Exploring the Relationship Between Factors of Emotional and General Intelligence and the Quality of Life of Foster Care Alumni

Quality of Life Applied Research Grant
March 9, 2010

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Introduction

- It is well documented that foster care children often experience more adversity than non-foster care children as they move into young adulthood and “age out” of the foster care system. 

  - According to the Child Welfare League of America (2005), approximately 20,000 to 25,000 adolescents “age out” of the foster care system each year, of these children, 25% end up homeless, 56% become unemployed, and 27% of the young men end up in jail.
Introduction

- A recent survey (Miller, 2008) designed to measure the success of Florida’s efforts to prepare older foster children (age 13 to 23) for adulthood revealed that:
  - (a) at least one in four former foster kids are homeless in Sarasota
  - (b) fewer than one in 10 foster children age 17 are performing at grade level in St. Augustine
  - (c) fewer than one in four 17-year-old foster kids passed Florida’s high-stakes standardized assessment test in Miami, Tampa and Daytona Beach

- In Broward County specifically, the school board reported that children in foster care scored lower on school-wide exams than children not in foster care (The School of Broward County, 2007).
Introduction

- “The little research that exists on outcomes for youth who have grown up in foster care indicates that resilience is not a common phenomenon within this population.” (Hines, Merdinger & Wyatt, 2005)

- Clearly, there is a significant need to better understand the factors that affect the success of foster care children as they “age out” of the system.
Introduction

Impetus for this research:

- Gain a better understanding of factors that affect the success of young adults in Broward who have “aged out” of the foster care system.

- No published study to date has explored the relationship between variables of general and emotional intelligence and the quality of life of foster care alumni.
 Predictor Variables (IV’s)

1) Emotional Intelligence (EQ-i)

2) General Intelligence (KBIT-2)
Emotional Intelligence

2 types of theories

**Trait EI Models**
- EI is a dispositional tendency
- Measurements: self-report questionnaires
  - Baron Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i)
  - Widely used
- Goleman
  1. Self awareness
  2. Self-regulation
  3. Motivation
  4. Empathy
  5. Social skills

**Ability Based Models**
- EI is an ability involving cognitive processing of emotional information
- Measurements: Performance Tests
  - Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT)
    - Mayer, Salovey, Caruso
      1) Perception
      2) Utilization
      3) Understanding
      4) Regulation

(Austin et al., 2005; Extremera, Fernandez-Berrocal, 2005; Petrides, Frederickson, & Furnham, 2004; Zeidner, Mathews, Roberts, & MacCann, 2003)
What does it mean to be emotionally intelligent?

- "Personally and socially desirable transactional outcomes"
- Capable of correctly understanding:
  - Self emotion
  - Other’s emotions
  - Rules
  - Beliefs
- Evaluate situations and express feelings accordingly
- Are more able to resist peer pressure in connection to risky health behaviors
- Related to willingness to seek help for personal-emotional problems, depression, and suicidal ideation

(Austin et al., 2005; Bar-On, 2007; Kunnanat, 2004; Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2007)
General Intelligence

- For the purposes of this study, general intelligence (IQ) will be measured by the Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test (K-BIT).

- The test is divided into a measure of verbal or crystallized thinking (Expressive Vocabulary and Definitions), and one of nonverbal or fluid thinking (Matrices).
Criterion Variables (DV’s)

- Subjective well being (QLQ) (i.e., overall Quality of Life)
- Psychological Distress (SCL-90-R)
Criterion Variables (DV’s)

- Subjective well being is used as an indicator of life satisfaction, prevalence and intensity of positive, happy emotions and absence of negative affect in one’s life.

- SWB is based on how and why we view our lives as a satisfying, happy experience.

(Deiner & Emmons, 1984; Bryant & Veroff, 1982; Emmons et al., 1985)
Criterion Variables (DV’s)

- The QLQ is a measure of subjective well being (Evans & Cope, 1989). The measure includes 15 subscales and an overall summative scale.

Criterion Variables (DV’s)

- **SCL-90-R**: Self-report symptom inventory designed to reflect the psychological symptom patterns of respondents.

- **Global Severity Index (GSI)**
  - Best single indicator of the current level or depth of the disorder.
  - Combines information concerning the number of symptoms reported with the intensity of perceived distress.
The purpose was to determine how accurately factors of general and/or emotional intelligence can predict Quality of Life and Psychological Distress in a sample of male and female foster care alumni.

Individual level qualitative data will be examined.
Foster Care and Individual Experiences

- Each foster alumni’s experience is unique
  - Brief histories of the participants confirmed this
  - Experiences before, during, and after foster care vary
    - Before placement (e.g., placement age, reason for placement, familial relationships, support)
    - During placement (e.g., number of placements experienced, number of reunifications the family, support)
    - After placement (e.g., education and job status, living situations, support, familial relationships)
Individual Experiences Before Placement: Age at Initial Placement

Number of Foster care alumni

Age
### Individual Experiences Before Placement: Reported Reasons for Initial Placement

- 3 neglect to self or family member
- 3 physical abuse to self or family member
- 2 sexual abuse to self or family member
- 2 parental death and unable to be cared for by relatives
- 1 voluntarily given up
- 1 parental incarceration
- 1 parental alcohol abuse
- 1 domestic violence
- 2 reported multiple reasons
- 4 unknown or did not give reason
Individual Experiences During Placement: Number of Placements Foster Care Alumni Experienced

Reported Total Number of Placements Experienced

Number of Foster Care Alumni
Two participants were reunified with their biological parents at least once during their foster care experience.

- Of these participants, one was reunified twice and the other was reunified three times.
Individual Experiences During Placement: Reunification and Biological Sibling Placement

- Five participants were reunified with relatives at least once during their foster care experience.
  - Of these participants, one participant was reunified 3 times and two participants were reunified 2 times.
Individual Experiences During Placement: Reunification and Biological Sibling Placement

- 90% of participants had biological siblings also placed in foster care
  - Of these participants, 78% (14 out of 18 participants) were initially placed together
  - Of those placed together, 29% (4 out of 14 participants) remained together throughout foster care
Individual Experiences: After Foster Care

Job and Educational Status

- 65% of participants received funding from Child Net ($1135 per month)
- 2 participants were unemployed & were not students
- 5 participants were employed, 9 participants were students, and 4 participants were both employed and students
Individual Experiences: After Foster Care
Job and Educational Status

- **Employment**
  - Teacher, cashier, interns (not receiving full pay), maintenance workers
  - Hours ranged (some working 6 hours a week to full-time)

- **Highest level of Education completed**
  - 2 participants still in high school
  - 2 participants completed 11th grade
  - 1 participant completed 10th grade & took GED and awaiting results
  - 11 out of 20 participants completed 12th grade
  - 1 participant reported being in his 1st year of college
  - 2 participants reported having an associates/two year technical school degree
  - 1 participant reported having 6 months until she completed her Masters of Science
What do foster care alumni have in common?

- Foster care alumni all experience transitions
  - Transitions into foster care
  - For some, transitions during foster care
  - Transition out of foster care

✓ The participants in this study shared something else in common...
The Living Environment Prior to Transition

- **Multiple houses**
  - **Children**
    - Gender specific houses
    - Shared rooms
    - Family type setting
      - Displayed photographs, awards
  - **Caretakers**
    - live in the house
    - Shifts = 3.5 days
  - **Community Features/Services**
    - Club/Activity house
    - Involvement in activities with neighboring houses
    - Onsite Therapist and Tutor
What were your experiences during your transition from your “home” environment into the “real world?”

- Did you have support? If so, from who?
- What kind of support was it? Financial, Emotional, Educational…?
- What was most helpful for you at the time of your transition?
The average age of emancipation is 18 years 6 months old. Statutorily defined as 18 years old in many states. Some states and facilities allow children to remain in out-of-home care until the age of 21. (Pecora et al., 2006)
After Care Coordination

- Offered transitional guidance
- Through observation and alumni report, after care coordination/independent living guidance has evolved

1. Education about Transition
2. Financial Education
   - Saving, opening bank accounts
   - How to balance a checkbook
   - Available grants and funding
3. Employment Opportunities
   - How to search for jobs in the newspaper
   - Onsite Internship Opportunities
After Care Coordination

1. Educational Assistance
   - Applying for educational programs

2. Housing Assistance
   - Government funded housing

3. Counseling before and after transition

4. Assistance for After Care
   - Transportation
   - Shopping assistance, help finding furniture

5. Support
   - Some do not utilize this service for various reasons
     - Unfamiliar with service provided, preference, not offered at time of transition, and worries about sharing financial difficulties
Reported Difficulties with the Adjustment

- Living Environment
  - Government housing: "They don’t tell you it’s in the ghetto."
    - Ex. Two testing cases
      - Female with two children
      - Two single males
    - Option to stay at SOS
    - Sharing of apartments
    - Shelters

- Limited Transportation
  - 45% currently had a drivers license
  - 2 had license suspended
Reported Difficulties with the Adjustment

- Financial Hardship
  - Difficulty managing finances
  - $50 gift card provided by the grant
    - Used for food
    - Interview clothes
    - Diapers
    - Supplies for college or school

- Inadequate knowledge about the “real world”
  - Handling money, finding jobs, paying bills, options in community, parenting
Foster Care Alumni’s Rating of Transitional Experience

Number of Participants

Transitional Rating

- Very Easy
- Somewhat Easy
- Not Difficult/Easy
- Somewhat Difficult
- Very Difficult
What helps and what needs help with the transition process?

- **Not helpful**
  - Lack of support (i.e. biological and foster family)
  - Financial situation
  - Lacking motivation
  - Family issues (e.g. mixed emotions because of past history with family)
    - One participant reported biological mother being deathly ill

- **Helpful**
  - After Care Coordinator support, life coaching, and education (35% reported this to be most helpful)
  - Financial assistance
  - Staff Support
  - Working
  - Taking mind off of the situation
  - Help moving out
  - Being able to talk to someone (e.g. friends, family members, staff)
  - Education about the “real world” and the advice
Additional Observations

**Motivation:**
- Many were motivated to perform well on the IQ test.
- Many were initially motivated by the gift card but on multiple occasions this motivation transitioned into wanting to help foster children.
  - On multiple occasions the individuals showed interest and asked if they could receive findings of the study.
  - E.g., one participant refused to give the voluntary brief history portion of the assessment. Despite being informed this was o.k. and told that she would still receive the gift card for completion of the assessments she later voluntarily offered it stating, “I want to help foster children.”
  - A few individuals expanded the brief history questions with reported hopes to help foster care children.
Preliminary Results
(Descriptives)

- $N = 21$
- $n = 3$ (incomplete)
- $N = 18$
- Comparisons will be made relative to demographic variables such as years in the foster care system, ethnicity and gender.
Preliminary Results (Inferential)

IQ and Quality of Life

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<thead>
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<th>Kbit I Q</th>
<th>QOL</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Below Avg</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>85.89</td>
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<td>Above Avg</td>
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<td>91.18</td>
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\[ t(18) = -1.399, \ p < .179 \]

IQ and Distress (SCL)

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<th>Distress</th>
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<th>Mean</th>
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<td></td>
<td>High Levels</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>91.60</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Low Levels</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>84.38</td>
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\[ t(16) = 1.891, \ p < .077 \]
Preliminary Results
(Inferential)

EQ and Quality of Life

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<th>QOL</th>
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<th>Mean</th>
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<td>Above Avg</td>
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\[ t(16) = -3.838, p < .001, d = .54 \]

EQ and Distress (SCL)

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<td>Low Levels</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100.28</td>
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\[ t(14) = .214, p < .834 \]
Scatter Plots

EQ and Quality of Life

$r_{pb} = 0.692^{**}$

$r = 0.771^{**}$

$r^2 = 0.59$ (59% Explained Variance)
References