

Review comment-1

This manuscript addresses a highly significant and timely issue within social work, child welfare, and mental health research—namely, the barriers to mental health service access for youth aging out of foster care. The focus on transition-age youth is particularly important given their elevated risk for adverse mental health outcomes and systemic marginalization. By synthesizing findings across multiple studies, the manuscript contributes to a broader understanding of structural, relational, and systemic barriers that impede service continuity. The emphasis on disparities, especially among youth of color and those with placement instability, further enhances its relevance to equity-focused research and practice. Additionally, the integration of implications for policy and practice strengthens its applied value. Overall, the manuscript makes a meaningful contribution to both scholarly discourse and professional practice by highlighting gaps and proposing actionable directions for improving service delivery.

The current title, Mental Health Service Access for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care, is clear, concise, and accurately reflects the central focus of the manuscript. It effectively communicates the population of interest and the primary issue being examined. However, it could be enhanced by signalling the methodological approach or emphasizing key themes such as barriers or transitions. An alternative title might be: Barriers and Pathways to Mental Health Service Access Among Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care: A Systematic Review. This revised title provides additional specificity and may attract a broader academic audience.

The abstract is generally well-structured and includes the key components of purpose, methods, results, and implications. It clearly conveys the scope and findings of the study. However, there are minor inconsistencies between the abstract and the methodology section—specifically, the abstract describes a “narrative review,” while the methods section references a “machine learning approach combined with content analysis.” This discrepancy should be clarified for consistency and transparency. Additionally, the abstract could be strengthened by briefly noting the final sample size (13 studies) and

specifying inclusion criteria (e.g., post-2021 focus, if applicable). Including these details would improve clarity and rigor.

The manuscript demonstrates overall clarity, but the English quality requires moderate revision to meet scholarly standards. There are several grammatical errors, awkward phrasings, and inconsistencies in tone (e.g., informal language such as “adulting” may not be appropriate without stronger academic framing). Additionally, there are punctuation issues, spacing inconsistencies, and occasional repetition. It is recommended that the authors conduct thorough proofreading or seek professional editing support. Attention should also be given to maintaining formal academic tone, improving sentence structure, and ensuring consistent terminology throughout the manuscript.

The manuscript is generally well-organized, with clearly delineated sections including introduction, theoretical framework, methodology, results, and discussion. The introduction effectively establishes context, although it could benefit from a more formal tone and tighter focus. The theoretical framework is appropriate and well-aligned with the study’s aims, though clearer integration with the results would strengthen coherence. The methodology section needs greater clarity and rigor, particularly regarding the description of the “machine learning approach,” inclusion/exclusion criteria, and analytic procedures. The results section appropriately identifies themes but would benefit from more detailed synthesis and clearer linkage to the included studies. The discussion effectively interprets findings but could further expand on limitations and future research directions. Overall, the structure is sound but would benefit from refinement and increased methodological transparency.

The reference list is generally appropriate and includes a mix of foundational and recent sources, including studies up to 2024–2025, which supports the manuscript’s relevance. Key authors in the field are cited, and the sources appear relevant to the topic. However, there are some inconsistencies in formatting (APA style issues), and a few references appear outdated relative to the rapidly evolving nature of mental health service research. The authors may consider

incorporating additional recent empirical studies (post-2022) and ensuring all citations are consistently formatted. Additionally, verifying the accuracy of all DOIs and removing any duplicate or redundant citations would improve the overall quality.

Specific Comments:

This manuscript addresses an important and underexplored issue concerning mental health service access for youth aging out of foster care. The topic is highly relevant to social work, child welfare policy, and mental health practice, and the authors demonstrate a clear commitment to highlighting systemic inequities and service gaps. The use of a literature-based approach to synthesize findings across studies is appropriate for the research aim, and the integration of both Ecological Systems Theory and Trauma-Informed Care provides a strong conceptual foundation. Additionally, the manuscript offers meaningful implications for practice and policy, particularly in emphasizing the need for continuity of care, cross-system collaboration, and culturally responsive services.

However, several areas require revision to strengthen the manuscript's rigor and clarity. First, there is a notable inconsistency between the abstract and methodology sections. The abstract describes a "narrative review," while the methods section refers to a "machine learning approach combined with content analysis." This discrepancy should be clarified, and if machine learning was used, the authors must provide a detailed explanation of how it was applied (e.g., tools, algorithms, procedures). Currently, the methodological description lacks sufficient detail regarding screening processes, coding strategies, and analytic rigor, which limits reproducibility and transparency.

Second, while the introduction is engaging, the use of informal language (e.g., "adulthood") detracts from the scholarly tone. This section would benefit from more formal framing and tighter alignment with the research purpose. Similarly, throughout the manuscript, there are grammatical errors, punctuation inconsistencies,

and awkward phrasing that require careful editing to meet academic writing standards.

Third, the results section identifies key themes but remains somewhat descriptive. The authors should deepen the analysis by providing more explicit connections between findings and the reviewed studies, possibly incorporating more direct synthesis or comparative insights. Additionally, the discussion could be strengthened by more explicitly addressing study limitations (e.g., small sample of 13 articles, potential selection bias, lack of global perspective) and expanding on future research directions.

The theoretical framework is appropriate and well-articulated; however, its integration into the results and discussion sections could be more explicit. Strengthening these connections would improve the overall coherence of the manuscript. Furthermore, while the reference list is generally relevant and includes recent sources, the authors should ensure consistent APA formatting and consider incorporating additional up-to-date empirical studies.

Overall, this manuscript has strong potential to contribute to the literature but requires moderate revisions to improve methodological clarity, writing quality, and analytical depth. I recommend revision prior to publication.