

Media Relations

Carsey Institute: Children In Long-Term Foster Care Suffer High Rates Of Behavioral, Emotional Problems

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DURHAM, N.H. – Children who live in long-term foster care experience higher rates of behavioral and emotional problems compared with their peers who are reunited with their families or adopted, according to new research from the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire.

The research was conducted by Wendy Walsh, research assistant professor of sociology at the UNH Crimes against Children Research Center and a research associate at the Carsey Institute, and Marybeth Mattingly, director of research on vulnerable families at the Carsey Institute and a research assistant professor of sociology at UNH.

"Children in long-term foster care suffer from behavior and emotional problems at alarming rates. Better identifying and assisting children with, or at risk of developing such problems upon entry to foster care and throughout their out-of-home placement, may alleviate their needs and troubles and provide mechanisms for supporting them as they get older," the researchers said.

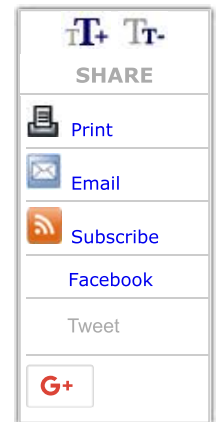
The researchers analyzed data from a nationally representative sample of children placed in out-of-home care between July 1998 and February 1999. They found that after one year, 78 percent were still in out-of-home care. Only 15 percent of children were reunified with their parents, and 7 percent were adopted. Four years after removal, 43 percent of children were in out-of-home care, including 22 percent in foster care, 13 percent in kinship care with other relatives, and 8 percent in a residential program, group home, or other living arrangement.

The key findings show:

- Younger children are adopted more often than older children. Four years after removal, 61 percent of children aged 3 to 5 were adopted compared with 5 percent of children aged 15 to 18.
- A sizable share of children in out-of-home care have emotional problems. Nearly three in ten (27 percent) children aged 11 to 18 had clinical levels of emotional problems while 41 percent had clinical levels of behavioral problems.
- Children with emotional or behavioral problems are more likely to be in foster care. Four years after removal, 32 percent of children with clinical levels of emotional problems and 35 percent of those with clinical levels of behavioral problems were in foster care placements. This compares with 19 percent of those without such problems.
- Children with emotional problems are less likely to be reunified with their families. Among children with no emotional problems, 31 percent were reunified with their family compared with 19 percent of children with emotional problems. One-third of children with no behavioral problems were reunified with their family compared with 18 percent of children with behavioral problems.

"In many states, foster care ceases at age 18, and the youth are on their own. Yet they are aging out of foster care at a time in life when many peers still require substantial guidance, structure, and support," the researchers said.

The researchers note that programs that extend foster care such as "The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008," which promotes kin and relative care, and allows states reimbursement for caring for eligible foster youth up to age 21, may benefit vulnerable youth.



Research shows that the financial benefits of extending foster care outweigh costs to government by a factor of approximately 2 to 1. As of April 2011, 11 states had adopted the legislation.

"These findings suggest that it may be worthwhile for states to reconsider their policies for the sake of long-term success. This type of investment may be significantly less expensive than the costs of the increased burdens on the community in the form of lost potential and would be a positive investment in these young adults," the researchers said.

The complete report about this research, "Long-Term Foster Care – Different Needs, Different Outcomes," is available at <http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/CarseySearch/search.php?id=164>.

The Carsey Institute conducts policy research on vulnerable children, youth, and families and on sustainable community development. We give policy makers and practitioners the timely, independent resources they need to effect change in their communities. For more information about the Carsey Institute, go to www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu.

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Editors and Reporters: Wendy Walsh can be reached at 603-862-1026 and wendy.walsh@unh.edu. Marybeth Mattingly can be reached at 603-862-2961 and beth.mattingly@unh.edu.

Media Contact: [Lori Wright](#) | 603-862-0574 | UNH Media Relations

Secondary Contact: [Amy Sterndale](#) | 603-862-4650 | Carsey Institute

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