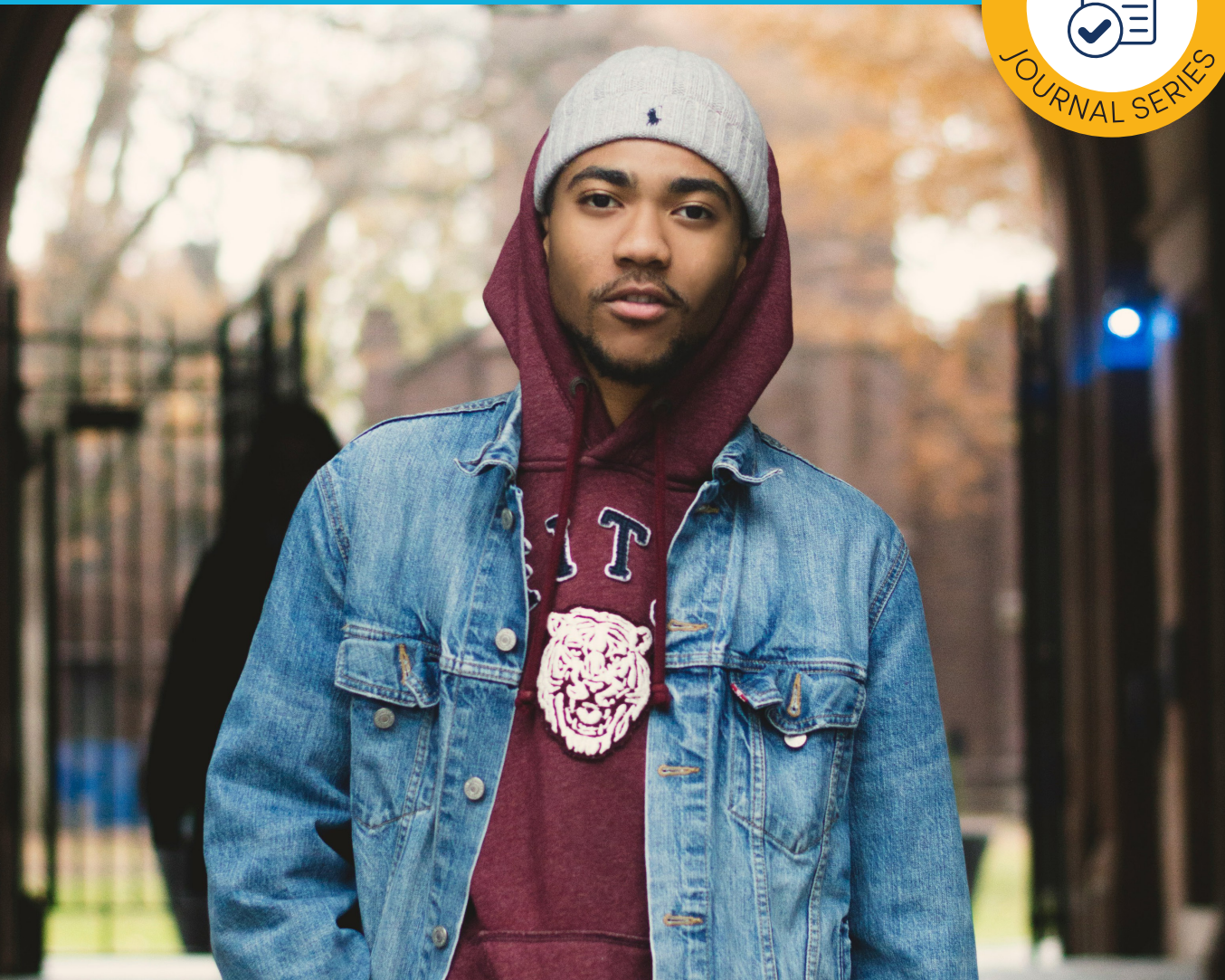




TAY-Hub

Transition-Age Youth
Research & Evaluation Hub

Residential Mobility for Young Adults in Extended Foster Care



FEBRUARY 2025

IVY HAMMOND, PhD
KEUNHYE PARK, PhD
ANDREA LANE EASTMAN, PhD

MARK E. COURTNEY, PhD
ASTHA AGARWAL, MA

Significance

Research has consistently shown that placement stability—the longevity and consistency of housing placements—is tied to the well-being of children and adolescents in foster care. Higher residential mobility—the number of times a dependent minor moves from one home or facility to another while in foster care—is known to affect developmental processes adversely. In general, older children tend to have greater placement mobility. Foster care characteristics and some sociodemographic characteristics have also been linked to higher levels of mobility.

However, there has been little examination of residential mobility and factors that predict mobility among young adults living in extended foster care (EFC). Among adults in the general population, researchers have also suggested that socioeconomic scarcity may function as a barrier to upward residential mobility. Given that residential mobility has been tied to well-being for children and adolescents in foster care and adults in the general population, investigating mobility and its predictors for young adults living in EFC is of great significance for child welfare policymakers and practitioners alike.

Study Methods

This study used statewide administrative child protective services records from California’s Child Welfare Services Case Management System, which were accessed through a long-standing research partnership between the California Department of Social Services and the California Child Welfare Indicators Project. The final population for this study featured 10,517 young adults who had lived in EFC for at least 1 week after their 18th birthday and who turned 21 between 2019 and 2021.

Residential mobility was measured by the rate of placement moves per year. For transition-age youth (TAY) who lived in multiple EFC placement types, their main (or modal) residence type was considered as their placement type in this analysis. See the full study for the percentage of EFC duration spent in the modal placement by placement setting and duration of stays in EFC by placement setting. Negative binomial regressions were used to evaluate the association between residential characteristics and annual rate of moves in EFC.

THE CURRENT BRIEF SEEKS TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- ✓ What are the sociodemographic characteristics and child welfare system experiences of young adults living in EFC in California?
- ✓ What is the rate of residential mobility among these young adults?
- ✓ How does residential mobility vary among young adults living in different EFC placement types? How does mobility vary between within-county and out-of-county placements?
- ✓ How does residential mobility differ by child welfare system experiences prior to age 18?

Findings

1 This study highlights the unique characteristics and experiences of young adults in EFC, showing they differ from minors in care in both demographics and child welfare experiences occurring before age 18.

Black youth were overrepresented among young adults in EFC (26.6%), compared to Black youth between ages 15 and 17 in California foster care (20%) and in the statewide population of 18- to 20-year-olds (6%). Young adults in EFC also had longer child welfare histories prior to age 18 and were more likely to have lived in group homes, been absent from care, and had a documented history of commercial sexual exploitation risk or victimization.

2 Most young adults in the sample experienced relative housing stability.

More than 50% of the sample received EFC support for at least 2.6 years of the 3-year eligibility period. The rate of residential mobility was 0.7 (one move per 18 months) among girls and young women and 0.6 (one move per 20 months) among boys and young men. The median number of moves in EFC was one.

3 Placement setting was associated with residential mobility.

Young adults living in supervised independent living placements—41.6% of California's EFC population—experienced higher rates of mobility than those living in all other EFC types. TAY living in an out-of-county placement—38.7% of the EFC population—also experienced higher mobility. Notably, young people in Los Angeles County experienced significantly fewer moves per year than those in other large urban counties.

4 Two foster care characteristics prior to age 18 were associated with increased mobility in EFC.

Young people who had ever been placed in a group home setting prior to the age of 18 were more likely to experience elevated mobility during EFC. A history of suspected commercial sexual exploitation risk or victimization also increased the likelihood that a youth would experience a higher rate of mobility.

Implications

The longevity and stability of housing placements in the study population suggest that EFC may protect against residential mobility for California's TAY. Significant variation in mobility by placement type and child welfare system experiences has implications for child welfare researchers, policymakers, and practitioners:

- Further research is needed to understand the reasons behind residential moves in EFC, such as moves for jobs or education, and to identify which moves signify true instability. This insight can help child welfare agencies and cross-system partners design policies and practices that better support stability and improve outcomes for young adults in care.
- Policymakers and child welfare administrators should account for the unique challenges faced by the 38.7% of young adults in out-of-county EFC placements, including increased residential mobility and its impact on access to essential resources like healthcare, education, and employment opportunities.
- Variations in mobility by placement type, history of group home placement, and history of commercial sexual exploitation risk underscore the importance of integrating housing and psychosocial resources during independent living planning processes, ensuring that young people continue to have access to quality mental and behavioral health care during EFC.



READ THE FULL STUDY:

Hammond, I., Park, K., Eastman, A. L., & Courtney, M. E. (2024). Residential mobility for young adults in extended foster care. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 156, 107002.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2024.107002>