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Exploring the families of origin of LGBTQ former foster youth and their trajectories throughout care

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Highlights

- Parental substance abuse and mental health are the reason most LGBTQ youth enter foster care.
- Most LGBTQ youth in foster care experience rejection by at least one family member or caregiver.
- Family rejection presents a unique permanency barrier to LGBTQ youth in foster care.
- Intergenerational substance abuse and mental health issues impact LGBTQ youth in foster care.
- LGBTQ former foster youth report they are inadequately prepared to transition from foster care.

Abstract

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer (LGBTQ) identified youth are overrepresented in the foster care system. Many experience discrimination, violence, and oppression related to their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression before, during, and after foster care. There is limited research regarding LGBTQ-identified youth who have aged out of the foster care system. Theoretically informed by intersectionality, queer, and feminist theories, the purpose of this community based qualitative research study was to gain a nuanced understanding of the experiences of 25 diverse LGBTQ former foster youth before, during, and after being in foster care. In-depth qualitative interviews with LGBTQ former foster youth between the ages of 18 and 26 provided participants with the opportunity to narrate their histories and pathways into and out of the foster care system. Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) was used to analyze interview findings. This article presents one cluster of interview findings pertaining to: (1) LGBTQ former foster youth's reasons for first entering foster care; (2) the effects of intergenerational mental health and substance abuse; (3) family and caregiver rejection as a barrier to permanency; and (4) experiences of transitioning from foster care.

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