



Invited summaries of research for scholar and practitioner advocates for, traditionally hidden college student populations

Current Hidden College Student Populations

May include those who have foster care or justice-involved experiences, who are survivors of sexual violence, who are recovering drug or alcohol addicts, who face housing insecurity, or who are considered Third Culture Kids

R is for Thursday

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National Conference for Engaged Scholarship on Hidden Student Populations

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

This publication reinforces the work of the **National Conference for Engaged Scholarship on Hidden Student Populations (NCHP)** by providing a space to share research applications for practice. NCHP was the first research conference dedicated to this interdisciplinary area of study. The NCHP 3rd conference will be held at Oklahoma State University, September 14-16, 2022.

What Policies, Programs, and Individual Factors are Associated with Postsecondary Education Enrollment and Employment among Youth with Foster Care Histories?

Geiger, J.M. & Okpych, N.J. (2021). Connected after Care: Youth characteristics, policy, and programs associated with postsecondary education and employment outcomes for youth with foster care histories. *Child Maltreatment*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10775595211034763>

Research Summary

Research has shown that young people with foster care histories are particularly susceptible to being disconnected from school and work, with approximately one-third who are neither working nor in school at age 21, a rate that is significantly higher than that of same-age peers in the general population (Courtney et al., 2018). A number of programs and policies have aimed at promoting educational and employment opportunities for youth with a foster care background, however, little is known about their impact on postsecondary education enrollment and employment outcomes or about other possible contributors to education and/or employment (e.g., disparities, risk and protective factors). The purpose of this study was to examine the role that state-level policies and programs, youth-level participation in programs and services, and youth characteristics play in young people's connection to employment and education.

Methodology

This study used data from the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) - 2014 cohort. We linked data from the NYTD Outcome file with the NYTD Services file and the Adoptions and Foster Care Reporting System (AFCARS) to obtain additional information about participants' foster care history and receipt of Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA) funded education and employment independent living (IL) services. We used multilevel modeling (MLM) to estimate associations between youth- and state-level predictors and youths' enrollment and employment outcomes at age-21. The *state-level programs* we used as predictors were youths' participation in 1) career preparation, 2) employment programs or vocational training, 3) educational financial assistance, 4) postsecondary education support. The *state-level policies* examined were 1) tuition waiver, 2) extended foster care, and 3) the percentage of unspent

funding for FCIA-IL services, and education and training vouchers (ETV). *Individual-level variables* included various demographic characteristics and foster care experiences. We first examined whether youth were currently enrolled/employed or not. Then we examined a multi-category measure of connectedness type as the outcome (1=neither enrolled nor employed, 2=employed only, 3=enrolled only, 4=employed and enrolled).

Overview of Findings

The sample included 7797 youth. At age 21, about 31% were neither enrolled nor employed, 41% were employed only, 11% were enrolled only, and 17% were enrolled and employed. At age 17, half (50%) of participants had received career preparation services, 43% had received postsecondary education services, and about a third had participated in employment programming or vocational training (34%) and education aid (35%). More than half of participants lived in a state that did not offer a state tuition waiver (53%) and 60% were in a state with a federally-approved extended foster care law.

Several *youth-level* variables increased the expected odds of youth being connected to school and/or work at age 21, including race (Black vs. White), gender (female vs. male), having a diploma/GED at age 17, receiving postsecondary education services, receiving educational aid, and the number of years they spent in extended

foster care. Factors that decreased the likelihood of youth being connected to school and/or work were the number of placements per year while in care, number of years in care, number of foster care episodes, a history of incarceration, having a disability, being referred for substance abuse, having a child, and participating in career preparation services. Of the state-level policies examined, only having a tuition waiver available to all youth (vs. no tuition waiver) increased the predicted odds of being connected to school and/or work.

Implications for Practice

This study points to several implications for both practice and policy. First, the study findings indicate that few state-level policies were significantly associated with youths' connectedness at age 21, but where we did see differences is in whether youth actually received services. For example, youth simply living in a state with extended foster care (EFC) did not increase their odds of being connected, however, the amount of time youth spent in EFC did significantly increase their odds of connectedness. Second, we found that youth were more likely to be connected to work and education if they participated in postsecondary education services and received educational aid. These findings highlight the importance of connecting youth to financial resources and services that target postsecondary education and training. Third, a state-level

program that was found to be associated with youth connectedness is state tuition waivers when they were available to all youth with foster care backgrounds. This is an important finding as a growing number of states are adopting tuition waivers for youth with foster care histories. When combined with resources such as ETVs and campus support programs, tuition waivers may be an important promoter of college persistence.

The study also identified characteristics of youth that lowered the expected odds of being connected at age 21, and these youth may need additional supports and services to promote their connection to school and/or work in early adulthood. These characteristics include youth with medical disabilities, youth with intellectual disabilities, youth who were parents at age 17, youth with histories of incarceration, youth experiencing substance abuse, and youth who experienced instability in foster care. Overall, our study found that most (70%) youth were enrolled or employed at age 21, yet there is still room for improvement in policies and programs, both in content and access, to promote greater connectedness among youth with care backgrounds.

Courtney, M. E., Okpych, N. J., Park, K., Harty, J., Feng, H., Torres-Garcia, A., Sayed, S. (2018). Findings from the California youth transitions to adulthood study (CalYOUTH): Conditions of youth at age 21. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

Note: This research was supported by the extramural small grant program on youth employment from the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE).

SAVE *the* DATE

Sept. 14-16, 2022



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