

Chapin Hall Issue Brief

Policy research
that benefits
children, families,
and their
communities

March 2010

partners
forourchildren™

Building a Case for Change

W SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago 1313 East 60th Street Chicago, IL 60637 T: 773.753.5900 F: 773.753.5940 www.chapinhall.org

Employment of Former Foster Youth as Young Adults: Evidence from the Midwest Study

By Jennifer L. Hook, Partners for Our Children, University of Washington and Mark Courtney, Chapin Hall, Partners for Our Children, University of Washington

Introduction

Since at least the late 1980s, when federal policy first began to focus on preparing foster youth for independent living, the importance of preparation for employment has been paramount. The Independent Living Initiative of 1986 and Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 both provided funds to states for services intended to prepare youth for employment, and the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Fostering Connections Act) includes employment as one of the activities that young people must engage in to be eligible to remain in foster care past age 18. In addition, workforce policy directed towards vulnerable youth focuses specifically on foster youth. For example, the Youth Services and Job Corps programs funded through the Workforce Investment Act both include foster youth as a target population. In spite of this policy focus, little is known about the employment outcomes of former foster youth during early adulthood and the factors associated with those outcomes.

In this issue brief, we explore how former foster youth in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa are faring in the labor market and what explains the variability in employment outcomes for these youth. First, we describe trends in former foster youths' employment from age 17 to 24. Then, we consider how former foster youths' characteristics and experiences are associated with their employment and wages. We use data from the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth (henceforth the Midwest Study), a longitudinal study that has been following a sample of 732 young people from Iowa ($n = 63$), Wisconsin ($n = 195$) and Illinois ($n = 474$) as they age out of foster care and transition to adulthood. Foster youth in these three states were eligible to participate in the study if they (1) had entered care before their 16th birthday; (2) were still in care at age 17; and (3) had been removed from home for reasons other than delinquency. Study participants were 17 or 18 years old at the time of their first interview. Eighty-two percent ($n = 603$) were re-interviewed at age 19, 81 percent

($n = 591$) were re-interviewed at age 21, and 82 percent ($n = 602$) were re-interviewed at ages 23 and 24.^{1,2}

What Do We Know about Employment and Foster Youth?

Foster youth who age out of care are less likely to be employed and earn lower wages than other youth, even when compared to demographically similar low-income youth. Although the vast majority of youth work at some point in the years after discharge from care, unemployment and underemployment are common. Recent research on California, Minnesota, and North Carolina reveals that 22 to 33 percent of former foster youth in these states are not connected to the labor market by age 24. In contrast, only 16 to 25 percent of youth are consistently connected. Even if former foster youth are in the labor market, they are disadvantaged in earnings. Employed youth nationally earn about \$1,500 a month at age 24, whereas former foster youth in these states earn only about \$700 in California and \$450 in North Carolina (Macomber et al., 2008).

There is clearly variability in the employment outcomes of youth. One of the most consistent predictors of employment and wages is an individual's *human capital*, or stock of education and skills. High school completion, college attendance, and a college degree are all associated with the likelihood of employment and higher wages (Murnane, Willett, & Boudett, 1995; Surette 1997). Former foster youth, however, are less likely to have educational credentials than other youth. Educational attainment is hindered by both individual characteristics, such as histories of abuse and neglect, and characteristics of the foster and educational systems, such as increased school changes and concentration in poor-performing

schools (Smithgall, Gladden, Howard, Goerge, & Courtney, 2004).

Youths' social capital is also linked to their employment outcomes. *Social capital* refers to the personal relationships youth may have that could facilitate employment, such as access to an adult who could provide assistance getting a job or access to a social network that could provide information about employment opportunities (Caspi, Entner Wright, Moffitt, & Silva, 1998). Youths' experience in foster care affects their social capital. Ties to adults that can aid youth in finding employment may be weaker for youth who exited from group care or a residential treatment center, were emancipated early, or who experienced many moves while in care. Youth exiting from group homes are less likely to be employed and earn lower wages in California (Macomber et al., 2008). Conversely children who remain in care past the age of 18 may benefit from continued attachment to adults. There is evidence that remaining in care increases employment stability, but not necessarily wages, in Minnesota and North Carolina (Macomber et al., 2008).

Personal capital also influences employment outcomes. *Personal capital* refers to the behavioral characteristics that influence youth motivation and capacity to work, such as delinquency and mental health issues (Caspi et al., 1998). A history of abuse or neglect may be related to a young person's motivation or capacity to work, but research finds little support for a direct linkage between type of maltreatment and employment (Macomber et al., 2008). Incarceration and delinquency are particularly relevant for young men aging out of care. Incarcerated youth are out of the labor force. Men with a felony conviction, particularly African American men, are less likely to

¹ For additional information, see Courtney and colleagues (2010).

² All eligible youth were included in Iowa and Wisconsin, whereas a two-thirds sample was drawn for Illinois. Descriptive data are weighted to account for this and for greater sample attrition by young men than women.

be hired. In one study, African American men with a felony drug conviction were two-thirds less likely than similar African American men to receive a call back after applying for an entry-level job, and white men with a conviction were half as likely as similar white men (Pager, 2003).

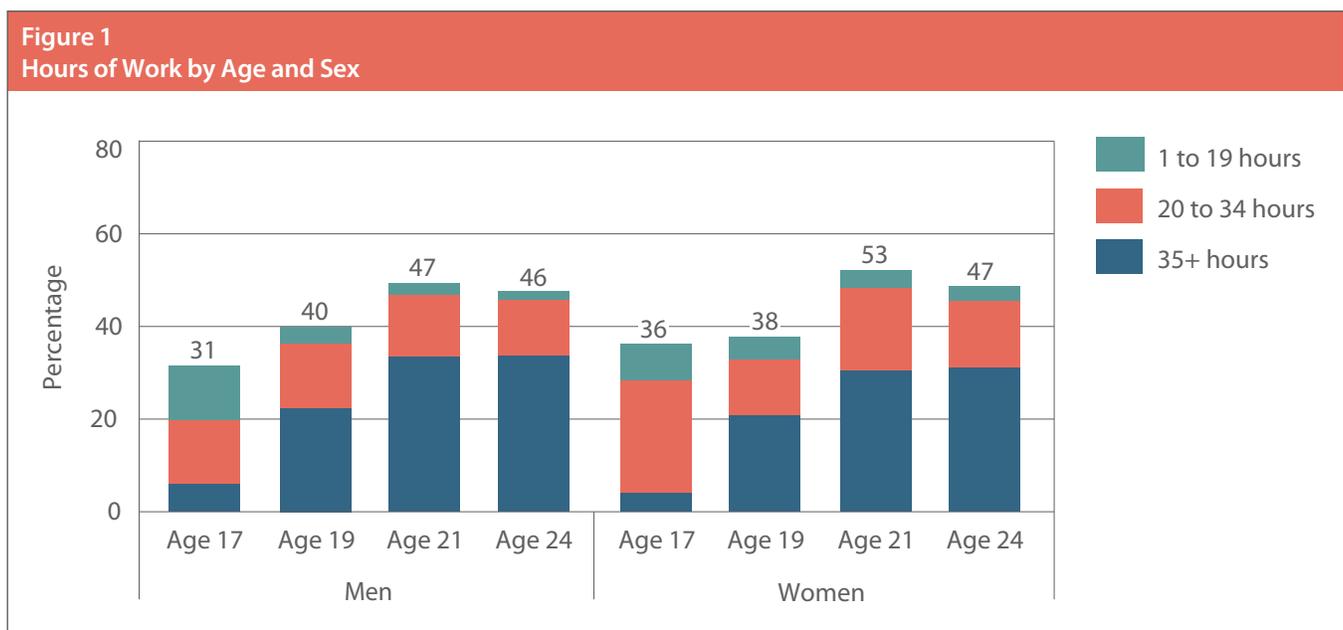
Although young women aging out of care are not as mired in the criminal justice system (Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, & Raap, 2010), young women’s employment is tied to early parenting. Motherhood may prevent women from seeking employment or from being able to accept employment because of a lack of affordable or reliable childcare. Evidence also suggests that mothers are less likely to be hired, and if hired they are offered lower wages than comparable non-mothers or fathers (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007). The labor market can be especially difficult for low-skilled, urban, African American mothers, who are often perceived by employers as single mothers and thus problematic employees (Browne & Kennelly, 1999).

Differential employer perceptions of African American men with felony convictions compared to white men and African American mothers compared to white mothers highlights a more general association

between race and employment. Non-Hispanic white youth aging out of foster care show better employment stability and earnings than African Americans (Macomber et al., 2008). Differences emerge even prior to leaving school. During high school, African American youth in Baltimore began work later, had lower rates of employment, and had less-stable employment than white youth, even when controlling for socioeconomic status and school performance. Although African American youth put greater effort into finding a job, they were less likely to be hired. This contributed to a deficit of experience in early adulthood compared to white youth (Entwisle, Alexander, & Steffel Olson, 2000).

What Is the Employment Profile of Midwest Study Youth?

By age 24, just under half of former foster youth participating in the Midwest Study are employed, and most are working full time, as shown in Figure 1. We observe increases in employment from ages 17 to 19 and 19 to 21 for both men and women, but there is little change from age 21 to 24. Women, in fact, show a small decrease in employment from age 21 to age 24.

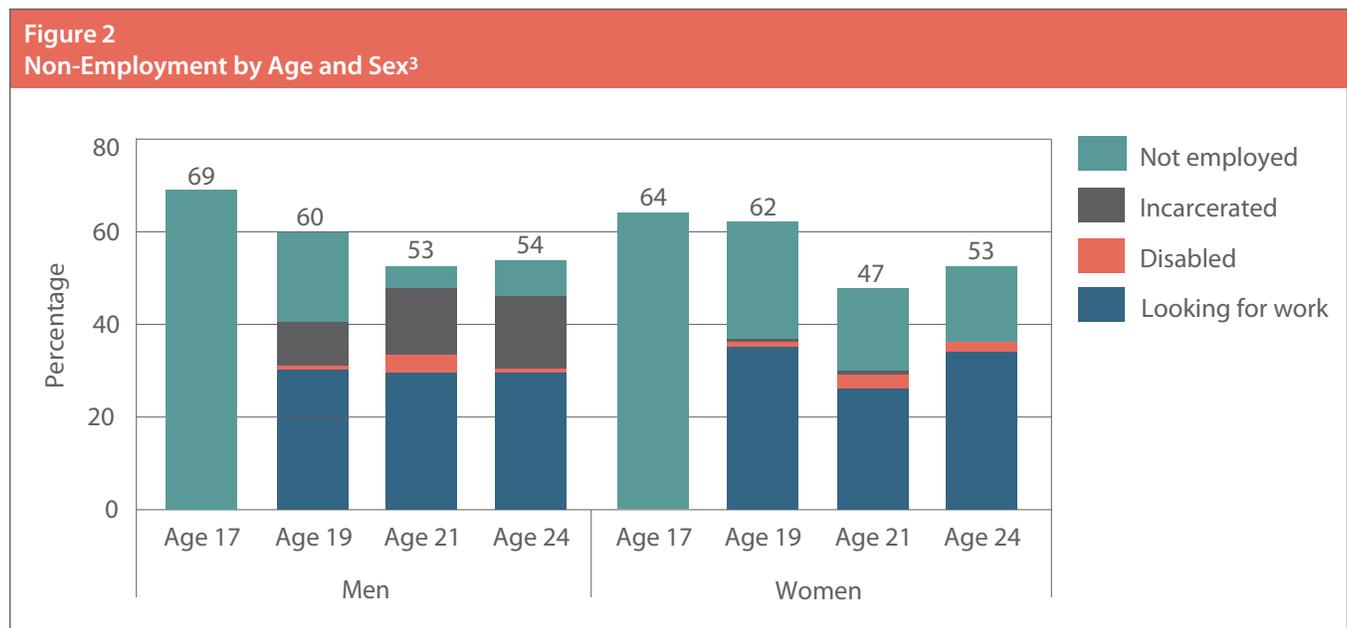


Although their participation in full-time employment holds steady, their part-time employment rates slip from 18 to 13 percent. Men’s rates hold stable, breaking the pattern of increasing employment. It is notable that the men’s rates held steady during a difficult economic period. Unemployment rates for 20- to 24-year-old white youth were 6.7 percent when data were collected in 2006–2007, but had risen to 10.3 percent when data were collected in 2008–2009. Rates for African American youth increased from 15.8 to 20.0 percent (58% of youth in the study are African American). Because women are disproportionately in part-time employment, young women’s employment may be more affected by layoffs during this recession than young men’s. Another possibility is that young women are increasingly raising children. By age 24, 59 percent of former foster youth are parents.

The majority of youth who are not employed are actively searching for work, as shown in Figure 2.

About 30 percent of men and over 30 percent of women are looking for work at age 24. There is some evidence that the decline in women’s employment may be related to the recession. The percentage of women looking for work increased from 16 percent at age 21 to 35 percent at age 24. Although the majority of men who are not employed are looking for work, a sizable group is not employed because they are incarcerated, 16 percent at age 24. By age 24, only 8 percent of men are unemployed and not looking for or unable to work, compared to 16 percent of women. Former foster youth are clearly vulnerable in the labor market, especially in the current economic climate.

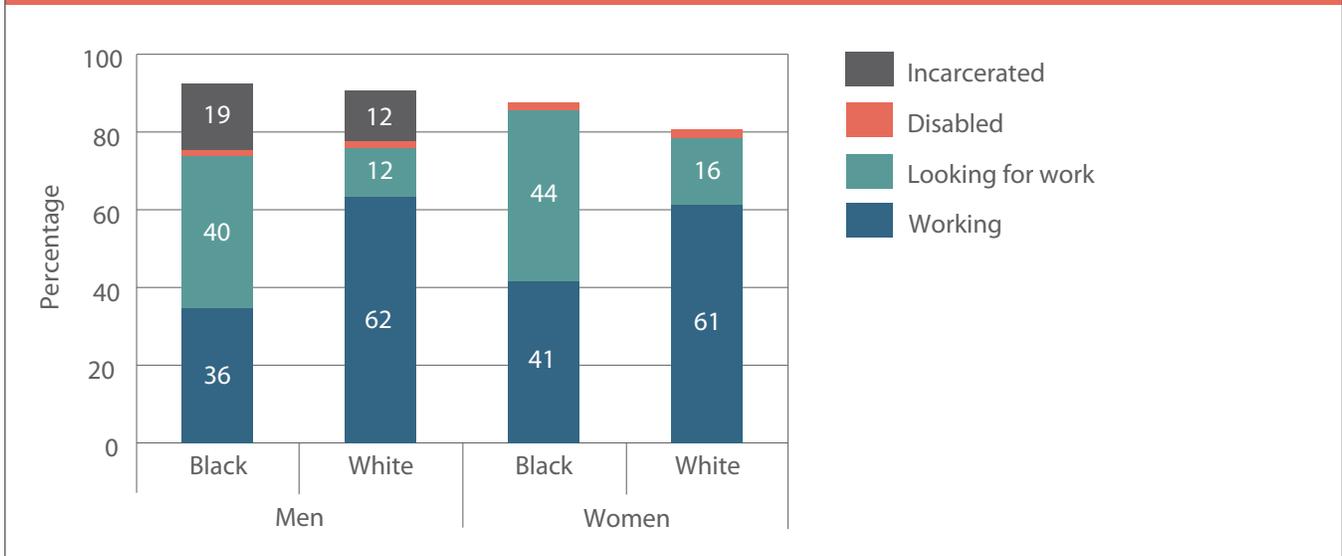
If we further refine employment rates by race-ethnicity, we see a large gap between African Americans and whites, as shown in Figure 3.⁴ Only 36 percent of African American men and 41 percent of African American women are working, compared to over 60 percent of white men and women. Furthermore, 40



³ We are unable to distinguish reasons youth are not employed at age 17-18. No youth in the sample were incarcerated at this time.

⁴ At the first wave of data collection, 55 percent of youth reported being non-Hispanic black, 29 percent reported being non-Hispanic white, and 16 percent reported another race-ethnicity (either mixed race, Hispanic, Native American, or Asian). Unfortunately, the sample size is too small to make meaningful comparisons across these categories.

Figure 3
Employment by Sex and Race at Age 24



percent of African American men and 44 percent of African American women have looked for work in the last 4 weeks, compared to only 12 percent of white men and 16 percent of white women. African American men are also more likely to be out of the labor force because of incarceration (at 19 percent) than are white men (at 12 percent). Very few African American men are not working, not looking for work, disabled, or incarcerated—only 5 percent. In contrast, 14 percent

of white men, 12 percent of African American women, and 21 percent of white women are in this category.

Focusing on the half of youth that are employed, their wages, hours, and job tenure increased over time, as shown in Table 1. Hourly wages (adjusted to 2008 dollars) increased from an average of \$7.47 an hour at age 17 to \$10.59 at age 24 for men, and from \$7.41 to \$9.09 for women. At age 17, men and women earned

Table 1
Wages, Hours, and Job Tenure among Youth Employed 10 Hours or More per Week⁵

	Men				Women			
	2002-03 Age 17-18	2004 Age 19	2006-07 Age 21	2008-09 Age 23-24	2002-03 Age 17-18	2004 Age 19	2006-07 Age 21	2008-09 Age 23-24
Hourly wage	\$7.47	\$8.80	\$10.20	\$10.59	\$7.41	\$7.79	\$8.61	\$9.09
Hours of work per week	22.5	34.2	37.8	40.8	22.4	30.2	33.2	34.7
Months at current job	8.6	7.7	10.4	16.7	8.0	10.6	11.3	15.6
N	108	111	129	131	137	109	162	148

⁵ Hourly wages are adjusted to 2008 using the Bureau of Labor Statistic’s Consumer Price Index (CPI). The CPI tracks changes in the price of goods and services consumed by urban households.

about the same average wage, but by age 24, men were earning \$1.50 more per hour. At age 24 men working full-time, full-year at this wage would earn about \$22,000 a year, and women would earn about \$18,900. Fewer than one-third of all youth, however, are working full-time. Average hours of work have increased over time to 41 hours for men and 35 hours for women at age 24. Youth also show a steady increase in job tenure. By age 24 they have spent an average of 16 months at their most recent job.

These earnings from employment are put into perspective by considering how many of these young adults would be considered *poor* according to the U.S. Census Bureau definition. Estimating annual earnings based on current employment and adjusting for family size and partners' income, 56 percent of young people participating in the Midwest Study at age 23 or 24 would be classified as poor (not including the 9% out of the labor force because they are incarcerated or disabled). Among those employed, 22 percent would be classified as poor.⁶

What Can We Predict about Employment and Wages of Foster Youth?

We now turn to identifying factors that help us understand if youth are employed, and if so, how much they earn. We analyze youth's employment at all four waves of data collection predicting employment with stable characteristics observed at the first interview, such as number of placements while in care, and characteristics that may vary each time a youth is interviewed, such as educational attainment. The first column of Table 2 shows odds ratios indicating how a characteristic affects the odds that a youth will be employed 20 or more hours a week (compared to

being not employed or employed less than 20 hours). The second column shows how these characteristics affect the wages (on a logged scale) of youth who are employed. We only display statistically significant results.⁷

Beginning with stable characteristics observed at age 17, black youth are about half as likely to be employed as white youth. Black youth in the labor market, however, do not appear to receive lower wages. It is important to note that youth in the labor market are a more "select" group than youth out of the labor market—that is, they are more educated and can expect to earn higher wages than youth out of the labor market. In fact, if we estimate the wages that youth who are not employed would earn if they became employed, they would earn only \$6.67 an hour compared to \$8.02 for employed youth—a difference of 17 percent.

Youths' reading recognition score on the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) is associated with odds of employment. Youth scoring above grade 6 were 40 to 70 percent more likely than youth scoring below grade 6 to be employed at least 20 hours per week. Furthermore, employed youth scoring at the post-high school level at age 17 earned 7 percent higher wages.

Youth who had been neglected by a caretaker were about 40 percent more likely to be employed than foster youth who had not been neglected. One potential explanation for their greater employment is that neglected youth have fewer social supports outside of the labor market and thus find it more necessary to work than youth who have others they can rely on in times of need. We find that neglected youth are less likely to have someone they can ask for favors, and less likely to be close with their birth mother or any

⁶ Estimated annual earnings are calculated by multiplying reported hourly wage by hours worked per week by 52 weeks. Not all youth work year-round, however. If we use youths' reports of annual earnings, 64 percent of youth would be classified as poor. If youth are married or cohabiting, partners' earnings are added to household income. Household income is compared to the federal poverty line, adjusting for the number of the respondent's biological children living in the household and the presence of a spouse or partner.

⁷ The distribution of wages for this sample was highly skewed, which led us to use the natural logarithm of wages rather than actual wages since this better fit the assumptions of the statistical methods we employed.

Table 2 Factors associated with employment and wages ⁸				
	Employed 20+ hours Odds ratio		Log hourly wage Beta	
<i>Characteristics at Wave One</i>				
African-American (compared to white)	.52	*		
Reading level (compared to less than 6th grade)				
6th-8th grade	1.48	*		
High school	1.70	*		
Post high school	1.40	+	.073	*
Neglected	1.43	*		
Total placements			-.007	*
<i>Living arrangement (compared to traditional foster home)</i>				
Relative foster home	.68	*		
Group or treatment	.38	*	-.062	+
Independent living	.57	*		
Emancipated or other	.49	*		
Wisconsin (compared to Illinois)	1.55	*		
Iowa (compared to Illinois)	1.89	*		
<i>Characteristics at Each Wave</i>				
Age			.063	*
Hours of work per week	N/A		.004	*
Months at current job	N/A		.002	*
<i>Educational attainment (compared to less than high school degree)</i>				
GED or equivalency	1.82	*		
High school diploma	1.98	*	.053	*
Some college	3.69	*	.057	+
Associate's degree +	3.67	*	.172	*
Female	1.12		-.091	*
Child	1.72	*	.060	+
Child x Female	.37	*	-.068	+
Engaged in property crime	.75	*	-.041	+
Still in care	.59	*		
<i>Illinois Only</i>				
Years in care past 18			.028	*

⁸ Notes: *p<=.05, +p<=.10. Models include other race, abuse by a caretaker, enrolled in school, recent symptoms of depression, PTSD, drug dependence, alcohol abuse or dependence, count of employment-related independent living services, engagement in violent crime, ever convicted, and urbanicity of current residence. We tested, but excluded, youth's likelihood of turning to their foster care agency for help with future problems, closeness to a parent or caregiver at age 17, age of entry into foster care, and whether the youth was ever retained a grade. We used multiple imputation to address missing data. We used multivariate normal regression, which uses an iterative Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) method to impute missing values, imputing at least one of 15 variables in 438 cases (18.5%). No more than 5.4 percent of cases were missing data on any single variable. Estimates are averaged over 50 imputed datasets. We removed youths not in the labor force because of disability or incarceration from the logistic models predicting employment (34 cases at wave 2, 64 at wave 3, and 56 at wave 4). Wages are logged in the linear regression predicted wages. Average log wages were \$1.82 in 2002 and \$2.28 in 2008. Both models are multi-level with observations at each wave nested within individuals.

caregiver in the foster care system than youth who were not neglected.

Youth who were not living in family foster care on the verge of transition were less likely to be employed. Traditional family foster care may connect youth to networks that facilitate employment. Youth exiting from group care or residential treatment were 60 percent less likely to be employed and many earned smaller wages than other youth. These youth may be particularly unlikely to have adults with connections that foster employment. They may also have personal characteristics not captured by the measures we used that affected both their initial placement into group care and their employability (e.g., emotional and behavioral problems). Results for the lower likelihood of employment among youth who were living independently may be surprising; however, anecdotal evidence suggests that youth in Illinois, where the vast majority of youth in independent living arrangements resided, are often placed in independent living settings not because they are prepared to live independently, but because they have few remaining placement options. Independent living may also be unlikely to facilitate connections that foster employment. Youth living with relatives are also less likely to be employed, about 30 percent less likely than youth living in a traditional family foster home. One possibility is that youth living with family may be financially supported by family members to a greater extent than youth living in traditional family foster care. Finally, the more placements a youth experienced prior to exit, the lower their wages. Each placement is associated with 0.7 percent lower wages. Similar to our findings regarding group care placement, this result may be an indication that placement instability is a proxy for emotional and behavioral problems of youth and/or an indication that instability undermines the development of social connections that might assist youth in obtaining higher-paying jobs.

Youth exiting care in Wisconsin and Iowa were more likely to be employed than youth in Illinois.

Although there may be multiple explanations for state differences, the unemployment rates in these states differ considerably. The statewide unemployment rate in November 2009 was higher in Illinois (10.9%) than in Wisconsin (8.2%) or Iowa (6.7%) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009).

Turning to characteristics in Table 2 that vary over time and that we capture at each wave of interviews, we see that as employed youth age, they earn higher wages. In their early years of employment, wages grow by about 6 percent per year. As expected, greater hours of work and more months at their current job are both associated with higher hourly wages for employed youth. Youth receive 2.4 percent higher wages for every year at their current job, and 4 percent higher hourly wages for every additional 10 hours they work per week.

Educational attainment is strongly associated with employment and wages (an example of how youth are positively selected into the labor market). Youth with a GED or a high school diploma are almost twice as likely to be employed as youth who did not complete high school. Youth with some college attendance or an associate's degree are over three times as likely to be employed. Youth with a diploma or some college attendance earn about 5 percent higher wages, and youth with an associate's degree earn 17 percent higher wages than youth who did not complete high school. At age 24, 20 percent of youth did not complete high school, 46 percent had a diploma, GED, or equivalency, 28 percent had attended some college, and 6 percent had an associate's degree.

With regard to parenthood, having a child increases the likelihood of young men's employment, but depresses young women's employment. Fathers are over 70 percent more likely to be employed than childless men and mothers are about 30 percent less likely to be employed than childless women. Women, whether or not they are mothers, earn 9 percent less than childless men. In addition, there is some evidence

that mothers earn an additional 7 percent less than other women, whereas fathers earn about 6 percent more than other men.

Those engaged in property (but not violent) crime are 25 percent less likely to be employed and earn lower wages. Property crime includes stealing, breaking and entering, and damaging property. One explanation is that property crime may serve as an alternate source of income for some youth.

Finally, if youth are still in care, they are 40 percent less likely to be employed at least 20 hours per week. In further analyses, we find that youth still in care are not less likely to be employed part-time, but they are less likely to be employed full-time. Most youth are still in care at age 17. Only youth in Illinois may stay in care past the age of 18. A little over half of youth (all from Illinois) were still in care at age 19. By age 21, only two youth remain in care. In a model restricted to Illinois, there is evidence that the number of years in care from age 18 to 21 increases wages by 2.8 percent with each additional year in care; this amounts to 8.4 percent higher wages for youth who remain in care until age 21. This effect persists under a number of alternate model specifications. Furthermore, because time in care past age 18 is associated with higher educational attainment, the effect of years in care is larger if we omit educational attainment from the models.

What Are the Policy and Practice Implications of these Findings?

Our findings regarding the employment of young people making the transition to adulthood from foster care are sobering. At the age of 24, only half of former foster youth who aged out of the system in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa are employed. Another 30 percent are looking for work. Even among those employed, the findings highlight the extreme vulnerability of this population during periods of economic downturn; we estimate that 22 percent of

employed former foster youth have earnings as young adults that would not lift them out of poverty. Below we summarize our findings and point to their policy and practice implications.

Youth who are not working have lower educational attainment than employed youth. About one-third of youth not looking for work and one-quarter of youth actively looking for work do not have a high school diploma or equivalency degree. In contrast, only one-tenth of youth working full-time do not have this credential. Education is clearly important for employment and wages. Youth without a high school diploma and with low reading comprehension at age 17 are especially disadvantaged. Other data from the Midwest Study point to the poor educational attainment of foster youth making the transition to adulthood (Dworsky & Courtney, 2010). The educational divide in employment outcomes and poor educational trajectories of former foster youth point to a clear need to understand and address the barriers to education and employment for this population.

Among young men, we see an additional barrier to employment for the sizeable number who are currently incarcerated. At age 23 or 24, 16 percent of young men who aged out of care were incarcerated and nearly three-fifths (58.8 percent; $n = 157$) had been convicted of a crime since age 18 (Courtney et al., 2010). The employment prospects of these men are dim on average. Forty-seven percent of those incarcerated at age 23 or 24 have not earned a high school diploma or equivalency. Furthermore, research shows that young men with a felony conviction are less likely to be hired (Pager, 2003). Although the young men participating in the Midwest Study all entered foster care as a result of abuse, neglect, or dependency, not delinquency, many of them nevertheless have been involved with the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems. This finding calls for closer collaboration between child welfare and criminal justice systems in developing coordinated practice models and programs to address

the employment needs of foster youth making the transition to adulthood. It also calls attention to the need to enhance interventions targeting behavior problems of adolescents in foster care, particularly young men, in order to prevent their involvement in the criminal justice system.

Among young women, motherhood is a barrier to employment and attaining higher wages. Whereas having a child increases men's likelihood of employment and wages, the opposite is true for women. The majority of young women aging out of the foster care system are mothers by the age of 24. Sixty-two percent of working women are mothers, whereas 75 percent of those actively looking for work and 78 percent of those not working and not looking for work are mothers. The fact that so many former foster youth are parents early in the transition to adulthood, and the extent to which parenting influences employment for former foster youth, calls into question the adequacy of current policy directed at this population. The older youth provisions of the Fostering Connections Act make no mention of parenting, and the provisions requiring young people remaining in care beyond age 18 to be employed or in school make no reference to the additional challenges faced by young parents. Our findings raise serious questions about the extent to which Fostering Connections Act provisions may result in the exclusion of young parents from care after age 18. Other research based on data from the Midwest Study identifies struggling young parents as a distinct subgroup of former foster youth in transition (Courtney, Hook, & Lee, 2010). Child welfare services practitioners and program administrators should devote more attention to the particular needs of this population, including developing strategies for collaborating with other institutions that serve young, low-income parents.

African American former foster youth may be particularly affected by a tight labor market. Only two-fifths of African American youth are employed

at age 24 compared to three-fifths of white youth, and African American youth are about three times as likely as white youth to be looking for work. However, once employed, there is no evidence that wages are depressed for African American youth. This absence of a wage penalty for African American workers reflects the fact that African American youth in the labor market are a more select group than white youth in the labor market. Overall, estimated wages for those in the labor market are 17 percent higher than for those out of the labor market. Our findings identify yet another racial disparity in outcomes experienced by young people in the child welfare system and call for efforts to understand both the causes of this disparity and potential strategies for reducing it (Dworsky et al., in press).

Finally, the characteristics of the foster care system itself are associated with employment outcomes of former foster youth. The living arrangement a youth is in on the verge of transition is associated with employment outcomes. It is not clear from this analysis whether youth in group care are limited by characteristics associated with their placement into group care or whether the experience of being in group care alters a youth's employability, but youth exiting from group care or a treatment facility are especially vulnerable. Anecdotal evidence suggests that at least some group care settings may discourage youth from acquiring work experience. Research should be conducted to assess the extent to which this is true and to identify strategies for increasing the likelihood that youth in group care will acquire work experience during their time in care. In addition, generally targeting employment supports towards youth in group care makes sense given their relatively poor employment trajectories. Even children in relative placements do not seem to fare as well as children in family foster homes. A potential strategy for improving employment outcomes is to identify characteristics of family foster homes that facilitate youths' employment.

In Illinois, where youth can remain in care until 21, there is further evidence that the foster care system is associated with employment outcomes. While being in care at age 17 and 19 is associated with a decreased probability of employment, the number of years a youth remained in care from age 18 to 21 is positively associated with wages (and does not show an association with the probability of employment). This effect on wages is even more pronounced when we account for the positive correlation between remaining in care and educational attainment. That is, youth remaining in care attain higher educational credentials and earn higher wages. While further research is needed to identify the long-term trade-offs between education and employment associated with extending care past age 18, these early findings provide some justification for states to adopt the Fostering Connections Act provisions allowing the extension of foster care past 18.

Perhaps the most important implication of the Midwest Study finding regarding the employment trajectories of former foster youth, and the contributors to those trajectories, is the importance of better coordination between the child welfare system and other institutions that serve young adults. A better-coordinated strategy of collaborative parenting of these young people by a wide range of public institutions is sorely needed (Courtney, 2009). For example, the needs of this population should be taken into account by programs supported through the Workforce Investment Act, and child welfare agencies should redouble their efforts to coordinate their own employment supports with those of these other providers. Collaboration between child welfare agencies and the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems could help improve employment outcomes for the many young men involved in both systems. Finally, it is long past time to acknowledge that many young adult former foster youth, and most of the young women, are balancing the often-competing demands of work and parenting. This calls for better

collaboration between child welfare authorities and the range of institutions involved in the lives of young low-income parents (e.g., welfare-to-work programs; public health systems; schools).

References

- Browne, I., & Kennelly, I. (1999). Stereotypes and realities: Black women in the labor market. I. Brown (Ed) *Latinas and African American Women at Work: Race, Gender, and Economic Inequality*. (pp. 302–326). Edited by Irene Browne. New York: Russell Sage.
- Caspi, A., Entner Wright, B. R., Moffitt, T. E., & Silva, P. A. (1998). Early failure in the labor market: Childhood and adolescent predictors of unemployment in the transition to adulthood. *American Sociological Review*, *63*(3), 424–451.
- Correll, S. J., Benard, S. & Paik, I. (2007). Getting a job: Is there a motherhood penalty? *American Journal of Sociology*, *112*, 1297–1338.
- Courtney, M. E. (2009). The difficult transition to adulthood for foster youth in the U.S.: Implications for the state as corporate parent. *Social Policy Report*, *23*(1), 3–18.
- Courtney, M. E., Dworsky, A., Lee, J. S., & Raap, M. (2010). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 23 and 24*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- Courtney, M. E., Hook, J. L., & Lee, J. (2010). *Subgroups of Former Foster Youth in Early Adulthood: Implications for Policy and Practice*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- Dworsky, A. & Courtney, M. E. (2010). *Assessing the Benefits of Extending Foster Care Beyond Age 18 on Post-Secondary Education: Emerging Findings from the Midwest Study*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- Dworsky, A., Roller White, C., O'Brien, K., Pecora, P., Courtney, M., Kessler, R., Sampson, N., & Hwang, I. (in press). Racial and ethnic differences in the outcomes of former foster youth. *Children and Youth Services Review*.
- Entwisle, D. R., Alexander, K. L., & Steffel Olson, L. (2000). Early work histories of urban youth. *American Sociological Review*, *65*(2), 279–297.
- Macomber, J., Cuccaro Alamin, S., Duncan, D., McDaniel, M., Vericker, T., Pergamit, M., Needell, B., Kum, H., Stewart, J., Lee, C., & Barth, R. (2008). *Coming of age: Empirical outcomes for youth who age out of foster care in their middle twenties*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Murnane, R. J., Willett, J. B., and Boudett, K. P. (1995). Do high school dropouts benefit from obtaining a GED? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 17(2), 133-147.

Pager, D. (2003). The mark of a criminal record. *American Journal of Sociology* 108(5), 937-975.

Smithgall, C., Gladden, R.M., Howard, E., Goerge, R., & Courtney, M. (2004). *Educational experiences of children in out of home care*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

Surrette, B. J. (1997). *The effects of two-year college on the labor market and schooling experiences of young men*. Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System Finance and Economic Discussion Series 97-44. Washington, DC: Federal Reserve Board.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009). Regional and State Employment and Unemployment—November 2009. Table A. States with unemployment rates significantly different from that of the U.S., November 2009, seasonally adjusted. Washington, DC: BLS. http://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/laus_12182009.pdf.

ChapinHall at the University of Chicago

Established in 1985, Chapin Hall is an independent policy research center whose mission is to build knowledge that improves policies and programs for children and youth, families, and their communities.

Chapin Hall's areas of research include child maltreatment prevention, child welfare systems and foster care, youth justice, schools and their connections with social services and community organizations, early childhood initiatives, community change initiatives, workforce development, out-of-school time initiatives, economic supports for families, and child well-being indicators.

Recommended Citation

Hook, J. L. & Courtney, M. E. (2010). *Employment of Former Foster Youth as Young Adults: Evidence from the Midwest Study*. Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

Related Publications

Courtney, M. E., Dworsky, A., Lee, J. S., & Raap, M. (2010). *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Ages 23 and 24*. Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

For a complete list of Chapin Hall projects and to download publications, please visit our website.

Contact

Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

1313 East 60th Street
Chicago, IL 60637
T: 773.753.5900
F: 773.753.5940
www.chapinhall.org

Partners for Our Children

Box 359476
Seattle, WA 98195-9476
T: 206.221.3100
F: 206.221.3155