

# Survey of Youth Transitioning from Foster Care

## OMB Information Collection Request 0970 – New Collection

### Supporting Statement

### Part B

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**Alternative Supporting Statement for Information Collections Designed for  
Research, Public Health Surveillance, and Program Evaluation Purposes**

## **Part B**

### **B1. Objectives**

#### *Study Objectives*

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) seeks approval for a one-time survey of youth transitioning from foster care. The goals of the survey are to better understand the prevalence of human trafficking (HT) among youth transitioning from foster care; the risk and protective factors associated with increased or decreased risk of trafficking victimization, respectively; and the context surrounding victimization among youth in foster care. The survey will be administered to youth, aged 18 and 19 years, who were in foster care during their 17th year (i.e., when they were 17 years old). Survey data will be combined with child welfare (CW) administrative data to gain a better understanding of the intersections among youth characteristics, CW placements and services, and HT victimization. Data will be used to inform CW policy, programs, and practices intended to prevent, identify, and respond to HT, while youth are in foster care and as they exit foster care in young adulthood.

#### *Generalizability of Results*

This study is intended to present, among chosen sites, an internally valid description of the prevalence of HT among youth at increased risk for trafficking in the CW population; the contributions of identifiable risk and protective factors to increased or decreased risk of trafficking victimization, respectively; and the context surrounding victimization among youth in foster care. It is not intended to promote statistical generalization to other sites or other populations of youth.

#### *Appropriateness of Study Design and Methods for Planned Uses*

The study design selected is intended to maximize the inclusion of youth most likely to have experienced HT victimization based on characteristics and experiences that have been associated with increased risk for HT. These youth are therefore most likely to have the ability to answer the research questions of interest. The study population includes youth who were discharged from, aged out of, or remain in foster care. Survey questions will address participants' lifetime trafficking experiences before, during, and after CW involvement. Surveying youth about their experiences since age 18 will allow us to assess the protective value of extended care. The study design and methods were developed specifically to maximize the likelihood of reaching youth who have experienced or are at increased risk of trafficking victimization, and therefore, to provide the most useful information on how CW agencies can prevent, identify, and respond to HT victimization. While the survey sample will be representative of youth at increased risk for trafficking, rather than the full youth population, administrative data analysis will allow us to descriptively contextualize the sample within the full youth CW population. This context, and the limits to representativeness, will be clearly documented in the text of all written materials associated with this study.

As noted in Supporting Statement A, this information is not intended to be used as the principal basis for public policy decisions and is not expected to meet the threshold of influential or highly influential scientific information.

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### B2. Methods and Design

#### *Target Population*

The Survey of Youth Transitioning from Foster Care will be a one-time survey with up to 780 youth aged 18 or 19 who were in foster care during their 17th year (i.e., when they were 17 years old). We plan to recruit from two to three sites (i.e., state or large county CW agencies).

#### *Sampling and Site Selection*

*Site Selection.* A data-driven tiered approach will be taken to selecting study sites, which may be either state agencies or large county child welfare agencies. The contractor has identified a subset of states or counties with the largest number of youth in foster care at age 17 as potential sites based on criteria of the number of youth in foster care at age 17: Arizona (i.e., Maricopa County), California (i.e., Los Angeles County), Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania (i.e., Philadelphia County), Ohio, Tennessee, and Texas.<sup>1</sup> Within these states and counties factors considered for selection will include geographic diversity, use of congregate care, and racial-ethnic composition; feasibility of field survey operations based on geographically clustered sampling; and inclusion of at least one site with strong use of extended foster care to assess its association with risk indicators for HT.

A systematic process will be used to conduct outreach, invite sites to participate in the research, and engage points of contact in obtaining CW administrative data to guide sample selection. The contractor has identified initial county points of contacts through environmental scans from reports, organizational charts, and county websites. The initial points of contact will be asked in conjunction with their leadership, to identify staff who will best serve as CW administrative data liaisons for this project (two to three total, one for each county or state).

*Youth Sample Selection.* The sampling frame will consist of youth who were in foster care while 17 years old during the 12 months before the data abstract is drawn (as described below). This specification of the sampling frame was determined to best meet the study goals because the resulting sample will include youth who left foster care because they were reunited or achieved another permanency goal, youth who aged out of foster care at age 18, and youth who remain in extended foster care after age 18. These events may influence youths' vulnerability to trafficking victimization (Clayton, Krugman et al. 2013, Choi 2015, Gibbs, Henninger et al. 2018). Additionally, surveying youth after their 18th birthday will allow them to consent to survey participation on their own behalf rather than requiring consent from parents, caregivers, or a CW agency. Finally, surveying youth soon after their 18th birthday will facilitate locating them based on last known address or residence in extended foster care, reducing bias caused by inability to locate sampled youth. Because CW administrative data are maintained on an ongoing basis, the sample frame will be current at the point when the initial data abstract is drawn.

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<sup>1</sup> Two states (Massachusetts, New York) and one city (New York City, NY) also have relatively large populations of youth aged 17 in foster care. However, these states/cities were excluded from consideration because of laws that prohibit release of child welfare data without individual consent (New York) and share data only on substantiated allegations and not reports or other child welfare involvement (Massachusetts).

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Youth will be selected to participate based on characteristics and experiences that likely to increase their status as being at increased risk” for HT. This status will be determined based on review of key information from CW administrative data. Data elements include, for example, CW experiences, out-of-home placements, and runaway episodes—all of which are associated with increased risk for HT victimization. CW data elements are described in **Appendix C: Child Welfare Data Elements Used for Sampling and Analysis – SYTFC**. With youth consent, these data will also be used to supplement analysis of survey data, as described in **Section B4**.

Study sites will provide a data abstract of anonymized data (i.e., no personally identifying information) that will be analyzed by the contractor to identify youth with recognized indicators of increased risk for trafficking, such as history of sexual abuse, extensive history of out-of-home placement, or multiple runaway episodes. Study sites will then provide contacting information (e.g., name, last known address, and Social Security Number [SSN] if available) for selected youth.

For each site, a sample size of 260 youth was selected to achieve at least 200 completed surveys (assuming a response rate of approximately 75%). With N=200 participants, the study will have .8 power to detect a small-to-medium effect size (an odds ratio of 2.4; Cohen, Chen et al., 2010) for the relationship between one or more predictors (e.g., episodes of homelessness) and trafficking victimization. Power analyses were estimated using the logistic regression routine of PASS version 14 (PASS 14, 2015). Testing relationships within sites is essential so that analyses can be used to assess between-site differences attributable to practice differences such as the availability of extended foster care. Should there be more than 260 youth per site meeting criteria to be selected at increased risk of HT victimization, a random sample of 260 youth will be selected using a random number generator.

### **B3. Design of Data Collection Instruments**

#### *Development of Data Collection Instruments*

The survey instrument was developed to address study research questions, using validated scales and measures that have been used successfully with similar populations wherever possible.<sup>2</sup> **Table 2** in Supporting Statement A (p.6) presents the questions, constructs, data sources, and instrument module/sections—by research question (RQ)—for the Survey of Youth Transitioning from Foster Care. **Instrument 1: Survey of Youth Transitioning from Foster Care (SYTFC)** provides the items for the survey instrument.

### **B4. Collection of Data and Quality Control**

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<sup>2</sup> Sources for survey instrument questions include: American Community Survey (ACS), The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Children’s Hope Scale, Cantril Ladder, California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study, Financial Strain Index, Global Appraisal of Individual Needs, The GenIUSS Report (Williams Institute), Health Related Quality of Life, Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire, Kessler Screening Scale, Life Experiences Survey, LifePaths Research, My Life My Choice evaluation survey, CDC National Health Interview Survey, National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being, National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, , National Youth in Transition Database Survey, PTSD Checklist – Civilian Version, USDA U.S. Adult Food Security Survey Module, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System.

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The contractor, RTI International, will collect all data for this study. One-time surveys will be conducted with sampled youth. All surveys will be conducted in person, with both field interviewer-administered items and Audio Computer-Assisted Self-Interview items (ACASI) for sensitive topics that the youth will complete privately. With the youth's consent, CW administrative data will be obtained from participating sites and merged with survey data at the youth level to enhance the robustness and overall utility of the study. Both youth who provide consent to link to administrative data and those who do not will be part of the study.

*Contacting Youth Selected into the Sample.* Prior to being contacted via phone by a field representative, a lead letter will be mailed to the sampled youth at the last address of record. The lead letter is provided in **Appendix D: Lead Letter – SYTFC**. The letter emphasizes the importance of the study, ACF's sponsorship, the protections private survey data will receive, and that participation in the study provides each youth the opportunity to share their experiences with the CW system. Within a week of the letter being mailed, a local field representative will contact the youth by telephone to answer any questions about the study and schedule a survey. Surveys will be conducted at the youth's home or in another public location with private space (e.g., private area in a public library).

*Informed Consent Procedures.* The youth will be asked to provide their signed consent prior to study participation. The consent form is provided in **Appendix E: Consent Form – SYTFC**. The field representative will read the consent form aloud to introduce the youth to the study, assure the youth that what they tell us will be kept private to the extent permitted by law (with the exceptions surrounding expressed suicidal intent and suspected maltreatment), and to provide the youth with an understanding of the voluntary nature of participation and their right to refuse to answer any question we ask of them. The field representatives will leave a copy of the consent form for the respondent to keep.

After consenting to survey participation, sampled youth will be asked to provide their consent for data linkage. Youth will be informed that the information is collected only for linking purposes and reminded that all information provided will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. See *Data Linkage* form in **Appendix F: Data Linkage Form – SYTFC**.

*Data Collection Procedures.* The survey will be conducted in person and will include both field interviewer-administered items (computer-assisted interviewing [CAI]) and, for the most sensitive topics, ACASI for which the respondents hear the questions read by the computer through headphones and enter their responses directly into the computer.

The ACASI sections include questions on mental health, out-of-care episodes, substance abuse, sexual activity, relationship violence, and trafficking and other maltreatment histories. The surveys will average 1.2 hours (70 minutes) in length depending on the youth's age and experiences. As noted in **Supporting Statement A**, youth survey modules and items are provided in **Instrument 1: Survey of Youth Transitioning from Foster Care (SYTFC)**.

*Data Quality.* Computer-assisted data collection improves survey data quality by eliminating routing errors, implementing logical range checks, and increasing response rates. Even with this technology, however, the quality of the data gathered depends largely on the abilities of the field staff and proper

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execution of the established field procedures. Field interviewers will attend an in-person training focused on the study procedures and survey administration. During training, each field interviewer's performance will be evaluated, and additional training provided as necessary to ensure that each has the skills required for the study. The final component of training will involve certification of staff in key areas of field performance, including answering questions about the study, gaining cooperation, consent form administration, and survey administration.

During data collection, several data quality monitoring activities will be employed on the study, including telephone verification of completed surveys, data frequency reviews, and, with participant consent, Computer Audio-Recorded Interviewing (CARI). CARI is a laptop computer application developed by RTI for audio recording of field data collection. It provides a means for both verifying the data collection and monitoring the quality of the survey, including the behavior of the interviewer during the data collection and the reactions of the youth respondent to the survey questions.

*Administrative Data.* CW administrative data will be provided by the participating CW agencies in each study site recruited during the first phase of the study. CW agencies will provide the administrative data in its existing format, adding only a crosswalk identifier to enable linkage of survey and administrative data for youth who consent to linking.

Data from completed surveys will be transmitted to RTI by secure File Transfer Protocol in encrypted files and then stored in RTI's Enhanced Security Network, which satisfies the National Institute of Standards and Technologies (NIST) Moderate security criteria. Data files will be protected through access restrictions on a need basis and stored in username and password-protected directories. All necessary Institutional Review Board approvals and Data Use Agreements will be in place prior to conducting the data linkage.

### **B5. Response Rates and Potential Nonresponse Bias**

#### *Response Rates*

An important requirement of the Survey of Youth Transitioning from Foster Care design is to maximize youth response rates. We expect a response rate of 75% based on rates achieved in similar studies. For example, the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health) was able to successfully locate 92% of respondents who had not been contacted in over 6 years; of these, over 80% agreed to participate in the survey ("Add Health Research Design," n.d.). The Second National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW II) achieved Wave 2 and Wave 3 youth response rates of over 80%; importantly, a subset of youth were over the age of 18 years (Casanueva, Tueller, Smith, Dolan, & Ringeisen, 2014; Casanueva et al., 2012). Finally, in the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood (CalYOUTH) survey of youth formerly in foster care, over 95% of youth eligible to participate in Wave 1 of the study agreed to participate. For Wave 2, the percentage of youth located and who agreed to participate varied depending on whether youth were in foster care at the time of the field period. The response rates for young people who were in care were higher (87%) than the response rate for young people who were out of care (78%) (Courtney, 2016). Despite being a one-time survey, our expected

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response rate of 75% is lower than these three studies, because we will be oversampling for youth at increased risk for HT and the majority will not be in foster care at the time of the field period.

Recognizing the challenge of contacting youth who are not in foster care at the time of the study, the contractor will use several response rate enhancement features. These will maximize response rates without appreciably increasing data collection costs. First is oversampling as described in **Section B2**, where 260 cases will be sampled with the expectation that 200 (or approximately 75% of 260) will agree to participate. Second, if more than 260 cases are available and random sampling is used as described in **Section B2**, we will replenish the sample if response rates dip below 75%. If additional respondents are needed to achieve the N = 200 targets, we will also replenish the sample with participants who are at highest risk but did not meet the criteria for increased risk described in **Section B2**.

### *Nonresponse*

Nonresponse is expected to be minimized by the use of a one-time CAI and ACASI survey and limiting the survey to 70 minutes in length. Item nonresponse is also expected to be minimal based on results of a nonresponse analysis conducted on questionnaire data from the NSCAW II (RTI, 2013), a nationally representative, longitudinal survey of children and families who have been the subjects of investigation by Child Protective Services. In this analysis, only a few items had high missing rates defined as item nonresponse, which is 10% or greater, mostly because of “Don’t Know” responses. Over half of the questions with high missing rates (between 10%–27%) were from modules administered to children that will not be administered in the Survey of Youth Transitioning from Foster Care, like wanting to be adopted and the frequency of biological family visits. None of the main well-being indicators (e.g., physical health; cognitive development; and social, emotional, and behavioral well-being), which are very similar to items in the Survey of Youth Transitioning from Foster Care, had missing rates that were greater than 5%. Therefore, because of this information, paired with the fact that the Survey of Youth Transitioning from Foster Care is a one-time survey and shorter in length, it is expected that this survey will have even lower item nonresponse rates than did NSCAW II (i.e. 5% or lower). Any remaining item nonresponse will be dealt with as described in *Missing Data* in **Section B7**.

### **B6. Production of Estimates and Projections**

Estimates produced by this work will be prepared for internal use by ACF and external release by the agency in the form of reports, presentations, and/or other publications. Reports and other dissemination products will note that the sample is not nationally representative and data should not be used to generate population estimates. However, the representativeness of the sample will be assessed by comparisons to the characteristics of the CW populations from which the sample was drawn. Estimates will be calculated via unbiased maximum likelihood (ML) estimators.

### **B7. Data Handling and Analysis**

#### *Data Handling*

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The survey will be programmed for CAI data collection. This technology affords several improvements in the collection of survey data specific to mitigating and correcting detectable errors and minimizing the errors typically produced by data entry by hand. First, this technology improves the consistency of data provided by a respondent. If a respondent's answers fall outside the logical range, the interviewer is prompted to verify the two seemingly inconsistent pieces of data with the respondent, while their thinking on how the answer was formulated is still fresh. This reduces the need for subsequent data editing. Second, CAI technology provides greater expediency with respect to data processing and analysis. A number of backend processing steps, including editing, coding, and data entry, become a part of the data collection process.

### Data Analysis

Along with the list of core research questions, **Table 2** provides information on the analysis strategies likely to be used to address each research question. These analytic strategies are also detailed in the following section.

**Table 2. Survey of Youth Transitioning from Foster Care Questions and Analytic Strategies**

Research Question		Analytic Strategy
<b>Prevalence</b>		
RQ1	How many youth report having experienced sex trafficking before age 18, sex trafficking after age 18, and/or labor trafficking?	Proportion by group
RQ2 <sup>3</sup>	How do the characteristics of youth who self-reported trafficking experiences compare with those whose trafficking was identified by the CW agency?	Test for proportion in two groups, crosstabulation
RQ3	Based on known characteristics of the study population, what is the estimated prevalence of trafficking among older youth in foster care?	Proportion
<b>Risk and Protective Factors</b>		
RQ4	What factors differentiate youth who report trafficking experiences from other youth? These may exist at the individual level (e.g., sexual orientation/gender identity, risk behaviors), system level (e.g., juvenile justice involvement), community level (e.g., extended foster care), or social support level (e.g., adequacy of support system).	Crosstabulation, logistic regression
RQ5	What factors appear to precede trafficking victimization?	Logistic regression, survival analysis
RQ6	Among factors associated with self-reported trafficking experiences, which are potentially modifiable through resource and policy measures?	Crosstabulation, logistic regression
<b>Context of Trafficking Victimization</b>		
RQ7	Did trafficking occur while the youth was in a CW or juvenile justice placement?	Crosstabulation, logistic regression
RQ8	Did another person arrange or profit from the youth's sex trafficking? If so, what was the youth's relationship to that person? Do facilitator roles vary by age at which trafficking occurs?	Crosstabulation, logistic regression
RQ9	Did any acute events precede the trafficking experience (e.g., running away or being kicked out of home)? Do precipitating events vary by age at which trafficking occurs?	Logistic regression, survival analysis

<sup>3</sup> RQ2 and RQ10 can only be addressed if sufficient number of youth consent to linking their survey responses to their CW administrative data, as described in SSB, Section B4.



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RQ10	What contextual factors (i.e., trafficking during missing from care episodes may be more likely to be identified) affect whether trafficking was identified by the CW agency?	Crosstabulation, logistic regression
RQ11	What services or supports, like extended foster care, social support, or material resources might have reduced the youth's susceptibility to trafficking?	Crosstabulation, logistic regression

**Statistical Methods and Software.** Several analysis strategies are planned for the Survey of Youth Transitioning from Foster Care. First, we will develop *prevalence estimates* to describe the youth who self-report HT victimization involved with CW services. It will be possible to use univariate methods to derive estimates (proportions and means in particular) of important variables related to safety, well-being, permanency, and service use, including estimates of the precision of using 95% confidence intervals

Second, we will explore and describe risk and protective factors for HT victimization, primarily through *group comparisons* and *bivariate correlations*. These include contingency table (crosstab) analyses with appropriate statistical tests (e.g., Pearson's  $\chi^2$ ) and simple regression and correlation procedures. This will enable us, for example, to examine risk and protective factors for HT victimization across age groups, genders, and other individual and background characteristics.

*Multiple regression models* will play an important part in analysis of the data. There are circumstances, for example, in which important questions about what variables predict an outcome must consider confounding variables that limit interpretation. For example, will consider age by sex interactions because HT risk is likely to vary by age differently for males and females. Multiple indicator methods like structural equation modeling may be needed to adapt to measurement error that is likely to arise for some measures (Biemer et al., 2006). Questions about the relationship between agency variables and youth outcomes necessitate multivariate analysis, because they require hierarchical linear models that can consider sampling both at the agency and youth level. The project team will be focused and selective about our use of multiple regression methods; the project team will not conduct multivariate methods for every dependent variable or if simpler methods will be more appropriate.

The special requirements of the Survey of Youth Transitioning from Foster Care preclude using “off-the-shelf” methods in many circumstances and may require careful programming with sophisticated statistical software such as SUDAAN, MPlus, or R.

*Missing Data.* As with most studies, the Survey of Youth Transitioning from Foster Care will likely contain missing data because of item nonresponse. As noted in **Section B5**, item nonresponse is expected to be small.

In prior work, the contractor found that analyses with nonresponse can be addressed using methods for missing data, such as full information ML estimation of regression curve models. Under conditions where full information ML was computationally infeasible, we have used multiple imputation, which approximates the ML solution (e.g., Stambaugh et al., 2013). Both approaches were shown to increase statistical power and reduce bias under most conditions, and both were used with the sampling weights. However, sampling weights increase standard errors, which reduce statistical power.

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### *Data Use*

Dissemination of survey findings may include practice briefs, webinars, and summary reports, as requested by ACF. Priority audiences for these products will include CW professionals and researchers focused on vulnerable youth and HT. Consistent with the values of ACF, RTI is committed to transparency in its research. Sharing access to survey data sets will support further analyses that can inform policy and practice related to HT. We will submit the final, deidentified survey data set to the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN, 2014), following their requirements for ensuring privacy. The contractor will prepare supporting materials to contextualize and assist in interpretation of the data and as required by NDACAN, including documentation of sampling methods, response rates, population of inference, construction of analytic variables, and construction and appropriate use of survey weights, along with a variable list and codebook. Archiving data and supporting information will support future contributions to our understanding of HT victimization, including analyses by researchers and within other federally-funded studies.

### **B8. Contact Person(s)**

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### **Attachments**

Instrument 1: Survey of Youth Transitioning from Foster Care (SYTFC)

Appendix A: 60-Day Federal Register Notice – SYTFC

Appendix B: Public Comments – SYTFC

Appendix C: Child Welfare Data Elements Used for Sampling and Analysis – SYTFC

Appendix D: Lead Letter – SYTFC

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Appendix E: Consent Form – SYTFC

Appendix F: Data Linkage Form – SYTFC

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