



TAY-Hub

Transition-Age Youth
Research & Evaluation Hub



CCWIP

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Indicators Project

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TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH IN KINSHIP CARE:

TRENDS OVER TIME FROM THE CalYOUTH STUDY | SEPT. 2022

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Disclaimer

The study was performed with the permission of the California Department of Social Services; however, the opinions and conclusions are solely those of the authors and do not represent the policy or opinions of the collaborating agencies or any California Department.

Project Overview

The Transition-Age Youth Research and Evaluation Hub (TAY-Hub) is a university-based research collaborative housed within the California Child Welfare Indicators Project at the University of California, Berkeley. The TAY-Hub specializes in research related to policies and practices affecting transition-age youth by monitoring outcomes and through applied research. This work is grounded in engagement with members of the child welfare services community, including those with lived experience of foster care.

Introduction

Kinship care is a fundamental pillar of the U.S. child welfare system. Defined as a caregiving arrangement in which a relative or family friend assumes the primary care of a child, approximately one in three children and youth in foster care are placed with a relative (U.S. Department of Human and Health Services, 2021). Kinship care has been linked to a host of benefits for youth including higher placement stability, better mental health, and greater academic achievement (Nadorff et al., 2021; Webster et al., 2000; Winokur et al., 2018). Moreover, kinship care promotes the maintenance of familial and cultural connections that can bolster resilience (Barrio & Hughes, 2000; Brown et al., 2002). Consequently, researchers, policy makers, and practitioners alike have engaged in efforts to improve services that support kinship families (Beltran & Epstein, 2013; Lin, 2014; Testa & Kelly, 2020).

Despite the scholarly and programmatic investment in kinship care, little is known about the experience of transition-age youth (TAY) in foster care who live with relatives, be they kinship caregivers, birth or stepparents, siblings, partners, or non-relative extended family members. TAY in foster care are more likely than younger children in care to experience housing instability, relational strain with friends and family, and mental health concerns (Carnochan et al., 2013; Leathers et al., 2006). And although kinship care is associated with resilience that might ease these stressors (Gómez, 2021), many kinship families also experience material hardship, familial tensions, and trouble navigating resources offered through the child welfare system (Hong et al., 2011; Koh et al., 2022; Lin, 2014). Understanding TAY's relations with relatives as they transition out of foster care and into early adulthood can reveal opportunities for policies and programs that address the needs of TAY and their families (Parolini et al., 2018).

The purpose of this brief is to summarize data about TAY's connections with relatives collected across the four waves of the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood (CalYOUTH) Study and inform the development of policies and programs targeting TAY, their kinship caregivers, and other relatives that play a fundamental role during TAY's transition into adulthood. CalYOUTH is a longitudinal evaluation of California's extended foster care program authorized by the California Fostering Connections to Success Act (AB 12). Given a substantial proportion of all U.S. young adults in care live in California (Courtney, 2022), these data have the potential to inform policy and programmatic efforts that support TAY throughout the United States.

Methods

Data for this brief were extracted from four reports detailing the findings of the CalYOUTH Study (Courtney et al., 2014; 2016; 2018; 2020). The CalYOUTH Study followed youth through age 23 using in-person interviews at ages 16-17 (Wave 1 in 2013), 19 (Wave 2 in 2015), 21 (Wave 3 in 2017), and 23 (Wave 4 in 2019). Youth were eligible to participate if at Wave 1 they were between the ages of 16.75 and 17.75 in 2013 and had been placed in California child welfare supervised foster care for at least six months. Of the 2,583 youths that were eligible, a stratified sampling method yielded 763 potential participants. Of these, 727 youths completed the survey (95.3% response rate). Sample weights were created to adjust for the sampling strategy and nonresponse rate, which allows participants' responses to be representative of foster youth who met CalYOUTH criteria at Wave 1 (see Courtney et al., 2014 for more information). Correspondingly, the tables and figures in this brief are reported using unweighted frequencies and survey weighted percentages. Study approval was obtained from the University of Chicago Institutional Review Board and the California Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects. The survey was also approved by the Data Protection Committee of the California Department of Social Services.

Findings

CalYOUTH provides information about the following kinds of connections between youths and their kin during the transition to adulthood:

- whether a youth was living in the home of a relative at the time of the interview;
- which members of a youth's household at the time of interviews at ages 19, 21, and 23 were relatives;
- among those who moved between interviews, whether they had lived in the home of a relative during that period; and
- which individuals who were members of a youth's social support network at each interview were relatives.

Living Arrangements

At each interview youths were asked about the nature of their living arrangement. Table 1 shows the number and percent of TAY living with the following relatives: birth/stepparents, spouses/partners, other relatives, or non-relative extended family members. At age 17, they were asked about the kind of foster care arrangement they were living in (e.g., foster home with an adult relative, foster home without relatives, group home, independent living); approximately 18.2% of TAY lived in kinship foster care and almost one-third of the youths reported having ever been placed in a relative's care by age 17. During subsequent interviews, youths were asked about a wider range of living arrangements that included arrangements not available in foster care (e.g., living in the home of a birth parent, one's own place, in the home of a friend, in the home of a spouse or partner). The proportion of TAY living with relatives peaked at age 19, with 35.8% of youth reporting that they lived with a birth/stepparent, spouse/partner, another relative, or a non-relative extended family member. After this the percentage of youths living with these relatives decreased, with 32% and 28.3% of youth reporting that they lived with any of these relatives at ages 21 and 23, respectively.

Table 1

Percent of youth living in the home of a relative*
at the time of each interview

	<i>N</i>	<i>n</i>	%
Age 17	727	125	18.2
Age 19	611	199	35.8
Age 21	616	180	32.0
Age 23	622	183	28.3

Notes. *Except for age 17, relatives included parents, spouses/partners, other relatives, and non-relative extended family members. Because youth were in care at age 17, numbers represent the proportion of youths living with a kinship caregiver. Unweighted frequencies and weighted percentages; N= total sample; n= number of youths living with a relative.

Changes in living situations in the approximately two years between interviews were common, with 76% to 82% of youths reporting at least one change in living arrangement at each follow-up interview (Ages 19, 21, & 23). Among youths who experienced a change in living arrangement, one-fifth to one-half reported having lived in the home of a birth/stepparent since their last interview and over one-third reported having lived in the home of another relative. About one-quarter of the youths reported having lived with a spouse or partner at age 19 and over one-third reported having done so at ages 21 and 23.

Table 2

Among TAY no longer living in the same place,
type of place(s) lived

	Age 19 (n= 404)		Age 21 (n= 506)		Age 23 (n= 486)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Own place (house/apartment/trailer)	233	54.6	350	68.9	349	73
Own room in a motel, hotel, or single room occupancy	80	21.1	163	33.5	170	36.2
Home of birth parent or stepparent	80	19.2	104	20.4	125	25.2
Home of another relative	138	36.4	184	36.4	175	35.9
Home of a former foster parent	65	17.4	67	15.4	--	--
Home of a foster parent	93	23.2	57	12.2	35	6.7
Home of a spouse/partner	110	23.8	197	37.3	196	37.9
Home of a friend	139	32.4	187	36.1	185	36.7
Transitional Housing Placement	--	--	170	34.2	102	20.8

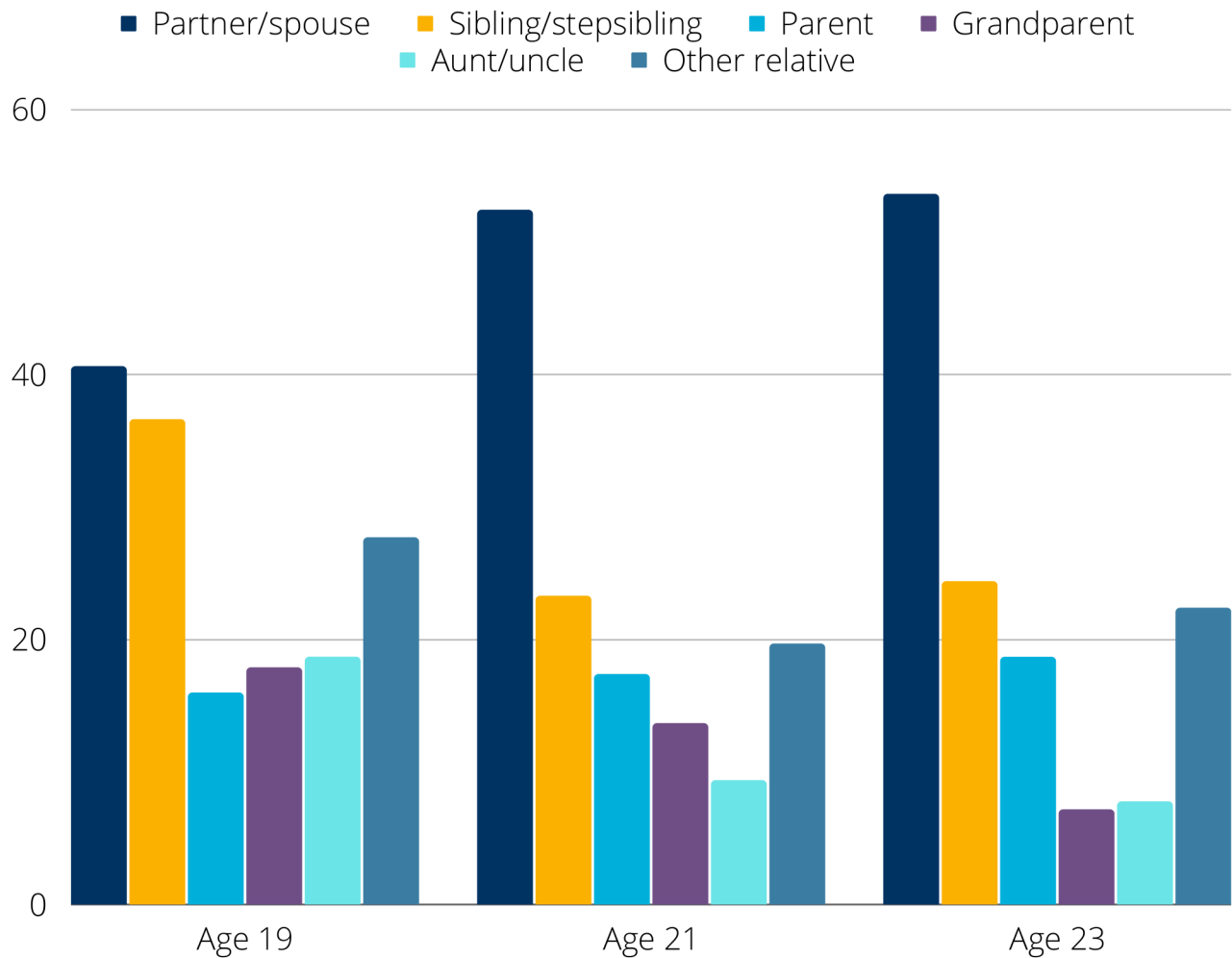
Notes. Unweighted frequencies and weighted percentages. Relative categories are presented in bold typeface. Youths could select more than one living arrangement. Transitional Housing Placement was not an option during the first follow-up interview. "Home of a former foster parent" was not a response option during the final follow-up interview.

Kin Youths Lived with at the Time of the Interview

During the interviews at ages 19, 21, and 23, youths were asked to identify the relationship they had with each member of the household they were living in at that time. While partners/spouses became increasingly common cohabitants as youth grew older, a substantial proportion of TAY reported living with siblings or stepsiblings across all three follow-up interviews (Figure 1). At age nineteen, 36.6% of youth reported living with a sibling or stepsibling while more than one in five reported living with a sibling/step sibling at ages 21 and 23.

Figure 1

Among youth living with relatives, youth's relation to these individuals



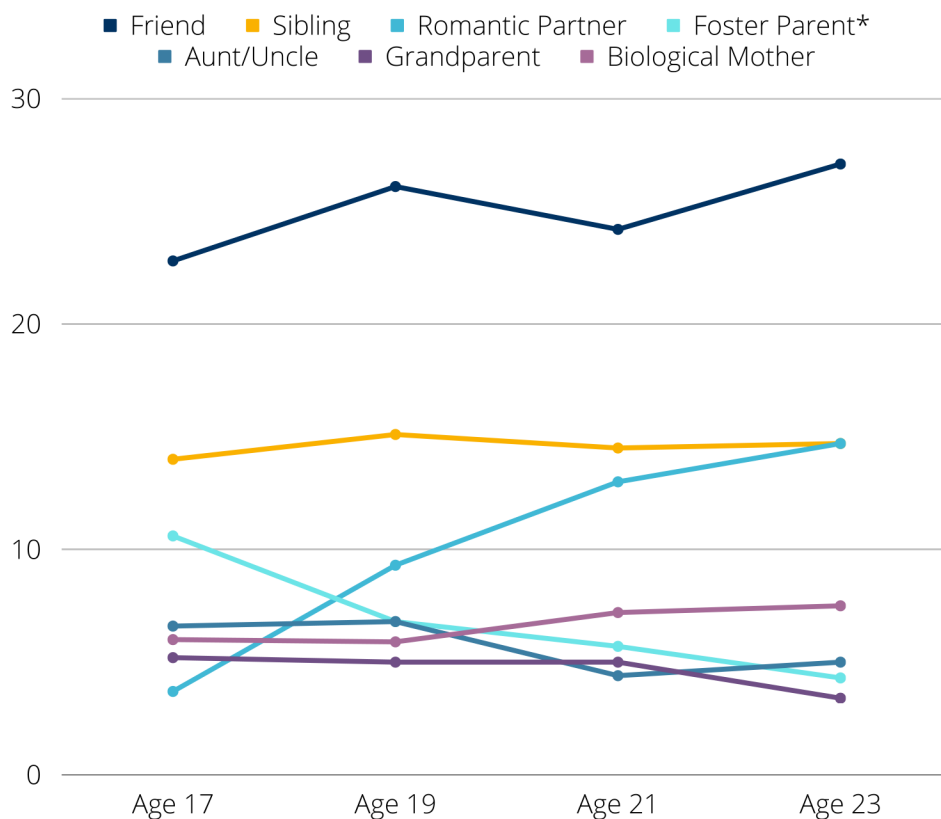
Notes. Other relative includes parent's spouse/partner, father- or mother-in-law, cousin, another relative sibling's partner/spouse, and nonrelative extended family member. Children and nieces/nephews are excluded from this graph.

Kin Youths Identified as Sources of Social Support

Youth were also asked a series of questions about individuals they could rely on for social support using an adaptation of the Social Support Network Questionnaire (Gee and Rhodes, 2007).¹ Across all four interviews, siblings were the second most frequent source of social support (behind friends), representing 14-15% of all individuals the youths named as supports (Figure 2). TAY did not frequently report grandparents or aunts/uncles as sources of social support, with approximately 5% of TAY reporting either type of relative as a source of social support.

Figure 2

Youth's relationship to nominated social supports



Notes. Graph shows only the most frequently endorsed social supports;
*Represents former foster parents at Age 21 and 23 follow-up interviews.

¹The section of the survey on social support began with the following introduction: "I would like to spend the next few minutes talking with you about the people who are important to you in a number of different ways. To begin with, I am going to ask about the people you turn to for different kinds of help and support. These people might be friends, family members, ministers, teachers, mentors, caseworkers, or anyone else you know."

Limitations

This study's findings should be considered alongside its limitations. Although over 85% of youth who participated in the baseline interview also completed Wave 4 interview, the extent to which their survey responses differ from those who did not participate is unknown. Participants and nonparticipants were similar in characteristics across waves, but they did differ in terms of gender (participation rates were higher for females than males) and by their foster care status at age 21 (participation rates were higher for youth who were in care on their 21st birthday than for youth who had left care). The findings shown in this report are statewide averages, which likely masks differences among counties. Similarly, these data may not be representative of youth in other states due to variations in youth characteristics and child welfare policies and practice.

Given the scope of the survey tool, the categorization of TAY's living situations is ultimately broad and does not allow us to assess household composition, family roles, and circumstances that may shape TAY's experience of residing with relatives. For example, youth living with siblings may be in any number of living arrangements, including being placed with a sibling in a foster/kinship caregiver's home, living with an older sibling who is/was a caregiver, or caring for a younger sibling who is/was in foster care. Furthermore, social support data are presented across the entire sample, meaning we cannot determine how social support varies by the type or length of time in kinship care. Additional research is needed to examine whether social support differs between TAY who live (or have ever lived) in kinship care and those who live in non-relative foster care.

Summary and Implications

Youth reside with relatives throughout their transition into early adulthood

Our findings suggest relatives play a notable role in TAY's lives as they enter adulthood. Approximately 18.2% of TAY reported living with a kinship caregiver at age 17, which is comparable to the 21.6% of 16- to 17-year-old youth in formal kinship care throughout the state of California on July 1, 2013 (the approximate midpoint of Wave 1 data collection; Webster et al., 2022).

Moreover, the proportion of TAY living with relatives peaked at age 19, with 35.8% percent reporting they lived with birth/stepparents, partners, or another relative. Among TAY that reported a change in living arrangements at each follow-up interview, many reported living with some sort of family member, be they birth/stepparents, a partner, or another relative. These data suggest that, at the very least, many youths live with relatives as they navigate challenges associated with housing during early adulthood. This highlights an opportunity for policies and practices that both help youth identify viable living arrangements with relatives and support relatives that take in youth transitioning out of care.



Kinship navigator programs may be particularly well-positioned to meet these needs considering many of them offer support groups and family-wide programming that allow kinship families to share instrumental and emotional resources.

TAY may need specialized supports to reduce placement instability in kinship care

While 18.2% of youth reported living with a kinship caregiver at age 17, one-third reported having ever been placed in relative care, suggesting youth experienced placement instability in previous kinship care arrangements. While kinship care is generally believed to promote placement stability (Osborne et al., 2021; Winokur et al., 2018), evidence also indicates placement disruption becomes more likely during adolescence as the onset of emotional and behavioral problems, engagement in risky behavior, and assertions of independence can cause tension between caregivers and adolescents in care (Carnochan et al., 2013; Leathers, 2006). Few resources are designed to support TAY or their caregivers (Day et al., 2022), which in turn may make it more likely for TAY to experience placement instability in kinship care.

Part I of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)² provides an opportunity to address this resource gap for TAY who are under age 18. Considering about 17% of all youth in California’s foster care system are between the ages of 15 and 17 (Webster et al., 2022), Title IV-E dollars could be leveraged to benefit TAY under age 18 who are eligible for prevention and family services under Part 1 of the FFPSA. This includes TAY who are (1) identified as “candidates” for foster care, (2) at imminent risk of entering foster care but can remain safely in a kinship placement, or (3) in kin guardianship arrangements that are at risk of disruption or dissolution. Therefore, youth at risk of placement who are living with kin or kin guardians could receive evidence-based mental health and/or substance abuse treatment services to help them remain in the care of their relatives. Similarly, kinship caregivers and the adolescents living in their home could receive in-home parent skill-based programs to help prevent the removal and placement of the youth.




Recently, the California state legislature appropriated \$222.4 million for the Family First Prevention Services Program State Block Grant (California Department of Social Services, 2021). Available through the 2024 fiscal year, local Title IV-E agencies could use these funds to develop and evaluate new programs or expand currently available services targeting TAY and kin who are eligible for services under Part I of the FFPSA.

Although TAY over age 18 do not qualify for Title IV-E services under Part 1 of the FFPSA, there are other services and programs that can support older TAY and their kin. Part V of the FFPSA bolstered the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood to allow states to (1) begin transition to adulthood services at age 14, (2) extend the provision of Chafee Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) until age 26, and (3) provide Chafee aftercare services to young adults until age 23 (Pokempner, 2019). California has since extended eligibility for ETVs to age 26. Beyond the FFPSA, local agencies can bolster the capacity of kinship navigator programs to meet the needs of older TAY and their kin. Since 2018, Congress has allocated \$20 million each year for the development, enhancement, and/or evaluation of kinship navigator programs (Beltran, 2019; H.R. 2471, 2021-2022).


² For more information about the Family First Prevention Services Act, please see <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1892/text>.

In addition to extending the reach of kinship navigator programs, these funds are explicitly designed to help programs meet the evidence standard required for Title IV-E reimbursement under the FFPSA.

 Considering the widespread use of kinship care and kin guardianship in the state, California should lead the way in building the evidence base for kinship navigator programs.


Siblings play a central role in the lives of young people transitioning out of care.

Most kinship care programs, policies, and research are directed toward grandparent-led families. While grandparents consist of the majority of kinship caregivers (Berrick et al., 1994; Strozier & Krisman, 2007), our data suggest a substantial proportion youth maintain close relationships to their siblings and stepsiblings throughout their transition out of care. Between one-fifth and one-third of youth living with relatives at each follow-up interview reported cohabitating with a sibling. Furthermore, siblings were the second most common source of social support across all time points.

 Taken together, these findings suggest TAY may benefit from policies and practices that (1) support the relationships between youth transitioning out of care and their siblings, (2) include siblings as viable living arrangements and/or placements for extended foster care when appropriate, and (3) connect sibling-led kinship families with other sources of instrumental and emotional support such as KIN-GAP and kinship navigator programs.

Research Implications

These findings also have implications for researchers looking to support the efforts of policy makers and practitioners working with TAY living with kinship caregivers and other relatives. We know little about the circumstances behind placement disruption among TAY living in kinship care, particularly among TAY 18 or older. Similarly, additional research is needed to ascertain whether relatives have access to the needed instrumental and emotional resources to support and sustain TAY placements and living arrangements.



Existing kinship literature also does not adequately speak to kinship families in which TAY are living with siblings. Particularly in families where siblings are serving as caregivers for TAY (or vice versa), little is known about youth’s motivations to live with siblings, the stability of these living arrangements, and whether these families have equitable access to KIN-GAP, extended foster care, and other critical supports. Finally, FFPSA Part I funding is tied to the evidence base that a program has established, and we have precious few behavioral health programs for TAY in care that are supported or well-supported, and few parent skill programs have been evaluated with kin caregivers. California should commit to building the evidence base for mental health, substance abuse, and parenting programs that serve older adolescents living with kin or for whom kinship placement supported by evidence-based interventions could prevent placement in foster care. Research that answers these questions can help practitioners and policymakers create an array of kinship supports that more accurately reflects the composition, dynamics, and lived experiences of TAY and their relatives.

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Related Publications

Courtney, M.E., Charles, P., Okpych, N. J., Napolitano, L., & Halsted, K. (2014). Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH): Conditions of foster youth at age 17. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

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