

Highlights from the NYTD Survey: Outcomes reported by young people at ages 17, 19, and 21 (Cohort 1)

Background

To measure the outcomes of youth transitioning out of foster care, states are required to administer the NYTD survey to cohorts of youth at ages 17, 19 and 21. With three waves of data collection completed with youth in the first cohort¹, we are beginning to better understand the experiences of current and former foster care youth as they age. Response rates for both baseline (age 17) and follow-up (ages 19 and 21) surveys varied widely by state. To account for the variation and to ensure that groups that differ in response behavior are represented by members of those groups who did respond, the Children's Bureau employed a weighting methodology to the NYTD survey responses to identify and correct potential non-response bias in each of the three waves of data collection². All results were weighted to represent the first cohort of 17-year-olds eligible to take the NYTD survey in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2011. All percentages reported in this data brief are weighted estimates unless otherwise noted.

In this data brief:

We present findings from NYTD surveys completed by Cohort 1 youth at ages 17, 19, and 21.

For more information, please contact the Children's Bureau at NYTDinfo@acf.hhs.gov



Findings

Response Rates and Reasons for Non-Participation

In FFY 2011, 29,569 youth were identified as eligible to take the survey at age 17. Of those, 15,597 completed the survey, resulting in a national response rate of 53%. In FFY 2013, 11,712 youth were eligible for follow-up at age 19, and 7,845 (67%) completed the survey. State-level response rates also varied widely at follow-up, with one state not reporting and the remaining states ranging from 26% to 95%³. In FFY 2015, 11,675 youth were eligible for follow-up at age 21, and 6,985 (60%) responded. Similar to the previous two waves, state response rates in FFY 2015 varied and ranged from 17% to 86%⁴.

Survey Response Rates and Reasons for Non-Participation, Cohort 1

Survey Status	Age 17 (n=29,565)	Age 19 (n=11,712)	Age 21 (n=11,675)
Participated	53%	67%	60%
Youth declined	11%	6%	5%
Parent declined	1%	<1%	<1%
Incapacitated	2%	1%	1%
Incarcerated	2%	2%	3%
Runaway or missing	5%	<1%	<1%
Unable to locate or invite	17%	23%	27%
Death	<1%	<1%	<1%
Blank/Not Reported	<1%	1%	4%

Demographics of Survey Participants

Youth who participated in the survey at age 17 and youth who participated again at age 19 and/or 21 were demographically similar. This first cohort of youth is racially diverse and generally represented equally by both genders. All youth surveyed at age 17 were in foster care. By age 19, 64% of youth surveyed were no longer in foster care, and by age 21 that percentage had increased to 78%⁵.

Demographics of Survey Participants, Cohort 1

	Age 17 (n=15,597)	Age 19 (n=7,845)	Age 21 (n=6,985)
Race			
American Indian or Alaska Native	3%	3%	3%
Asian	1%	1%	2%
Black or African American	35%	37%	37%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1%	1%	<1%
White	56%	56%	59%
Unknown/Declined to Specify	8%	7%	6%
Ethnicity			
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	19%	19%	17%
Sex			
Male	53%	52%	50%
Female	47%	48%	50%

Youth Outcomes at Ages 17, 19, and 21

As youth begin their transition to adulthood, they should have experiences that foster growth and independence. Youth who are or have been in foster care face a number of challenges that can hinder a smooth transition. The NYTD results from this first cohort of youth can provide a national glimpse of how these young people are faring in certain outcome areas as they age.

Outcome 1: Financial Self-Sufficiency⁶

To better understand a youth’s outcome experiences in the area of financial self-sufficiency, the NYTD survey poses questions to youth regarding their acquisition of skills necessary to enter the labor market and to access financial resources to help meet their living expenses. As youth age and make decisions about whether or not to remain in or return to foster care⁷, financial stability becomes a crucial indicator of youth’s readiness for independence.

- Although youth at age 17 were young and in foster care, over one-quarter (29%) reported experiences in at least one employment-related category (full- or part-time employment; paid or unpaid apprenticeship, internship, or other on-the-job training). About half (51%) at age 19 and 65% at age 21 reported some employment-related experience.
- By age 21, 40% reported receiving at least one form of financial assistance (Social Security, educational aid, or some other form of significant, periodic financial support).
- Only youth not in care at ages 19 or 21 were asked if they were receiving at least one type of public assistance (housing, food, or financial); 34% at age 19 and 38% at age 21 reported that they were.

Financial Self-Sufficiency among Young People in Cohort 1

Outcome area	Age 17 (n=15,597)	Age 19 (n=7,845)	Age 21 (n=6,985)
Employed full- or part-time	13%	33%	52%
Receiving employment-related skills training	21%	30%	32%
Receiving Social Security	13%	13%	14%
Receiving education aid	4%	24%	22%
Receiving other financial support	9%	14%	11%
Receiving public assistance ⁸	N/A	34%	38%

Outcome 2: Educational Attainment

Achieving a high school diploma or General Equivalency Degree (GED) can be considered a minimal requirement for self-sufficiency and can assist in establishing a solid educational foundation that will prepare youth for future educational pursuits. The NYTD survey asks young people to report their current enrollment status in an educational program and the highest educational certification received.

- While most youth (91%) at age 17 had not yet received any educational certifications, an overwhelming majority (94%) of them had indicated they were enrolled in and attending some type of educational program.
- By age 19, over half (55%) had received a high school diploma or GED. By age 21, that percentage had increased to 67%. An additional 5% reported having received a vocational certificate or license and 3% reported receiving an associate’s, bachelor’s or higher degree.

- At age 21, 23% reported being neither enrolled in or attending an educational program nor employed full- or part-time.

Educational Attainment among Young People in Cohort 1

Outcome area	Age 17 (n=15,597)	Age 19 (n=7,845)	Age 21 (n=6,985)
Received high school diploma or GED	9%	55%	67%
Enrolled and attending an educational program	94%	54%	32%

Outcome 3: Connections with Adults

Establishing a positive, consistent and lasting relationship with at least one adult is a critical component in ensuring youth make a successful transition from foster care to adulthood. The NYTD survey asks youth whether there is currently at least one adult in their life to whom they can go for advice or emotional support.⁹

- At age 17, 93% of youth had reported having an adult in their lives.
- The vast majority of young adults continue to report having a positive connection as they age, including 89% of 19-year-olds and 87% of 21-year-olds.

Outcome 4: Experiences with Homelessness

Permanent and adequate housing can protect against a number of negative outcomes. Young people who leave foster care unprepared to live on their own are at risk for becoming homeless soon after discharge. In FFY 2011, youth were asked at age 17 if they had ever been homeless at some point in their lives. In FFYs 2013 and 2015, youth were asked if they had experienced homelessness within the past two years.

- At age 17, 16% had experienced homelessness at some point in their lives. Nineteen (19) percent of 19-year-olds reported having been homeless at some point within the past two years, the vast majority (80%) of whom were no longer in foster care. At age 21, 26% had experienced homelessness within the past two years. Of these young people, 88% had left foster care.
- Youth who at age 21 reported having experienced homelessness within the past two years were also more likely than their peers who had not experienced homeless in the past two years to report other financial challenges, including being unemployed (58% versus 44%) and not having Medicaid or some other type of health insurance (28% versus 18%). These youth were also more likely to report having given birth to or fathered a child (31% versus 23%).
- Of the 5,583 youth who completed all three waves¹⁰ of the NYTD survey, 43% reported having had a homeless experience by age 21 (at either age 17, 19, or 21).

- Of the 947 young people who reported at age 17 having been homeless at some point, about half (51%) reported another homeless episode at either age 19 or 21, and 20% reported a homeless experience in all three survey waves.

Outcome 5: High-Risk Behaviors

Many behaviors place youth in foster care at risk for a variety of negative outcomes. The NYTD survey collects information on three key outcomes that have been associated with hindering successful transitions to adulthood among youth in foster care.¹¹ Results from the survey indicate that more than one-third (39%) of 19-year-olds and 43% of 21-year-olds reported experiencing at least one high-risk outcome within the past two years. At age 17, half (50%) had reported a history of high-risk behaviors.

- At age 17, over one quarter (28%) had, at some point during their lifetimes, been referred for substance abuse assessment or counseling. Fifteen (15) percent at age 19 and 10% at age 21 reported having had a referral within the past two years.
- At age 17, over one-third (37%) of the youth reported a history of incarceration. Two years later, slightly more than one-in-five (24%) 19-year-olds reported having been incarcerated within the past two years. By age 21, that percentage had decreased to 20%.
- The proportion of youth reporting having given birth to or fathered a child has steadily increased at each wave of the survey. At age 17, 7% of youth had a child. Twelve (12) percent of 19-year-olds and 25% of 21-year-olds reported having given birth to or fathered a child within the past two years.
- Among the 5,583 youth who completed all three waves of the NYTD survey, 32% reported having had a child by age 21. Of these young people, only 9% reported having ever been married at the time of a child’s birth.

High-Risk Behaviors among Young People in Cohort 1

Outcome Area	Age 17 (n=15,597)	Age 19 (n=7,845)	Age 21 (n=6,985)
Referred for substance abuse assessment or counseling	28% (in lifetime)	15% (in past two years)	10% (in past two years)
Incarcerated at some point	37% (in lifetime)	24% (in past two years)	20% (in past two years)
Had children	7% (in lifetime)	12% (in past two years)	25% (in past two years)

Outcome 6: Access to Health Insurance

Access to health care can help ensure that youth receive the prevention and treatment services they need to remain healthy. Youth in title IV-E foster care are categorically eligible to receive Medicaid. Additionally, a number of provisions under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act increase access to health care for youth formerly in foster care¹², including the extension of Medicaid coverage to young people up to age 26 in certain circumstances. The NYTD survey asks youth whether they are receiving Medicaid or some other type of health insurance coverage.

- The majority of youth at age 17 (81%) reported having Medicaid insurance coverage. Six percent of surveyed youth, however, reported not knowing if they had Medicaid coverage.
- The majority of 19-year-olds (71%) reported having Medicaid, and 15% also reported having some other type of health insurance. More youth in care (85%) than youth not in care (63%) reported having Medicaid coverage at age 19.
- At age 21, 70% of young adults reported having Medicaid and 12% reported having some other type of health insurance. Of those reporting having insurance other than Medicaid, 12% reported their insurance covered mental health treatment and 14% reported having prescription drug coverage.
- Fourteen (14) percent of 19-year-olds and 25% of 21-year-olds reported not having Medicaid or some other type of health insurance coverage. Of the uninsured 19-year-olds, 11% reported having given birth to or fathered a child within the past two years. Of the uninsured 21-year-olds, 20% reported having a child within the past two years.

Conclusion

The baseline and follow-up survey information from Cohort 1 reveals that, generally, young adults are faring well in many outcome areas but also struggling in other areas. By age 21, young people reported positive gains in many protective factors, yet, in some cases there is evidence that current and former foster youth continue to face challenges that can be barriers to independence.

At age 17, the majority of youth were attending school, had positive connections to at least one adult, and were receiving Medicaid. Half of them did not report any history of high-risk behaviors, and the majority reported never having been homeless. At ages 19 and 21, many of these positive indicators were still evident. From age 17 to age 21, the proportions of youth in each survey wave reporting referrals to substance abuse treatment or counseling or having been incarcerated decreased. By age 21, over two-thirds reported having earned a high school diploma or GED, and the vast majority had maintained a positive connection to an adult. There also are encouraging signs of financial self-sufficiency with the majority of 19 and 21-year-olds reporting being employed or receiving employment-related skills. Although these gains are promising, there are indications that in some outcome areas young adults are struggling. As they aged, an increasing

proportion of youth reported experiencing homelessness, giving birth to or fathering a child, and not having any health insurance.

With this information from the first NYTD cohort of youth, we are beginning to better understand the experiences of young adults and the potential cumulative risks they encounter as they move toward adulthood. These findings may help underscore the importance of providing supports to youth who may be particularly vulnerable to poor outcomes, including providing targeted independent living services or allowing youth to remain in foster care during this transition.

We hope states will see these results as one additional piece of information that may be used to help inform transition planning practices, service provision, extended foster care policies, and data collection procedures. We encourage states to analyze their own NYTD data to guide continuous data quality improvements, and, if needed, identify areas where systems or practice changes may be needed to increase survey participation rates. We also urge states to continue to engage young people as partners in data collection, data analysis, and dissemination of survey results.

Endnotes

¹ All 50 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico are required to collect and report NYTD data. States were required to collect baseline outcomes information from youth who turned age 17 while in foster care in FFY 2011. At follow-up, states were required to survey youth during the six-month reporting periods in which they turned age 19 (in FFY 13) and 21 (in FFY 15). Depending on when the state invited the youth's participation, a youth may have been age 18 or 19 (in FFY 13) or age 20 or 21 (in FFY 15) when surveyed. Because the goal of the NYTD survey is to capture a youth's outcome experiences on or around the 19th and 21st birthdays, we refer to these youth as 19-year-olds and 21-year-olds in this brief. The NYTD survey questions are in Appendix B of the NYTD regulation, available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2008-02-26/pdf/E8-3050.pdf>.

² Weighted results did not vary dramatically from unweighted results. Non-response bias corrections were small. For a description of the weighting methodology used in the first two survey waves, please see the NYTD User's Guide available at the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN): <http://www.ndacan.cornell.edu>. An updated document incorporating weighting methodology and survey responses from the 21-year-olds is forthcoming.

³ Due to technical problems in its data submissions, Puerto Rico is not represented in the weighted age 19 or age 21 outcomes data.

⁴ For information on survey results and response rate comparisons at ages 17 and 19, see Data Brief #4 at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/nytd_data_brief_4.pdf.

⁵ For comparisons of outcomes between 19-year-old youth in foster care and not in foster care, see Data Brief #3 at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/nytd_data_brief_3_071514.pdf.

⁶ Financial self-sufficiency includes whether or not the youth reports (1) being employed full-time, (2) being employed part-time, (3) completing training for employment-related skills, and/or (3) receiving financial supports such as Social Security, educational aid, or some other type of financial assistance. See 45 CFR 1356.83(g) for complete definitions of NYTD data elements.

⁷ Some states have opted to extend title IV-E assistance to youth over age 18, permitting some youth to remain in foster care voluntarily.

⁸ The NYTD survey questions related to a young person's use of public assistance are only asked of youth who are no longer in foster care.

⁹ “Adult” is considered to be someone other than the youth’s spouse/partner, boyfriend/girlfriend, or current caseworker.

¹⁰ For analyses across waves on particular subgroups, unweighted results are reported. Because the subgroup analyses are limited to a group of youth with a particular response (e.g., all youth reporting a homeless experience at age 17 and then followed forward), non-response bias is not applicable.

¹¹ High risk behaviors include histories of substance abuse assessment or counseling, incarceration, or having children. The NYTD survey also asks a youth if they were married at the time of the child’s birth. Only 6% of the youth at age 19 and 9% of the youth at age 21 who had children were married at the time of the child’s birth.

¹² Section 1902(a)(10)(A)(i)(IX) of the Social Security Act extends Medicaid assistance to former foster youth in certain circumstances. This provision became effective January 1, 2014, after the 19-year-old follow-up survey was completed.