women while transitioning out of the foster care system. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single case study conceptual replication was to determine whether the social support services received by young Black women were effectively matched to their perceived social support needs when transitioning out of the NC foster care system to independent living.

The optimal matching theory (OMT) served as the guiding framework for this study, offering a lens through which to interpret the alignment between the social supports received by young Black women aging out of foster care and their expressed needs. As an instrumental theory in psychology and the social sciences, OMT emphasizes that the effectiveness of social support lies not in the quantity of services provided, but in the appropriateness and quality of the support in meeting individualized needs. However, in this study OMT is examined through the Popperian lens of falsifiability to critically assess whether aligning support services with the perceived needs of young Black women genuinely facilitated improved outcomes during their transition from foster care.

The findings of the study addressed the sub and overarching research questions, emphasizing how social supports were perceived, communicated, and interpreted within the transition experience of young Black women aging out of foster care. Grounded in OMT, the analysis examined whether the support provided aligned with the specific needs expressed by this population and interpreted by stakeholders.

The findings revealed a partial alignment between available social supports and the individualized needs of young Black women transitioning into adulthood. Programs such as Youth Villages and the 18 to 21 Program were identified as critical resources; however, participants consistently pointed to unmet needs, particularly in areas requiring culturally responsive, consistent, and individualized support. While some young women described stable networks of support involving family members, professionals, and peers, others reported experiences of isolation, disconnection, and insufficient guidance.

Stakeholders acknowledged systemic barriers that hindered effective service delivery, including inequities in housing access, limits of mental health care, fragmented interagency coordination, and difficulties in participants engagement. Moreover, cultural dynamics and institutional constraints further complicated their ability to provide tailored services. These findings underscore the importance of sustained, developmentally appropriate, and culturally competent interventions, echoing existing literature on the critical role of continuity and integration in transitional support systems (Cudjoe et al., 2022; Verulava & Dangadze, 2021; Narendorf et al., 2020).

Limitations of the Study

My study was not without limitation. Several limitations inherent to this study may constrain the extent to which the findings can be generalized to broader populations. The following are the key limitations of my study.

Limited Generalizability

My study was a single case study and focused on a specific geographic and demographic context, young Black women transitioning out of foster care in North Carolina. While the findings may not be generalizable to other populations, regions, or foster care systems with

differing structures and cultural contexts, they contribute to the broader testing of OMT through the Popperian principle of falsifiability. This approach allows future researchers to examine whether OMT holds explanatory power across diverse populations and settings.

Sample Size and Availability

The small sample size of 13 participants (four young Black women and nine stakeholders) was purposively selected for my research. While this sample size is appropriate for qualitative inquiry, it may not fully capture the diversity of experiences among all young Black women in or exiting foster care. Additionally, while the use of convenience and purposive sampling was necessary for accessibility and relevance, it introduced potential bias, as participants were selected based on availability and their direct involvement with foster care transition services.

Self-Reported Data

My study heavily relied on self-reported experiences and perceptions of stakeholders and young Black women participants. The information was gathered from their worldviews and may be influenced by recall bias, personal interpretation, or social desirability, especially when discussing sensitive topics such as trauma, neglect, or system involvement.

Limited Stakeholder Representation

The lack of availability of stakeholder participants created limited diversity among stakeholder participants, particularly in terms of gender and ethnicity. Only one male stakeholder was included, which restricts the range of perspectives on how gender dynamics may influence the provision and perception of support services. Additionally, the study included only two African American female stakeholders, limiting the cultural representation and depth of insight

into the systemic and racialized experiences that uniquely affect young Black women transitioning out of foster care.

Researcher Bias and Subjectivity

I made deliberate and meticulous efforts to preserve the objectivity of this study, incorporating strategies such as reflexivity and member checking to ensure credibility. Nonetheless, there remains a minimal possibility that my professional background and interpretive lens may have influenced aspects of the coding process, thematic development, and presentation of findings. Additionally, the coding approach was theory-driven, guided by the principles of OMT, which may have further shaped the analytical framework.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the complex social support needs of young Black women transitioning out of foster care, a population that has long been underserved and marginalized within child welfare systems.

Chapter Organization

Chapter 5 provides a comprehensive interpretation of the study's findings, organized by the overarching and sub-research questions to explore how social supports matched the perceived needs of young Black women transitioning from foster care and how those needs were identified and addressed by stakeholders. The chapter discusses the implications of these findings, highlighting the partial alignment between available services and the participants' expressed needs, and emphasizing the importance of culturally responsive, individualized, and consistent support.

Based on these insights, several recommendations for practice are proposed, including improved stakeholder engagement, expanded transitional services, and the integration of OMT into service delivery models. The chapter also outlines recommendations for future research,

such as longitudinal studies, broader stakeholder inclusion, and further exploration of intersectional factors influencing the transition experience. The chapter concludes by reaffirming the significance of centering the voices of young Black women in child welfare policy and practice to foster equitable, sustainable transitions into adulthood.

Implications

This qualitative exploratory single case study, designed as a conceptual replication, aimed to answer the research questions by drawing on three distinct sources of data: the lived experiences of young Black women transitioning out of foster care, the perspectives of key stakeholders involved in service delivery, and a document analysis of North Carolina's Requirement 8 policy for youth aging out of the foster care system. The study was guided by one overarching research question and two supporting sub-research questions:

Research Question (Overarching)

How did the social supports provided to young Black women match their perceived needs?

Sub-Research Question (RQa)

How did young Black women transitioning from foster care describe their social support needs to stakeholders?

Sub-Research Question (RQb)

How did stakeholders determine the social support needs of young Black women transitioning out of foster care?

To address these questions, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions with both groups of participants and performed a qualitative content analysis of the NC Requirement 8 policy document. Through a systematic coding and thematic analysis

process, eight key themes emerged from participant responses. These themes provided a foundation for interpreting the alignment between provided social supports and perceived needs, as viewed through the lens of OMT.

In the following sections, I explored these findings to assess whether, and to what extent, the supports offered to young Black women were effectively matched to their developmental, cultural, and perceived individual needs. I began the discussion with the implications derived from the two sub-research questions and progressed to the broader implications addressed by the overarching research question.

Sub-Research Question (RQa): How did the social supports provided to young Black women match their perceived needs?

This sub-research question explores how young Black women participants perceived the alignment between the social support services they received and their expressed needs during their transition out of foster care. The implications drawn from this analysis focus on four key themes that emerged from participant interviews in order of priority: (1) participation in social support programs, (2) social support service needs, (3) Social Support Network, and (4) unaddressed social support needs. These themes provide insight into the adequacy, accessibility, and cultural responsiveness of the supports offered and underscore the importance of tailoring services to meet the individualized needs of this population.

Implications: Social Support Service Needs. Findings from this study indicate that social support needs were a central concern for the young Black women participants, who consistently emphasized the importance of addressing a wide range of needs during their transition from foster care. These included basic necessities, stable housing, access to education, employment and financial stability, reliable transportation, and mental health services. While all

participants recognized the significance of social support, the prioritization of specific needs varied based on their individual experiences, circumstances, and access to services. These findings align with existing literature that identifies these domains as essential to successful transitions into adulthood for youth aging out of care (Avant et al., 2021; Packard & Benuto, 2020) and are directly supported by the NC Department of Health and Human Services' Requirement 8, which outlines the fundamental support goals for youth exiting foster care (NCDHHS, 2024).

The implications of these findings underscore the importance of a comprehensive and individualized approach to support service delivery. Secure employment and financial stability were frequently discussed as foundational to long-term independence, with participants expressing a need for job readiness training, budgeting skills, and employment placement support. This aligns with Dumais and Spence (2021), who assert that economic self-sufficiency is a primary determinant of post-care stability. Educational attainment also emerged as a critical factor. As Hanson et al. (2023) note, there is a strong correlation between access to higher education and enhanced employment opportunities. Participants who received support with scholarships, financial aid, and vocational training reported greater confidence in their transition pathways.

Housing instability remained one of the most pressing and least consistently addressed needs. Participants frequently described temporary placements, limited transitional housing options, or experiences of couch surfing, which often hindered their ability to focus on employment or education. Leathers et al. (2023) similarly observed that youth facing financial insecurity are disproportionately vulnerable to homelessness. Additionally, mental health was identified as both a critical support area and a barrier to achieving other life goals. Emotional

well-being significantly influenced participants' ability to maintain employment, pursue education, and manage daily responsibilities. This is supported by Narendorf et al. (2020), who emphasized that untreated mental health concerns can significantly disrupt a young person's trajectory toward independence.

Overall, the implications of these findings highlight the need for integrated, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive support systems that address the full spectrum of social service needs for young Black women exiting foster care. Programs that tailor services to individual priorities, rather than offering standardized or fragmented support, are more likely to produce meaningful, sustained outcomes consistent with the OMT framework. To effectively support this population, service providers must prioritize flexibility, equity, and continuity of care.

Implications: Social Support Network. The findings of this study underscore the critical role that social support personnel play in the lives of young Black women transitioning out of foster care. Three of the four participants positively affirmed the importance of having a supportive network comprised of both formal and informal relationships. Two of these participants described their networks as including a range of individuals such as social workers, therapists, LINKS coordinators, teachers, houseparents, family members, and close friends. These support figures were instrumental in helping them access essential services such as housing, education, and mental health care. One participant, however, reported relying primarily on a single friend who provided consistent emotional and financial support. In contrast, the fourth participant indicated that she had no external support network, particularly no connection with family. However, she noted that her current placement in a group home adequately met her basic needs at the time of the interview.

These findings reinforce the notion that consistent and responsive social support personnel are essential to a successful transition from foster care to independent living. Participants who had access to supportive relationships expressed greater confidence in their ability to navigate adulthood and meet their individual needs. This is consistent with previous research that emphasizes the importance of social connectedness, particularly through trusted adults and professionals, in promoting positive developmental outcomes for youth exiting care (Best & Blakeslee, 2020; Villagrana & Lee, 2020).

The implications of these findings suggest that establishing and maintaining strong, stable relationships with caring adults should be a central priority in transitional planning. Emotional and instrumental support from professionals—when sustained and culturally responsive—can serve as a buffer against the risks commonly faced by youth aging out of foster care, including homelessness, isolation, and poor mental health. Moreover, the presence of at least one reliable support figure, whether formal or informal, can significantly enhance a young person’s resilience and capacity to self-advocate.

In alignment with North Carolina’s Requirement 8, which recommends that youth exiting foster care have a support network of at least five responsible adults, the study’s results suggest this goal remains aspirational for many. Strengthening peer and adult connections through mentorship programs, aftercare services, and family preservation initiatives may increase the likelihood that young Black women exit care with a dependable support system in place. These relationships are not only beneficial for practical assistance but also play a crucial role in fostering a sense of belonging, emotional security, and long-term stability.

Implications: Participation in Social Support Programs. The findings of this study highlight the significant impact of program participation on the developmental outcomes of

young Black women transitioning out of foster care. All four participants reported that once they felt emotionally supported and understood by professionals or caregivers, they were more likely to engage actively in available social support programs. Their willingness to participate was closely tied to their perception that the services were relevant, respectful, and responsive to their unique circumstances.

Each participant identified one or more programs, such as Youth Villages, LINKS, Job Corps, or the 18 to 21 Program, which provided vital support in areas including housing assistance, educational access, mental health counseling, and life skills development. These programs were generally viewed as aligned with the participants' perceived needs and were cited as contributing positively to their growth, sense of stability, and progress toward independent living. In particular, the programs that integrated emotional support with practical resources appeared to have the most meaningful impact on sustained engagement.

Notably, two participants highlighted how social support services extended beyond individual support and included assistance with parenting. They reported receiving critical help with caring for their children, such as access to diapers, clothing, and daycare services, enabling them to work or pursue college education. This underscores the importance of comprehensive service models that recognize and accommodate the multifaceted responsibilities of young mothers transitioning out of care.

These findings are consistent with existing literature, which emphasizes that optimal social support, when appropriately matched to the recipient's life context, can create a supportive environment conducive to academic success, stable housing, and long-term self-sufficiency (Best & Blakeslee, 2020). The implications suggest that participation in social support programs is most effective when services are delivered in a personalized, culturally informed, and

nonjudgmental manner. When young women feel seen, heard, and respected, they are more likely to engage, trust service providers, and utilize resources that enhance their transition into adulthood.

Furthermore, the findings reinforce a central tenet of OMT: that support must not only be available, but also contextually and personally appropriate in order to be effective. This is particularly evident in programs that successfully integrate instrumental support (e.g., housing, childcare, employment assistance) with affective or emotional support (e.g., mentorship, trauma-informed counseling, encouragement). Such holistic approaches appear to foster greater engagement, resilience, and long-term success among young women transitioning from foster care, especially those navigating the additional responsibilities of parenthood.

However, this study also reveals limitations within OMT when applied to marginalized populations, particularly young Black women with intersecting systemic vulnerabilities. While OMT assumes that individuals are able to accurately articulate their perceived needs and access corresponding supports, this may not always hold true in practice. Participants described barriers such as limited cultural responsiveness, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and a lack of trust in service providers; all of which can disrupt the matching process regardless of available programs' intent or design. This suggests a need to expand OMT to account for structural and relational dynamics, including historical trauma, cultural mistrust, and the unequal distribution of power in service settings.

A possible revision of OMT, therefore, would include a more explicit recognition of systemic inequities and relational constraints that affect both the perception of need and the delivery of support. By embedding concepts from critical theory and intersectionality into the OMT framework, future models could more accurately predict and address mismatches in

support for historically marginalized populations. In consideration of these findings, policymakers and practitioners should invest in culturally grounded, client-centered programs that attend to both the tangible and psychosocial needs of young women exiting foster care. This includes programs that recognize parenting youth as a distinct subgroup requiring additional layers of coordinated care, emotional validation, and tailored resources.

Implications: Unaddressed Social Support Needs. The findings of this study revealed that, despite access to some formal support services, critical social support needs remained unaddressed for several participants. Two of the four young Black women explicitly reported unmet needs in key areas such as mental health and substance use recovery, while the remaining two expressed uncertainty regarding whether all of their needs were being adequately met. This uncertainty itself reflects a lack of clarity, communication, or consistency in service delivery, which may prevent young adults from fully recognizing or articulating the gaps in their care.

Participants described persistent struggles related to securing stable transitional housing, accessing consistent and culturally competent mental health services, particularly for substance use recovery, and maintaining custody of their children. In some cases, unmet needs had severe consequences, such as the removal of children from their care and placement into the foster care system. These experiences underscore the systemic deficiencies that can perpetuate cycles of instability, particularly for young Black women who may already be navigating the intersection of racial, gender, and economic disparities.

The reflections shared by participants highlighted a need for more individualized, hands-on assistance in managing the complexities of daily life, from housing and childcare to recovery support and advocacy. They expressed a desire for deeper, more personalized guidance as they attempted to navigate early adulthood with limited resources and inconsistent support. These

findings align with Harp and Bunting (2020), who noted that Black women often face disproportionately harsh consequences in child welfare proceedings, such as the immediate removal of newborns following positive drug tests, which can retraumatize individuals and, in some cases, re-entangle them in the very foster care system they are trying to exit.

The implications of these findings are significant. They suggest that transitional programs must go beyond basic service offerings and be proactive in identifying and addressing complex, layered needs that are often stigmatized or overlooked. Moreover, services must be delivered in ways that acknowledge the systemic inequities that disproportionately affect young Black women. To improve long-term outcomes, support systems should integrate trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and family-centered approaches that not only provide immediate resources but also empower young women to advocate for themselves and maintain custody of their children when safe and appropriate.

These unaddressed needs point to the ongoing mismatch between available support and the lived realities of young Black women transitioning out of foster care. The findings reinforced the core principle of OMT, that support must not only be present, but must also be relevant, tailored, and sustainable to be effective.

Sub-Research Question (RQa): How did stakeholders determine the social support needs of young Black women transitioning out of foster care?

This sub-research question examines how stakeholder participants identified and matched young Black women to appropriate social support services during their transition from the foster care system. The implications are organized around four primary themes: (1) available social support services, (2) interacting with young Black women to meet their needs, (3) determining the social support needs of young Black women, and (4) challenges encountered when meeting

social support needs. This analysis highlights the strategies used by stakeholders, as well as the systemic and interpersonal factors that either facilitated or hindered effective support delivery.

Implications: Available Social Support Services. Stakeholders identified a comprehensive variety of social support services currently accessible to young Black women transitioning out of foster care, with critical domains such as housing, education, employment, financial assistance, transportation, mental health care, and parenting support. Primary programs cited by stakeholders included the 18 to 21 Program and Youth Villages LifeSet, both of which aim to promote independence through age-appropriate case management and resource linkage.

These programs align directly with NC Child Welfare Requirement 8, which stipulates that youth exiting foster care must secure economic resources, safe and stable housing, academic or vocational opportunities, a supportive network of adults, avoidance of high-risk behaviors, postponement of parenthood until maturity and stability are attained, and access to comprehensive physical and mental health care (NCDHHS, 2024).

Despite the breadth of services, stakeholders consistently emphasized that accessibility and cultural responsiveness remain areas of concern. For example, while the 18 to 21 Program offers educational scholarships and housing subsidies, participants noted that program administrators sometimes lacked cultural competence in addressing the unique experiences of young Black women, particularly around racialized trauma and historical mistrust of institutions.

Similarly, Youth Villages LifeSet was praised for its individualized transition planning and life skills workshops, yet some clients reported challenges navigating eligibility requirements and were not accepted into the program. These limitations suggest that, although foundational resources are in place, systemic barriers, such as inflexible program criteria and

insufficient representation of Black practitioners, can impede full utilization of available supports.

From an OMT perspective, the effectiveness of these services depends not only on their existence but also on their appropriateness to the recipient's contextual needs (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Stakeholder insights revealed that programs most successful in meeting participants' perceived needs were those that combined tangible assistance (e.g., housing placement, tuition support) with culturally attuned, trauma-informed case management.

For instance, stakeholder "Kevin," the Youth Village regional supervisor stated when stakeholders with lived experience of foster care, particularly Black counselors, engaged directly with young Black women, trust increased, and service uptake improved. Conversely, participants conveyed that generic or "one-size-fits-all" interventions often failed to address culturally specific stressors, thereby undermining long-term stability.

These findings have several implications for policy and practice. First, service providers must enhance cultural competence through targeted training and recruitment of Black practitioners who can better understand and advocate for the unique challenges faced by young Black women.

Second, program eligibility criteria and delivery models should be reviewed to incorporate greater flexibility, allowing seamless transitions between services (e.g., extending housing vouchers while participants are enrolled in part-time education).

Third, establishing formal feedback loops with participants can ensure that programs evolve in response to emerging needs, such as childcare assistance for young mothers or peer support groups to mitigate social isolation.

Finally, stakeholders highlighted the value of centralized resource directories, for example, a regularly updated digital platform that consolidates housing listings, mental health providers, and educational scholarships, thereby reducing the administrative burden on youth to locate appropriate services.

Implications: Interacting with Young Black Women to Meet their Needs. All stakeholder participants emphasized that meaningful interaction with young Black women aging out of foster care is essential to effective service delivery. The quality of these interactions shaped how services were perceived as helpful, relevant, or trustworthy. Stakeholders described using both formal assessments and informal relationship-building strategies such as empathetic listening, advocacy, goal-setting, and practical support (e.g., transportation, housing, financial guidance) to build rapport and trust.

These relational approaches were seen as vital for helping youth navigate complex transitions. Culturally responsive and trauma-informed communication was particularly important for affirming the unique lived experiences of young Black women, often shaped by systemic inequities. This aligns with NC Requirement 8 (NCDHHS, 2024) and existing research that emphasizes the role of strong adult relationships in improving outcomes such as housing stability, education, and employment (Greeson et al., 2021; Best & Blakeslee, 2020).

The implications clearly indicate that individualized engagement must be embedded as a best practice. It would be beneficial for agencies to train staff in culturally competent, relationship-centered approaches and design systems that prioritize time for genuine connection. Sustained, trust-based support, beyond initial intake, is key to ensuring young Black women feel seen, empowered, and equipped to transition successfully into adulthood. In line with OMT, how support is delivered can be as impactful as what support is delivered.

Implications: Determining the Social Support Needs of Young Black Women. Six out of nine stakeholders consistently described employing a combination of formal assessments and structured interviews, and ongoing direct engagement to identify the social support needs of the young Black women. However, all stakeholders described engaging in ongoing, direct interaction with young Black women to effectively assess and understand their perceived needs. These methods allowed for a more individualized understanding of each youth's circumstances and helped inform tailored support plans. Through these interactions, stakeholders were able to discern the most commonly requested and prioritized areas of need, specifically, housing, education, employment and financial support, transportation, and mental health services.

These findings not only reflect the core needs emphasized by the study's participants but also align with the broader body of literature highlighting the fundamental areas critical to a successful transition to independent living (Lindquist-Grantz et al., 2022; Schelbe et al., 2024). Moreover, they correspond directly with the goals outlined in North Carolina's Requirement 8 (NCDHHS, 2024).

The implications of these findings suggest that while existing assessment strategies are effective in capturing high-level needs, there remains a need for more culturally responsive and trauma-informed assessment tools that consider the intersectional experiences of young Black women. Stakeholders emphasized that traditional assessments may not always capture the nuanced barriers these young women face, such as systemic discrimination, cultural stigmas surrounding mental health, or institutional mistrust. Therefore, integrating more personalized, narrative-based approaches may enhance the accuracy and depth of needs assessments.

Additionally, the frequency with which basic needs were cited reinforces the importance of early and proactive identification. Timely needs assessment not only enables more effective

service delivery but also helps prevent crises such as housing instability, untreated mental health conditions, or early unemployment. From the lens of OMT, these findings affirm that the impact of support depends not only on its availability but on how well it aligns with the recipient's specific and evolving needs.

Implications: Challenges Encountered When Meeting Social Support Needs. All stakeholders acknowledged facing a range of challenges in their efforts to provide effective social support to young Black women transitioning out of foster care. These challenges were multifaceted, encompassing structural, institutional, and interpersonal barriers that hindered the consistent delivery of individualized and culturally responsive care.

One of the most frequently cited obstacles was the pervasiveness of systemic inequalities or barriers. Stakeholders described how racial and economic disparities, coupled with limited affordable housing, inconsistent mental health coverage, and fragmented service systems, disproportionately impacted the stability and outcomes of Black youth aging out of care. These systemic barriers often required professionals to navigate institutional constraints beyond their immediate control, such as long waiting lists for services, eligibility restrictions, or inflexible program guidelines.

Another major challenge was the shortage of culturally competent services. Stakeholders reported that many existing support programs lacked staff who reflected the cultural backgrounds or life experiences of the youth they served. As a result, young Black women often struggled to form trusting relationships with providers or to access services that fully acknowledged their cultural, racial, or gendered realities. This lack of cultural responsiveness sometimes resulted in youth disengaging from services or feeling misunderstood and unsupported.

In addition to structural and institutional issues, some stakeholders pointed to aging youth-related barriers, such as mistrust of the system, difficulty articulating needs, or reluctance to engage in services due to past trauma or negative experiences with authority figures. While these barriers were never framed as shortcomings of the youth themselves, they were recognized as meaningful dynamics that required patience, relational consistency, and trauma-informed approaches to overcome.

These findings have several implications. First, they highlight the urgent need for systemic reforms that reduce bureaucratic barriers and increase access to affordable, youth, centered services. Second, investment in recruiting and training culturally competent staff, particularly those with lived experience in foster care, would likely improve relational engagement and service outcomes. Third, agencies must recognize the impact of trauma and systemic mistrust and adjust their approaches, accordingly, fostering environments where young Black women feel safe, heard, and respected.

From the perspective of OMT, the findings of this study challenge the presumption that the mere presence and intent of support are sufficient for effectiveness. For instance, while young Black women participants in need of housing reported being placed in safe and secure group homes, the accommodations were not well-suited to their developmental stage as emerging adults. One participant, who had recently given birth, described the difficulty of adhering to rigid house wake-up rules despite experiencing sleepless nights caring for her newborn. Another participant shared that, as a form of discipline, her phone was confiscated, leaving her unable to communicate with her healthcare provider and employer, thereby compromising her well-being and responsibilities. These findings underscore that optimal matching requires more than aligning the type of support with the perceived needs of the

recipient, it must also consider the context in which that support is delivered. When services are administered within culturally incongruent, emotionally unsafe, or structurally inequitable environments, their impact is often diminished, regardless of their availability or design. Participants' experiences highlighted that systemic issues, such as implicit bias, lack of representation, and inflexible bureaucratic procedures, can erode the trust necessary for effective engagement, thereby weakening the support match.

When viewed through the Popperian falsification lens, these challenges call into question the foundational assumption of OMT that individuals are appropriately matched with perceived supports, they will benefit from available supports as intended. Realistically, the process of "matching" is filtered through complex relational, cultural, and institutional dynamics that OMT does not fully account for. As such, the theory's current formulation may oversimplify the interaction between support availability and individual outcomes, especially within marginalized populations such as the young Black women who are aging out of foster care.

Therefore, to advance the utility of OMT in real-world applications, particularly for vulnerable young Black women who are aging out of foster care, the model must be expanded to include variables such as cultural competence, relational safety, and structural accessibility. Further investigation is warranted into how power dynamics, trauma histories, and identity-based factors (e.g., race, gender, parenting status) mediate the perceived relevance and actual effectiveness of support. For example, services that were well-intentioned but lacked cultural attunement often failed to meet emotional needs, even when instrumental resources were provided. This highlights a critical dimension in need of theoretical revision: the role of perceived fit must be redefined to include sociocultural resonance and emotional congruence, not just logistical alignment.

Addressing these gaps is essential to developing support systems that are not only accessible, but genuinely effective in promoting positive developmental, psychological, and socio-economic outcomes for young Black women transitioning out of foster care. Integrating intersectional and ecological perspectives into OMT may yield a more responsive and inclusive framework capable of guiding future research, policy, and practice.

Research Question (Overarching): How did the social supports provided to young Black women match their perceived needs?

The overarching research question considers the extent to which the social supports provided to young Black women transitioning out of foster care matched their perceived needs. Synthesizing the findings from both sub-questions, this section evaluates the overall effectiveness of support systems within the framework of OMT. The implications presented here reflect both areas of alignment and mismatch between provided services and individual needs, emphasizing the importance of contextually relevant, developmentally appropriate, and culturally informed supports. This broader analysis provides a foundation for informing policy, improving practice, and guiding future interventions targeting the unique experiences of young Black women aging out of foster care.

The study effectively addressed both its stated problem and purpose by examining whether the social support services received by young Black women transitioning from the North Carolina foster care system were appropriately matched to their perceived needs. The findings revealed areas of alignment, such as access to education and employment support, and areas of misalignment, particularly in mental health care, transitional housing, and cultural responsiveness. These results were evaluated in conjunction with NC Requirement 8, which outlines key outcomes for youth aging out of foster care, including stable housing, financial

independence, educational attainment, supportive adult relationships, and access to health services.

Thematic analysis of interviews and policy documents provided a nuanced understanding of how well existing supports fulfilled these state-mandated goals. Through the lens of OMT, the study emphasized that the effectiveness of support depends on its contextual fit with each young woman's individual needs and circumstances. These findings offer meaningful insight into the strengths and limitations of current service delivery and affirm the ongoing relevance of OMT in evaluating and enhancing foster care transition outcomes in line with state policy expectations.

The findings also suggest partial alignment between provided social supports and the perceived needs of young Black women transitioning from foster care. Programs that offered individualized, relationally driven, and culturally responsive services were viewed as effective and empowering. However, systemic barriers, such as limited access to culturally competent providers, inflexible program requirements, and racial disparities, undermined the consistency and quality of care. According to OMT, support is most effective when it is appropriately matched to the individual's situation. This study demonstrates that when such alignment occurred, participants were more engaged, resilient, and capable of independent living. Conversely, when support was misaligned, participants experienced isolation, unmet needs, and in some cases, regression (e.g., child removal, housing instability).

Significant Implication: Through Psychological Lenses. The findings of this study both affirm and challenge the assumptions of OMT when applied to young Black women transitioning from foster care to independent adulthood. OMT posits that social support is most effective when it is matched to the recipient's specific needs (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). In several cases, this proposition held true: participants who engaged with programs such as Youth

Villages, LINKS, and the 18 to 21 Program reported positive outcomes when services were individualized, relational, and responsive to their immediate goals. These matched supports, particularly in education, employment readiness, and emotional support, demonstrated increased engagement, resilience, and optimism about future independence.

However, the study also uncovered critical misalignments that serve to partially falsify OMT within this population. Young Black women participants encountered multiple instances where services were theoretically available but either inaccessible, ineffective, or delivered in ways that were culturally detached. For example, mental health services were frequently misaligned due to a lack of culturally competent providers or systemic constraints like service cut-offs at age 18. Similarly, transitional housing was often reported as insufficient, unsafe, or incompatible with long-term independence goals. These mismatches reveal a limitation in OMT's core premise: the assumption that accurate categorization of support (e.g., emotional, informational, instrumental) alone ensures effectiveness.

There are several critical psychological and developmental factors that influence the experiences of young adults, particularly young Black women, aging out of the foster care system. Chief among these factors is trauma, which both stakeholders and young Black women participants consistently identified as a foundational concern. The very act of being removed from one's home of origin constitutes a traumatic event. Trauma, broadly defined, is a psychological or emotional response to an adverse experience that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope (Spinelli et al., 2023; Teculeasa et al., 2023). For young people in foster care, trauma often originates from a range of experiences, including the death of a loved one, parental separation, physical or sexual abuse, exposure to violence, neglect, discrimination, and

witnessing events such as suicide or homicide. These experiences can compromise an individual's sense of safety, trust, power and control, self-worth, and capacity for intimacy.

When youth enter the foster care system, often without preparation or adequate emotional support, their existing trauma may be exacerbated, potentially leading to chronic psychological distress or even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Accordingly, trauma-informed care is not optional but essential when working with young Black women aging out of foster care. This approach ensures that services acknowledge the impact of trauma, avoid re-traumatization, and prioritize emotional safety and healing.

The second critical factor is attachment. Rooted in Bowlby's attachment theory and expanded by Ainsworth's work on attachment patterns, this framework emphasizes the enduring impact of early caregiver relationships on an individual's ability to form secure connections in adulthood. Four primary attachment styles—secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganized—shape interpersonal functioning over the lifespan. Individuals with secure attachment are more likely to develop healthy, trusting relationships and navigate adulthood with confidence. In contrast, those with anxious attachment often fear abandonment, become overly dependent on others, and experience emotional volatility in relationships (Mısırlı & Karakuş, 2024). Avoidant attachment is characterized by emotional suppression, difficulty trusting others, and an aversion to intimacy. The disorganized attachment style, commonly observed in youth with traumatic early caregiving, combines anxious and avoidant tendencies, often resulting in difficulty regulating emotions and forming stable relationships. For young Black women in foster care, disrupted or inconsistent attachments can profoundly affect their transition to adulthood, increasing their vulnerability to relational challenges and emotional instability.

The third factor is substance use, which frequently emerges as a maladaptive coping mechanism in response to cumulative trauma, neglect, and emotional pain. Many young people in care environments turn to substances to manage symptoms of depression, anxiety, and unresolved trauma. Several participants in this study described using substances to self-medicate, especially when therapeutic resources were either unavailable or mismatched to their needs (Mısırlı & Karakuş, 2024). One young Black woman participant, for example, explicitly requested a therapist with substance use expertise but was assigned someone without this specialization. She reported feeling unheard and continues to struggle with cravings and triggers, an outcome that reflects both a service mismatch and a deeper sense of systemic neglect.

These findings highlight the psychological risks of support mismatches, especially when youth are provided with services that do not address their immediate emotional and mental health needs. According to OMT, support is most effective when it aligns with an individual's perceived needs. However, individuals may not always know what supports they need or even the impact of unaddressed needs. In practice, mismatches can exacerbate feelings of abandonment, distrust, and helplessness, particularly for young Black women who have already endured relational trauma and systemic marginalization. When support is perceived as invalidating or unhelpful, it undermines the development of self-efficacy, autonomy, and secure identity formation, all of which are central to emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000).

Despite articulating their needs clearly, several young Black women participants described services as inadequate or environments as rigid and unresponsive. This perception of being overlooked reinforces trauma-related beliefs of being unworthy or invisible and may lead to disengagement from systems intended to help them. These psychological implications suggest

that matching support type alone is insufficient, delivery must also be emotionally attuned, culturally responsive, and contextually safe.

In this light, OMT proves to be a useful but incomplete framework for addressing the complex needs of marginalized populations. While the theory emphasizes the fit between support type and perceived need, it does not fully account for the delivery context, cultural congruence, or structural barriers that mediate the perceived effectiveness of support. This study suggests that OMT should be refined and complemented by trauma-informed, intersectional, and culturally grounded frameworks. The inclusion of variables such as relational tone, cultural humility, and systemic flexibility would significantly enhance OMT's relevance and application to vulnerable populations, such as the young Black women navigating the transition out of foster care.

Most Significant Implication: Cultural Responsiveness. One of the most significant implications of this study is the absence of cultural sensitivity in many support encounters, which directly challenges core assumptions within OMT. The findings revealed that young Black women were more likely to engage with services, express their needs, and make progress in education, employment, and housing when supported by stakeholders who demonstrated cultural competence and sustained, empathetic engagement. The providers fostered trust by affirming the cultural identities and honoring the lived experiences of these young Black women.

Conversely, the absence of culturally attuned support resulted in service disengagement, increased mistrust, and critical needs going unmet. Young Black women participants described feeling misunderstood, dismissed, or stereotyped by providers who lacked cultural awareness, which undermined the perceived relevance and effectiveness of available services.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings falsify the assumption within OMT that support matching alone is sufficient for effectiveness, particularly when the theory is applied to

racially and culturally diverse populations. Through the Popperian lens of falsifiability, this evidence suggests that the predictive validity of OMT does not hold when cultural responsiveness is absent, regardless of whether the service type appears to align with the individual's stated needs.

Therefore, this study not only confirms the importance of need-based social support but also exposes a crucial limitation in OMT as a framework: its inability to account for the delivery context, especially cultural congruence, as a determinant of whether a match is truly optimal. To enhance its applicability, it is necessary that OMT be revised to integrate cultural competency as a core dimension of the matching process. In doing so, support systems can move beyond transactional service delivery toward more relational, equity-informed models that foster trust, autonomy, and long-term stability for young Black women aging out of foster care.

Second Significant Implication: Misalignment of Available Services and Perceived Needs. Stakeholder participants reported that even when services were technically available, they were often inaccessible, misaligned, or delivered in ways that failed to address the young Black women's unique circumstances. For instance, stakeholder participant "Angel," a human trafficking case manager, proposed the creation of a drop-in center for young women aging out of foster care who were not yet ready to leave exploitative situations. She emphasized the need for flexible, low-barrier services, such as basic financial literacy classes, that could be accessed voluntarily and without judgment. This approach reflects a key principle of OMT, which asserts that the effectiveness of support is contingent not only on its availability but also on its contextual fit with the recipient's situation.

However, the findings also expose a critical limitation in OMT when examined through the lens of Popperian falsifiability. According to OMT, properly matched support should yield

positive outcomes; yet in this study, even when services were perceived as appropriately “matched” in type, they failed to generate impact when delivery context, such as timing, accessibility, relational safety, and cultural sensitivity, was not addressed. Furthermore, the disconnect between theoretical alignment and real-world outcome serves as a falsifying instance of OMT, suggesting the theory lacks explanatory power in cases where systemic and structural barriers interfere with service uptake.

Therefore, these findings highlight the need to revise OMT to include not just the content of support, but also the conditions under which support is accessed and experienced. Without that expanded framework, young Black women aging out of foster care remain at heightened risk for housing instability, unemployment, and continued involvement with multiple systems. Effective support must be contextually attuned, trauma-informed, and flexible enough to meet individuals where they are, both emotionally and situationally.

Probable Societal Outcomes. The findings of the study will be beneficial in informing agency practice and policy to potentially improve the life trajectories among young Black women who receive personalized, culturally responsive support. These outcomes may include greater educational attainment, increased employment opportunities, and more successful parenting experiences, leading to long-term stability and self-sufficiency.

Additionally, enhanced alignment between services and young Black women’s needs could contribute to a reduction in public expenditures related to emergency housing, crisis mental health services, and child welfare reentry. When young adults are adequately supported, they are less likely to rely on reactive systems, reducing the financial and logistical burden on state agencies.

Probable Negative Consequences. Controversy, failure to address the gaps identified in this study may result in continued cycles of poverty, instability, and re-involvement with the child welfare system for young Black women exiting foster care. Unmet needs in housing, education, and mental health may perpetuate systemic disadvantage and hinder long-term independence.

There is also a significant risk of exacerbating existing racial disparities. Without intervention, inequities in access to safe housing, mental health services, educational opportunities, and employment pathways may widen, further marginalizing this already vulnerable population.

Moreover, if culturally responsive care and trust-building are not prioritized, the credibility of social service systems among marginalized communities may continue to erode. This could lead to disengagement, underutilization of available resources, and resistance to future support interventions.

Improbable Consequences. It is unlikely that the findings of this study alone will trigger sudden, large-scale policy reform. While the findings contribute meaningful insight, systemic change typically requires a sustained, collective effort across multiple agencies and levels of government.

Similarly, the immediate elimination of systemic inequities is improbable without ongoing advocacy, structural investment, and the coordinated efforts of policymakers, department of human services, foster care system, communities, and stakeholders. While the study lays a foundation, its impact depends on how its recommendations are received and translated into action.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to inform future practice related to the transition of young Black women from the foster care system to independent living.

Cultural Awareness

It is strongly recommended that social service agencies prioritize culturally responsive, relationship-centered practices to improve outcomes for young Black women transitioning from foster care to independent living. Participants who received personalized support from culturally competent professionals, such as social workers, LINKS coordinators, houseparents, and therapists, consistently reported greater trust in services, higher engagement, and improved self-advocacy. These findings reinforce the central tenet of OMT (Cutrona & Russell, 1990), which emphasizes that social support is most effective when it aligns with the recipient's specific needs. However, as important is matching the social support services to needs aligned with current circumstances, lived experiences, and cultural background.

Cultural Competency Training

In alignment with existing research, culturally attuned services have been shown to foster emotional safety, strengthen service continuity, and increase the likelihood of long-term success across multiple life domains, including education, housing, and mental health (Best & Blakeslee, 2020; Villagrana & Lee, 2020). As such, agencies should invest in sustained cultural competence training, increase the hiring of racially and experientially diverse staff, and incorporate trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate assessment tools. Moreover, intentional relationship-building must be integrated into all phases of service delivery, not only during intake or crisis periods, so that trust, empathy, and mutual respect become foundational to care.

These practices directly address the gaps identified in this study, particularly in areas where support was misaligned or perceived as ineffective, such as mental health care access, life skills development, and transitional housing. By aligning practice with the standards outlined in NC Requirement 8 (NCDHHS, 2024, pp. 25–27), which calls for individualized, comprehensive preparation for adulthood, agencies can more effectively support young Black women in achieving stability, autonomy, and long-term well-being. Ultimately, embedding culturally responsive, trust-based engagement strategies into routine practice is not only an ethical imperative but a necessary step toward dismantling systemic disparities and ensuring equitable outcomes for youth aging out of care.

Recommendations for Future Research

Drawing on the findings and limitations of this study, several targeted recommendations for future research are proposed to advance the understanding and application of culturally responsive social support services for young Black women transitioning out of foster care:

Expanded Sample Size and Participant Diversity

Future studies should employ a larger and more demographically diverse sample to enhance the transferability and generalizability of the findings. Expanding the participant pool to include individuals from various geographic regions and foster care systems, along with broader representation across racial, ethnic, and professional backgrounds, would provide richer, more comprehensive data and yield deeper insights into how social support services are delivered and experienced across different contexts.

Include Underrepresented Stakeholder Perspectives

Additional research should specifically seek the perspectives of male stakeholders and specifically, Black male and female stakeholders, frontline workers from varied disciplines such

as healthcare, housing, and education. Including diverse voices would help uncover blind spots in service coordination and reveal opportunities for more integrated and equitable approaches to transition planning.

Culture Specific Trauma

Future research should explore culturally specific trauma responses amongst young Black women aging out of foster care to determine how race, gender, and socioeconomic status helped shape trauma and how trauma-informed interventions maybe used to promote healthy recovery.

Attachment Theory and Relational Development

Future studies should examine the attachment patterns exhibited by young Black women as they transition out of foster care, including those from group homes, kinship placements, and traditional foster settings. Research should assess how these attachment styles influence their relationships with social support personnel and impact their ability to engage with services. Additionally, there is a need to develop and evaluate attachment-based interventions that foster emotional regulation and promote the formation of secure, healthy adult relationships among this population.

Use of Substances to Cope

Further research is needed to explore the role of substance use and abuse among young Black women aging out of foster care, particularly as a coping mechanism for feelings of unpreparedness for independent living. Studies should also investigate the effectiveness of culturally relevant prevention and recovery models, including faith-based, peer-led, and trauma-informed approaches, in addressing substance use within this population. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies may be employed to gain a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics.

Human Trafficking Vulnerabilities and Recovery

Future qualitative research should explore the pathways into and out of human trafficking among young Black women, particularly those with histories of foster care involvement or experiences of homelessness. Such studies should also examine the effectiveness of drop-in centers, harm reduction strategies, and low-barrier programs specifically designed to support young Black women who remain in trafficking situations but are beginning to seek help. These insights can inform the development of more responsive, trauma-informed interventions tailored to their unique needs and circumstances.

Conduct Longitudinal Studies

Long-term follow-up research is essential to assess the sustained impact of matched support services on key life outcomes such as stable housing, gainful employment, mental health continuity, financial independence, and successful parenting. These studies would offer critical evidence regarding the extent to which services provided during the transition out of foster care contribute to meaningful and lasting improvements in the lives of young Black women.

Examine Intersectionality and Marginalized Identities

Future research should examine how intersecting identities, such as disability status, immigration background, and sexual orientation, influence the perception, accessibility, and effectiveness of social support services. Such inquiry would enhance the applicability of OMT across diverse subpopulations of young Black women aging out of foster care and strengthen the understanding of how support can be more precisely aligned with multifaceted needs.

Evaluate Implementation of Policy Standards

Further studies should assess the extent to which state-mandated frameworks like North Carolina's Requirement 8 are effectively implemented across agencies and perceived as

beneficial by youth. This would highlight gaps between policy intent and practice, as well as inform strategies for improved compliance and accountability.

Collectively, these recommendations will expand the applicability of OMT within child welfare contexts, enhance organizational awareness of culturally responsive care, and guide the development of more equitable, effective support systems for young Black women and other youth aging out of the foster care system.

Conclusions

This qualitative, exploratory single case study conceptual replication investigated whether the social supports provided to young Black women transitioning out of the North Carolina foster care system were appropriately matched to their perceived needs. Framed by OMT, the study examined alignment through three primary data sources: the lived experiences of young Black women, the insights of service stakeholders, and the policy mandates outlined in North Carolina's Requirement 8 for youth aging out of foster care. The central problem addressed whether these young women's support services were adequately matched to their stated needs in order to ease their transition to independence.

The findings revealed both areas of alignment and significant gaps. Programs such as Youth Villages and the 18 to 21 Program were effective in addressing education and employment when services were personalized and relational. However, substantial mismatches emerged in the domains of mental health, transitional housing, and culturally competent service delivery. These findings affirm a key tenet of OMT, that the effectiveness of social support depends not merely on availability but on contextual appropriateness. When services were delivered in culturally responsive, empathetic, and consistent ways, participants reported higher engagement, trust, and perceived benefit.

At the same time, this study challenges the comprehensiveness of OMT when viewed through the lens of Popperian falsification. According to OMT, appropriately matched support should result in positive outcomes. However, even in cases where support type seemingly aligned with young Black women participants' expressed needs, outcomes were not uniformly beneficial. For example, some young Black women participants received mental health services but found them ineffective due to a lack of cultural understanding or trauma-informed care. These instances serve as falsifying cases that question the predictive validity of OMT in marginalized populations, revealing that the theory does not fully account for relational, structural, or cultural variables that mediate support effectiveness. Thus, while OMT remains a valuable evaluative lens, it must be revised to integrate intersectional, trauma-informed, and culturally grounded dimensions in order to remain theoretically robust and practically relevant.

This study contributes to a growing body of literature that calls for culturally attuned, trauma-informed, and individualized approaches to child welfare transition planning (Best & Blakeslee, 2020; Villagrana & Lee, 2020). It highlights the systemic inequities young Black women face and the urgent need to reform how support services are conceptualized, implemented, and evaluated. The core message is clear: effective transition support must be relational, responsive, and rooted in a deep understanding of the cultural, emotional, and developmental realities of young Black women. Failing to center these dimensions not only perpetuates disparities but undermines the very goals of foster care transition initiatives.

Ultimately, this study reinforces the value of using OMT as a foundational theory for evaluating support systems, while also demonstrating its current limitations. It calls for intentional, equity-centered revisions to OMT and for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to adopt frameworks that reflect the complex, intersectional experiences of

marginalized youth. Only then can we ensure that all young people, especially those most vulnerable to systemic neglect, have access to the resources, relationships, and culturally relevant supports needed to thrive in adulthood.

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Appendix A

Site Permission



National University IRB
9338 Lightwave Ave., San Diego, CA 92123
irb@nu.edu

Site Permission

Date: August 1, 2024

Hello NU IRB,

My name is Dr. Chester Martin, and I am Clinical Director at Lighthouse Counseling Center.

I have reviewed Nicy Bishop's study, and I understand that she is recruiting participants who meet all of the following criteria:

1. Stakeholders
 - a. Professional such as social workers, foster parents, transitional counselors, mental health providers, primary care providers, case managers, educators
 - b. Provided social support services to young Black or African American women who transitioned from foster care
 - c. Work in the State of North Carolina
2. Young women
 - a. Black or African American
 - b. Between 18 to 25 years old
 - c. Transitioned from the Foster Care System in North Carolina

I grant permission to Mrs. Bishop to do the following:

1. Recruit participants via email, flyers, and in person
2. Conduct 60-minute individual interview (in person or virtual) in office
3. Review interview transcript via email (10-15 minutes)
4. Transcribe interviews using office
5. Conduct any business associated with dissertation research in office

If you have questions and would like to reach me, please do so at (910) 323-3368.

Thank you for your time,

Chester M. Martin
Owner and Clinical Director, D Min, MED, MA
NC Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor-Supervisor
National Certified Counselor

Appendix B

Young Black Women Recruitment Flyer



Title: Young Black Women's Social Support Needs When Transitioning from Foster Care, A Case Study

Seeking young Black women (between the ages of 18 to 35) who transitioned out of the Foster Care System in NC. Must be willing to participate in a voluntary research to improve the social support services of young Black women transitioning from foster care.

Study Purpose: To determine if the social support services received by young Black women were effectively matched to their perceived needs when transitioning out of the NC Foster Care System to Independent Living.

You are eligible for this study if you meet the following criteria:

1. You are a woman
2. You are a Black or African American
3. You are between 18 to 35 years old
4. You aged out of the foster care in North Carolina

You will receive a \$30 gift card after interviews are completed.

For this study, you will engage in a:

1. 60-minute individual interview (in person or virtual)
2. Review interview transcript via email (10-15 minutes)

You will be asked questions about:

1. Your experience with social support services when exiting foster care
2. The challenges or benefits you experienced with your social support network when transitioning out of foster care

Thank you for considering participating in this voluntary research!

Contact: Nicy Bishop
Doctoral Student at National University

Phone: 910-493-3525
Email: N.Bishop6426@o365.ncu.edu

Appendix C

Stakeholders Recruitment Flyer



Title: Young Black Women's Social Support Needs When Transitioning from Foster Care, A Case Study

Study Purpose: To determine if social support services received by young Black women were effectively matched to their perceived needs when transitioning out of the NC Foster Care System to Independent Living.

Stakeholders are eligible for this study if the following criteria are met:

1. You provided social support services to young Black or African American female adults who transitioned from foster care
2. You work in the State of North Carolina

In this study, participants will engage in a:

1. 60-minute individual interview (in person or virtually)
2. Review interview transcript summary (10-15 minutes)

You will be asked questions about:

1. Your experience with providing social support services to young Black female adults as they transition from foster care

Seeking stakeholders to be part of a voluntary study to offer input to improve the social support services provided to young Black women transitioning out of foster care.

social workers, foster parents, transitional counselors, mental health providers, primary care providers, case managers, educators

To participate in this study, please contact:

Nicy Bishop, Doctoral Student at National University

Phone: 910-493-3525

Email: N.Bishop6426@o365.ncu.edu



Scan me!

Thank you for considering participating in this voluntary research!

Appendix D

Young Black Women Recruitment Email

Hi! My name is Nicy Bishop, and I'm a doctoral candidate at National University. I'm conducting a research study on about the effectiveness of social support services for young Black women who transitioned out of foster care.

I am recruiting individuals who meet the following criteria:

1. You are a woman.
2. You are Black or African American.
3. You are between 18 to 35 years old.
4. You aged out of foster care in North Carolina.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

- Participate in a 60-minute interview in person or virtually via Doxy.me.
- Review interview summary for accuracy via email for 10-15 minutes

During these activities, you will be asked questions about:

- Your experience with social support services when exiting from foster care.
- Any challenges or benefits experienced with your social support network when transitioning to independent living.

Upon completion of interviews, you will be compensated for your time with a \$30 gift card. You can choose to have the gift card mailed to you or you can pick the gift card up from the Counseling Center during business hours.

To participate or ask questions, please contact me at N.Bishop6426@o365.ncu.edu or (910) 493-3525.

Thank you for considering participating in this voluntary research!

Nicy Bishop
Doctoral Candidate
National University

Appendix E

Stakeholders Recruitment Email

Hi! My name is Nicy Bishop, and I'm a doctoral candidate at National University. I'm conducting a research study on about the effectiveness of social support services for young Black women who transitioned out of foster care.

I am recruiting individuals who meet all the following criteria:

1. Provided social support to young Black or African American women who transitioned from foster care.
2. Stakeholder works in the State of North Carolina
3. You are one of the following stakeholders: social worker, foster parent, transitional counselor, mental health provider, primary care provider, case manager, educator.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

- Participate in a 60-minute interview in person or virtually via Doxy.me.
- Review interview summary for accuracy via email for 10-15 minutes

During these activities, you will be asked questions about:

- Your experience with providing social support services to young Black women as they transitioned from foster care.
- Any challenges or benefits encountered when assisting young Black women with transitioning to independent living.

To participate or ask questions, please contact me at N.Bishop6426@o365.ncu.edu or (910) 493-3525.

Thank you for considering participating in this voluntary research!

Nicy Bishop
Doctoral Candidate
National University

Appendix F

Young Black Women Recruitment Consent Form

My name is Nicy Bishop, and I am a doctoral student at National University (NU).

I am asking you to take part in a research study about the effectiveness of social support services for young Black women who transitioned out of foster care. The title of my research study is “Young Black Women’s Social Support Needs When Transitioning from Foster Care, A Case Study.”

You may participate in this research if you meet all the following criteria:

5. You are a woman
6. You are between 18 to 35 years old
7. You are Black or African American
8. You aged out of foster care in North Carolina

I hope to include 18 people in this research.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

What you will be asked to do: If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

- Participate in a 60-minute interview in person or virtually via Doxy.me
- Review interview summary via email for accuracy (10-15 minutes)

During these activities, you will be asked questions about:

- Your experience with social support services when exiting from foster care.
- Any challenges or benefits experienced with your social support network when transitioning to independent living.

Risks: There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. You may stop participation at any time.

Benefits: If you participate, there are no direct benefits to you. However, this research may help other young Black women transitioning out of foster care in the future. This study may also increase the body of knowledge in the subject area of this research.

Recording: I would like to audio/video record your responses during the interview, whether in-person or virtually. You can disable the video function of the online meeting platform at any time.

Compensation: You will receive a \$30 Gift Card for your participation in this study.

Confidentiality: All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The results of this research study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researchers will not identify you. Participants will be assigned an alphanumeric code to ensure anonymity. The code will be used in results, reports, presentations and publications. My dissertation chair and dissertation committee will have access to information with participants’ codes.

All recorded and written information collected will be secured on a password-protected computer and password-protected recorder. The transcripts of the recordings will be stored in a locked file cabinet. All research information will be kept for three years and discarded appropriately by shredding transcripts, deleting information from the computer, and erasing interviews from the recorder.

Taking part is voluntary: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. It is okay for you to decline to participate in this research study. Even if you say yes now, you are free to say no later, and stop participating at any time, there will be no penalty to you. If you decide not to participate, you may contact me at (910) 493-3525 or email me at N.Bishop6426@o365.ncu.edu to let me know. If you choose to be interviewed and decide to withdraw from the study at any time, I will use the interview information I gathered from you. Your decision will not affect your relationship with National University.

If you have questions: Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at N.Bishop6426@o365.ncu.edu or (910) 493-3525.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) via email at irb@nu.edu

Appendix G

Stakeholders Recruitment Consent Form

My name is Nicy Bishop, and I am a doctoral student at National University (NU).

I am asking you to take part in a research study about the effectiveness of social support services for young Black women who transitioned out of foster care. The title of my research study is “Young Black Women’s Social Support Needs When Transitioning from Foster Care, A Case Study.”

You may participate in this research if you meet all the following criteria:

9. Provided social support to young Black or African American women who transitioned from foster care.
10. Stakeholder works in the State of North Carolina
11. You are one of the following stakeholders: social worker, foster parent, transitional counselor, mental health provider, primary care provider, case manager, educator.

I hope to include 18 people in this research.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

What you will be asked to do: If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

- Participate in a 60-minute interview in person at Lighthouse Counseling or virtually via Doxy.me
- Review interview summary via email for accuracy (10-15 minutes)

During these activities, you will be asked questions about:

- Your experience with providing social support services to young Black women as they transitioned from foster care.
- Any challenges or benefits encountered when assisting young Black women with transitioning to independent living.

Risks: There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. You may stop participation at any time.

Benefits: If you participate, there are no direct benefits to you. However, this research may help young Black women transitioning out of foster care in the future. This study may also increase the body of knowledge in the subject area of this research.

Recording: I would like to audio/video record your responses during the interview, whether in-person or virtually. You can disable the video function of the online meeting platform at any time.

Compensation: There are no compensations for your participation in this study.

Confidentiality: All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The results of this research study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researchers will not identify you. Participants will be assigned an alphanumeric code to ensure

anonymity. The code will be used in results, reports, presentations and publications. My dissertation chair and dissertation committee will have access to information with participants' codes.

All recorded and written information collected will be secured on a password-protected computer and password-protected recorder. The transcripts of the recordings will be stored in a locked file cabinet. All research information will be kept for three years and discarded appropriately by shredding transcripts, deleting information from the computer, and erasing interviews from the recorder.

Taking part is voluntary: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. It is okay for you to decline to participate in this research study. Even if you say yes now, you are free to say no later, and stop participating at any time, there will be no penalty to you. If you decide not to participate, you may contact me at (910) 493-3525 or email me at N.Bishop6426@o365.ncu.edu to let me know. If you choose to be interviewed and decide to withdraw from the study at any time, I will use the interview information I gathered from you. Your decision will not affect your relationship with National University.

If you have questions: Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at N.Bishop6426@o365.ncu.edu or (910) 493-3525.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) via email at irb@nu.edu

Appendix H

Young Black Women Pre-Screening Questionnaire

Young Black Women's Social Support Needs When Transitioning from Foster Care,
A Case Study

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Other _____

Age Range

- 18-19
- 20-21
- 22-23
- 24-25
- Over 25

Ethnicity

- African-American/Black
- Caucasian/White
- Hispanic
- Other _____

Did you age out of foster care in North Carolina?

- Yes
- No

Years in foster care

- 1-2
- 3-4
- 5-6
- 7-8
- 9-10
- Over 10

Appendix I

Stakeholders Pre-Screening Questionnaire

Young Black Women's Social Support Needs When Transitioning from Foster Care,
A Case Study

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Other _____

Ethnicity

- African American/Black
- Caucasian/White
- Hispanic
- Other _____

What is your profession?

- Social Worker
- Foster Parent
- Transitional Counselor
- Mental Health Provider
- Primary Care Provider
- Case Manager
- Educator
- Other _____

Do you work in North Carolina?

- Yes
- No

Did you provide services to young Black women as they aged out of foster care?

- Yes
- No

Appendix J

Interview Questions Expert Reviewers



Rovener Adams <arovener@gmail.com>

Sep 13, 2024, 11:58 AM (4 days ago)



to me ▾

Good Morning Nicy,

Thank you for the opportunity to review your interview questions. After reading your problem and purpose statements, I found the interview questions appropriate for your study. They are clear, concise, and well worded. They will be instrumental in collecting your data.

Your study is needed and will be beneficial for this vulnerable population. I would love to know the results of your study.

Very Respectfully,

Rovener Adams, BS
CPS Conservatorship Supervisor, Retired
arovener@gmail.com
(254) 290-4574



Chester Martin

Wed, Aug 21, 2:33 PM (5 days ago)



to me ▾

Hi Nicy,

Thank you for allowing me to review your interview questions for young Black women who have transitioned out of the Foster Care System in North Carolina. After carefully reviewing the interview questions, and I see no reason to make any changes. The interview questions directly align with the research questions. I find these interview questions appropriate and relevant for collecting data for your research study. Please let me see the outcome of your dissertation upon completion. Please feel free to contact me, if you need further assistance.

Sincerely,

Chester M. Martin
Clinical Director, D. Min. MED, MA
North Carolina Licensed Clinical Health Counselor Supervisor
National Certified Counselor



**Kim Herring**

to me ▾

Tue, Aug 20, 6:56 PM (6 days ago)



Hi Nicy,

Thank you for trusting me to review your dissertation questions. Per my review I find the questions to be excellent related to clarity and direction. Therefore I do believe that these questions will allow you to gain the information needed to complete your research study.

Respectfully,

Kim Herring, MA, LPA

NC Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor

Lighthouse and Biblical Counseling Outpatient Provider

**Arena, Michael**

to me ▾

Aug 28, 2024, 10:04 AM



Hello Nicy,

Thank you for asking me to review the questions for your survey.

After carefully reviewing your questions, I believe they are very appropriate and highly relevant to collect data for your study. The questions are clear and understandable for those involved in the study. I look forward to hearing the results collected from your study to provide greater insight into serving this population.

Respectfully,



Appendix K

Research Questions, Interview Questions, and Document Questions

RQ: How did the social supports provided to young Black women match their perceived needs?	
Sub-questions	Interview Questions
<p>RQa: How did young Black women transitioning from foster care describe their social support needs to stakeholders?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What were some of the social support services you received as you transitioned out of the foster care system? 2. What social support services did you use as you transitioned out of foster care? Why did you choose these social support services? 3. Explain in what way did the social support services provided address your educational and financial needs? 4. Explain in what way did the social support provided address your mental and emotional needs? 5. Explain in what ways the social support services provided addressed your housing and transportation needs? 6. What other types of social support services would have been beneficial for you as you transition to adulthood? 7. Who were the support persons in your Circle of Support, and how did they assist you in transitioning out of foster care? 8. Which one support person had the most influence on your decisions when choosing the social support services while transitioning from the foster care system? Explain your response. 9. What other information would you like to share about the social support personnel or social support services available to you when transitioning from the Foster Care System?
<p>RQb: How did stakeholders determine the social support needs of young Black women transitioning out of foster care?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the current social support services available to young Black women adults transitioning out of foster care? Please list a few or several examples. 2. In what way did you provide support to young Black women as they exited the foster care system? 3. What type of social support services did young Black women request the most? How did you assist them with obtaining those services? 4. What social support services did you match the young Black women with when they were transitioning from the foster care system? Explain your response. 5. In what way did the social support programs provided to the young Black women address their needs? Provide some examples.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. How did you interact with the young Black women to ensure that they received the optimally match with the appropriate social support service programs as they transitioned? 7. What were the steps taken to encourage young Black women to participate in the social support services that were optimally matched to their specific needs? 8. What were some of the major struggles you encounter when assisting young Black women with engaging in services while transitioning out of foster care? 9. What other information would you like to share about your experience with young Black women who were transitioning or the social support services available to them as they transitioned out of the foster care system?
<p>NCDHHS Document:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. NC Child Welfare 2020-2024 Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan Requirement 8- Ensuring Transitional Plans Meet the Health Needs of Youth Aging Out if Foster Care 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Did the social support services provided to young Black women adults emerging out of foster care aligned with the services outlined in these documents? 2. Were there social services listed in these documents that were not offered to young Black women adults while exiting the foster care system? 3. Were there any social support services outlined in these documents that were not offered but would have been beneficial for young Black women adults while exiting foster care?

Appendix L

Research Document Protocol

The document was collected from NC Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services website: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/documents/files/dss/statistics/2021-apsr-appendix-b/download>

North Carolina Child Welfare, 2020-2024 Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan

Section II. Health Programming Laws and Regulations (pp. 25-33)

Requirement 8 – Ensuring Transition Plans Meet the Health Needs of Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

North Carolina’s child welfare program is committed to ensuring that every young person has a planned health care transition to maximize his/her well-being and optimize his/her ability to assume adult roles and activities. Each youth transitioning to adulthood requires specific and individualized support in order to transition successfully to adult-oriented health care. This process includes ensuring that high-quality, developmentally appropriate health care services are available in an uninterrupted manner as the youth moves from adolescence to adulthood.

By utilizing the Foster Care Medical Home Model, providers and others involved can assist the youth and county child welfare workers in developing a plan for transition from pediatric care to adult care. Independent Living Services for Foster Children (NC LINKS) provides services and resources to youth and young adults ages 13-21 who are currently or formerly in the foster care program. NC LINKS provides a network of relevant services for youth so that they will have ongoing connections with family, friends, mentors, the community, and employers; it also provides education, financial assistance, skills training, and other resources to facilitate their transition to adulthood. LINKS Coordinators and county child welfare workers collaborate with the youth to develop their Transitional Living Plans (TLPs). As set forth in DSS policy, the TLP must be developed, reviewed, and updated according to the following table.

Youth turning 14	Youth age 14 or Older
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed no more than 30 days following the youth’s 14th birthday; • Reviewed within 60 days of the youth’s 14th birthday; • Updated at least every 90 days thereafter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed within 30 days of the youth entering custody if they are 14 years old or older; • Reviewed within 60 days of the youth entering custody if they are 14 years old or older; • Updated at least every 90 days thereafter,

The Transitional Living Plan (Documented on forms DSS-5096b, and DSS-5096c) takes great care to ensure the health needs of youth aging out of foster care are met. Options about health insurance, including health insurance resources, provider information, and contact information for health care resources, are discussed in a youth driven meeting, in which a young person takes an active role in identifying supportive adults they wish to invite. The resources identified are outlined on the

corresponding forms. Additionally, the DSS-5096b and DSS-5096c forms are utilized to engage youth in conversation about the need for a health care power of attorney and/or health care proxy and to empower youth to execute such an agreement upon exiting care. The forms also document that the youth has received information and/or assistance regarding applying for Medicaid or other state/federally funded health insurance.

The goal in North Carolina is for every youth and young adult who lives or has lived in foster care as a teenager to achieve the following outcomes, identified by the federal government to monitor the effectiveness of Chafee-funded independent living services, by age 21. The seven identified objectives are:

- All youth leaving the foster care system shall have sufficient economic resources to meet their daily needs.
- All youth leaving the foster care system shall have a safe and stable place to live.
- All youth leaving the foster care system shall attain academic or vocational/educational goals that are in keeping with the youth's abilities and interests.
- All youth leaving the foster care system shall have a sense of connectedness to persons and community. This means every youth, upon exiting foster care, should have a personal support network of at least 5 responsible adults who will remain supportive of the young adult over time.
- All youth leaving the foster care system shall avoid illegal/high risk behaviors.
- All youth leaving the foster care system shall postpone parenthood until financially established and emotionally mature.
- All youth leaving the foster care system shall have access to physical and mental health services, as well as a means to pay for those services (*Italics added*).

LINKS Coordinators assist with linking transition age youth with community resources such as Strong Able Youth Speaking Out (SAYSO). SAYSO is a statewide association of youth aged 14 to 24 who are, or have been, in county DSS custody in North Carolina, whether placed in family foster care, group care, or mental health facilities. Counties can utilize LINKS support groups and/or SAYSO to develop youth-led recommendations on what youth need to know prior to the transition planning session. These activities and recommendations assist the youth in developing their own transition plans.

Document will be analyzed via these questions:

1. Did the social support services provided to young Black women adults emerging out of foster care aligned with the services outlined in these documents?
2. Were there social services listed in these documents that were not offered to young Black women adults while exiting the foster care system?
3. Were there any social support services outlined in these documents that were not offered but would have been beneficial for young Black women adults while exiting foster care?

Appendix M

Research Interview Protocol

Introduction: Hi, and thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. My name is Nicy Bishop, and I am a doctoral student at National University conducting my dissertation research.

Rapport building questions before beginning the interview:

1. What made you decide to participate in this research study?
2. What other research study have you participate in?

This interview is expected to last about 60 minutes. I will be recording our discussion and taking notes to make sure I have complete information. Your responses will be held in confidence.

Consent: I would like to review the consent letter with you before we begin the interview.

Review the consent form with the participants.

Then ask: Do you agree to participate in the study?

Participant: Yes _____ or No _____

Lead into the Interview: Thank you. I am interested in the effectiveness of social support services for young Black women who transitioned out of foster care. This information will be confidential, and your individual answers will not be shared with anyone. Your perspectives and experiences are important to understanding the social support needs of young Black women as they transitioned from foster care.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Consider beginning the interview with questions that put the participants at ease before moving onto the more complex or sensitive questions.

Beginning questions:

- For all: Tell me a little about yourself.
- For Stakeholders: When did you start working with children in the foster care system?
- For Young Black women: When did you enter foster care? How long were you in foster care?

Conclusion: Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today and to share your perspectives/experiences on the social support needs of young Black women as they transitioned from foster care.

Close the interview with some debriefing questions. This can serve as a process for clarification or as review of the interview.

Debriefing questions:

1. Do you have any questions or concern?
2. Is there anything you would like to add or clarify about the social service needs of young Black women transitioning from foster care.

Next Steps: You will receive a copy of your interview summary via email. Please take 10-15 minutes to review it for accuracy and return it to me. Thank you for participating in the study.

Appendix N

Social Support Services and Programs Discussed by Participants

- Connections of Cumberland County
- Department of Social Services 18 to 21 Program
- Education and Training Voucher (ETV)
- Falcon Children's Home Transitioning Living Placement (TLP)
- Hope Center
- Job Corps
- LifeSet Program
- Life Skills Foundation
- NC LINKS Program
- NC Reach Program
- Rooming Houses
- Service Source
- Strong Able Youths Speaking Out (SAYSO)
- Wheels for Hope
- Youth Villages

Appendix O

IRB Approval Letter



9388 Lightwave Ave.
San Diego, CA 92123
irb@nu.edu

Notice of Exemption

October 27, 2024

To: Nicy Bishop

Project Title: Support for Black Woman

NU IRB Number: IRB-FY24-25-62

Determination: Exempt from further review 45 CFR 46.101 Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

Status: Active - Research activities may begin as of October 27, 2024

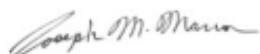
Dear Nicy Bishop:

The study referenced above has been reviewed by the National University IRB. The IRB has determined your research is exempt from further review under 45 CFR 46.104, which means you will not need to renew your study and may begin your study effective immediately. However, if you find the need to change your study in any way, you will need to submit a modification to the IRB prior to implementing the changes. This will allow the IRB to determine whether or not the study still meets exemption criteria.

Please review your Post Approval Responsibilities here: [Approved Documents Guidelines](#)

For any questions regarding your protocol, please reach out to the IRB at irb@nu.edu.

Sincerely,



Dr. Joseph Marron, IRB Chair



Dr. Brianne Mongeon, Director, HRPP & IRB



Jenessa Eberhardt, Associate Director, HRPP & IRB

Appendix P

My Dissertation Journey

I am including my story in this dissertation as a personal appendix to encourage anyone who may find themselves stuck where I once was. To you, I say: don't give up, don't give in, there is purpose in your completion. God does not make mistakes. He can use you with or without degrees. But if He is calling you to higher education, know that there is divine purpose in the process. Let Him shape you into the person He created you to be. As long as you have breath in your body, keep pressing toward the finish line.

While it may appear that my dissertation journey began in June 2015, when I enrolled in my first doctoral course, the truth is that it began much earlier- during childhood. I was born in Haiti, immigrated to the United States at the age of five, and grew up in Brooklyn, New York. Being Haitian in American culture was difficult. I repeated the first grade because I didn't speak English. I was raised in a strict household where my father placed great emphasis on education and public appearance. Yet, like many foster youths today, I grew up in an abusive environment- experiencing physical, emotional, sexual, and spiritual trauma.

At 16 years old, I reached a breaking point and attempted to escape a temporary problem with a permanent solution: suicide. Thankfully, an observant school counselor contacted Child Protective Services, and I was placed in foster care. For two years, I lived with a wonderful foster mother whose kindness made a lasting impact on my life.

That same year, I spoke with a military recruiter who encouraged me and began to coach me for enlistment. By 17, I joined the Delayed Entry Program, attending weekend drills, and at 18, I went active duty. My first assignment was in Germany, where- lacking direction and support- I experienced several painful and traumatic events. However, it was also in Germany that I had my first child and met my husband. My life began to take shape with a renewed sense of purpose. Marriage was challenging, as my husband also carried deep childhood wounds, but with the support of our faith, family, and friends, we learned to navigate life together.

Over the years, both my family and military career flourished. We had four children, and I transitioned from enlisted to officer through the Green to Gold program, becoming a medical officer. However, during a pre-deployment physical for a mission to Kosovo, doctors discovered several golf ball-sized tumors in my uterus. I underwent urgent surgery, which resulted in nerve damage that left me unable to walk. The prognosis was grim: I would never walk again, or if I did, it would be with a cane. But God! After two years of rehabilitation, I walked again- no wheelchair, no cane- and continued my military service.

During this time, I also completed a nursing degree and became a Registered Nurse. In 2010, I deployed to Iraq, where I suffered a back injury and re-aggravated my leg. Upon returning home, my physician recommended retirement due to my physical condition. My dream of joining the Nurse Corps was put on hold. In 2012, after 21 years of service, I retired from the military and began job hunting. Due to my military injuries, I was unable to secure work as an entry nurse independently and turned to the VA for help. Their solution was to retrain me for a new career.

After much prayer and wise counsel, I chose to pursue a career as a marriage and family therapy. I earned my master's degree in 2014, and the following year, June 2015, enrolled in a doctoral program at Grand Canyon University (GCU).

My doctoral journey was marked by both academic pursuit and profound personal loss. In 2016, in the middle of my core coursework, my family relocated to North Carolina due to my husband's military assignment. Soon after, my aging parents- both with significant health issues- moved in with us, and I became their primary caregiver. During my final core course in 2017, my mother passed away from respiratory failure. I completed the course and advanced to the dissertation phase. Over the next five years, I experienced an overwhelming wave of grief: in 2018, my godmother passed; in 2019, my grandfather; in 2020, several loved ones succumbed to COVID-19; in 2021, my father-in-law passed; and in January 2022, my father passed, followed by my younger sister in June 2022. The weight of so much loss left me shattered, yet God's grace sustained me.

Throughout all this, I continued working on my dissertation proposal. Unfortunately, the university was slow to respond and inconsistent in guidance. I ended up writing two full dissertation proposals (chapters 1-3) across two different topics. The process became so discouraging that I considered giving up entirely- especially after losing my mother, for whom I had begun this journey. But my husband, family, and close friends urged me to continue. In February 2022, a friend introduced me to a dissertation coach who helped me restructure my proposal between March and May. I submitted and received approval from my dissertation chair for a third topic and was told I was on track to graduate in December 2022.

However, in February 2023, my methodologist finally reviewed my proposal and requested major framework and methodology changes. The required revisions were extensive and left me disheartened once again. When I shared the situation with my dissertation coach, she assured me that the issue was not my writing, it was institutional neglect. She recommended I transfer to another university.

After much prayer, I discovered National University's Dissertation Completion Pathway (NU DCP). Skeptical at first, I contacted my coach, who confirmed the program's legitimacy- she was an alumna of NU herself. She provided a referral, which significantly reduced my tuition. I enrolled at NU in June 2023. Two years later, I am graduating. God is faithful! He placed extraordinary individuals along my path who helped make this possible.

My fourth and final topic, *Young Black Women's Social Support Needs While Transitioning Out of Foster Care*, aligns directly with my future purpose. I plan to open a transitional home for young women ages 18-25 who are aging out of foster care or who are experiencing housing insecurity. Despite the numerous obstacles I encountered during this journey, I wouldn't change any of it. Each step- no matter how difficult- was part of the process that brought me to this moment.

To anyone struggling on their academic or personal journey: Do not quit. Do not be discouraged. If God has called you to higher education, there is a reason. You may not fully understand until you reach the end but keep going. There is purpose in the process, and the victory is worth it!