

# The Transition to Adulthood for Foster Youth: Implications for Permanency Planning

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**ChapinHall** at the University of Chicago  
Policy research that benefits children, families, and their communities

# My Purpose Today

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Summarize what research tells us about how foster youth fare during the transition to adulthood

Present data pertaining to “permanence” for foster youth in transition

Point out some limitations of current policy and the challenges ahead

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# **How do foster youth fare during the transition?**

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# Midwest Study Design and Sample

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Largest prospective study of foster youth making the transition to adulthood since the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999

Collaboration between state child welfare agencies and the research team

Foster youth in Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois who:

- Were still in care at age 17
- Had entered care before their 16th birthday
- Had been placed in care because they were abused, neglected or dependent
- Not originally placed because of delinquency

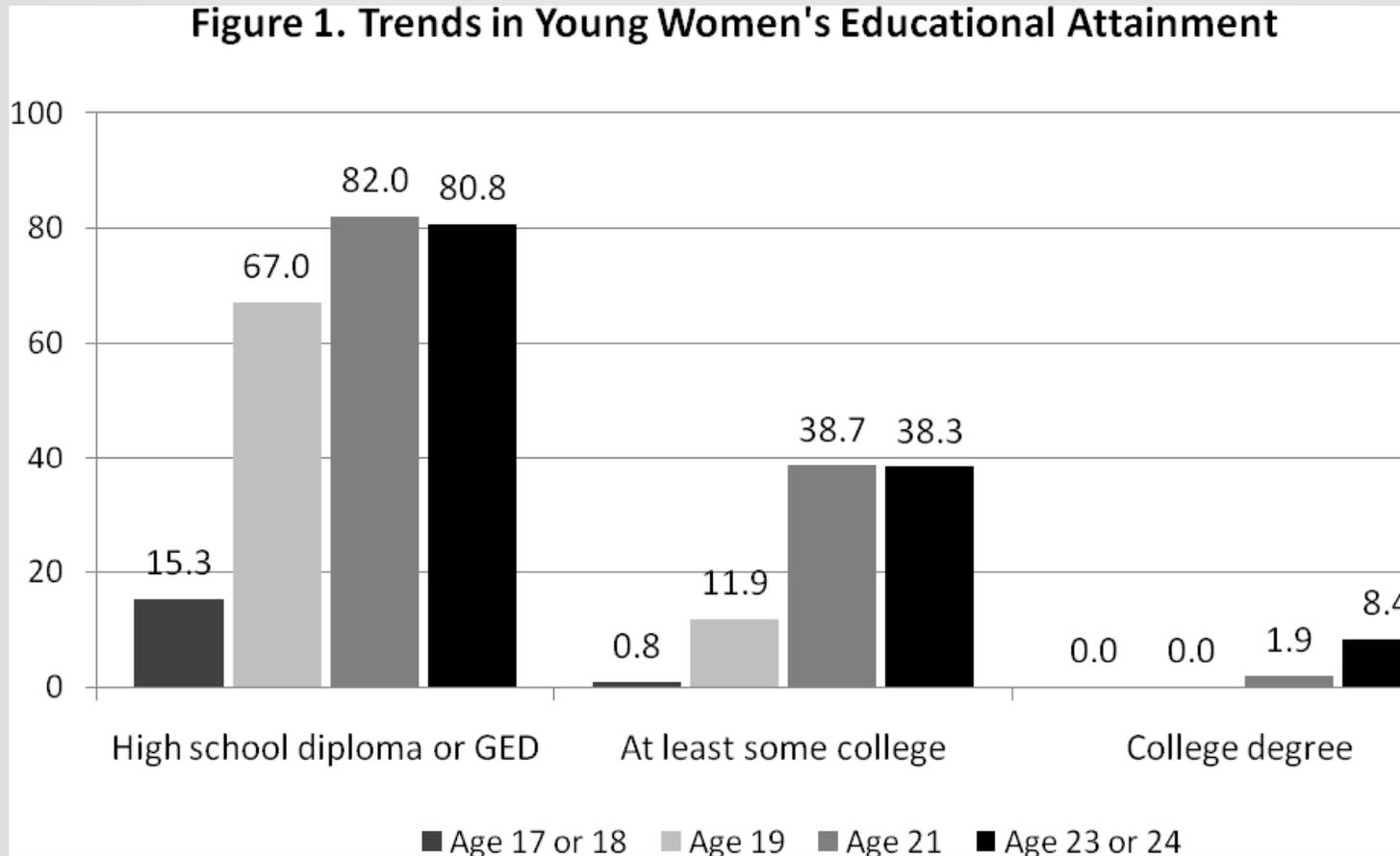
Data from in-person interviews (structured and in-depth qualitative) and government program administrative data

# Study Design and Sample (continued)

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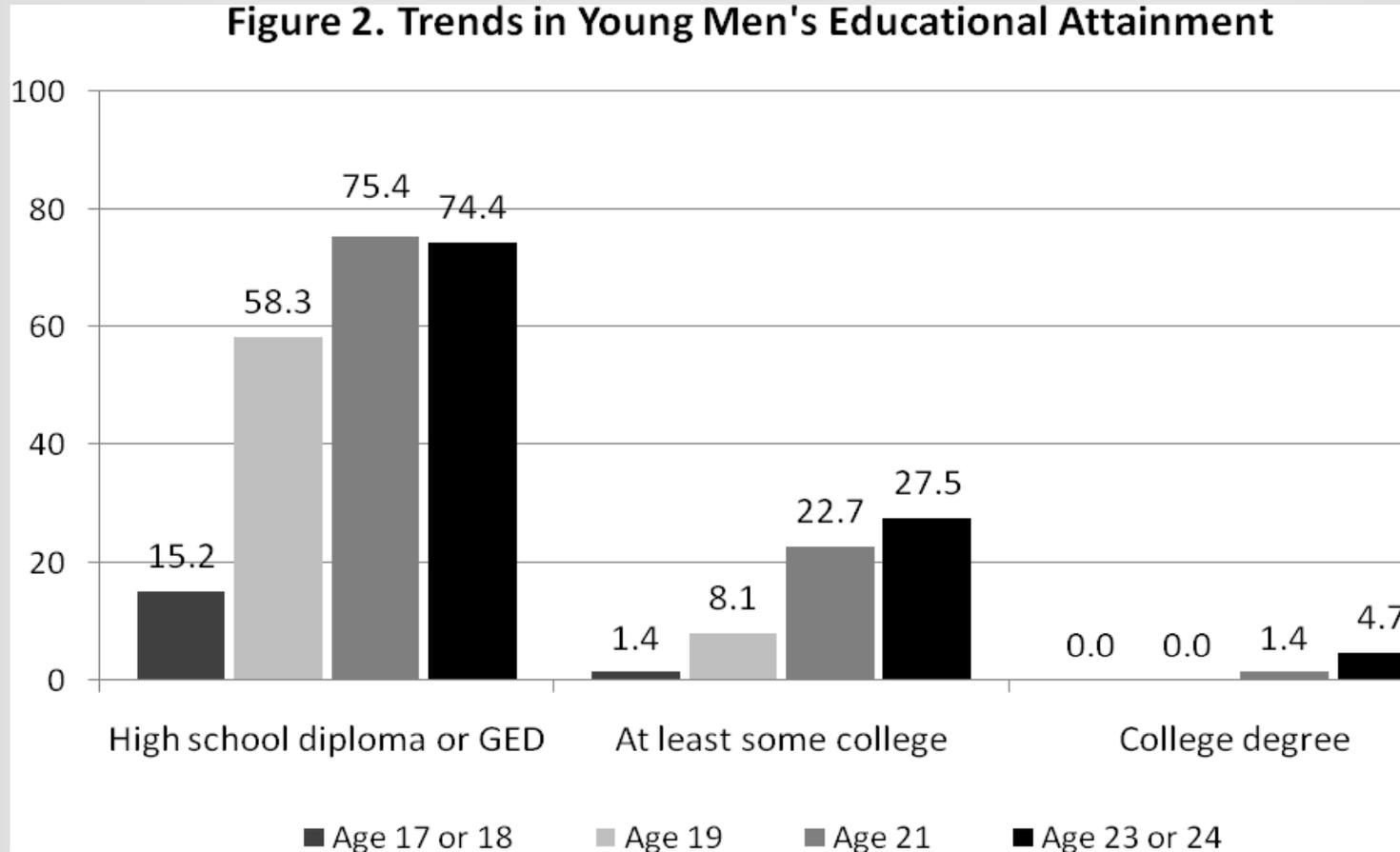
Wave	Year	Number Interviewed	Response Rate	Age at interview
1	'02 – '03	732	96%	17 – 18
2	'04	603	82%	19
3	'06	591	81%	21
4	'08	602	82%	23-24
5	'10 – '11	594+	82%	26

# Young Women's Educational Attainment

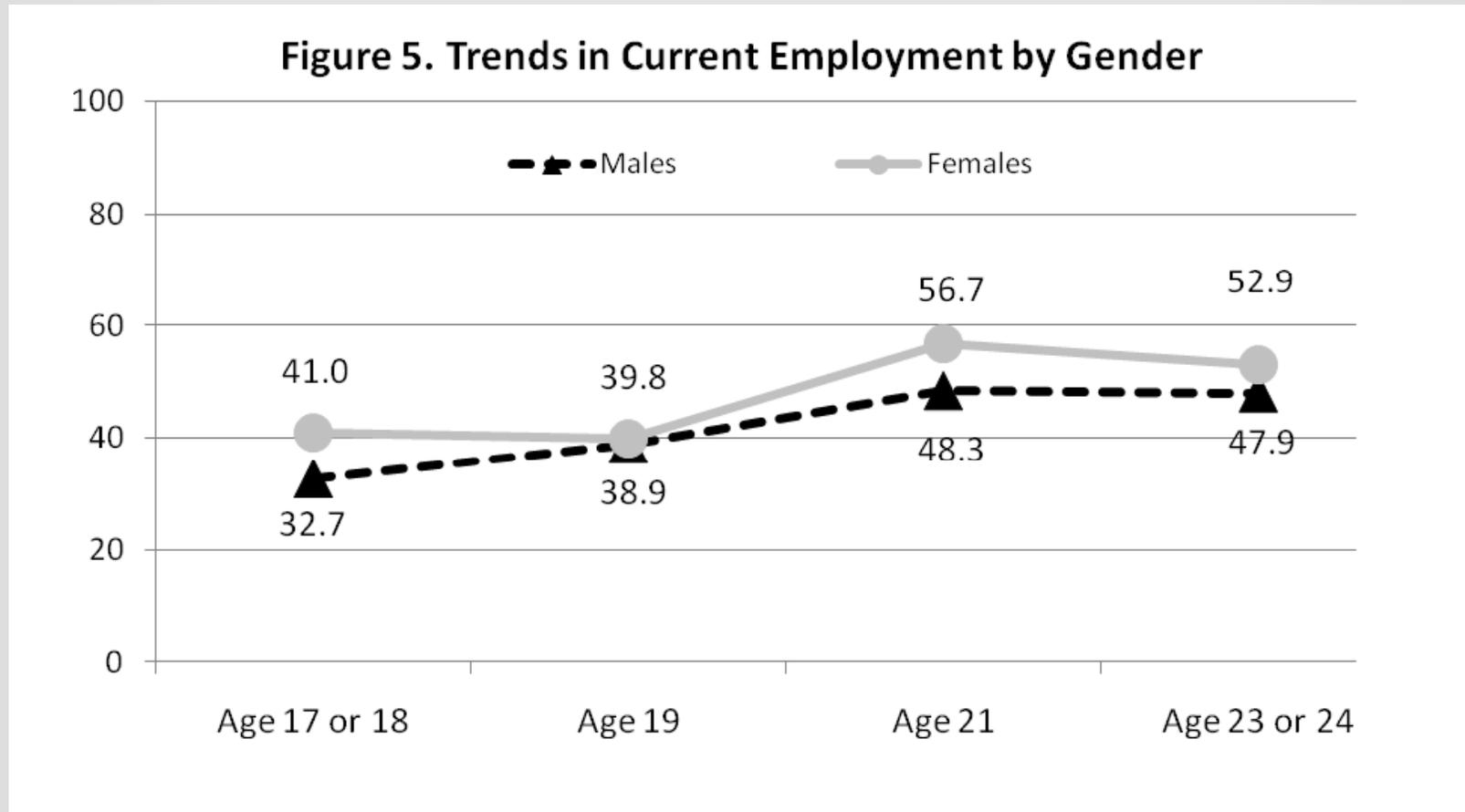


# Young Men's Educational Attainment

Figure 2. Trends in Young Men's Educational Attainment



# Young Men's and Young Women's Employment

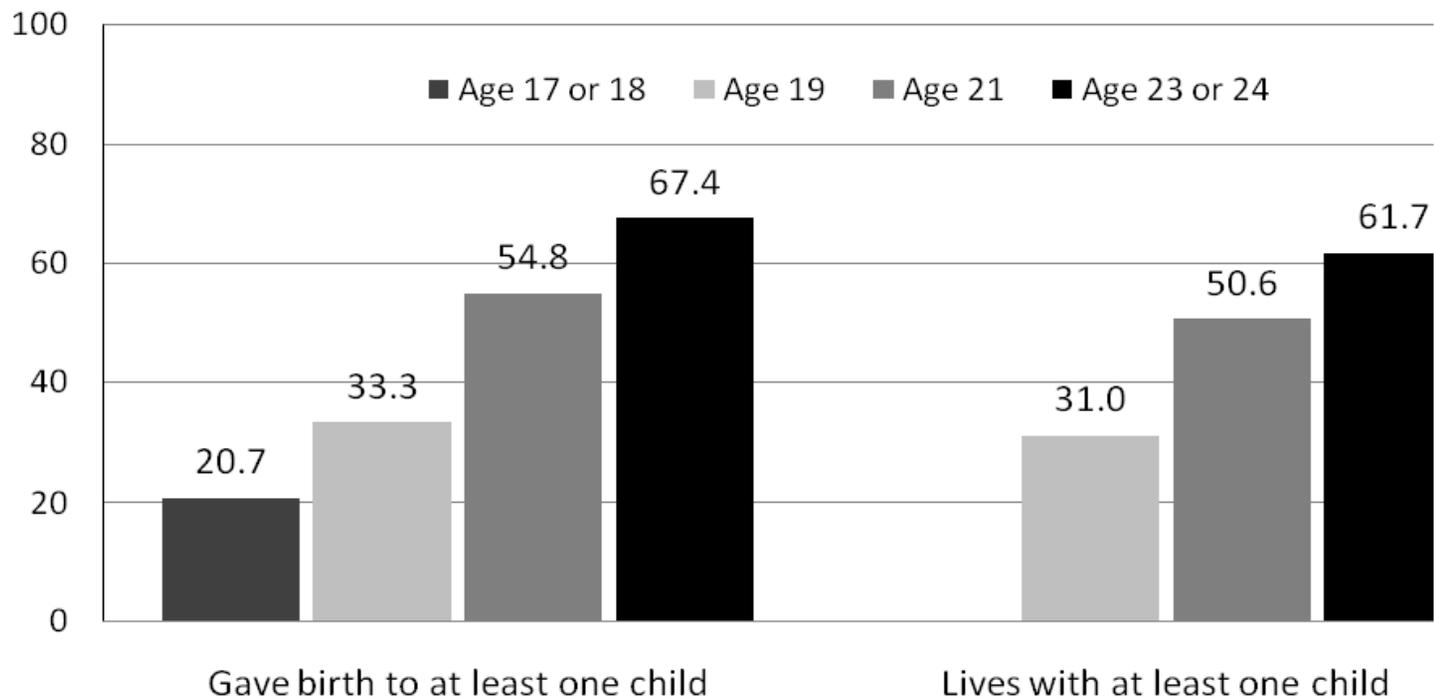


73% employed during year; mean earnings among employed = \$12,064

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# Parenthood Among Young Women

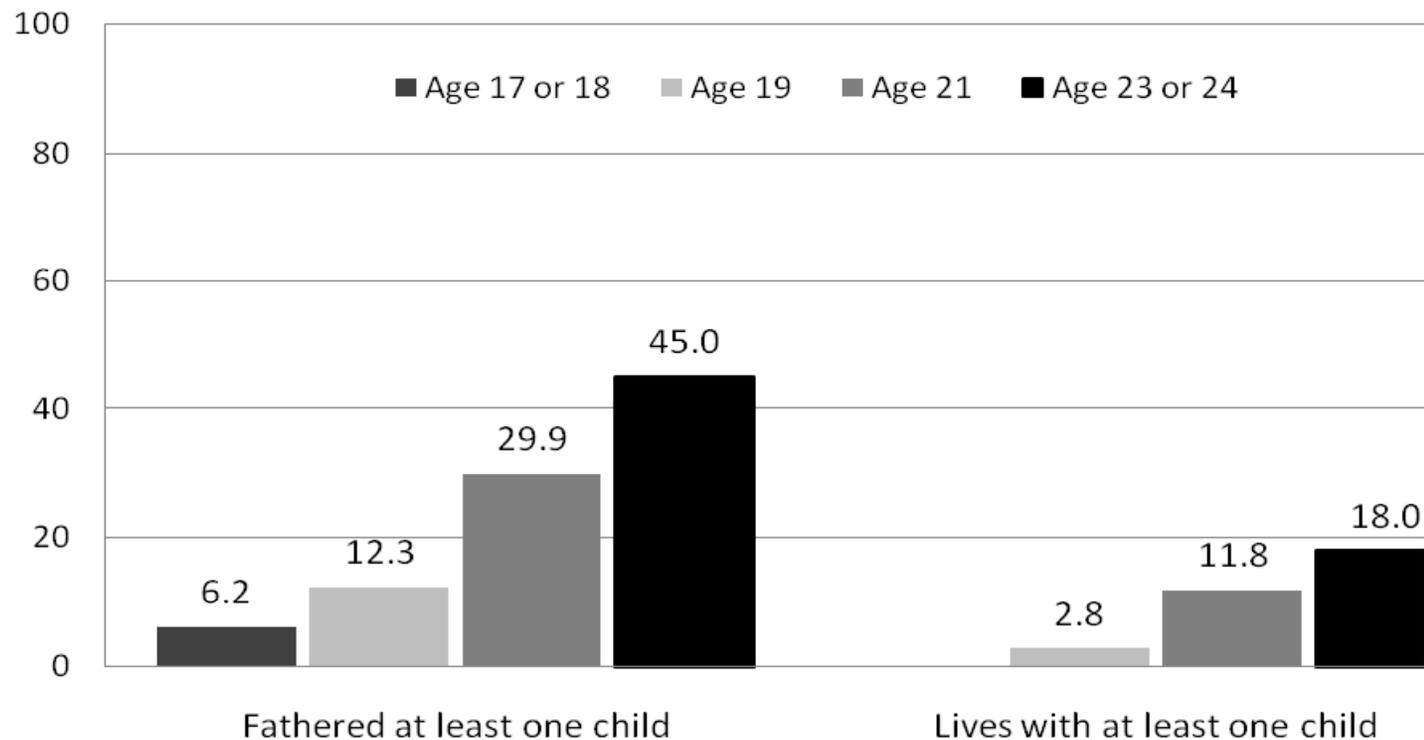
Figure 8. Trends in Parenthood among Females



17% of women with children have a nonresident child

# Parenthood Among Young Men

Figure 9. Trends in Parenthood among Males



61% of men with children have a nonresident child

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# Young Women's Criminal Justice System Involvement

Figure 10. Trends in Criminal Justice Involvement among Females

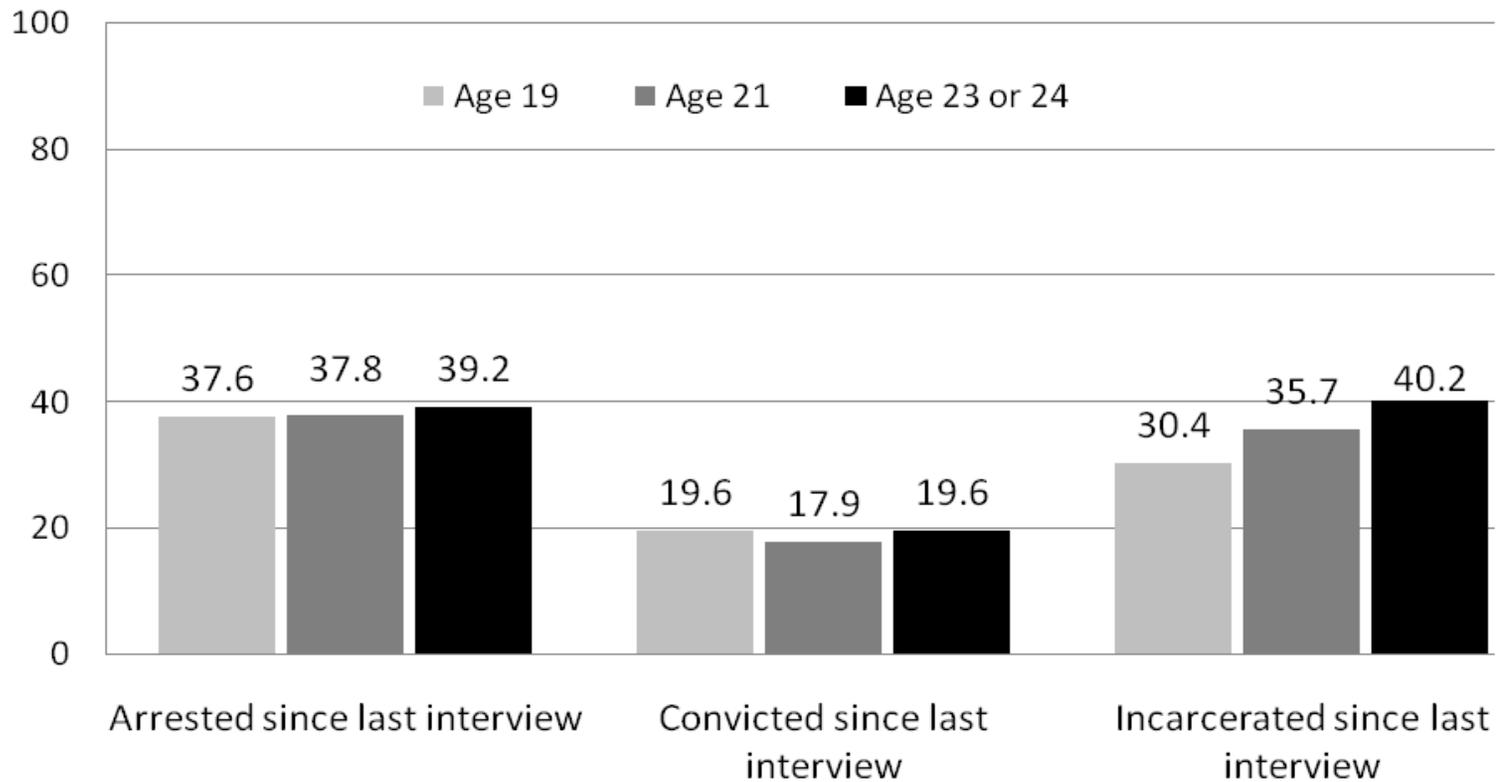


Arrested since age 18 = 39%

Convicted since age 18 = 18%

# Young Men's Criminal Justice System Involvement

Figure 11. Trends in Criminal Justice Involvement among Males



Arrested since age 18 = 64%    Convicted since age 18 = 43%

# Summary of What We Know About Early Adult Outcomes Post Chafee

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Outcomes are relatively poor across a variety of domains

Trends are generally problematic:

- Declining engagement in education
- Gradually increasing but poor engagement in the workforce
- Many non-resident children
- Troubling levels of justice system involvement continuing through early 20s

Outcomes vary by gender; males fare worse

Despite a sobering picture overall, many young people leaving the care of the state do well

Relational permanence matters: Family; adult mentors; adopted family

Overall outcomes obscure important between-jurisdiction differences; policy does matter!

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# Summary of Findings on Extending Care

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Strong evidence that allowing foster youth who approach the age of majority in care to remain in care until age 21 increases their likelihood of pursuing post-secondary education, though few youth continue through to a degree

More qualified evidence that allowing foster youth to remain in care until age 21 is associated with increased earnings and delayed pregnancy

Extending care appears to delay homelessness, but not prevent it

Allowing foster youth to remain in care until age 21 also increases the likelihood of receiving independent living services after age 19

# Subgroups Provide More Clarity for Policy and Practice

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Current study using key transition indicators to classify youth at age 23-24 (n = 584) using LCA:

- living arrangement
- educational attainment
- employment
- resident and non-resident children
- convicted of a crime

Model fit statistics indicate a four-group model best fits the data: Accelerated Adults 36%; Struggling Parents 25%; Emerging Adults 21%; Troubled and Troubling 18%

# Group 1: Accelerated Adults (36%)

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Most are female (63%)

Most likely to live on their own in fairly stable situation

Almost all (98%) have a HS degree or more; 52% have some college

Most likely to be currently employed

Nearly half (46%) has resident children

Relatively low rate of conviction (14%)

Group does not stand out on other indicators of functioning (e.g., social support; health; MH and AODA problems; economic hardships)

**Summary: This group is most likely to have made key transitions relatively early in adulthood...84% are “connected”**

## Group 2: Struggling Parents (25%)

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Most are female (74%)

Nearly all (91%) have resident children and relatively few (8%) have a non-resident child; they parent 55% of all resident children

About equal numbers have their own place (46%) or live with relatives/friends (44%)

Most likely not to have a HS degree (44%) and only 3% have any college

Only one-quarter currently employed

Lower than average rate of conviction (14%)

Also...least likely group to be currently in school, most likely to be married or cohabiting, second lowest reported social support, and most likely to experience economic hardship

**Summary: This group's experience is dominated by their parenting, under difficult circumstances...38% are "connected"**

## Group 3: Emerging Adults (21%)

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Slightly over half are male (55%)

All are living with friends, relatives, or in other settings that are not their own

Vast majority (91%) has finished high school and they have the second highest rate of having at least some college (46%)

They have the second highest rate of current employment (63%)

They are least likely to have children (27%) and over two-thirds of those with children have non-resident children

Lowest rate of conviction (6%)

Also, they are least likely to have ever been married, to have ever dropped out of high school, and to have ever been homeless

**Summary: This group most resembles Arnett's (2000) "emerging adults" in that they are delaying some transition markers (e.g., living on their own; finishing school; having children) while generally avoiding hardship...68% are "connected"**

# Group 4: Troubled and Troubling (18%)

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Vast majority is male (83%)

Are most likely to be incarcerated, otherwise institutionalized, homeless, and/or to have experienced high residential mobility (72%)

Two-fifths have not finished high school or GED and only 11% have any college

Least likely to be currently employed (10%)

48% have non-resident children and none have resident children; they account for 41% of all non-resident children

82% report a criminal conviction since age 18

Also, least likely to have felt prepared to be on their own at exit from care, most likely to report mental health and/or substance use problems, lowest reported levels of social support, highest rate of victimization, four-times higher rate of non-violent crime and doubled rate of violent crime compared to other groups

**Summary: This group experiences a wide range of psychosocial problems and poses challenges to the community...30% are “connected”**

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**What about “permanency” for  
foster youth in transition?**

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# Connections with Family of Origin at Age 21

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<u>Contact at least once a month</u>	<u>%</u>
Mother	61%
Father	31%
Grandparent(s)	46%
Sibling(s)	78%

- Nearly one-quarter were living with a birth parent or other adult relative at the time of the interview ; over half had done so at some point since leaving care
- Three-quarters were close to at least one adult relative

## Other indicators of adult support...and potential for permanency

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- 9 percent had been adopted at some point; another 20 percent wished they had been adopted
- 5.6% were living with a former non-relative foster parent at age 21, but more (7.1%) were in jail or prison
- 60% reported having had an adult mentor, with 72% being very or quite close to the mentor...almost 9 in 10 were “informal” mentors

# Implications for Informing Policy and Practice Intended to Assist Foster Youth Transitions

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Adult outcomes for youth aging out of foster care are poor; regardless of whether foster care placement contributed to these outcomes, they remain unacceptable

Emphasizing permanency for adolescents in care is complicated...

- Most older adolescents in care entered care as adolescents; most have long-term connections to their family or origin
- Nevertheless, about one-third have few or no connections to responsible adults, and many would like to be adopted
- With few exceptions, courts and caseworkers should pay *close and ongoing* attention to foster youths' connections with family, and other adults, regardless of a youth's case plan goal

# Implications for Informing Policy and Practice Intended to Assist Foster Youth Transitions

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Distinct subgroups at the age of majority and during early adulthood suggest the need for targeted policy and practice:

- A large group mainly needs support making the transition to higher education and employment providing a living wage
- About one-fifth needs significant intervention, perhaps for many years, with a range of psychosocial problems.
- Parents as a distinct group arguably need distinct kinds of support
- Greater focus on well-being while youth are in care could help prevent poor outcomes; focusing on legal permanency is crucial, but is not sufficient
- **ALL** of these young people need the support of caring adults!!!

For more info:

<http://www.chapinhall.org/research/report/midwest-evaluation-adult-functioning-former-foster-youth>

[http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/abuse\\_neglect/chafee/index.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/abuse_neglect/chafee/index.html)

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