

Fast Facts

Reproductive Health Outcomes Among Youth Who Ever Lived in Foster Care

Approximately half a million children in the United States live in foster care.¹ These young people are at greater risk of early pregnancy than teens generally and many teens in foster care become parents, either while they are in the foster care system or shortly after transitioning out of the system.² This fact sheet presents new findings from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) specifically on the reproductive health outcomes of youth who ever lived in foster care.³

Demographic Characteristics (Measured at the time of the interview, youth were ages 12-19)^a:

- Nearly two-thirds (60%) of youth who ever lived in foster care are white, 23% are black, and 11% are Hispanic (see Figure 1).
- Three out of five (59%) youth who ever lived in foster care are female.

Family Circumstances (Measured at the time of the interview, youth were ages 12-19)^a:

- Not surprisingly, youth who ever lived in foster care have unique family structures. At the time of the interview, only one-third (33%) of youth who have ever been in foster care were living with two biological or adoptive parents and 32% lived with a single parent compared to 57% and 22% respectively among all other youth. However, foster care youth were less likely to live with one biological and one stepparent than their counterparts (13% versus 15% of other youth). Two out of 10 (22%) foster care youth lived in a family structure other than with one or both biological parents, a single parent, or with one biological and one stepparent compared to 5% of all other youth.
- At the time of the interview, 27% of foster youth lived in households with an income below the federal poverty level compared to 16% of all other youth.
- Among foster youth, more than one-third (37%) of girls and 29% of boys had no routine physical exam in the past year at

FIGURE 1. Percent of Youth Who Ever Lived in Foster Care by Demographic Characteristics

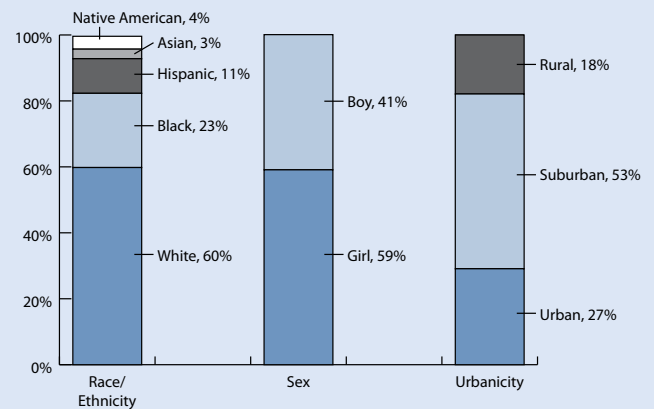
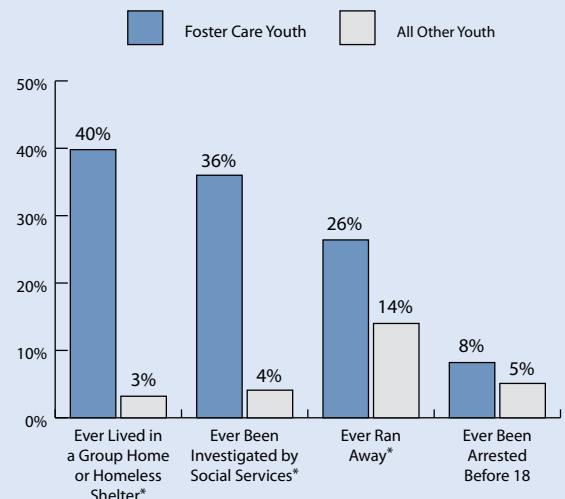


FIGURE 2. Percent of Youth in Various Risk Groups



* Comparisons between youth who have ever lived in foster care and all other youth are statistically significant differences; p<0.001

the time of the interview. In fact, 30% of girls and 22% of boys reported that they had needed medical care but did not receive any.

Additional Risk Factors (Measured at the time of the interview, youth were ages 18-26)*:

- Youth who ever lived in foster care are 13 times more likely to have ever lived in a group home or homeless shelter, 9 times more likely to have ever been investigated by social services, nearly twice as likely to have ever run away, and 1.6 times more likely to have ever been arrested before age 18 than all other youth (see Figure 2).

Reproductive Health Behaviors (Measured at the time of the interview, youth were ages 18-26)*:

- Like their non-foster care peers, a large proportion of young adults who have ever lived in foster care have had sex. In fact, 93% of young adults who have ever lived in foster care report being sexually experienced compared to 87% of their peers who never lived in foster care. Additionally, almost half of youth who ever lived in foster care are under age 16 when they have sex for the first time compared to one-third of all other youth (see Figure 3).
- Foster care youth, both boys and girls alike, are less likely to use contraception at first sex compared to their non-foster care peers. Only about half (56%) of youth in foster care used contraception at first sex.
- Young adults who lived in foster care are 1.9 times more likely to have ever experienced forced sex when compared to all other youth. Additional results not shown in the chart indicate that this is particularly prevalent among girls who ever lived in foster care. They are nearly 3 times

more likely than boys who ever lived in foster care to have ever experienced forced sex.

- Not only are young adults who ever lived in foster care nearly twice as likely to have had a teen birth, they are also more likely to have had an STI, an unintended birth and/or a nonmarital birth (see Figure 4).

These results show that youth who ever lived in foster care tend to exhibit higher sexual risk-taking, and thus also tend to experience a higher incidence of teen and nonmarital births. It is also the case that they tend to fall into other risk groups (e.g. ever been arrested before age 18), more so than the rest of the population—possibly suggesting the importance of reaching these kids through a variety of systems.

FUNDING INFORMATION:

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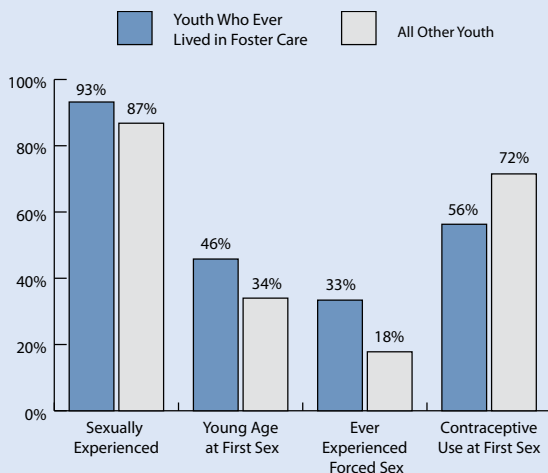
NOTE:

- Add Health data was collected in three waves of in-home interviews, in 1995 (Wave I), 1996 (Wave II), and 2002 (Wave III). Baseline characteristics including socio-demographics and family characteristics are based on data from Wave I when youth were aged 12-19. Risk Factors and reproductive health outcomes reported in this fact sheet were measured in Wave III when respondents were aged 18 to 26.

SOURCES:

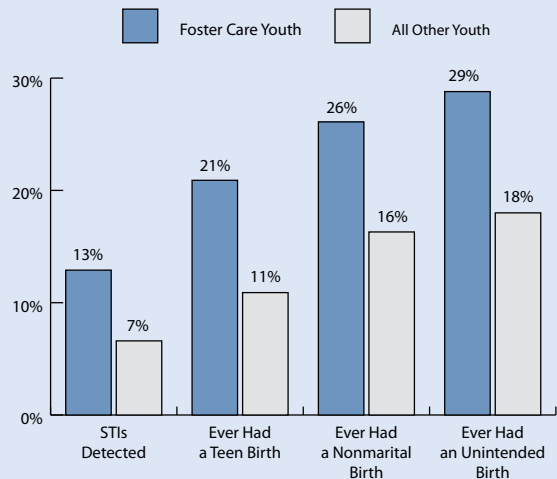
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FIGURE 3. Reproductive Health Behaviors Among Young Adults (Age 18-26)



All comparisons between youth who have ever lived in foster care and all other youth are statistically significant differences; p<0.001

FIGURE 4. Reproductive Health Outcomes Among Young Adults (Age 18-26)



All comparisons between youth who have ever lived in foster care and all other youth are statistically significant differences

* STDs detected in biomarker data (gonorrhea, Chlamydia, trichomoniasis), difference p<0.05

** All other differences p<0.001