Extended foster care systems have been implemented in half of the U.S. states to aid teens in a healthier transition into adulthood. The proposed study aims to examine the potential benefits these extended programs provide. A quasi-experimental approach will be utilized to examine two groups of 25 participants from each state. The first group will include teenagers aged 18 to 19 from foster care programs and the second will include teenagers aged 18 to 19 from traditional foster care programs. Participants will be interviewed at age 18, 21, and 25 to gain insight on resources provided and their overall status regarding jobs, education, housing, and arrest record. Results from these three interviews will be compared between the two groups to assess the differences. It is expected that the teenagers enrolled in the extended foster care programs will provide the necessary resources to be more successful adults compared to those who aged out of the system at age 18.

According to the Children’s Bureau of the United States Department of Health, there are an estimated 400,000 children in the foster care system at any given time in the U.S. (2020). In many states, when these teenagers reach the age of eighteen, they are forced to age out of the system. To help combat this issue, extended foster care programs have been implemented in 26 of the U.S. states to provide additional support for teenagers in the system as they transition into adulthood. According to Mendes and Rogers (2020), these extended foster care programs are viewed as providing young people with a more normalized process on developmental capacity, rather than chronological age (p. 1515). The present study will utilize research to further examine the resources these programs provide and how they might affect the overall status of the adult lives of former foster youth.

To get an insight on how extended foster care programs correlate with educational attainment, Courtney and Hook (2016) conducted a study by collecting data from the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth. This evaluation included five waves of data representing three states: Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin. At the time of the study, Illinois courts allowed foster children to stay in foster care until they were 21 while Iowa and Wisconsin rarely let the foster youth stay until their 18th birthday. After analyzing the data, Courtney and Hook found that “allowing youth to remain in foster care to age 21 increases the likelihood that they will continue their education” (2016, p. 130). Additionally, the study found that “each additional year in care is associated with a 46% increase in the estimated odds that former foster youth will graduate from college” (p. 130). The results of this experimental study allows the participants to pick which group they will be in. At three stages of their lives, participants in each group will be asked a series of interview questions regarding the resources they are provided and how their life is going overall. Scores from these questions regarding the resources provided will be added up and averaged for each interview and a score will be given for each time period. When being assessed for overall life trajectory, participants will be asked questions like “how satisfied are you with your life?” and “how hopeful are you for the future?”.

Procedure
Potential participants will be invited to participate in this study by their caseworkers at their foster care agency. After deciding to take part in the study, they will be divided into two groups – aging out of the system at 18 or staying in the extended programs. This quasi-experimental study allows the participants to pick which group they will be in. At three stages of their lives, participants in each group will be asked a series of interview questions regarding the resources they are provided and how their life is going overall. Scores from these questions regarding the resources provided will be added up and averaged for each interview and a score will be given for each time period. When being assessed for overall life trajectory, participants will be asked questions like “how satisfied are you with your life?” and “how hopeful are you for the future?”.

Discussion
If the findings of the proposed study support our two hypotheses, results would show that former foster youth who choose to stay in the extended foster care programs are provided with more resources that lead them into a more positive adult life. With this information, the remaining 24 states should consider implementing these programs. By gaining access to more resources, former foster youth are given a better chance of succeeding while transitioning into adulthood. With these extended programs in place across the country, Courtney and Hook (2016) predicted that former foster youth who participate in extended programs will have a higher level of education leading to more job opportunities. The predicted results of the study involving Boston former foster youth would indicate this increase in educational attainment as well. Along with increasing the likelihood of greater educational attainment, the predicted results of our study would also lead to a predicted decrease in homelessness numbers because of the additional resources these former foster youth are receiving (Dworsky et al., 2013). The additional resources and social support could also lead to a decrease in the rate of homelessness, if the results of the proposed study yield what they are expected to (Lee et al., 2014). Despite the concerns of the overall costs of implementing these programs, the results that we predict from this study would outweigh the potential cost concerns. By providing additional resources and support to foster youth who have just turned 18, a healthier and smoother transition into adulthood may be achieved.

**References**

**Appendix**

**Expanded Resources and Support**

**Predicated Results**

This study will use an independent samples t-test to test the two hypotheses that foster youth who continue in extended foster care programs will receive more support and have a better life trajectory than the foster youth that age out at 18. This statistical analysis will allow us to look for differences between our two levels of the independent variable. It is expected that there will be a significant difference in resources provided and life trajectory between the two groups of participants. The difference in the groups may be seen because the extended foster care program group might receive more resources and therefore have a better life trajectory than the group who aged out of the system at age 18. These findings would support both hypothesis one and two. The results of the study could also support the null hypothesis and show that there are no significant differences between the two groups.

**Methods**

Participants
The sample for this proposed study will include 50 participants who will be divided into two groups (25 participants in each): one group who aged out of foster care at 18 and one group who continued on to extended foster care programs. Participants will be former foster children who just turned 18 and those who have been given the choice to either age out of the system or stay in extended care. These participants would be from Boston, Massachusetts – an urban and diverse area of the United States where extended foster care has been implemented until age 21. They would be recruited through their caseworkers. Participants would be interviewed at three different points of their lives: age 18, 21, and 25. They will receive $50 per interview that they complete, or $150 in total if they complete all three interviews.

**Materials**

The primary outcome measures are the resources that former foster youth are provided after turning 18. The secondary outcome measures are how the resources provided affected the transition into adulthood for former foster youth.

**Resources Provided**

To assess resources that the participants in the two groups are provided, interviewers will ask questions regarding governmental help, job search programs, and social support. Participants will rate each of these categories on a scale from 1-5 where 1 is no support and 5 is exceptional support.

**Overall Life Trajectory**

To assess the overall life trajectory of the participants in the two groups, interviewers will ask questions regarding life satisfaction and helpfulness for the future. Participants will rate each of these categories on a scale from 1-5 where 1 is the worst life trajectory and 5 is the best.

**Procedure**

Potential participants will be invited to participate in this study by their caseworkers at their foster care agency. After deciding to take part in the study, they will be divided into two groups – aging out of the system at 18 or staying in the extended programs. This quasi-experimental study allows the participants to pick which group they will be in. At three stages of their lives, participants in each group will be asked a series of interview questions regarding the resources they are provided and how their life is going overall. Scores from these questions regarding the resources provided will be added up and averaged for each interview and a score will be given for each time period. When being assessed for overall life trajectory, participants will be asked questions like “how satisfied are you with your life?” and “how hopeful are you for the future?”.

**Scores from the life trajectory questions will also be added up and averaged for each interview and a score will be given for each time period.**

**Examining the Benefits of Extended Foster Care Programs on the Development of Teens Transitioning into Adulthood**

**PSY 4370 – Psychology of Aging Capstone (Spring 2021)**

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