



CHAPIN HALL

CENTER FOR CHILDREN  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

# The Transition to Adulthood for Foster Youth: Early Findings of a Longitudinal Study

Mark E. Courtney

Chapin Hall Center for Children and  
School of Social Service Administration  
University of Chicago

# My Purpose Today

---

- Describe the Midwest Study
- Present some information regarding the conditions of the young people at age 19
- Present findings of a preliminary analysis of predictors of college enrollment at age 19 among study participants
- Discuss some policy and practice implications of our findings to date

# Study Design and Sample

---

Largest longitudinal study of foster youth (n = 732) making the transition to adulthood post-FCIA

Foster youth in 3 states who:

- Were in out-of-home care at age 17
- Had entered care before their 16th birthday
- Had been placed in care due to abuse and/or neglect

Interviews at ages 17-18, 19, and 21

# Health and Mental Health Services

---

	Total	Still in Care	No Longer in Care
Has Health Insurance	71.3	<b>98.2</b>	<b>47.1</b>
Medical Exam Since Last Interview	47.4	<b>53.2</b>	<b>42.4</b>
Did Not Receive Needed Medical Care	13.5	<b>4.6</b>	<b>21.4</b>
Received Psychological or Emotional Counseling	20.6	<b>28.5</b>	<b>13.7</b>

# Markers of Transition to Adulthood: Educational Attainment

---

	Total	Still in Care	No Longer in Care
No high school diploma/GED	38.2	38.2	36.1
Enrolled in school	47.7	<b>66.7</b>	<b>30.8</b>
High school/GED program	15.2	<b>20.9</b>	<b>10.1</b>
Vocational training	8.8	8.5	9.1
2 or 4 year college	23.7	<b>37.2</b>	<b>11.7</b>

# Markers of Transition to Adulthood: Employment and Earnings

---

	Total	Still in Care	No Longer in Care
Never held a job	7.8	7.8	7.8
Worked during past year	67.0	<b>61.0</b>	<b>72.3</b>
Currently employed	40.5	<b>33.0</b>	<b>47.0</b>
Median hours worked	35	<b>30</b>	<b>35</b>
Median hourly wage	\$7.00	\$7.00	\$7.00

# Markers of Transition to Adulthood: Partnering and Parenthood

---

	Total	Still in Care	No Longer in Care
Pregnant after first interview	37.4	<b>31.1</b>	<b>44.2</b>
Married or cohabiting	10.0	<b>5.0</b>	<b>14.3</b>
Males	6.5	5.0	7.6
Females	12.9	<b>4.9</b>	<b>20.9</b>
Any living children	23.4	24.5	22.5
Males	13.8	15.1	12.7
Females	31.6	31.3	31.9

# Markers of Transition to Adulthood: Criminal Justice System Involvement

---

	Total	Still in Care	No Longer in Care
Arrested since last interview	28.1	<b>21.9</b>	<b>33.8</b>
Males	<b>38.0</b>		
Females	<b>20.1</b>		
Incarcerated since last interview	19.2	<b>14.4</b>	<b>23.7</b>
Males	<b>29.8</b>		
Females	<b>10.7</b>		

# Markers of Transition to Adulthood: Selected Problems

---

	Total	Still in Care	No Longer in Care
Did not eat for whole day	8.3	<b>2.9</b>	<b>13.1</b>
Homeless since leaving care	---	---	13.8
Shot, stabbed, beaten up or threatened with a weapon during past year	24.2	23.8	24.6
Males	<b>34.7</b>	35.3	34.2
Females	<b>15.3</b>	15.3	15.3

# Significant Predictors of College Enrollment at Age 19

---

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Estimated Effect on Odds</u>
Caregiver problems	1.26
Delinquency	.54
Retained a grade	.47
Plans to complete college	1.82
Close to an adult	2.43
Still in care at 19	6.59

# Summary

---

- Youth about to age out of foster care in the U.S. face considerable challenges including educational deficits, limited employment experience, and significant psychosocial problems
- They also have significant assets, including strong relations with members of their families and foster families, connection to the child welfare services system, and optimism about their future

# Practice Implications

---

- Service providers and the courts must take into account that many foster youth are not prepared to make the transition to independence at age 18
- Most young people appear to value and benefit from their connections to the child welfare system
- Aspirations matter
- Connections with family are, not surprisingly, important to the transition process for this population

# Policy Implications

---

- Demographic changes call into question federal and state policies that curtail government responsibility for wards of the state at age 18
- A variety of policies regarding health care, mental health care, education, and employment should also be reconsidered in light of these demographic changes

**For all reports on this study...**

[www.chapinhall.org](http://www.chapinhall.org)