Ethnic Differences in Therapy Outcome for Foster Youth

Breniel Q. Lemley  
*University of San Francisco, bqlemley@usfca.edu*

Rosana M. Aguilar  
*University of San Francisco, rmaguilar@usfca.edu*

Saralyn C. Ruff  
*University of San Francisco, sruff2@usfca.edu*

June Madsen Clausen  
*University of San Francisco*

Foster Care Research Group

Follow this and additional works at: [http://repository.usfca.edu/psyc](http://repository.usfca.edu/psyc)

Part of the [Psychology Commons](http://repository.usfca.edu/psyc)

**Recommended Citation**
Lemley, Breniel Q.; Aguilar, Rosana M.; Ruff, Saralyn C.; Clausen, June Madsen; and Foster Care Research Group, "Ethnic Differences in Therapy Outcome for Foster Youth" (2014). *Psychology*. Paper 20.  
[http://repository.usfca.edu/psyc/20](http://repository.usfca.edu/psyc/20)
Ethnic Differences in Therapy Outcome for Foster Youth
Breniel Q. Lemley, Rosana M. Aguilar, Saralyn C. Ruff, Ph.D., June M. Clausen, Ph.D.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

- Children placed into foster care are at increased risk for multiple mental health problems.
- Children of color, particularly Black children, are overrepresented in the foster care system.
- Previous studies have shown lower rates of mental health service use among Black children compared to all other ethnic groups in the foster care system.
- Ethnic differences in therapy outcome have not been examined among foster youth.
- Research has shown that Relationship-Based Therapy reduces many mental health symptoms in foster youth.
- The current study evaluates the impact of Relationship-Based Therapy on mental health service use among Black children, particularly Black children, who were randomly selected from a group of foster youth who were removed from home for reasons of neglect, parent’s inability to care take, and/or emotional abuse, and while in foster care, received long-term Relationship-Based Therapy, demonstrated a variety of mental health symptoms and attended long-term weekly/bi-weekly psychotherapy for 3.5 years.

RESULTS

- Findings indicate that Relationship-Based Therapy significantly reduced symptoms of anxiety, dissociative symptoms, peer relationship problems, school problems, anger problems, depression, conduct problems, and enuresis in this sample of foster youth.
- Substance use problems increased over the course of treatment; this increase may be due to change in patient age over the course of long-term treatment.
- Although Relationship-Based Therapy revealed significant decreases in school problems (truancy, suspensions, expulsions) over the course of treatment, Black children had significantly higher school problems at the start and end of treatment; research suggests that ethnic differences in school problems may stem from a variety of sources including social support, cultural norms of behavior, access to resources, and attachment.
- Limitations of this study include a small sample size, potential bias of therapist informants, and lack of a comparison group. Future research should address these issues and further examine ethnic differences in treatment outcomes among foster youth.

DISCUSSION

• This study's findings suggest that ethnic differences in treatment outcomes among foster youth should address these issues and further examine ethnic differences in treatment outcomes among foster youth.