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Trauma on Top of Trauma: How Child Welfare Failures Affect Trafficked Children

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TRAUMA ON TOP OF TRAUMA: HOW CHILD WELFARE FAILURES AFFECT TRAFFICKED CHILDREN

By

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ABSTRACT

The commercial sexual exploitation of children is a phenomenon that greatly impacts the victimization of children. The sexual victimization of children is harmful to children and prior research has found various risk factors related to exploitation. The main risk factors observed in the current paper include prior sexual abuse and/or assault, adverse childhood experiences, foster care failures, race/ethnicity, and running away. The current study used secondary data that collected data from non-foster and foster-involved exploited children to observe how foster care involvement and race/ethnicity affect victimization within the juvenile justice system. Findings confirmed that race/ethnicity and foster care involvement greatly influenced outcomes in the juvenile justice system. Additional findings and limitations are discussed.

Keywords: *commercial sexual exploitation of children, sexual victimization, risk factors, foster care, race and ethnicity*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The sexual exploitation and trafficking of individuals is a concerning issue in the United States (U.S.) due to long-term psychological, emotional, and physical harm to the victims. The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is equally crucial to understand. As defined by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, commercial sexual exploitation of children:

> Refers to a range of crimes and activities involving the sexual abuse or exploitation of a child for the financial benefit of any person or in exchange for anything of value (including monetary and non-monetary benefits) given or received by any person. Examples of crimes and acts that constitute CSEC: child sex trafficking/the prostitution of children, child sex tourism involving commercial sexual activity, commercial production of child pornography, and online transmission of live video of a child engaged in sexual activity in exchange for anything of value. (ojjdp.ojd.gov)

With this definition in mind, it should be noted that child sex trafficking and CSEC are acts of child abuse (Barnert, Iqbal, Bruce, Anoshiravani, Kolhatkar, & Greenbaum, 2017). CSEC of minors involve those under age 18 in the U.S. and is considered a form of modern slavery and sexual child abuse (O'Brien, 2018).

Commercial sexual exploitation of children and sex trafficking of children is a consequential issue in the United States and worldwide (Le, Ryan, Rosenstock, & Goldmann, 2018). Vulnerable children and youth who are victimized in commercial sexual exploitation face a wide range of violence, adversity, impoverishment, and marginalization (O'Brien, Finkelhor, & Jones, 2022). When children are exploited, they face extreme forms of abuse (Ottisova, Smith, Shetty, Stahl, Downs, & Oram, 2018). Research also reports that children who experience physical and sexual abuse have adverse effects on the children's physical health and wellbeing.

Childhood physical and sexual abuse are associated with a range of physical, emotional, and mental health problems including mental disorders, substance abuse, and suicidal ideations (Ottisova et al., 2018). Research has found that as adults, CSEC victims experience high rates of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety (Ottisova et al., 2018). Due to the shame, fear, and/or lack of understanding of CSEC, victims often do not disclose their experiences (O'Brien et al., 2022).

Children who have run away from foster care are reported to have an increased likelihood of being trafficked than children who have not run away from foster care (Latzman & Gibbs, 2020). Research supports that being involved in the foster care system is a common pathway to CSEC victimization. It has been reported that one in six children are sex trafficked during their runaway episodes from foster care. Latzman and Gibbs (2020) also theorize that foster children are more vulnerable to CSEC because of the lack of resources for basic needs when they run away. This in turn deprives the children of food, money, and/or shelter, where the children then become involved with traffickers who sexually exploit them.

Traffickers (also known as pimps) are third-party exploiters; however, minors can be victims of CSEC without pimps. As minors, they are not able to consent to sex work, even if there was no force, fraud, or coercion. Instead of shaming minors and children victimized in CSEC, recognizing them as victims is the first step to addressing CSEC (Franchino-Olsen, 2021).

Prevalence

Understanding the true prevalence of CSEC is difficult due to unreliable methods of data collection (Brandt, Lind, Schreier, Sievers, & Kramer, 2021; Fedina, Williamson, & Perdue, 2016). Despite data collection challenges, incident reporting still provides useful insights into present data on CSEC trends (Fedina et al., 2016). Kennedy and Pucci (2007) estimate in May 2007 alone, there were over 400 identified CSEC victims in the streets of Las Vegas. With a lack of a common database, the U.S. is estimated to have hundreds of thousands of undiscovered CSEC victims (Franchino-Olsen, 2021). Additionally, there are inconsistencies and double counting on data of CSEC victims because many agencies track their own database on reported CSEC victimization (Franchino-Olsen, 2021). Victims of CSEC have been found in all 50 states of the U.S., but victims fail to receive help from law enforcement and service providers because they are undiscovered (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Roe-Sepowitz, Hinckle, Bayless, Christensen, & Garuba, 2015). CSEC victims go undiscovered because it is uncommon for them to self-identify as victims of CSEC (Greenbaum, 2014; Hickle, & Roe-Sepowitz, 2018). The average age CSEC victims enter the industry is between 12 and 14 years old, the earliest age being ten (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hardy, Compton, & McPhatter, 2013).

CSEC victims experience a great deal of physical, mental, and emotional abuse while being exploited, and often, the effects last even after their getaway from the abuse (Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2013). Most notably, PTSD is a common psychological effect of victims that were involved in CSEC (Lanctôt, Reid, & Laurier, 2020). PTSD is a common effect of CSEC due to "psychological manipulation, threats, unsafe relationships, coercion, fear, violence, and safety concerns" victims face (Lanctôt, Reid, & Laurier, 2020, pg. 1).

This type of psychological trauma negatively impacts child development and attachment styles (Cole, Sprang, Lee & Cohen, 2016). In addition to PTSD, CSEC victims also experience the trauma of a "damaged sense of self, compromised interpersonal boundaries and distrust of others, suicidality, anxiety and depression, and substance abuse" (Cole et al., 2016, pg. 1). This only scratches the surface of the long-lasting trauma of CSEC victims.

The goal of this paper is to examine the lived experiences of CSEC victims and explore the similarities and differences between individuals in non-foster and foster care. This research paper also explores race and ethnicity to understand the racial/ethnic disparities within the juvenile justice system and the foster care system. To gain more knowledge on this matter, the first step is to explore what previous literature has found.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Prior research found that poverty, substance abuse, mental health problems, and early childhood sexual abuse and trauma are related to risks of prostitution in adult women (Fedina et al., 2016; Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014). Children or CSEC victims experience similar risks, especially in samples of at-risk children (i.e., foster care involved, homeless, runaways, or juvenile justice involved; Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014). Fedina et al. (2016) found that certain factors, such as running away or homelessness, increased the risk of becoming a CSEC victim in children because of engagement in survival sex (i.e., exchanging or selling sex for money, food, drugs, and/or shelter). Learning to identify risk factors of CSEC is critical in stopping future victimization. If these risk factors can be properly analyzed, new policies and resources can be provided for CSEC victims. There is no specific risk factor that leads to CSEC but a combination of risk factors that leads to involvement in CSEC (Fedina et al., 2016). This section will look at what is known about risk factors for CSEC, and how abuse and foster care involvement increases risk for CSEC victimization.

Prior Sexual Abuse and/or Assault

Pittenger, Pogue, and Hansen (2018) found that individuals who experience childhood sexual abuse have short- and long-term consequences, such as higher chances of developing mental illness and behavioral problems than individuals with no experience of childhood sexual abuse. It is reported that 26.6% of girls and 5.1% of boys experience childhood sexual abuse prior to age 17 (Pittenger, Pogue, & Hansen, 2018). Victims of childhood sexual abuse have an increased risk of future sexual victimization, which includes CSEC (Cole et al., 2016; Pittenger, Pogue, & Hansen, 2018).

Lalor and McElvaney (2010) state that there are two significant relationships between childhood sexual abuse and later involvement in CSEC. First, children who are sexually abused develop psychologically and emotionally in ways that make them significantly more vulnerable to sexual revictimization. Second, victims of childhood sexual abuse gravitate to more coping and survival strategies, such as drug/alcohol abuse and running away, subsequently leading them to survival sex. It is important to note that childhood sexual abuse does not cause CSEC, but rather, the traumatic experience takes a negative toll on the children's developmental stages (Lalor & McElvaney, 2010).

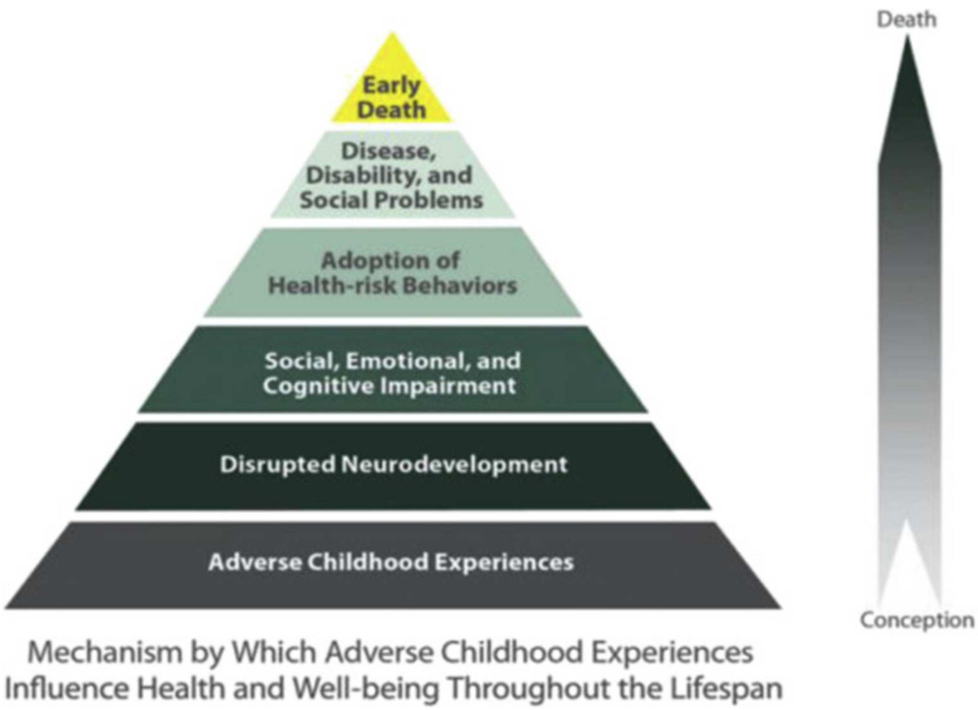
Cyders, Hunton, and Hershberger (2021) report that among CSEC victims, childhood sexual abuse is frequent. The researchers compared a group of high-risk girls (i.e., persistent running away, report of traumas) to victims of CSEC (self-reported or court records) and found victims of CSEC had higher rates of prior sexual abuse than high-risk girls. Additionally, they found that childhood sexual abuse are possible indicators of exploitation later in childhood life. When looking at both groups of girls, Cyders et al. (2021) discovered that 90% of the girls in the study were sexually abused during childhood. It has been found that among sex trafficked boys and girls, they had a much higher rate of sexual abuse than children who were not trafficked (Boullier & Blair, 2018).

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Figure 1 depicts the life history of individuals that experience adverse childhood experiences (ACE) and how it influences their development and overall health (Boullier & Blair, 2018). The psychological stress response helps us better understand the long-term mental and physical health consequences that impact CSEC victims early in life (Goddard, 2021). The ACE Pyramid is used to create a framework between psychological behaviors that turn into long-term diseases, resulting in needs for physical and mental health care for CSEC victims (Goddard, 2021).

Figure 1

The ACE Pyramid Model



Note. By Boullier, M., & Blair, M. (2018). Adverse childhood experiences. *Paediatrics and Child Health*, *28*(3), 132-137.

Only recently has it been understood that childhood maltreatment is an underlying source of a range of public health concerns (Diamond-Welch & Kosloski, 2020; Kennedy, Arebalos, Ekroos, & Cimino, 2021). The ACE Tool studies children's experiences in household dysfunctions (i.e., abuse, neglect, and/or household challenges) prior to 18. High ACE scores (i.e., four or higher) indicate that sex trafficking victims are more likely to have negative physical and mental health outcomes as adults, compared to adults with lower scores (Diamond-Welch & Kosloski, 2020). High ACE scores are indicative of likelihood of being sex trafficked. If children are screened for ACE at an early age, researchers can take the necessary steps to decrease the likelihood of being trafficked.

The ACE score is calculated by looking at responses to ten questions, zero indicating no dysfunctions and ten signifying they experienced each dysfunction. The ten questions asked to determine ACE scores include: emotional and physical abuse by a parental figure, sexual abuse by an adult, observing mother being treated violently, substance abuse in household, mental illness in household, separated or divorced parents, criminal household member, emotional and/or physical neglect (Boullier & Blair, 2018).

Sex trafficked children who have been arrested have a higher ACE score, especially on measures of sexual abuse and physical neglect (Naramore, Bright, Epps, & Hardt, 2017). The researchers found that children who experienced sexual abuse, physical neglect, and parental separation were four to eight times higher to be adjudicated for sex trafficking than children who have not experienced these types of abuse. Furthermore, children with an ACE score greater than four were found to be victims of CSEC more than other high-risk children (i.e., those just experiencing maltreatment, parental mental illness, family violence, and abandonment). Early intervention and identification of high ACE scores can help possibly stop future chronic health conditions and early death of CSEC victims (Jia & Lubetkin, 2020).

Research has found that the ACE questionnaire has high to moderate reliability and validity (Schauss et al., 2021). When testing for validity, research has shown a moderate internal consistency with the overall ACE test. To test reliability, the test-retest method was used and demonstrated that there is strong reliability with the ACE tests.

Foster Care Failures

The foster care system is built to ensure the safety and well-being of children by giving them a sense of belonging (Hannan, Martin, Caceres, & Aledort, 2017). Additionally, the foster care system has the responsibility of responding to child abuse, neglect, and/or maltreatment allegations (Hannan et al., 2017). Research shows that children in the foster care system are at an increased risk of being CSEC victims (Bounds, Julion, & Delaney, 2015; Latzman, Gibbs, Feinberg, Kluckman, & Aboul-Hosn, 2019; Pullmann, Roberts, Parker, Mangiaracina, Briner, Silverman, & Becker, 2020). However, there is strong indications that professionals working with foster care children do not report problems despite having the obligation to (Dimitropoulos, Lindenbach, Devoe, Gunn, Cullen, Bhattarai, Kuntz, Binford, Patten, & Arnold, 2022).

Pullmann et al. (2020) found that on average, children were referred to the foster care system at age six. It was common for these foster children to experience 27 living disruptions during their placement episodes. Children also reported that they did not get to stay in a single household for more than two to three months (Latzman et al., 2019; Pullmann, et al., 2020). This causes living disruptions because children get forcibly removed from the home and into a new environment where they might have a hard time adjusting to (Latzman et al., 2019). Awareness of the characteristics of the foster care system can contribute to research on child advocacy by better addressing the problems faced by victims in CSEC (Greeson, Treglia, Wolfe, Wasch, & Gelles, 2019).

When children become involved in the foster care system, their past traumas intensify because it can be upsetting for children to be removed from their homes, even if there was abuse in the household (Hannan et al., 2017). Being moved from home to home causes more harm to foster care children because the disruption in school attendance and detachment from mental and/or physical health (Hannan et al., 2017). These disruptions then source in the loss of social and peer connection, which children need to build relationships.

When disruptions are created, it causes instability for children. Children then feel the uncertainty to develop relationships with trustworthy adults or reject creating relationships due to the vulnerability the children face. This results in many mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, dangerous behaviors, and/or difficulty in having attachments (Hannan et al., 2017). Hannan et al. (2017) explain that these factors lead foster care children to repetitively run away without permission, resulting in higher risk of CSEC victimization.

The intersection between the foster care system and CSEC victimization is that most of the trafficking victims report histories of abuse and neglect from trusted adults (Hannan et al., 2017). In turn, the foster care system has the duty of restoring the children's trust and safety. However, research shows that foster-involved children fall higher to CSEC vulnerability. Hannan et al. (2017) found in a New York study that, 85% of CSEC victims had prior involvement in foster care, and 69% of victims experienced prior child abuse or neglect. Similar findings were found in California, where between 50 to 80% of CSEC victims were previously involved in foster care.

The failure of the foster care system adds a burden to foster children due to their unstable living conditions (e.g., multiple placements; Pate, Anderson, Kulig, Wilkes, & Sullivan, 2021). Despite CSEC victims having multiple contact with state social services, the agencies still lack preparation, policies, and infrastructure to meet the needs of the children; consequently, children in crisis are overlooked by an overwhelmed foster care system (Bounds et al., 2015). Additionally, these victims are often improperly placed in juvenile detention centers or placed back into homes they run away from, increasing their likelihood of being revictimized (Bounds et al., 2015; Hershberger, Sanders, Chick, Jessup, Hanlin, & Cyders, 2018).

Race and Ethnicity

Black, Hispanic, or Latino, and mixed-race/ethnicity children are disproportionately represented in foster care (Hannan et al., 2017). It has been found that about 24% of children in foster care are identified as Black/African American while Black/African American children only represent about 13% of the U.S. population (Hannan et al., 2017). Hispanic or Latino children had similar findings in that, 22% of children in foster care identified as Hispanic or Latino, but only represent 16% of the U.S. population (Hannah et al., 2017). This overrepresentation of ethnic and racial minorities in the foster care system may be because they are treated differently based on the service they receive and what is available to them (Hannan et al., 2017).

Putnam-Hornstein, Needell, King, and Johnson-Motoyama (2013) did a birth cohort study on children born in California in 2002 by linking child protective service (CPS) records with birth records. In addition to the CPS records, they also referred to data on maltreated children who were sent to foster care before the age of five. The total birth rate of children in California during the year 2002 was 531,035 children. Six percent were Black/African American, 51% were Hispanic or Latino, and 31% were White. The overall data showed that 14% of children were reported to CPS, and of these children, 37.5% were victims of abuse before age five. Additionally, two percent of the overall birth cohort entered the foster care system before age five. When they studied racial/ethnic differences between foster children, researchers found that 30% of Black children were more likely to enter the foster care system due to abuse or neglect by age five, versus 13.4% of White children. Black children are disproportionately represented in data of foster care involved children and findings indicate that different risk factors can be associated with the disparities in data.

Similar research has found that race/ethnicity was a primary risk factor for involvement in the foster care system (Cénat, McIntee, Mukunzi, & Noorishad, 2021). When compared to White children, Black identified children were more likely to be overrepresented in the foster care system. Additionally, Black children involved in foster care were more likely to report sexual abuse to CPS. Gerassi and Nichols (2017) report that Black women and children are at higher risk of sex trafficking/CSEC due to the unequal opportunity and suppression they face, leading to low socioeconomic status. These lack of opportunities leads to vulnerable individuals, leaving Black women and children an easy target for exploiters (Gerassi & Nichols, 2017).

Running Away of Foster Care Children

Research from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) found that one in six runaway children were likely CSEC victims in 2014. NCMEC also reported that 67% of foster care children who ran away from care experienced CSEC during their runaway time. Franchino-Olsen's (2021) research found that when children were in abusive households, it increased the children's risk of running away, subsequently leading to CSEC victimization. This gives a correlation between the age of first CSEC victimization and when children first ran away.

Cole et al. (2016) found that CSEC victims who ran away from care were trafficked before and/or after they first ran away. O'Brien et al. (2022) reported that is it common for CSEC victims to report a history of repeated runaway behavior. When CSEC victims get into the cycle of running away, they often run into obstacles such as access to food or shelter (Varma, Gillespie, McCracken, & Greenbaum, 2015). In turn, they become homeless and vulnerable to engaging in survival sex (Varma et al., 2015). It has also been found that individuals who entered CSEC under the age of 18 are five times more likely to have a history of running away than individuals who entered the commercial sex industry as adults (Fedina, Perdue, Bright, & Williamson, 2019).

There is limited amount of research to examine why victims of CSEC are more likely to run away than children of other high-risk groups (e.g., childhood sexual abuse victims; Hershberger et al., 2018). It is theorized that victims of CSEC distrust adults, which are caused by symptoms of PTSD. Exploiters then take advantage of this distrust, which further alienates victims from others, and ultimately making them at risk to run away (Hershberger et al., 2018).

Existing research suggests that factors such as individual and family relationships increased running away behavior in children (Fedina et al., 2019). Individual-level factors reveal that children who run away are more likely to experience childhood abuse, financial struggles, homelessness, and drug/alcohol abuse prior to them running away (Cook, Talbert, & Thomas, 2021; Fedina et al., 2019). Conflict with family was also found to be a primary predictor of running away in children (Cook et al., 2021; Fedina et al., 2019).

Harsh Punishments of the Juvenile Justice System

The juvenile justice system is one of the social services that handles CSEC-involved children (Anderson, England, & Davidson, 2017). It is known to be paternalistic towards girls, particularly around giving girls' control over their sexuality. Girls mainly enter the system for status offenses – adolescent-specific offenses including truancy, running away – and are typically found to be victims of CSEC. Research found that CSEC victims are treated differently across the juvenile justice system compared to other adolescent offenders because the lack of understanding of CSEC (Anderson et al., 2017; Shields & Letourneau, 2015).

Sherman and Balck (2015) report that girls represented 29% of arrested children in 2012 and reasons for their arrest was mainly due to prostitution or theft, which poses little to no threat to others. When children are arrested, it often leads to referral to court, where they are charged with multiple offenses, instead of one offense. This often becomes a lengthy process and instead of providing support, these children have limited opportunities for their future and further damages their behavioral responses. Research has found that children of color are at an increased risk for being formally charged. Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino girls were 20% more likely than white girls to be charged (Jones, Wallis, & Seibers, 2020; Sherman & Balck, 2015).

After arrest, it regularly leads to detention, which profoundly drives children more into the system (Sherman & Balck, 2015). Being in detention is harmful to children because it disrupts them from building meaningful relationships, loss of support, loss of control, and lack of safety. Data from 2013 found that probation was the most common post-adjudication disposition for all children and 67% of all girls were on probation. Black/African American girls were found to face discrimination during their probation process because they are seen as coming from broken homes or have personality flaws compared to White girls (Sherman & Balck, 2015).

Out-of-home placement was common among adjudicated girls. Sherman and Balck (2015) found that 88% of girls who were removed from their homes were placed in a locked facility. This sort of juvenile punishment makes it difficult for the children because they are far from their families and in an unfamiliar place. The researchers add that sending children to placements is harmful to children’s development and does not improve the safety of anyone. While in placement, children may face even more dangerous conditions such as lack of mental and/or physical help, sexual abuse, and maltreatment. These sort of harsh punishments from the juvenile justice system only further alienates CSEC victims from society, making their chances of revictimization increase.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS

The theoretical explanations of CSEC do not have much research attention from social scientists (Reid & Piquero, 2016). Many criminological theories have been questioned due to their primary focus towards males, which do not apply to female offending because theories mainly examine male delinquency and crime (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006). Despite these difficulties, the current study will examine Feminist Pathways Theory and Critical Race Theory.

Feminist pathways theory is being used to help explain how childhood victimization leads girls to offend in adulthood. Little is understood about the pathways of girls and how victimization shapes their criminality (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988). Critical race theory is similar in that it investigates race/ethnicity and how racial disparities in the system and society has influenced criminal behavior in minorities. These theories help explain the victimization of CSEC victims in the foster care system.

Feminist Pathways Theory

In Chesney-Lind's book, *The Female Offender*, the author states that feminist theory of delinquency must be sensitive to the life pathway of young girls (2012). Feminist theories must account for how gender matters and how there needs to be an understanding of how girls "negotiate and resist patriarchy and how these strategies can determine what crimes girls commit" (p. 22). Feminist pathways research collects data by asking girls and women about their experience with any sort of abuse, delinquency, and/or criminal behavior (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988).

Feminist pathways theory observes that childhood victimization and trauma lead girls to offend in adulthood (Sutton, & Simons, 2021). This theory believes that childhood physical abuse, sexual abuse, and/or other types of traumas, including familial drug use, household violence, and/or financial difficulties make way for girls' and women's offending. Sutton and Simons (2021) found that, for girls and women to cope with the trauma and abuse they experience, they engage in behaviors such as "running away, sex work, misbehavior at school, and substance use" (pg. 1). In the eyes of the law, the abovementioned behaviors are criminalized, rather than viewing the behavior as survival skills for these victims. This results in girls' and women coming into contact with the criminal justice system, increasing their likelihood of criminal behavior over time (Sutton & Simons, 2021).

This viewpoint has also been used to explain women's victimization, which is the idea that there is a blurred line between being a victim and an offender (Sutton & Simons, 2021). It has been recognized by feminist criminologists that the traumatic experiences women and girls face are rooted from patriarchal norms that condone the "domination, abuse, sexualization, and oppression of women" (Sutton & Simons, 2021, pg. 1). Thus, trauma negatively influences life-events faced by girls and women, which include physical, emotional, and mental abuse and neglect (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006).

Daly and Chesney-Lind (1988) explain the conveniences of using feminist pathway theory to studying involvement in underage prostitution for juveniles. First, this theory considers the effects of gender, which include how girls are socialized and what motivates them into delinquent behaviors. Second, girls' lived experiences are examined in congruence with sexism, which theorizes the lived realities of girls. Lastly, this theory takes into perspective the intersections of gender, class, and race. As a result, this theory focuses on victimization during childhood because this could be a critical risk factor for girls' later involvement with the system (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988).

When this theory is applied to the current study it can explain the victimization of foster children in CSEC. This can explore how the lived experiences of girls in foster care are different than those that are not in foster care. In addition, foster children have history of abuse prior to their entrance into foster care, in which their prior victimizations put them at a higher risk of being victimized in CSEC.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a broad critical theory that draws from a large base of literature (Solorzano, 1997). Despite the wide range of research done on CRT, the main premise of this theory is to examine "race, racism, and power structures that is used to guide critical analysis of issues to inform action strategies" (Kolivoski, 2020, p. 3). In addition, CRT explores the relationship among race, racism, and power, especially with white supremacy, and offers a new lens into how race and power influences racial disparities (Delgado & Stefancic, 1988). Kolivoski (2020) states that CRT is broad, but the main theoretical idea is racism, whiteness as the main component, arguing for the importance of the voices of people of color, and intersectionality. Harris (1993) argues that white identity and the "ideology of racial hierarchy" only expanded with the slavery of Black/African American individuals (p. 1717). Lawrence III (1995) says that in order to stop the struggle against white supremacy, the work has to be done within the minority community. Standing up together shows how much interrelated each racial group is and findings ways to come together, even with our differences, will build a coalition to fight against these racist issues in society.

Racism has become so normalized in the U.S. that it is difficult to pinpoint where the problem is, making it harder to address the problems. Whiteness as the main component means that being racially White offers leverage to Whites in society. People of color argue that their historical narratives have been forever changed by White individuals. Intersectionality refers to the interrelations of gender, sexuality, and race (Crenshaw, 2018). As opposed to viewing the list separately, intersectionality recognizes that these things cannot be studied individually but rather mutually as they impact one another (Crenshaw, 2018)

Kolivoski (2020) examined crossover youth and its relation to race using CRT. Crossover youth refers to involvement in the foster care system and juvenile justice system. Evidence from Kolivski (2020) shows that crossover youth are more likely to be Black/African American. When African American children are compared to their white counterparts, Black/African American children are deeper into both systems.

Focusing on CRT helps to understand the oppression of Black/African American children, which has been ingrained into American society (Kolivski, 2020). The dominant history of children of color is that, if they display delinquent behavior, it is seen as negative and dangerous, which in turn brings harsher punishment for these children. This increases involvement within the systems and further ostracizes the children from society. As mentioned, race and racism have been so ingrained into American society that looking at the current issues through a critical lens is crucial in understanding racial disproportionality. Kolivski (2020) mentions that there must be awareness on the lack of attention that these children receive and if it affects other racial groups similarly. An example of this would be a societal-level factor mentioned by Kolivski (2020), if a middle-class White child was being abused or neglected, would he be affected by the system in the same way as an African American child? These types of questions raise awareness on how differently children of color are treated than white children. When gender is added into this equation, it tells a different side to this story.

Kolivski (2020) found that Black/African American girls were 14 times more likely to be involved with the juvenile justice system compared to White girls, which is also related to the increase in poverty for Black/African American girls. Black/African American girls are also more likely to experience trauma, including sexual abuse when involved in foster care and the juvenile justice system. Despite there being no increase in delinquent behavior of girls of color, the juvenile justice system has a disproportionate growth of girls of color. Kolivski (2020) states that these rates are disproportionate because of how girls respond to sexual abuse and trauma, which often lead to running away and substance use. These girls are then criminalized by the juvenile justice system, which “reinforces the sexual abuse to prison trajectory” (Kolivski, 2020, p. 6).

Hines-Datiri and Carter Andrew’s (2020) research specifically focused on Black females and their treatment in the school system. Using the zero-tolerance policy, they found that Black girls were being treated and punished more harshly than White girls. Despite this policy being a safety measure for students, research shows that Black children were two to three times more likely to be suspended than students of another race/ethnicity. Research argues that teachers and the school system see Black children as hostile, which they see as requiring more police involvement and implicit racial bias from educators. This feeds into that school-to-prison pipeline and has been used as a method to sanction, remove, and criminalize children of color that fail to be controlled by expectations. The institution reinforces the harm to children of color.

The importance of this theory to the current research paper is that it provides a background of the racial issues within the foster care system. Understanding the inequalities and differences based on CRT will allow for more attention to these children. It could also help in identifying patterns and commonalities with children involved in the foster care system and juvenile justice system.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to analyze CSEC involvement within the foster care system and how their treatment in the juvenile delinquency system is affected. Although running away is a known risk factor for CSEC victims, proper research on which risk factors (i.e., familial, homelessness, abuse) cause children to run away has yet to be conducted (Fedina et al., 2019).

Current Study

It is important to examine whether running away and being in the foster care system increases victimization in CSEC victims. Additionally, ACE scores will be looked at for CSEC victims and runaways because it could be an indicator of the odds of being victimized for respondents with high ACE scores (Kulig, 2021). Using data from research collected in Nevada and funded by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the present study will look at personal experiences (i.e., running away, foster care involvement, and juvenile justice involved) among CSEC victims. This current study used the data to analyze victimized children's involvement with the foster care system and examined factors that increases likelihood of victimization, the research questions for this project are:

Question 1: Is race/ethnicity related to likelihood of being involved in foster care?

Hypothesis 1: It is hypothesized that more Black/African Americans and Hispanic/Latino will be likely involved with foster care compared to other racial/ethnic groups among the trafficked children.

Question 2: Do rates of childhood abuse differ based on foster care involvement?

Hypothesis 2: Individuals involved in foster care have higher ACE scores than non-foster care children.

Question 3: Does being involved in foster care lead to more running away behavior?

Hypothesis 3: Trafficked children who are in foster care will run away at a higher rate than non-foster involved children.

Question 4: Does being involved in foster care lead to harsher treatment in the Juvenile Justice System?

Hypothesis 4: Individuals involved in foster care were more likely to be arrested than non-foster involved trafficked children.

Hypothesis 5: Trafficked children involved in foster care were more likely to be held in juvenile detention upon arrest than non-foster involved victims.

Hypothesis 6: Children involved in foster care were more likely to be deemed a juvenile delinquent by a judge than non-foster involved children.

Hypothesis 7: Trafficked children involved in foster care were more likely to be placed on probation than non-foster involved peers.

Hypothesis 8: Trafficked children involved in foster care were more likely to be sent to a juvenile delinquency facility than non-foster involved victims.

Hypothesis 9: Trafficked children involved in foster care were more likely to be sent to a residential placement outside of their home city than non-foster involved children.

Procedures

This study sought to research the effects of trafficked children's involvement with the foster care system and how that affects their treatment in the juvenile delinquency system. Previous research revealed that running away, foster care involvement, prior sexual abuse, and/or racial/ethnic are precursors of victimization in CSEC. This research paper is investigating whether trafficked children involved in the foster care system have a higher likelihood of being victimized and criminalized than those not in the foster care system.

Participants

Ninety-six young adults, aged 18 to 24, were recruited for this study from local service providers working with trafficking victims. Victims self-identified as minor sex trafficking victims and were screened for involvement before being asked to complete an online study. The average age of respondents was 20 years old; 91 self-identified females, and 5 self-identified males.

Demographics for this group were diverse, with 35% self-reporting as Black/African American, 31% Hispanic/Latino, 19% Caucasian, and 15% mixed race or other. Table 1 presents the race/ethnicity of the participants next to expected national and state rates. The national rates come from the State of America's Children report (2021) and the Nevada rates come from the 2019 Census numbers.

Table 1

Race/Ethnicity of Population

	SAC **% (n)**	**Nevada** **% (n)**	**Current** **% (n)**
Caucasian, Non-Hispanic/Latino	50.2% (36.7 million)	34.6% (239,367)	19.1% (18)
African American/AA-Hispanic	13.7 (10 million)	10.5 (72,727)	35.1 (33)
American Indian	<1 (615,950)	0.8 (5,541)	3.2 (3)
Hispanic/Latino	25.6 (18.7 million)	41.2 (285,367.268)	30.9 (29)
Asian/Pacific Islander	5 (3.7 million)	5.5 (38,095.145)	2.1 (2)
Mixed	N/A	6.7 (46,406.813)	9.6 (9)

It is clear from these comparisons that Black/African American are overrepresented in the current data set. Prior research found a similar overrepresentation. CSEC numbers reported by Nevada Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) show an overrepresentation of Black/African American children as well (Nevada Coalition, n.d.).

Measures

Using secondary data from research collected in Nevada and funded by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the present study examines race/ethnicity, arrest details, foster care involvement, running away, and ACE scores. The survey asked about demographic information, all ten items on the ACE Tool, and it included most of Greenbaum and colleagues' tool. The

ACE Tool is a ten-item questionnaire that asks about childhood adversities and Greenbaum and colleagues' tool included a Six-Item Screening Tool to identify victimization of children. This survey did not ask about item six, which refers to number of sexual partners. It instead asked about patterns of sexual abuse to identify unwanted sexual experiences.

The data being used for this research paper was an exploratory survey to examine why CSEC victims do not ask for help and to quantify the experiences of the CSEC victims, including any risks and protective factors. Due to this, the reliability and validity of this data could not be measured (Kennedy, Cimino, & Decker, 2019)

Independent Variables

Figure 2

Predicting Independent Variables

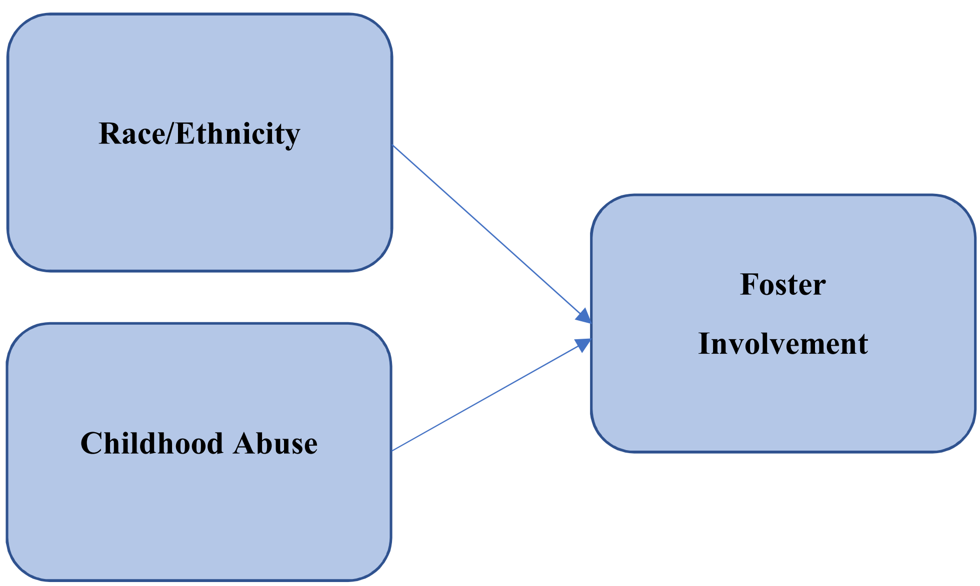


Figure 2 depicts the predicting independent variables. Childhood abuse includes prior sexual victimization and ACE Scores. The primary independent variable being considered in this research paper was involvement in the foster care system. The participants were asked "Have you ever lived in foster care?" and responses were yes or no. Additional independent variables included race/ethnicity and a history of abuse, measured two ways.

The variable race and ethnicity were categorized into: (1) Caucasian (not Hispanic)/White, (2) Black/African American, (3) American Indian, (4) Latino/Hispanic, (5) Asian/Pacific Islander, and (6) Mixed, respondents had the option to choose. Table 2 presents the number of participants that were involved in foster care or not by race and ethnicity groups.

The next variable was specifically a history of sexual victimization, either sexual abuse and/or assault before age 18. There were three questions in the study that were combined for this measure. The three questions asked: "How many time times did you experience unwanted sexual contact before age 13?", "How many times did you experience unwanted sexual contact between ages 13-17?", and "Before you were age 18, how often did your parents or other adult caregivers touch you sexually, force you to touch them sexually or forced you to have sex?". All responses to these questions ranged from: (1) Never, (2) Once, (3) Twice, (4) 3-5 times, (5) 6-10 times, and (6) More than 10. Responses were simplified to answering yes to any of the three questions. Nearly all (93%) of the participants answered yes to a childhood sexual victimization question.

Lastly, ACE scores were calculated using ten items related to family disruption. High ACE scores, which in research is considered four or higher, indicate that children have experienced dysfunction. These dysfunctions include family disruptions, abuse/neglect, and/or maltreatment. When an individual answers "yes" to each question, it indicates that they experienced each dysfunction while growing up. The average ACE score for the sample was 6.03 (SD = 3.03). Over three-quarters of the participants had an ACE score of 4 or higher.

Dependent Variables

Figure 3

Predicting Dependent Variables

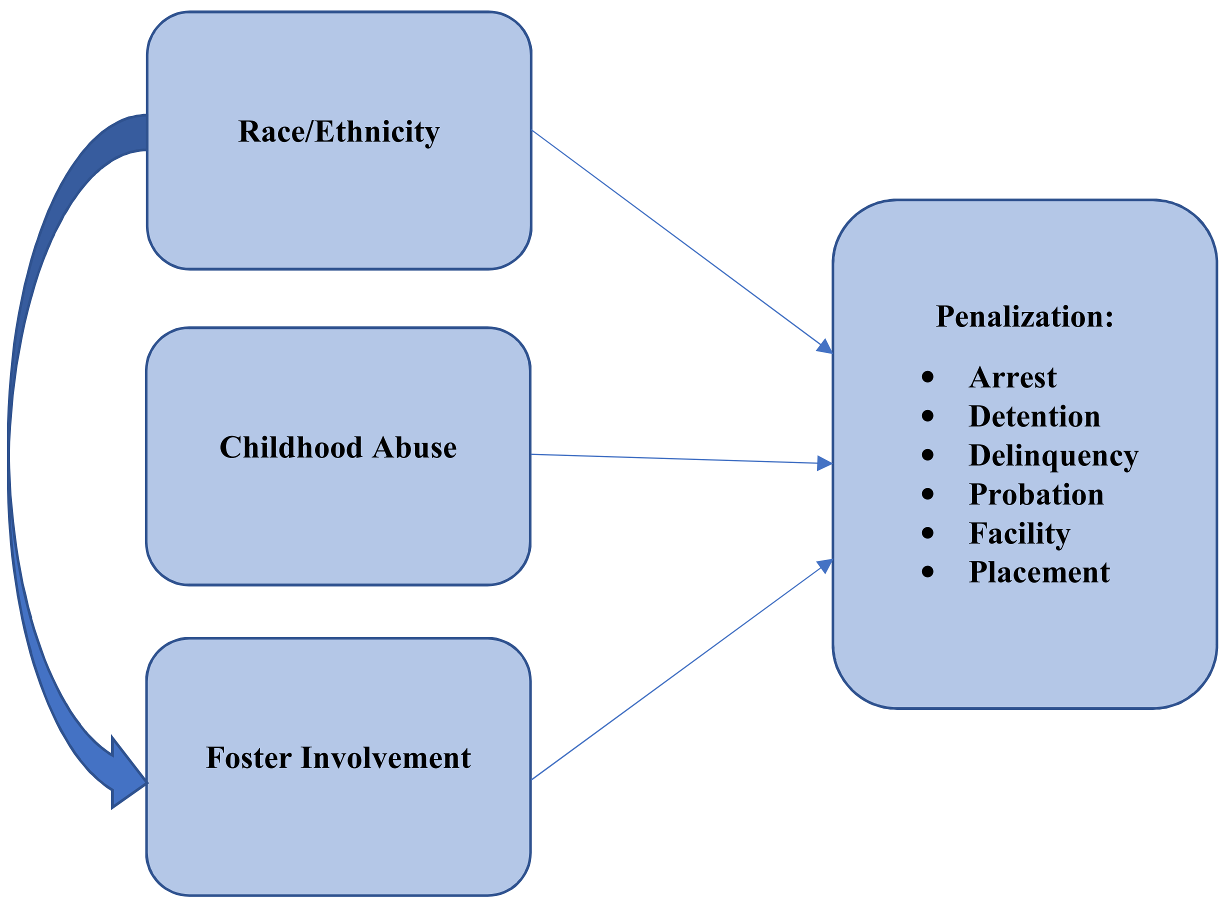


Figure 3 depicts the dependent variables that this paper is predicting. The primary variable of interest in this study was involvement in foster care. It was first considered as a dependent variable when considering its relationship to race and childhood abuse. Following that, it was used as an independent variable to predict the outcome variables of running away and engagement in the delinquency system.

Being arrested was an outcome variable. A childhood history of arrest was asked through two questions: “Before you turned 18, were you ever arrested?” and “Before you turned 18, were you ever arrested for involvement in prostitution?”. The response to both these questions were yes or no.

Five other variables were used to compare the treatment of foster and non-foster involved children: being held in juvenile detention (as opposed to being released upon arrest); being declared a juvenile delinquent by a judge in a hearing; being placed on juvenile probation; being placed in a residential juvenile facility; or being sent to a residential placement outside of their home city. The responses to each of these questions were yes or no, and it was asking for experience prior to turning 18.

Analyses

Using SPSS, analyses were conducted with the data to test for relationships through independent t-test, correlations, and logistic regression. Data was examined for normality and outliers. Dummy coding was used for some variables (i.e., race being Black/African American) with 0 as no and 1 yes. Continuous variables were examined with bivariate correlations and dichotomous variables with independent sample t-test.

The primary analyses used logistic regression to test the predictive ability of foster care involvement above and beyond the effects of race and abuse history.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

All the 96 victims in the sample had experienced commercial sexual exploitation but they differed in their experiences of childhood abuse and child protection involvement. A series of independent sample t-test analyses were used to compare how the experiences of CSEC victims who were involved in the foster care system compared to those who were not. The first variable considered was race. Next considered were rates of sexual abuse/assault, and ACE scores. Regression analyses were then conducted to assess foster involvement and predicted treatment in the juvenile delinquency system above and beyond the effects of race and abuse history.

Race/Ethnicity

The first research question was whether trafficked children were represented differently in the foster system based on race. Like prior research findings, Black/African American children were more likely to be involved in foster care. Black/African American children made up 35% of the total sample, they were also 48% of the foster sample. Table 2 presents the breakdown of race/ethnicity of children that were in foster care and those that were not in foster care. Table 3 also includes a comparison for foster care involvement on the national and state level rates, these rates are only from children who are reported CSEC victims. And to get a better understanding, it was also compared to the current foster care data.

Table 2

Race/Ethnicity of Non-Foster and Foster Care CSEC Victims

	Non-Foster % (n)	Foster % (n)
Caucasian, Non-Hispanic/Latino	22.4% (15)	11.1% (3)
African-American/AA-Hispanic	26.9 (18)	48.1 (13)
American Indian	1.5 (1)	7.4 (2)
Hispanic/Latino	38.8 (26)	11.1 (3)
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.5 (1)	0
Mixed	9 (6)	22.2 (6)

Table 3 presents those percentages compared to national and state rates. National rates came from the Child Welfare Information Gateway (CWIG, 2021) and represented the 2019 data on children in the foster care system that were CSEC victims. The state rates also come from the Child Welfare Information Gateway and represent the 2019 data on CSEC victims that were in foster care.

Table 3

Race/Ethnicity of CSEC Victims in Foster Care

	National rates % (n)	Nevada Foster Care % (n)	Current % (n)
Caucasian, Non-Hispanic/Latino	44% (186,559)	39% (1,757)	11.1% (3)
African-American/AA-Hispanic	23 (97,519)	26 (1,185)	48.1 (13)
American Indian	2 (8,480)	1 (35)	7.4 (2)
Hispanic/Latino	21 (89,039)	24 (1,083)	11.1 (3)
Asian/Pacific Islander	1 (4,240)	2 (91)	0
Mixed	8 (33,920)	8 (379)	22.2 (6)

Table 4 presents the correlations between foster care involvement, abuse, and race. Being Caucasian was not significantly related to foster care involvement or abuse. Being Hispanic/Latino had a negative relationship with being in foster care ($r = -0.237$, $p = 0.022$). Being Black/African American was significantly correlated with being in foster care ($r = 0.357$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 4

Correlations between Foster Care Involvement, Abuse, and Race

	Foster Involvement	Sexual Victimization	ACE Score	Caucasian	African American
Sexual Victim	0.001	-			
ACE	**0.324****	**0.368*****	-		
Caucasian	0.031	0.085	0.136	-	
AA	**0.357*****	-0.088	-0.05	**-0.266***	-
Hispanic/Latino	**-0.237***	0.096	0.007	**-.0299****	**-0.573*****

Note. *p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001.

Appendix A presents the independent sample t-test that were used to check that the following variables should be carried forward to the regression analyses (i.e., race, abuse history, and foster involvement). Since the dichotomous variables of being Caucasian and being a sexual abuse or assault victim did not show any significant differences, they were not included in further analyses. Being Hispanic/Latino was only significant on the outcome variable of running away, so it was not used the predictive models either (see Appendix A).

Histories of Abuse – Sexual Victimization

Since the foster care system is designed to protect children who are being abused, it was expected that relationships would be seen between its use and victimization experienced. Prior research has identified a history of sexual abuse is common among CSEC victims. The vast majority of trafficking victims reported a history of sexual victimization (92.5% of non-foster involved and 92.6% of foster involved). This represents a restriction in range for this variable – since most participants had experienced sexual abuse, it would not likely be a useful predictor. As seen in Table 4 sexual victimization did not vary by race although it was significantly related to ACE scores ($r=0.368$, $p<.001$).

Worth noting is the high rates of victims that experienced their first sexual abuse before age 13. Over three-quarters (77.6%) of non-foster children and 81.5% of foster children experienced sexual abuse prior to 13.

Histories of Abuse - ACE Scores

When comparing the ACE scores with non-foster and foster children, higher rates of foster children report higher ACE scores. Figure 4 gives a visual representation of the reported ACE scores of non-foster and foster children.

Figure 4

ACE Scores of Non-Foster and Foster Children

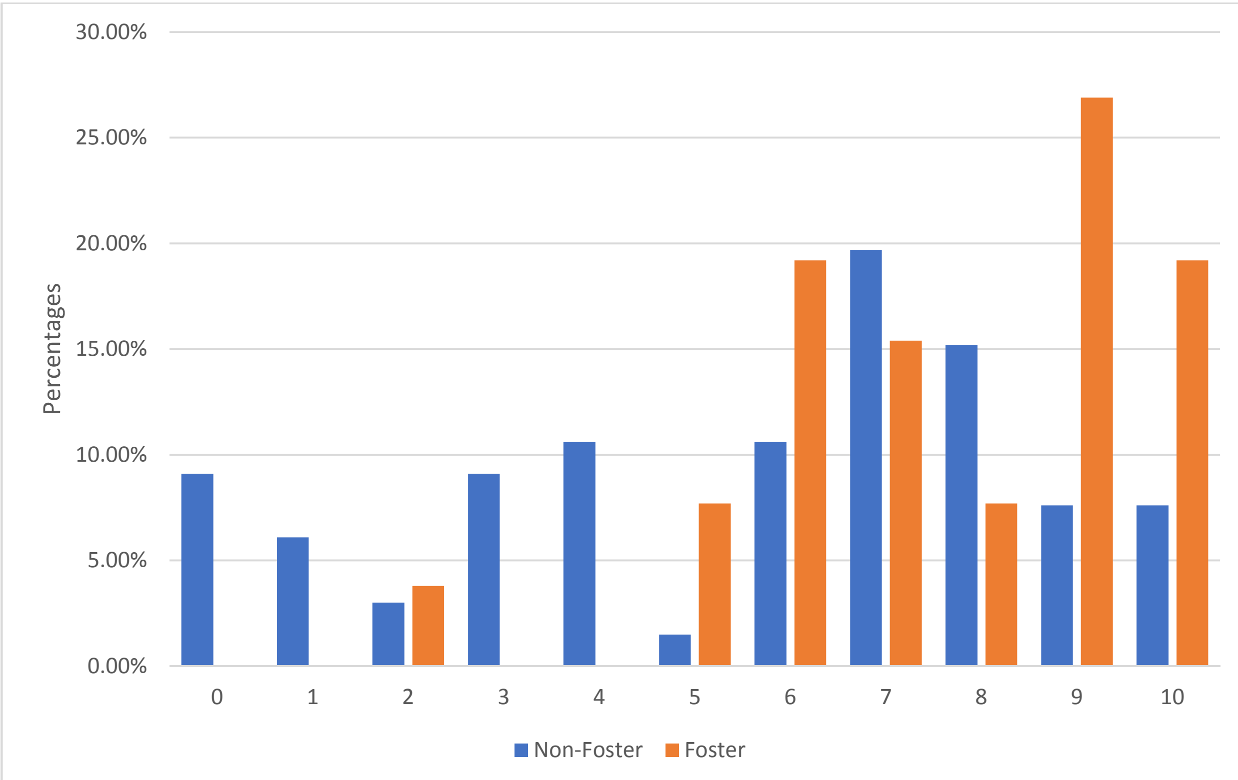


Table 4 presents the correlations and while ACE scores were related to foster-involvement (r=0.324, $p < 0.001$), the ACE scores did not vary by race. This seems to answer research question 2 in an expected direction, children involved in foster care have higher ACE scores.

Primary Analyses

Based on these analyses, it was decided to include being Black/African American and the continuous ACE score as predictor covariates in the subsequent outcome analyses to distinguish their effects from the role of being a foster-involved child. Sexual victimization and other race categories were not included. While being Hispanic was significantly correlated with being in foster care, it was a negative relationship meaning these children were under-represented. The over-representation was the greater concern.

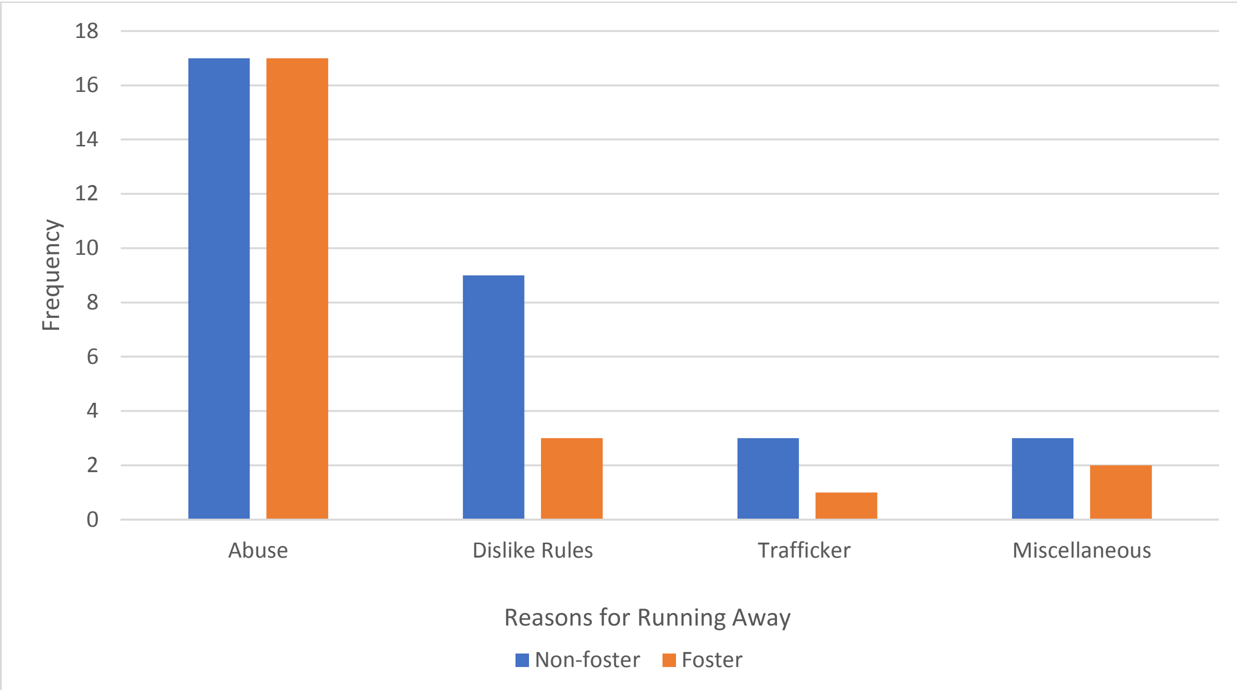
Running Away Behavior

Research question 3 sought to understand if being involved in foster care leads to an increase in running away behavior in children. The hypothesis was that trafficked children who are involved in foster care are more likely to run away at a higher rate than non-foster children. This hypothesis was made on the fact that previous research has shown that foster children are more likely to run away from abuse that they experience from parents or guardians (Franchino-Olsen, 2021).

The current data found that among non-foster and foster children, foster children were more likely to run away from parents and guardians. 52.7% of non-foster children report to have run away from home versus 92.6% of foster children. Before presenting predictors of running away, Figure 5 presented the self-reported reasons that trafficked children ran away. Both non-foster and foster children reported similar reasons for running away: abuse (including physical, sexual, verbal, substance, neglect), dislike of rules (including wanting freedom and curfew), traffickers (including not meeting quota, and boyfriends), and miscellaneous (i.e., not clear what they meant; including “n/a” and “yea”).

Figure 5

Reasons for Running Away



The first model to examine is the regression for predictors of running away. Being involved in foster care was just significantly related to running away (*B* 1.746, p = 0.034). What we cannot determine in this analysis was whether the running away occurred before being in foster care or after placement. A higher ACE score (*B* 0.209, p = 0.026) did predict running away, with an odds ratio of 1.233. Being Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino was not a significant predictor. The whole model only explained 23.9% (Cox & Snell R^2) and 32.6% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in running away. The model correctly predicted 77.5% of the cases. Table 5 presents the model for running away.

Table 5

Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Running Away

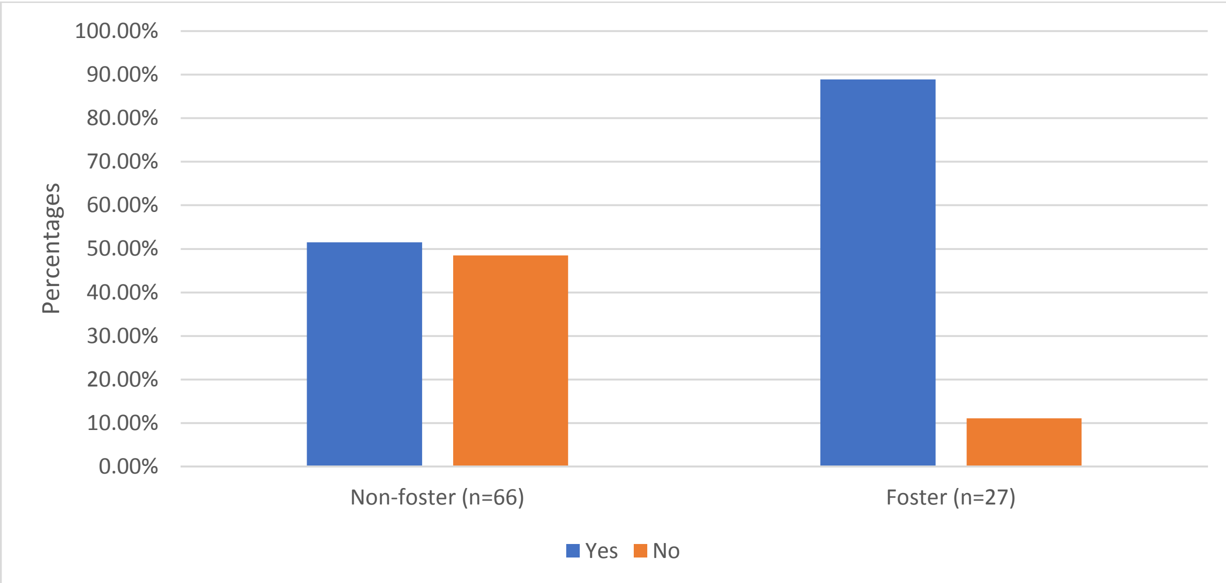
	B	S.E	Wald	df	Sig	Odds Ratio	95.0% C.I. for Odds Ratio (Lower)	95.0% C.I. for Odds Ratio (Upper)
AA	0.530	0.683	0.601	1	0.438	1.699	0.445	6.481
Hispanic/Latino	- 0.827	0.625	1.754	1	0.185	0.437	0.128	1.487
Foster	1.646	0.839	3.851	1	0.050	5.184	1.002	26.817
ACE Scores	0.209	0.094	4.957	1	0.026	1.233	1.025	1.483

Engagement in the Juvenile Justice System

Research question 4 is examining if being involved in foster care leads to harsher treatment in the Juvenile Justice System. The first hypothesis for this research question predicted that foster care children would be more likely to be arrested than non-foster involved children. This was measured through different dichotomous outcome variables. The first variable considered in engagement with the juvenile justice system was a history of being arrested. The rates of arrest are presented in Figure 6 for the two groups. 88.9% of foster care children reported to have been arrested, while 51.5% of non-foster children reported arrest. 11.1% of foster care children reported they have never been arrested, while 48.5% of non-foster children have never been arrested.

Figure 6

Non-foster and Foster Involved Children that have been Arrested



The model looking at predictors of arrest was statistically significant, p = .002, which indicates that the model was able to separate between participants who were arrested and who were not arrested. The whole model explained between 31.3% (Cox and Snell R^2) and 42.4% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in arrest and correctly identified 75.6% of cases. Table 6 indicates three of the independent variables were statistically significant predictors (Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and foster care involvement). The odds ratios over one indicate that the odd of arrest is higher for Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and foster care involved children.

Table 6

Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Arrest

	B	S.E	Wald	df	Sig	Odds Ratio	95.0% C.I. for Odds Ratio (Lower)	95.0% C.I. for Odds Ratio (Upper)
AA	3.014	0.744	16.408	1	0.000	20.373	4.739	87.590
Hispanic/Latino	1.922	0.687	7.823	1	0.005	6.835	1.777	26.286
Foster	1.809	0.829	4.765	1	0.029	6.102	1.203	30.955
ACE Scores	- 0.003	0.098	0.001	1	0.975	0.997	0.822	1.209

The next hypothesis predicted that foster care children were more likely to be held in juvenile detention upon arrest than non-foster children. The model was statistically significant, $p = .000$, which indicated that the model was able to distinguish between participants who were placed in juvenile detention and those who were not. The whole model explained between 23.5% (Cox and Snell R^2) and 31.4% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in juvenile detention and correctly identified 72.2% of cases. Table 7 indicates two of the independent variables were statistically significant predictors (Black/African American and foster involvement). The odds ratios over one indicate that the odd of being held in juvenile detention is higher for Black/African American and foster care involved children.

Table 7

Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of being in Juvenile Detention

	B	S.E	Wald	df	Sig	Odds Ratio	95.0% C.I. for Odds Ratio (Lower)	95.0% C.I. for Odds Ratio (Upper)
AA	1.944	0.645	9.088	1	0.003	6.985	1.974	24.715
Hispanic/Latino	1.007	0.641	2.467	1	0.116	2.737	0.779	9.616
Foster	1.763	0.693	6.467	1	0.011	5.831	1.498	22.697
ACE Scores	- 0.044	0.088	0.250	1	0.617	0.957	0.805	1.137

The following hypothesis predicted that foster care children were more likely to be deemed juvenile delinquents by a judge than non-foster children. The model was just statistically significant, $p = .048$, which indicated that the model was able to separate participants who were deemed as juvenile delinquents and those that were not. The whole model only explained between 13.7% (Cox and Snell R^2) and 18.3% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in juvenile delinquent, and correctly identified 63.3% of cases. Table 8 indicates two of the independent variables were statistically significant predictors (Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino). The odds ratios over one indicate that the odds of being deemed a juvenile delinquent is higher for Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino children.

Table 8

Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of being Deemed a Juvenile Delinquent

	B	S.E	Wald	df	Sig	Odds Ratio	95.0% C.I. for Odds Ratio (Lower)	95.0% C.I. for Odds Ratio (Upper)
AA	1.659	0.627	6.991	1	0.008	5.252	1.536	17.961
Hispanic/Latino	1.424	0.634	5.043	1	0.025	4.154	1.199	14.395
Foster	0.751	0.590	1.617	1	0.204	2.119	0.666	6.741
ACE Scores	0.035	0.084	0.173	1	0.678	1.036	0.878	1.221

The next hypothesis predicted that foster care children were more likely to be placed on probation than non-foster children. The model looking at predictors of being deemed as a juvenile delinquent was statistically significant, $p = .002$, which indicates that the model was able to separate between participants who were placed on probation and who were not on probation. The whole model explained between 22.5% (Cox and Snell R^2) and 30.2% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in probation, and correctly identified 71.9% of cases. Table 9 indicates two of the independent variables were statistically significant predictors (Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino). The odds ratios over one indicate that the odd of being on probation is higher for Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino children compared to other race/ethnicities.

Table 9

Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of being on Probation

	B	S.E	Wald	df	Sig	Odds Ratio	95.0% C.I. for Odds Ratio (Lower)	95.0% C.I. for Odds Ratio (Upper)
AA	2.310	0.677	11.633	1	0.001	10.078	2.672	38.012
Hispanic/Latino	1.778	0.660	7.254	1	0.007	5.919	1.623	21.588
Foster	1.024	0.681	2.261	1	0.133	2.785	0.733	10.586
ACE Scores	0.091	0.091	1.002	1	0.317	1.095	0.917	1.308

The following hypothesis predicted that foster care children were more likely to be sent to a juvenile delinquency facility than non-foster children. The model looking at predictors of being placed in a juvenile delinquency facility was statistically significant, $p = .013$, which indicates that the model was able to separate between participants who were placed in a juvenile delinquency facility and those that were not in facilities. The whole model explained between 16.8% (Cox and Snell R^2) and 22.5% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in juvenile facility placements, and correctly identified 67.4% of cases. Table 10 indicates two of the independent variables were statistically significant predictors (Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino). The odds ratios over one indicate that the odd of being sent to a juvenile facility is higher for Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino children than other racial/ethnic groups.

Table 10

Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of being sent to a Juvenile Delinquency Facility

	B	S.E	Wald	df	Sig	Odds Ratio	95.0% C.I. for Odds Ratio (Lower)	95.0% C.I. for Odds Ratio (Upper)
AA	1.973	0.717	7.569	1	0.006	7.195	1.764	29.350
Hispanic/Latino	1.629	0.738	4.878	1	0.027	5.099	1.201	21.643
Foster	1.004	0.601	2.794	1	0.095	2.729	0.841	8.857
ACE Scores	0.005	0.088	0.003	1	0.958	1.005	0.845	1.194

Finally, the last hypothesis predicted that foster care children were more likely to be sent to residential placement outside of their home city than non-foster children. The model looking at predictors of being sent to a residential placement outside the home city was statistically significant, $p = .016$, which indicates that the model was able to separate between participants who were sent outside the city and those that were not. The whole model explained only between 10.6% (Cox and Snell R^2) and 14.5% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in placements outside the city, and correctly identified 69.3% of cases. None of the variables were statistically significant. The overall model worked, but the predictors failed.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to analyze CSEC involvement in the foster care system and how they are treated differently in the juvenile justice system. Examining the differences between foster care children and non-foster children gave us a comparison for how they are treated. Additionally, this current study had a focus on race/ethnicity to recognize the disparities among foster care children. The current paper also examined the differences between the two groups with abuse and running away rates.

Is race/ethnicity related to likelihood of being involved in foster care?

The first research question examined likelihood of foster care involvement based on race/ethnicity. It was hypothesized that Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino children are more likely to be involved in foster care compared to other racial/ethnic groups. To answer this question, correlations were made between foster care involvement, abuse, and race. It was found that being Caucasian and Hispanic/Latino did not have a relationship with being involved in foster care or abuse, however, being Black/African American did have a correlation with being involved in foster care (Cénat et al., 2021). The findings supported the hypothesis in that Black/African American children are more likely to be involved in foster care than other racial/ethnic groups (Hannan et al., 2017).

Tying this back to CRT theory, it supported the theory that Black/African American children were more likely to be involved in the foster care system compared to White children (Kolivoski, 2020). These findings reflect that Black/African American children are oppressed in the U.S. culture and how deep-rooted racial disparities are in society. CRT explains that if children of color act in a delinquent way, it is frowned upon and seen as dangerous, which turns into harsher punishment for children of color, leading to increased involvement within the juvenile justice system and pushes them away from society.

A policy implication for the racial/ethnic disproportionately in the foster care system is to target the needs of children of diverse backgrounds. While it is impossible to get rid of the foster care system, it is possible to meet the needs of these children and offer the full set of support they deserve. As mentioned previously, the foster care system is built to ensure the safety and well-being of children, however, they continue to be victimized by the system (Bounds et al., 2015; Hannan et al., 2017). Offering their basic needs will show them that they are being recognized and their different needs are being met.

Do rates of childhood abuse differ based on foster care involvement?

The second research question asked about childhood abuse rates and how different they were based on whether children had foster care involvement. The hypothesis for this research question was that children who were involved in foster care were more likely to report higher ACE scores than non-foster children. Since ACE scores are related to childhood abuse and family dysfunctions, the current paper focused on abuse rates using ACE scores (Boullier & Blair, 2018; Naramore et al., 2017). To analyze this question, correlations were used to examine the relationship between ACE scores and foster care involvement. The findings supported the hypothesis and found that children that were in the foster care system reported to have higher ACE scores, which means that rates of childhood abuse were higher for foster care children. Additionally, sexual victimization was not used as a predictor because 96% of the participants had a history of sexual abuse and/or assault.

Feminist pathways theory can explain how childhood victimization leads to criminal involvement in adulthood. The relation of this theory to research question two is how childhood victimization (i.e., abuse) leads to juvenile delinquent behavior. These findings revealed a pathway - 96% of the participants reported that they had a history of sexual abuse and/or assault, this leads to the individuals running away, leading them into system engagement (i.e., harsh punishments from the juvenile justice system), in which they become criminalized by the system.

A policy implication for this research question would be to screen for ACE scores for at-risk children to minimize their involvement in foster care. If at-risk children are screened for ACE scores at an earlier age it will help to prevent future victimization. As mentioned, ACE scores predict early death in CSEC victims (Jia & Lubetkin, 2020), so screening children at an early age will decrease their chances of early death and decrease their vulnerability.

Does being involved in foster care lead to more running away behavior?

The third question focused on running away behavior in foster-involved children. It was hypothesized that foster care children will have higher rates of running away than non-foster involved children. The focus for this question was because prior research has found that running away is a predictor of CSEC because of the vulnerabilities that children must face when out on the streets (Cole et al., 2016; Franchino-Olsen, 2021). The findings suggest that foster care children are more likely to run away from their parents and guardians than non-foster children. The current research also examined foster and non-foster children's reason for running away, and it was found that for both groups, their main reason for running away was because of abuse.

As mentioned in research question two, victimization in childhood leads to juvenile delinquent behavior and research question three observed that running away is a major issue with foster care children. Running away is considered delinquent behavior because it is seen as acting out and not listening to adults. It is a status offense so; in most states, it is considered a juvenile crime. However, instead of blaming the children for running away, the current research paper also observed the reasons why children ran away from home or care. As previously mentioned, non-foster and foster children's main reason for running away was because of the abuse they experienced. When relating this to feminist pathways theory childhood abuse and trauma leads to delinquent behaviors such as running away.

The current research paper found the main reason for non-foster and foster children to runaway is because of the abuse they had to face. When children run away from foster care, they have nowhere to go, and they end up on the streets homeless, leading to CSEC victimization (Franchino-Olsen, 2021). To prevent this from happening in the first place, implementing an abuse response team with child protective services agencies will help to respond to different levels of child abuse and/or neglect. Creating a response team will help to tailor services of different needs and depending on the severity of the case, will meet the needs of the children.

Does being involved in foster care lead to harsher treatment in the Juvenile Justice System?

The last question observes how being in the foster care system leads to harsher punishments in the juvenile justice system. There were multiple hypotheses made for research question four. The hypothesis for the research question was that foster care children were more likely to be arrested than non-foster children. The model predictor was able to correlate that arrest rates were related to being Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and involvement in foster care. The hypothesis was supported by the results, and it additionally found that foster care involvement was also correlated with arrest rates in CSEC children (Anderson et al., 2017).

The next hypothesis for this research question was that CSEC children in foster care were more likely to be held in juvenile detention upon arrest than non-foster care children. The findings found that being Black/African American and in foster care were correlated with likelihood of being held in juvenile detention upon arrest (Sherman and Balck, 2015). The hypothesis for this research question was supported because it found that being in foster care was related to being held in juvenile detention upon arrest.

Being labeled a delinquent was significantly predicted by minority status with Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino children being judged more harshly. The hypothesis observed that foster care children were more likely to be deemed as juvenile delinquents by a judge than non-foster children. The findings were that there were correlations with being Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino and being deemed as a juvenile delinquent by a judge. This hypothesis was correct because there were relations between the variables and being deemed as a juvenile delinquent by a judge. However, being in foster care and ACE scores were not significant with being deemed a juvenile delinquent. Foster care involvement and ACE scores did not predict being labeled as a delinquent, so, the hypothesis was not supported because the findings were more significant with race/ethnicity.

The next hypothesis investigated foster care children's likelihood of being on probation. The model predictor of this hypothesis was able to identify that Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino children were more likely to be on probation and being in foster care and ACE scores had no relation to being on probation. Being in foster care and ACE scores did not predict being on probation so this hypothesis was not supported.

Being sent to a juvenile delinquency facility was significantly predicted by race/ethnicity status, rather than foster care involvement. The model was able to identify that being

Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino predicted likelihood of being sent to a juvenile delinquency facility. Being in foster care and ACE scores did not predict being sent to a juvenile delinquency facility so this hypothesis was no supported.

The final hypothesis was that foster care children were more likely to be sent to residential placement outside of their home city. None of the predictors proved to be significant so this data did not provide any insight into potential differences in the use of this type of placement.

Feminist pathways theory suggests how gender matters in understanding girls' delinquency because of the pathways victimized girls can take (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988). Although this current research paper did not consider gender, the majority of the sample self-identified as female (n = 91). Taking this into consideration, feminist pathways research collects data by asking girls and women about their history of abuse and/or delinquency (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006). Research question four and the hypotheses made support the feminist pathways theory because it observed in research question one how experiences of abuse, leads to delinquent behaviors observed in research questions two, three, and four.

Prior research also supports this theory because it found that individuals who suffered from childhood abuse cope with the trauma by engaging in delinquent behaviors (i.e., running away; Sutton & Simons, 2021). These behaviors were observed in the current research paper by asking research question four because it told the story of how abuse and contact with the foster care system lead to delinquent behaviors (i.e., arrest, juvenile detention, deemed as delinquent, probation, placed in juvenile facility, and sent to placement outside of the city). For this reason, researchers believe that there is a blurred line between being a victim and an offender (Sutton & Simons, 2021). Girls and women become victimized not only mentally and physically, but also by the system because the system does not differentiate between how a victim is forced into delinquent behavior (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988). In addition to gender, race/ethnicity is also a critical factor to examine.

Research question four found that being Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino had a major influence on how children were being treated in the system. Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino children were more likely to be arrested, held in juvenile detention, be on probation, and sent to juvenile delinquency facilities. This research question also supports CRT because previous research has found that Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino girls were more likely to be involved in the juvenile justice system than other racial/ethnic groups (Kolivoski, 2020). Additionally, girls of color are not more likely to engage in delinquent behavior, however, the juvenile justice system has found a disproportion of girls of color in the system (Kolivoski, 2020). This also supports the current research paper because there was an overrepresentation of Black/African American children in the foster care system (Table 3).

When looking at policy implications for harsh punishment in the juvenile justice system, race/ethnicity and gender identity need to be taken into consideration. Being Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and identifying as female increases juvenile punishments (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020). Implementing training on issues related to intersectional experiences with abuse, status offenses, and foster care involvement would help to decrease implicit bias and broaden knowledge on the issues that minority foster-involved children must face.

CHAPTER 7

LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings throughout Chapter 6, we found that being Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and foster care involvement led to harsher punishments and unfair treatment in the juvenile justice system. Even with these important findings, there are some limitations and future research directions to consider.

Limitations

Gender Disparities

Gender was an aspect in the current research paper that was limited because the survey had participants self-identify their gender. And some individuals that responded female were biologically male and those identifying as male were biologically female, so several of them were transgender. However, no one chose transgender, and it was only revealed by the qualitative section of the study that a small population was transgender. Which is why there was no significance in reporting the gender data because of the inaccurate reporting of the participants' gender. Consideration of different gender identities can change the results in how experiences differ and consider how victimization varies between gender identities.

Sexual Orientation

The current paper did not analyze experiences by sexual orientation. The majority of the group identified as being attracted to the opposite sex (74.7%), 12.7% reported they were attracted to the same sex, and 17.9% reported that they were bisexual. Analyzing sexual orientation will allow for more insight into the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals victimized in CSEC and how their experiences differ from individuals who identify as heterosexual.

Sample Size/Study Location

The data from the current research paper had a limited size of 96 respondents so it is hard to generalize this finding to other CSEC victims and their experiences. Although the sample has similar experiences, it is still tough to say that other children in CSEC in foster care and those that are not in foster care will experience similar disparities. Additionally, this study was conducted locally in Las Vegas so the experiences may differ from foster care outside of Las Vegas.

Suggestions for Future Research

The current research paper provided a limited understanding of children's experience in CSEC and foster care. Future research should consider exploring race/ethnicity disparities in the foster care system of CSEC children. There is an understanding that there is an overrepresentation of Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino children, however, researching the varying experiences will also give us a deeper understanding of victimization.

Research from Kennedy and Pucci (2007) suggests that there should be programs in the Las Vegas systems to educate children on recruitment into CSEC by pimps, however, even after a decade, these ideas have yet to be implemented in schools, because we are still seeing high volumes of CSEC. Similar to this idea, foster care should also implement programs in their system to target runaway children and educate them on the harms of running away and offer alternative coping mechanisms rather than running away. Instead of using this as a scare tactic, giving children more of an educational-based system will help them understand more of the harmful effects of CSEC.

Future research should also examine how being in the LGBTQIA+ community has an influence on CSEC victimization. Hounmenou and O'Grady (2019) found that the rates of LGBTQIA+ children who engage in survival sex are disproportionately higher than homeless or runaway children because these children were thrown out of their homes for revealing their sexual orientation or gender identity. Research also includes that LGBTQIA+ children are victimized in CSEC because they often start out engaging in survival sex first. For these reasons, focusing future research on LGBTQIA+ children in CSEC will help us to analyze how sexual orientation or gender identity is an important factor in victimization.

Conclusion

The sad reality is that we are still seeing the sexual victimization of children in CSEC and how foster care-involved children are being victimized by the system, especially among female identified girls of color. Despite the limitations of this research paper, the findings still show an important story of those victimized in CSEC and the justice system. Besides the fact that this was a limited sample size, it still supports the foundation that there are racial/ethnic disparities and high victimization rates of foster care and non-foster care CSEC children. This finding suggests that there are still many flaws in the U.S. juvenile justice system and how children are treated unfairly within the system.

The juvenile justice system is racist in that minorities are overrepresented in the system and identifying as a girl only intensifies this victimization. This study reveals that despite ACE scores and foster care involvement, Black/African American and other minority children are an increased rate of being victimized within both CSEC and the juvenile justice system. It is unfortunate to see that race/ethnicity still has such an influence on society, especially regarding children. Despite color and gender identity, children are still children, but the foster care and juvenile justice system continue to see only color and gender.

APPENDIX A

Independent sample T-tests for covariates, significant findings presented

Black/African American

	t	df	Sig
Run Away	2.447	89.258	.016
Arrest	4.808	91.807	.000
Held Detention	3.836	90.117	.000
Delinquent	2.113	92	.03
Probation	3.273	61.459	.002
Juv Placement	3.00	90	.003
Out of state placement	3.326	89	.001

Hispanic/Latino

	t	df	Sig
Run Away	-2.727	54.462	.011
Out of state placement	-1.914	69.698	.060

Foster Involvement

	t	df	Sig
Run Away	4.983	84.581	.000
Arrest	4.275	74.651	.000
Held Detention	4.436	66.286	.000
Delinquent	2.152	91	.037
Probation	3.165	88.588	.002
Juv Placement	2.766	91	.007
Out of state placement	2.489	77.156	.015

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