

# Children Within the Foster Care System That Become Emancipated



Tammy Howard  
Social Work Department  
University of TN at Chattanooga



*While we try to teach our children all about life, Our children teach us what life is all about.*

### Purpose/Rationale

With rising numbers of youth in foster care, there are increasing numbers of youth also aging out of foster care. Although child welfare agencies have had an ongoing concern about the experiences and outcomes for these youth who transition out of care, in recent years more has been learned and new programs developed to assist this population former foster care youth experience disproportionately high rates of homelessness, unemployment, and involvement with the criminal justice system. More likely to drop out of high school and less likely to attend college than other young people, these alumni of the foster care system face many challenges in addition to overcoming the abuse, neglect, and separation from family already experienced in the child welfare system .(Anderson, 2003).

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

2. What is the percentage of children who emancipate out of the foster care system?
3. Is there a relationship between emancipation and poverty?

### Descriptions of Methods to Select Study Sample

The Nominal Method will be used in selecting data. The research will look at data for the years 2001 through 2006. located on the public DCS website; www.Tn.gov.

### Description of sampling frame

The sampling frame includes youth whom have been placed within the foster care system. The youth will vary in respects to age, gender, race and adjudication and exiting reasons. The number of cases is still undetermined

### Study Procedures for Implementation and Data Analysis

I will use descriptive statistics to describe data and show relationships between variables and resources utilized Data will be collected using a non-probability purposeful sampling method and entered into SPSS. Descriptive statistics will be run to check for data distribution and skewness .Utilizing the nominal method of measurement, frequencies will be run to determine range of scores, mean of scores, and standard deviations. T-tests will be run to look for differences between the groups.

### Results

Out of the overall sample (N=45,267), 10.695% of youth within the foster care system during the period of 2001 through 2006, exited state's custody with emancipation as the discharge reason. Of the overall sample, there were 4,841 children who emancipated with a mean of 806.83 (SD=56.831). The range for years 2001 through 2006 for youth who emancipated was 162 with a maximum of 876 occurring in 2003 and a minimum of 714 occurring in 2006. In answering research question 2 , it was found that 1/3 of former foster care children have incomes at, or below, \$6,000 per year, which is substantially below the federal poverty level of \$7,890 for a single individual. In addition, 50% of emancipated foster youth experience high rates of unemployment within 5 years of emancipation.

### Discussion

With almost 800 children emancipating from the foster care system every year, additional programs and services need to be implemented to assist these children in becoming more productive and successful citizens. By implementing new resources like education, employment, housing and health care, we are not only creating positive change for the youth but for society as a whole.

### Implications for Social Work Practice

- 1 First, the child welfare system must continue to provide substantial support for children existing foster care.
2. Second, continuous permanency planning for teens must be a priority.
3. Third, youth must have a comprehensive transition plan designed to aid them in their transition out of care
4. Better communication and collaboration with the youth existing the system
5. Youth should be connected with services within the community

### Abstract

Children in the foster care system have typically already survived significant trauma or abuse, but as they grow older and approach aging out of the system, they face even more difficult odds. Each year, approximately 20,000 youth "age out" of the foster care system. Aging out refers to youth who exit the child welfare system simply because they reach the age of 18, and not because they are returned home to their families or adopted. This process of aging out of the foster care system is legally called Emancipation. Emancipation is a legal process that gives a teenager legal independence from his or her parents or guardians. There are generally 3 ways a child can become emancipated: get married, join the military and go to court and have the judge declare you emancipated. Once they reach 18, their state and foster families are no longer required to give them assistance. They are left to fend for themselves. Unfortunately, many foster care teens don't have the support and life skills necessary to live on their own. Foster care studies have shown that in just four years after leaving foster care, 25 percent of "aged-out" youth have been homeless, 42 percent have become parents themselves, fewer than 20 percent are able to support themselves, and only 46 percent have graduated from high school. Because they lack the support systems most young adults take for granted, aged out foster care teens are at high risk for substance abuse, domestic violence and poverty. Most young adults in the general population rely upon their families for assistance with a place to live, financial support and other guidance as they transition to adulthood. Indeed, half of young adults ages 18-24 in the general population in the United States live at home with their parents. Yet youth aging out of foster care—who have significant trauma histories—are out on their own at age 18 when the child welfare system has failed to connect them to a permanent, loving family.