

THE EXPERIENCES OF FOSTER YOUTH DURING COVID-19

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This study examined the experiences of 18-23 year old youth in foster care and aged out of foster care during the COVID19 crisis in April 2020 (n=281) living in 32 states (+Washington, DC). Youth aging out of foster care are a vulnerable population, and with the COVID19 crisis sweeping across the nation, these young people are among those bearing the heaviest burden of its economic and social consequences. Our goal was to gain a clearer picture of these burdens by deploying a national online survey over one month of the crisis. Findings include:

Housing & Basic Needs

- 7% reported couch-surfing or being homeless as a result of COVID19
- 55% reported being food insecure as a result of COVID19, including only having access to "some" food, "very low" access to food, or being unable to access food

Finances

- 48% reported COVID19 having a negative impact on their employment, including being laid off, no longer having reliable gig work, or having hours/income being severely cut
- 32% reported applying for some form of public assistance that they did not already have during COVID19, including 14% applying for unemployment

Education

- 31% lost access to academic or post-secondary educational supports due to COVID19
- 21% did not have access to personal support to ensure that their educational goals were not disrupted
- 22% reported that their school/institution did not do a good job communicating with them during COVID19

"I am afraid that if the stay-at-home orders are still in place when I turn 21, then I will age out of the system and lose all of my support, especially financially."

~ Young adult in foster care

Physical and Mental Health

- 52% reported COVID19 having a negative impact on their health/mental health care

Personal Connections

- For those in foster care, 14% reported that their caseworker has not done a good job communicating with them during the crisis
- 59% reported having reliable access to a computer during the crisis

"I get very depressed not being able to visit my siblings who are in a separate foster home. I worry about them and their safety ALL day."

~ Young adult in foster care

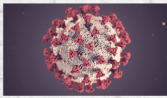
Our findings suggest that young people in foster care and those aged out of care are experiencing substantial challenges during COVID19, related to all aspects of their safety and well-being. This study is the first to take stock of the burden that this already highly marginalized population is bearing in light of the COVID19 crisis. We offer the following initial recommendations:

1. Ensure that eligible youth are **housed and connected to foster care services**, including instituting a moratorium on discharging youth from care, suspending school and work requirements for extended care, and expediting processes for youth to re-enter care.
2. Professionals and other caring adults should **check in on youth in foster care** and young adults who have recently exited foster care as frequently as possible during this time, providing emotional support and reliable information.
3. **Distribute concrete resources** directly to youth to alleviate financial or interpersonal stressors, including gift cards, bags of groceries, laptops, or WiFi hotspots.

DURING THE COVID19 PANDEMIC:

43% OF YOUNG ADULTS REPORTED COVID19 HAVING A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THEIR LIVING SITUATION

(INCLUDING BEING FORCED TO LEAVE THEIR LIVING SITUATION, FEARING BEING FORCED TO LEAVE, OR EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS/HOUSING INSTABILITY)

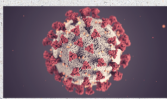


The Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice & Research

In a national study of 18-23 year olds who are currently in foster care or aged out of foster care

DURING THE COVID19 PANDEMIC:

72% OF YOUNG ADULTS REPORTED A MONEY SITUATION THAT WOULD BE STABLE FOR NO MORE THAN ONE MONTH (21% ARE IN FINANCIAL CRISIS)

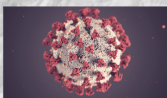


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DURING THE COVID19 PANDEMIC:

67% OF YOUNG ADULTS REPORTED THAT COVID19 IS HAVING A MAJOR IMPACT ON THEIR EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS OR ATTAINMENT

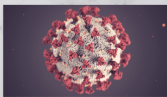


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DURING THE COVID19 PANDEMIC:

56% OF YOUNG ADULTS REPORTED CLINICALLY-SIGNIFICANT LEVELS OF DEPRESSION OR ANXIETY

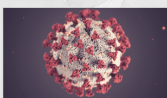


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DURING THE COVID19 PANDEMIC:

33% OF YOUNG ADULTS REPORTED WISHING THEY HAD CONNECTIONS WITH MORE PEOPLE TO HELP THEM (OR FEEL THEY WERE ON THEIR OWN OR ALMOST ENTIRELY ON THEIR OWN DURING THE CRISIS)



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