

Comparing Outcomes Reported by Young People at Ages 17 and 19 in NYTD Cohort 2

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. The Children’s Bureau is pleased to release the following NYTD data highlights that compare the outcomes reported by youth in the second NYTD cohort at ages 17 and 19¹. Although most outcomes reported by Cohort 2 respondents at ages 17 and 19 were similar to outcomes reported by Cohort 1 youth at ages 17 and 19, this brief also highlights those outcomes where some notable differences were found².

Response rates for both cohorts of baseline (age 17) and follow-up (age 19) surveys varied widely by state. To account for the variation, the Children’s Bureau employed a weighting methodology to the NYTD survey responses to identify and correct potential non-response bias.³ All results were weighted to represent each of the two cohorts of 17- year-olds identified at baseline as being eligible to take the NYTD survey in federal fiscal years (FFY) 2011 and 2014. All survey response percentages reported in this data brief are weighted estimates.

In this data brief:

We present findings from surveys completed by youth in NYTD Cohort 2 at ages 17 and 19. We also present select comparisons of results between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 youth.

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



Findings

Response Rates and Reasons for Non-Participation

In FFY 2014, 23,781 youth were identified as eligible to take the survey at age 17. Of those, 16,481 completed the survey, resulting in a national response rate of 69%, 16 percentage points higher than the FFY 2011 baseline response rate of 53% for Cohort 1 youth.

Survey Status	Age 17 (n=23,781)	Age 19 (n=12,310)
Participated	69%	72%
Youth declined	8%	6%
Parent declined	<1%	<1%
Incapacitated	2%	1%
Incarcerated	1%	2%
Runaway or missing	4%	<1%
Unable to locate/invite	9%	19%
Death	<1%	<1%
Invalid participant or blank ⁴	5%	0%

In FFY 2016, 12,310 youth were eligible at age 19, and 8,899 (72%) completed the survey—a rate higher than the 67% response rate for Cohort 1 youth at age 19. At the state level, response rates for Cohort 2 varied widely ranging from 14% to 100% at age 17 and from 43% to 90% at follow up.

Because of the wide range of response rates and because some states opted to survey a sample⁵ of 19-year-olds, non-response bias is a concern. Non-response bias occurs when youth who complete a survey (respondents) are significantly different from the youth who do not complete a survey (non-respondents). If the youth are characteristically different, the survey results may not adequately represent the outcomes of the population of 17- or 19-year-olds for whom the survey is targeted. The Children’s Bureau employed a weighting methodology to correct for potential non-response bias in youth outcomes reported at ages 17 and 19. This weighting ensures that groups that differ in response behavior are represented by members of those groups who did respond. Percentages reported in this data brief are weighted estimates. However, based on analyses, these weighted results did not vary dramatically from unweighted results, and non-response bias corrections were small.

Demographics of Survey Participants

Youth who participated in the survey at age 17 and youth who participated again at age 19 were demographically similar. This second 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, 62% of youth surveyed were no longer in foster care.

Demographics of Survey Participants at Ages 17 and 19, Cohort 2

Race	Age 17 (n=16,481)	Age 19 (n=8,899)
American Indian or Alaska Native	3%	3%
Asian	2%	2%
Black or African American	35%	36%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1%	1%
White	59%	58%
Unknown/Declined to Specify	8%	7%

Ethnicity	Age 17 (n=16,481)	Age 18 (n=8,999)
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	21%	20%

Sex	Age 17 (n=16,481)	Age 18 (n=8,889)
Male	52%	52%
Female	48%	48%

Youth Outcomes at Ages 17 and 19

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 survey results from youth at ages 17 and 19 provide a national glimpse into 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 their access to financial resources to help meet their living expenses. As youth age and make decisions about whether or not to remain in foster care⁷, financial stability becomes a crucial indicator of youth’s readiness for independence. Encouragingly, on two indicators, there are some signs of growing financial stability at age 19. More Cohort 2 youth at age 19 have employment-related experiences and fewer are receiving public assistance compared to the 19-year-olds in Cohort 1.

- 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) in Cohort 2. By age 19, over half (56%) reported some employment-related experience.
- No differences were found in employment-related experiences at age 17 between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 (29% in both cohorts), but at age 19, more youth in Cohort 2 than in Cohort 1 reported at least one employment-related experience (56% versus 51%).
- By age 19, 40% reported receiving at least one form of financial assistance (Social Security, educational aid, or some other form of significant, periodic financial support) in Cohort 2.
- At age 19, youth who are not in foster care are asked if they were receiving public assistance (i.e., housing, food, or financial). Among Cohort 2 youth, 30% reported that they were receiving some type of public assistance. By comparison, 34% of 19-year-olds in Cohort 1 reported receiving some type of public assistance.

Financial Self-Sufficiency at Ages 17 and 19, Cohort 2

Outcome area	Age 17 (n=16,481)	Age 19 (n=8,899)
Employed full- time	2%	9%
Employed part-time	13%	14%
Receiving employment-related skills training	20%	31%
Receiving Social Security	12%	12%
Receiving education aid	3%	22%
Receiving other financial support	8%	14%
Receiving public assistance ⁸	N/A	30%

Outcome 2: Educational Attainment

Achieving a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (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 the majority (91%) of youth at age 17 had not yet received any educational certifications, an overwhelming majority (93%) of them had indicated they were enrolled in and attending some type of educational programming. By age 19, over half (57%) in Cohort 2 had received a high school diploma or GED.
- Fifty-two percent of 19-year-olds in Cohort 2 were enrolled in and attending some type of educational programming. Of those enrollees, 51% reported having achieved a high school diploma or GED, suggesting that about a quarter of youth were enrolled in post-secondary vocational training or college.

Educational Attainment at Ages 17 and 19, Cohort 2

Outcome area	Age 17 (n=16,481)	Age 19 (n=8,899)
Received high school diploma or GED	5%	57%
Enrolled and attending an educational program	93%	52%

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, other than a caseworker, to whom they can go for advice or emotional support.⁹

- At age 17, 93% of youth in Cohort 2 had reported having a positive connection to an adult in their lives.
- The majority of youth (89%) continue to have a positive connection to an adult at age 19.

Outcome 4: Experiences with Homelessness

Stable 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 leaving care. Youth in Cohort 2 were asked at age 17 if they had ever been homeless at some point in their lives. At age 19, they were asked if they had experienced homelessness within the past two years.

- At age 17, 17% of youth had experienced homelessness at some point in their lives. Twenty (20) percent of 19-year-olds reported having been homeless at some point within the past two years, the majority of whom (79%) were no longer in foster care.

Outcome 5: High-Risk 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.¹⁰ Compared to Cohort 1 youth, fewer youth in Cohort 2 reported engaging in high-risk behaviors at ages 17 or 19. Results indicate that one-third (33%) of 19-year-olds reported experiencing at least one high-risk outcome within the past two years compared to 39% of the 19-year-olds in Cohort 1. At age 17, less than half (46%) had reported a history of high-risk outcomes compared to 50% of 17-year-olds in Cohort 1.

- At age 17, over one quarter (27%) of the youth in Cohort 2 reported having being referred for substance abuse assessment or counseling at some point during their lifetimes. At age 19, 14% had been referred within the past two years.
- At age 17, 33% of the youth in Cohort 2 reported a history of incarceration compared to 37% of the 17-year-olds in Cohort 1. Two years later, one-in-five (20%) 19-year-olds in Cohort 2 reported having been incarcerated within the past two years, a somewhat smaller percentage than in Cohort 1 when almost one-quarter (24%) of 19-year-olds reported being incarcerated. Young men were more than twice as likely as young women to report experiences with incarceration. In Cohort 2, 27% of males at age 19 reported having been incarcerated at some point within the past two years compared to 13% of females.
- Ten (10) percent of all 19-year-olds in Cohort 2 reported having given birth to or fathered a child in the previous two years. At age 17, 5% of Cohort 2 youth had a child.
- At both ages 17 and 19, females in Cohort 2 were more likely than males to report having had a child. At age 17, 7% of females in Cohort 2 and 10% of females in Cohort 1 reported having given birth to a child in their lifetimes. Comparatively, 3% of males in Cohort 2 and 4% of males in Cohort 1 reported having fathered a child by age 17. At age 19, 14% of females in Cohort 2 and 17% in Cohort 1 reported having given birth within the past two years. Six percent of males in both Cohorts 1 and 2 reported fathering a child within the past two years.

High-Risk Outcomes at Ages 17 and 19, Cohorts 1 and 2

Outcome Area	Cohort 1 Age 17 (n=15,597)	Cohort 1 Age 19 (n=7,845)	Cohort 2 Age 17 (n=16,481)	Cohort 2 Age 19 (n=8,899)
Referred for substance abuse assessment or counseling	28% (in lifetime)	15% (in past two years)	27% (in lifetime)	14% (in past two years)
Incarcerated at some point	37% (in lifetime)	24% (in past two years)	33% (in lifetime)	20% (in past two years)
Had children	7% (in lifetime)	12% (in past two years)	5% (in lifetime)	10% (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. The NYTD survey asks youth whether they are receiving Medicaid or some other type of health insurance coverage.

- The majority of Cohort 2 youth at age 17 (85%) reported having Medicaid insurance coverage, an increase over the 81% of 17-year-olds in Cohort 1. Seven percent of surveyed youth in Cohort 2, however, reported not knowing if they had Medicaid coverage.
- The majority of 19-year-olds (77%) in Cohort 2 reported having Medicaid, a higher proportion than was reported by the 19-year-olds in Cohort 1 (71%). Sixteen percent also reported having some other type of health insurance. More youth in care (89%) than youth not in care (69%) reported having Medicaid coverage at age 19.

Conclusion

The baseline and follow-up survey information from Cohort 2 reveals that although young adolescents continue to struggle in some key outcome areas, they are showing promising signs of early independence and stability. At age 17, the majority of these youth were attending school, had positive connections to at least one adult, and were receiving Medicaid. Over half of them did not report any history of high-risk outcomes, and the majority reported never having been homeless. At age 19, many of these positive indicators were maintained with the majority having earned a high school diploma or GED, reporting a positive connection to an adult, receiving Medicaid or some other type of health insurance, and demonstrating early signs of financial self-sufficiency. Additionally, when compared to their similarly-aged peers in Cohort 1, many of the young adults in Cohort 2 were reporting better outcomes. At age 19, more youth were engaging in fewer high-risk behaviors and were more financially self-sufficient than their peers in Cohort 1.

In other areas, however, there were few differences between the two cohorts, and results continue to indicate young people are struggling. The number of youth who have experiences with homelessness remains a concern, and while experiences with incarceration improved for 19-year-olds, over one-third of 17-year-olds in both cohorts reported having been incarcerated at some point in their lives. These findings may help underscore the importance of providing supports to youth who may be particularly vulnerable to poor outcomes as they transition to adulthood, including providing targeted independent living services or allowing youth to remain in foster care during this transition.

Endnotes

¹ States were required to collect baseline outcomes information from youth who turned age 17 while in foster care in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2014 (Cohort 2). At follow-up, states were required to survey youth during the six-month reporting period in which they turn age 19. Depending on when the state invites the youth's participation, a youth may be age 18 or 19 when surveyed. Because the goal of the second NYTD survey is to capture the outcome of experiences on or around the youth's 19th birthday, we refer to these youth as 19-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 For information on Cohort 1 survey results and comparisons of youth outcomes at ages 17 and 19, see Data Brief #4 at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/nytd_data_brief_4.pdf.

³ For a description of the weighting methodology, please see the NYTD User's Guide available at the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN): <http://www.ndacan.cornell.edu/>.

⁴ "Invalid participant" refers to records of baseline population youth whom the state surveyed late (i.e., more than 45 days after the youth's 17th birthday). "Blank" refers to records of baseline youth for whom a survey status was missing (i.e., the state neither reported that the youth participated in the survey nor reported a reason for non-participation in element 34).

⁵ States were permitted to select a sample of 19-year-olds from the population of youth who participated in the baseline survey at age 17. For Cohort 1, 12 states opted to sample. For Cohort 2, 15 states opted to sample.

⁶ Financial self-sufficiency includes whether or not the youth reports being employed full- or part-time employed part-time, completing employment-related skills training, and/or 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.

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 High risk outcomes 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 4% of the 910 youth at age 19 in Cohort 2 who had children were married at the time of the child's birth.