



National Conference for Hidden Student Populations

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<https://nchp.okstate.edu>

Current Hidden College Student Populations

May include those who have foster care histories, justice-involved experiences, who are survivors of sexual violence or sex workers, recovering substances addicts, who face housing insecurity, or who are considered Third Culture Kids/Individuals

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The Scholar-Practitioner is a monthly publication of research summaries that target the research-to-practice gap for U.S. scholar and practitioner advocates for hidden college student populations.

This publication reinforces the work of the **National Conference for Hidden Student Populations (NCHP)** by providing a space to share research applications for practice. NCHP was the first research conference dedicated to this multidisciplinary area of study. **The NCHP 4th conference will be held February 28 - March 1, 2024, at University of Texas—San Antonio.**

A Photovoice Study of College Students Who Have Experience Foster Care, Relative Care, and/or Homelessness

Samarah, E. M. S., Schelbe, L., & Jackson, L. A. (2023). A photovoice study of college students who have experienced foster care, relative care, and/or homelessness. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 151, 107042. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.107042>

The purpose of this Photovoice study was to explore the experiences of college students with a history of foster care, relative care, ward of the State status, and/or homelessness. Photovoice is a research method that uses photography to allow participants to express their perspectives and experiences. Students who participated in this study were part of the Unconquered Scholars Program, a campus support program at Florida State University. Unconquered Scholars provides an array of support services promoting overall success to college students who have experienced foster care, homelessness, relative care, or ward of the State status. Services offered to these students include one-on-one advising, college life coaching, financial aid assistance, as well as access to shared spaces reserved only for members of the program.

Students who participated in this study were part of the Unconquered Scholars Program. After being trained in safety, photography, and the study's goals, these scholars were asked to take photographs that addressed two questions, 1) What is it like to be a college student who experienced foster care, homelessness, relative care, or ward of the State status? and 2) What is it like to participate in Unconquered Scholars? Scholars were interviewed about their photos and the authors later coded each interview transcript to identify themes. A total of 18 scholars participated in this study.

Analysis of interviews with scholars and their photographs revealed several important themes that provide deeper insights into the experiences of these college students:

Past Impacts Future. Many students viewed their acceptance into college as an opportunity to escape a difficult past, leading to mixed emotions of excitement, guilt, and pressure for leaving behind family members, particularly younger siblings. The impact of their histories extended beyond emotional effects, affecting their finances, housing, and access to healthcare, resulting in challenges during their college journey. However, their past also motivated

them to create a sense of home, build supportive communities, and personalize their living spaces to overcome difficulties and establish independence.

Going back is not an option.

Scholars were aware of the precarious nature of their lives and saw college success as crucial in avoiding a return to their difficult pasts. Scholars' strong desire to secure a better future for themselves was often driven by a fear of repeating negative past experiences. They expressed feelings of hope, sought new opportunities, and emphasized the importance of working hard to overcome challenges. Scholars also discussed the complex relationship between seeking support, avoiding pity from others, and accessing necessary resources.

Alternative college acceptance.

Some scholars felt insecure about their worthiness and belonging on campus, believing they would not have been accepted without the college support program. Although all students admitted into Unconquered Scholars must meet academic requirements established by the university, some Scholars remained hesitant to disclose their backgrounds due to fear of pity and being made to feel like an outsider or unworthy. Many scholars did share, however, being on a large campus with many students provided a sense of anonymity

and freedom from judgment, allowing them to navigate college life without constant reminders of their past.

University experiences of exclusion. Scholars often experienced a dichotomy between blending into the college atmosphere and feeling unseen or misunderstood. They were hesitant to share their stories and faced external expectations of looking a certain way or acting "normal." Scholars also felt excluded from the broader university community due to their racial, ethnic, and socio-economic identities, experiencing challenges in predominantly white and affluent institutions. These feelings of exclusion and challenges impacted their ability to connect with other students and made the college experience more difficult.

College support program experiences of inclusion. The Unconquered Scholars program provided a distinct community, separate from the broader university, where they felt understood and supported. Scholars found comfort and a sense of belonging within the program, likening it to a home. The program's physical space and the connections they formed with other members created a strong support system and allowed scholars to navigate college life more effectively.

The study findings highlight the importance of addressing the isolation and invisibility that students with a history of foster care, homelessness, relative care, or ward of the State status experience on college campuses. College support programs should prioritize facilitating opportunities for students to connect with others who share similar backgrounds and provide relational support alongside resource-driven assistance. Future research should focus on understanding meaningful support and amplifying the lived experiences of students, while policy and program initiatives should prioritize equity and inclusion in higher education.

NCHP

Hybrid Conference

Save the date! Feb 28—March 1, 2024

Call for Proposal **NOW OPEN!**

Research Team Member - Become a new multidisciplinary research team member. December 1, 2023, Deadline (notifications by Dec 15)

Research Presenter - Present an original empirical work. January 12, 2024 Deadline (notifications by January 31)

For more information, go to:

<https://nchp.okstate.edu>

NCHP Community Kudos

Free webinar on **October 23, 10.00 am EST**

Explore the real-life youth experiences of aging out of foster care, with Dr. Schelbe

Register: bit.ly/3Rgrbj



To sign up for ongoing email updates about the 2024 national conference and/or for archives of The Scholar-Practitioner, go to: <https://risforThursday.okstate.edu>