

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SERVICE ADMINISTRATION

Youth Transitions from Care to Adulthood: Implications of Research for Policy and Practice

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My Purpose Today

- *Explain my rationale for studying youth making the transition to adulthood from state care*
- *Explain how policy can reasonably be expected to influence outcomes for this population*
- *Describe the evolution of US policy focused on this population, sharing along the way findings from my research*
- *Explore the implications of the research for policy, practice, and future research*

How does the transition to adulthood look for young people generally in the US?

- *Scholars describe the transition:*
  - Markers of the transition (living independently; completing education; parenting) are happening later; half of young people between 18-24 live with a parent (US Census 2010)
  - Continuing and considerable parental support ($38k in direct support between 18-34, Schoeni & Ross, 2004)
  - Developmental psychologists describe a new period of "emerging adulthood" (Arnett, 2004)
  - Developments in neuroscience (Luna at al, 2010; Steinberg, 2008; 2013).
- *Yet, U.S. policy provides relatively little support for young adults*
- *Little attention has been paid to the "other half"*

Why study foster youth?

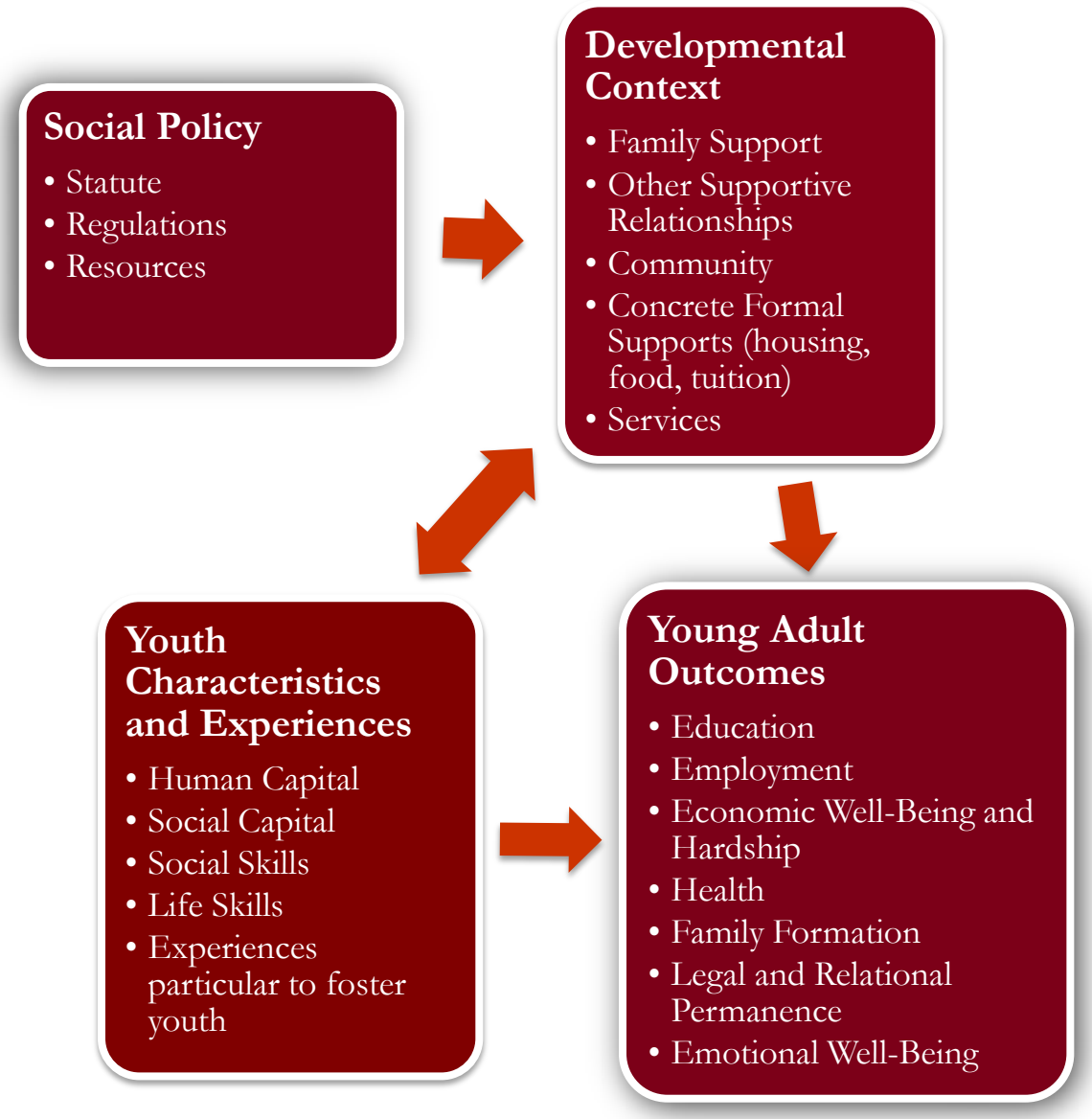
- *It's personal!*
  - 5 years living and working in group care for maltreated teens in state care
  - 25+ years working with child welfare services policymakers, program managers, and practitioners

BAYC
Better and Brighter Futures
A Division of Sunny Hills Services

Why study foster youth?

- *They exhibit the characteristics of other so-called vulnerable transition populations*
  - Poor education and employment histories; early parenting; mental and behavioral health problems; disabilities; justice system involvement; limited and/or problematic relations with parents…and resilience
  - This makes interventions targeting the population potentially relevant to a wide range of vulnerable youth
- *Federal (and state) policy explicitly focuses on this group and provides considerable resources*
- *They are **our** children!*

How Policy Influences the Transition to Adulthood for Foster Youth



Child Welfare 101

- *We have a child **protective** services system: children are removed from home when their safety is threatened*
- *About 400,000 children and youth in "foster care" (AFCARS, 2012)*
  - 47% in non-relative family foster care
  - 28% in kinship foster care
  - 15% in group settings
  - Remainder elsewhere (pre-adoptive home, independent living, runaway, trial home visit)
- ***Courts** supervise public agency provision of out-of-home care*
  - Primary goal is family reunification: almost 3/5 reunified with parent or other relative
  - Adoption and legal guardianship (mostly kin): about 30 percent
  - 10 percent are "emancipated" (our focus today)
  - Most states still "emancipate" at 18, but some as late as 21
- ***Older youth** are much less likely than young children to be adopted or placed with relatives and much more likely to run away or "age out"*

Evolution of Research Agenda

- ***Describing adult outcomes*** *for youth making the transition to adulthood from state care (1990s-today)*
- ***Identifying risk and protective factors*** *associated with those outcomes (2000-today)*
- ***Evaluating policies and programs*** *intended to improve outcomes (2002-today)*
  - Non-experimental evaluation of policies
  - Experimental evaluation of programs/interventions

Enduring question: How can the state optimally parent these young people?

U.S. Policy on Foster Youth in Transition

- *1970s studies showed poor outcomes for young adults formerly in foster care*
  - "Nobody Ever Asked Us" (Festinger, 1983)
- *Concern grew about lack of attention to preparing young people in care for adulthood*
- *1986* ***Independent*** *Living Initiative*
  - $70 million per year allocated to states
  - Services included: outreach programs; training in daily living skills; education and employment assistance; counseling; case management; and written transitional independent living plans
  - Funds could *not* be used for room and board

U.S. Policy on Foster Youth in Transition

- *Research from 1990s continues to show poor outcomes (Cook, 1991; Courtney et al, 1998)*
- *1999 Foster Care **Independence** Act*
  - $140 million per year allocated to states
  - Funds the same broad range of services as the earlier law
  - Up to 30% of funds can be used for room and board
  - Allows states to extend Medicaid to foster youth through age 21
  - Amendment to law allows appropriation up to $60 million per year to fund education/training vouchers for up to $5000 per year through age 23
  - Creates outcome reporting requirements and devotes 1.5% of funds to rigorous evaluation of promising programs

How do foster youth fare during the transition to adulthood?

The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth

- *"Midwest Study" is the 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*

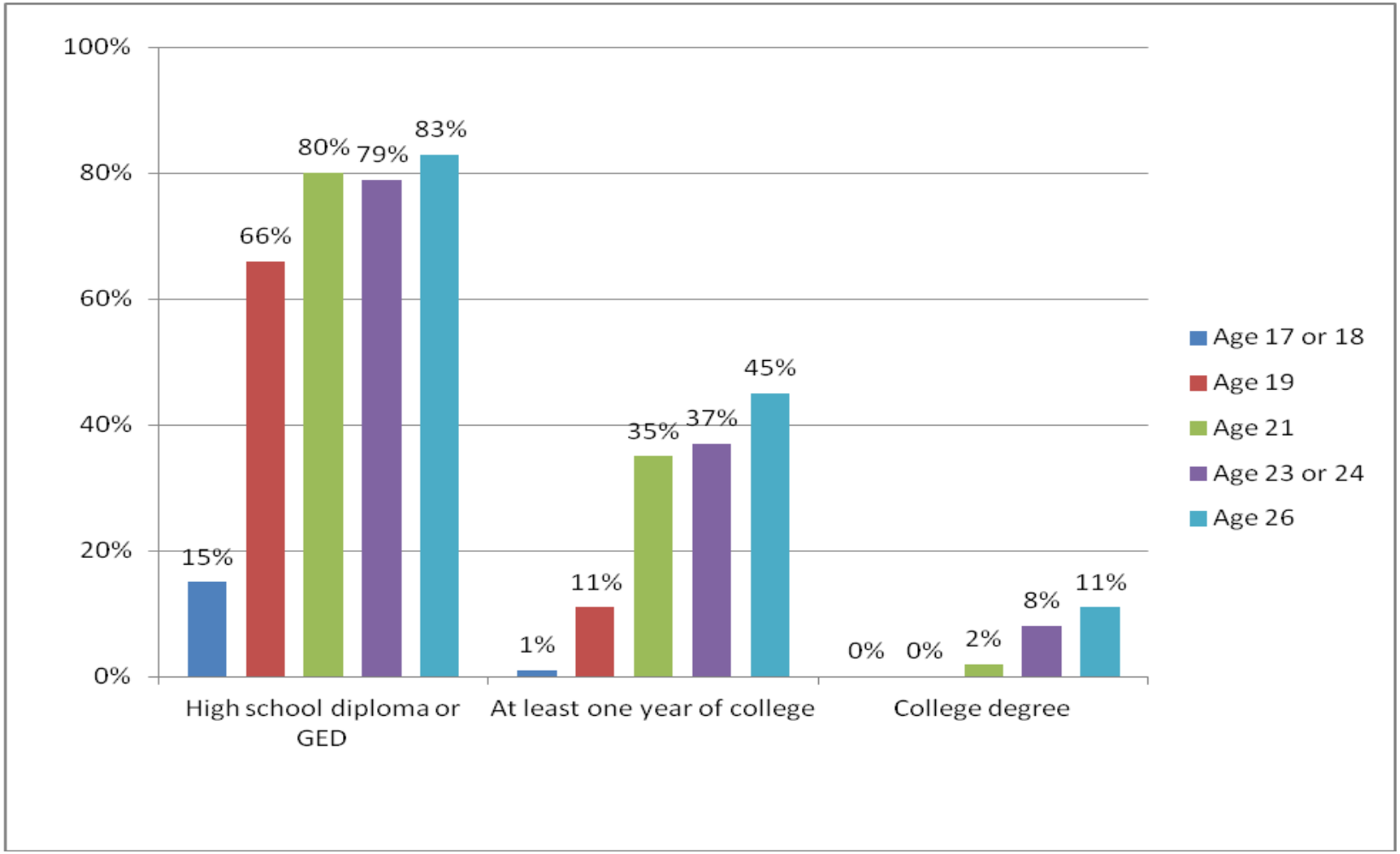
Study Design and Sample (continued)

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	596	83%	26

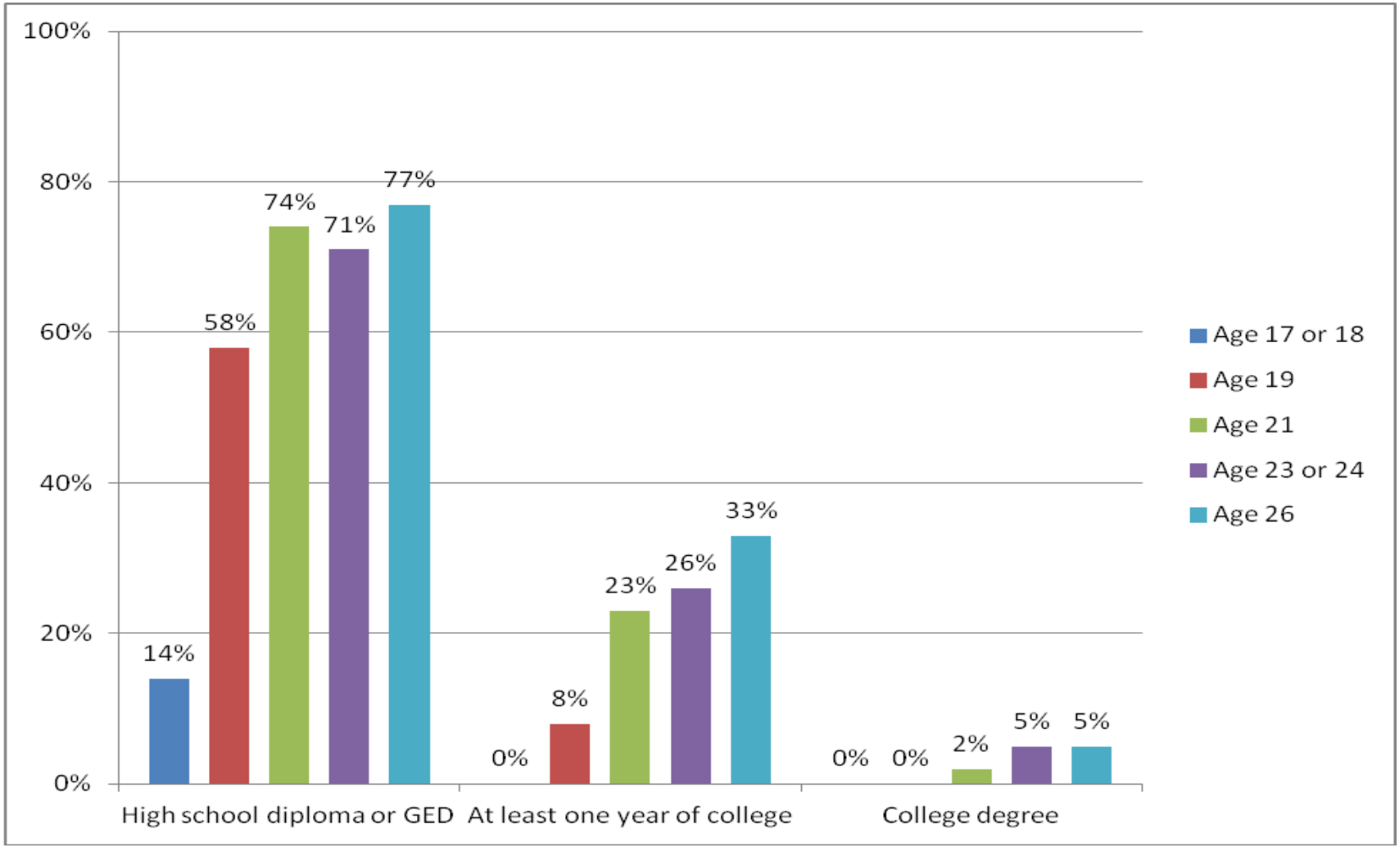
Demographic Characteristics

		Wave 1
N		732
Gender	Male	48.5
	Female	51.5
Race	Black	57.0
	White	30.9
	Other/Multi-racial	12.1
Ethnicity	Hispanic origin	8.6
State	Illinois	64.8
	Wisconsin	26.6
	Iowa	8.6

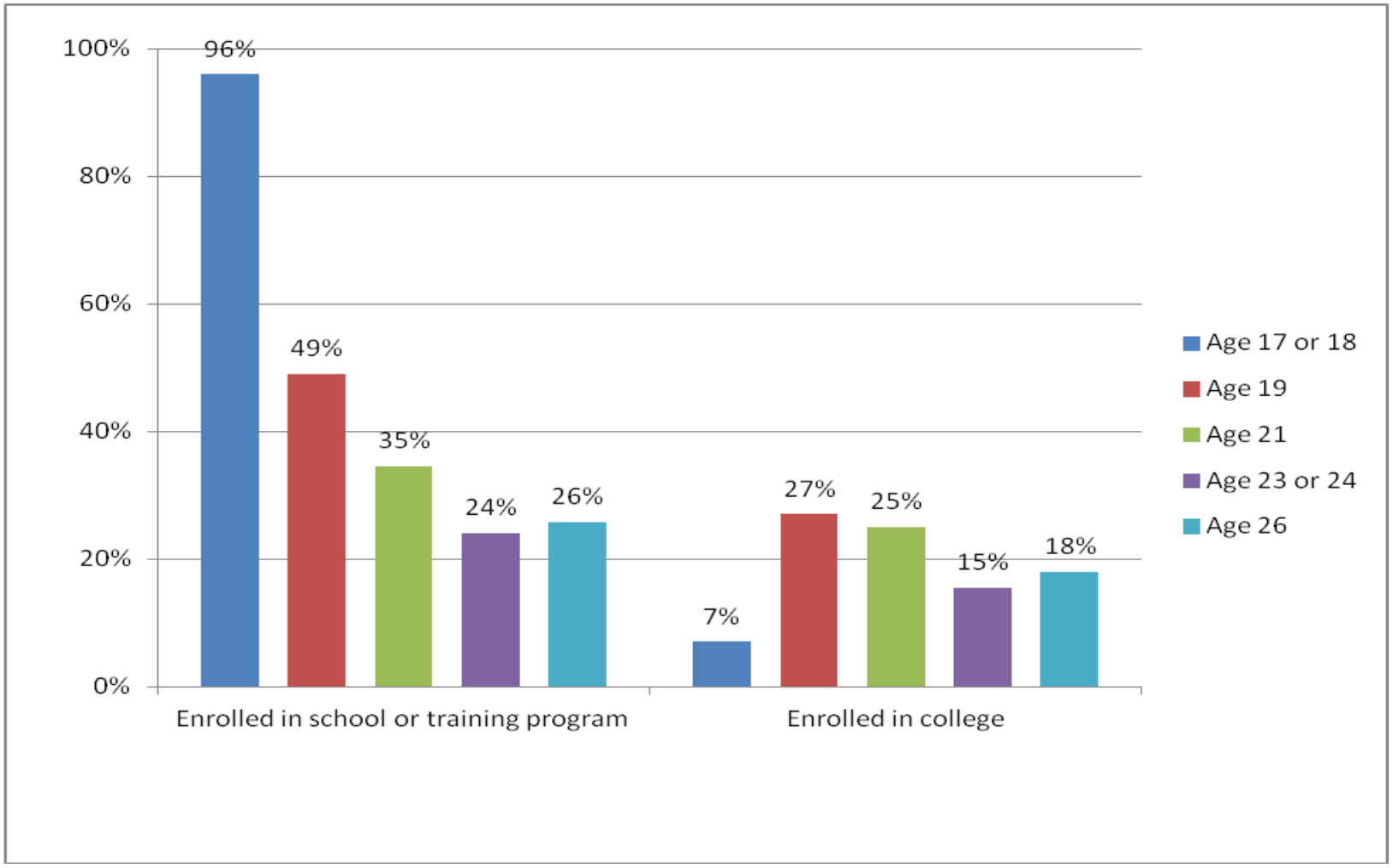
Young Women's Educational Attainment



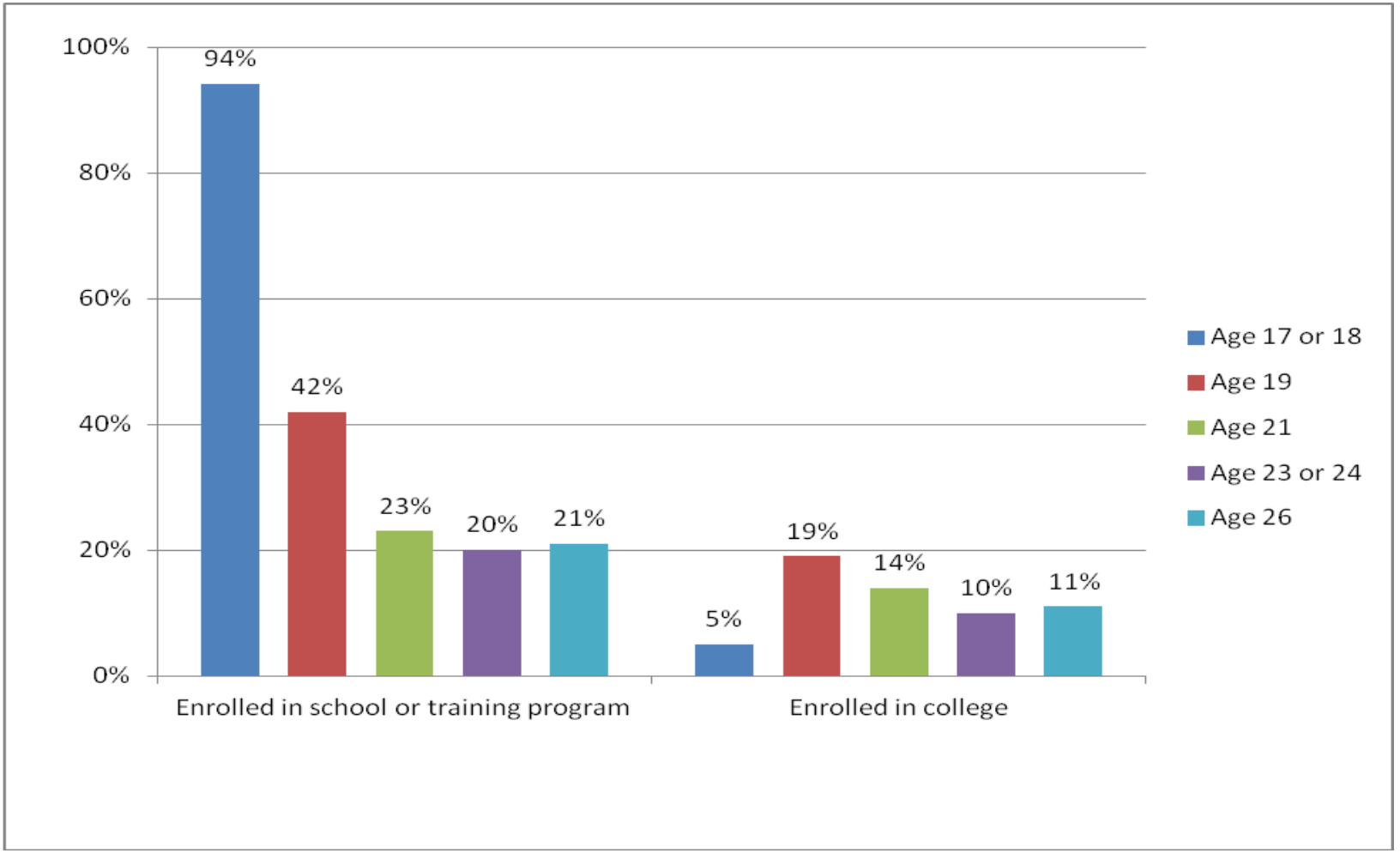
Young Men's Educational Attainment



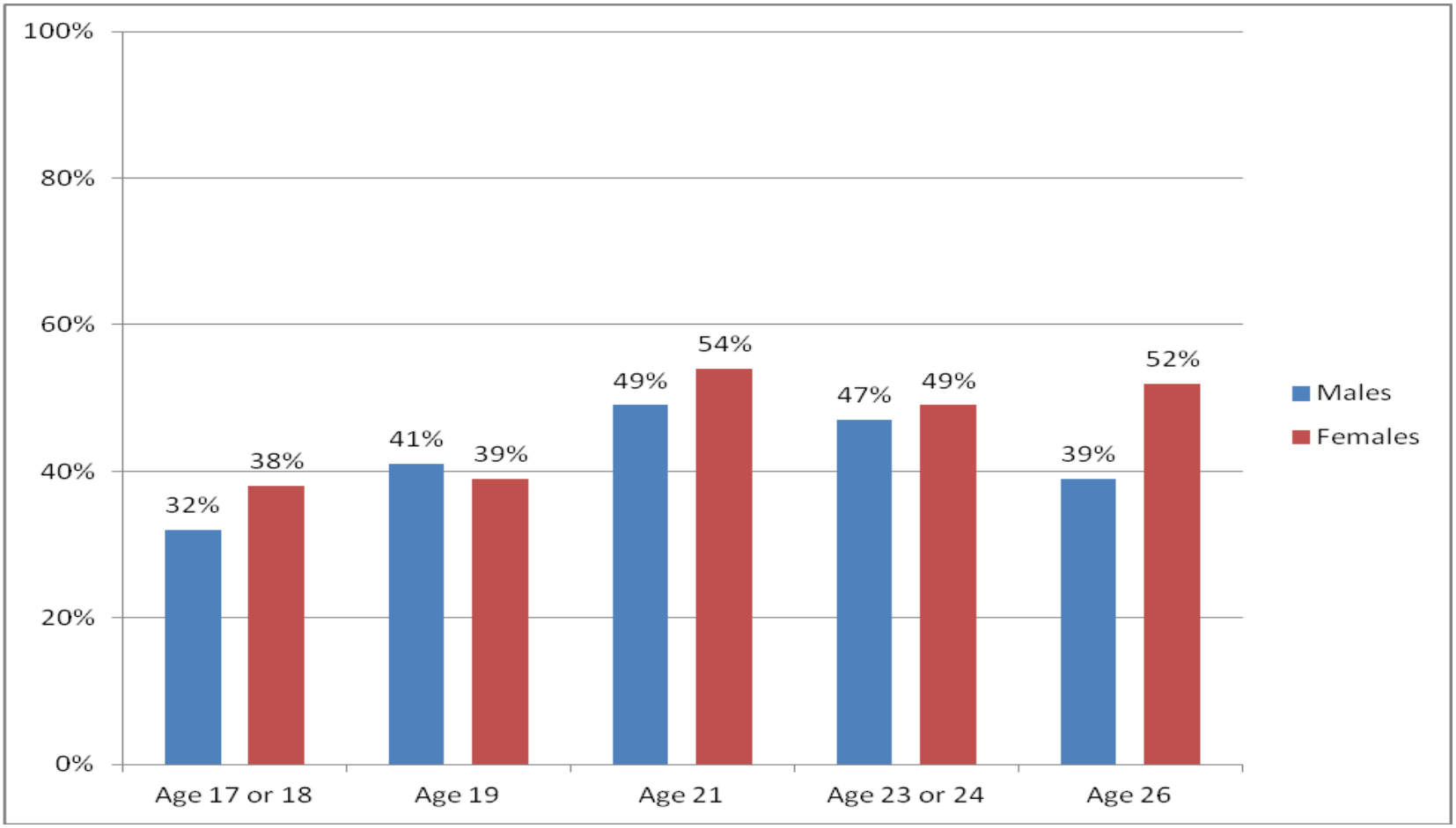
Young Women's Educational Enrollment



Young Men's Educational Enrollment

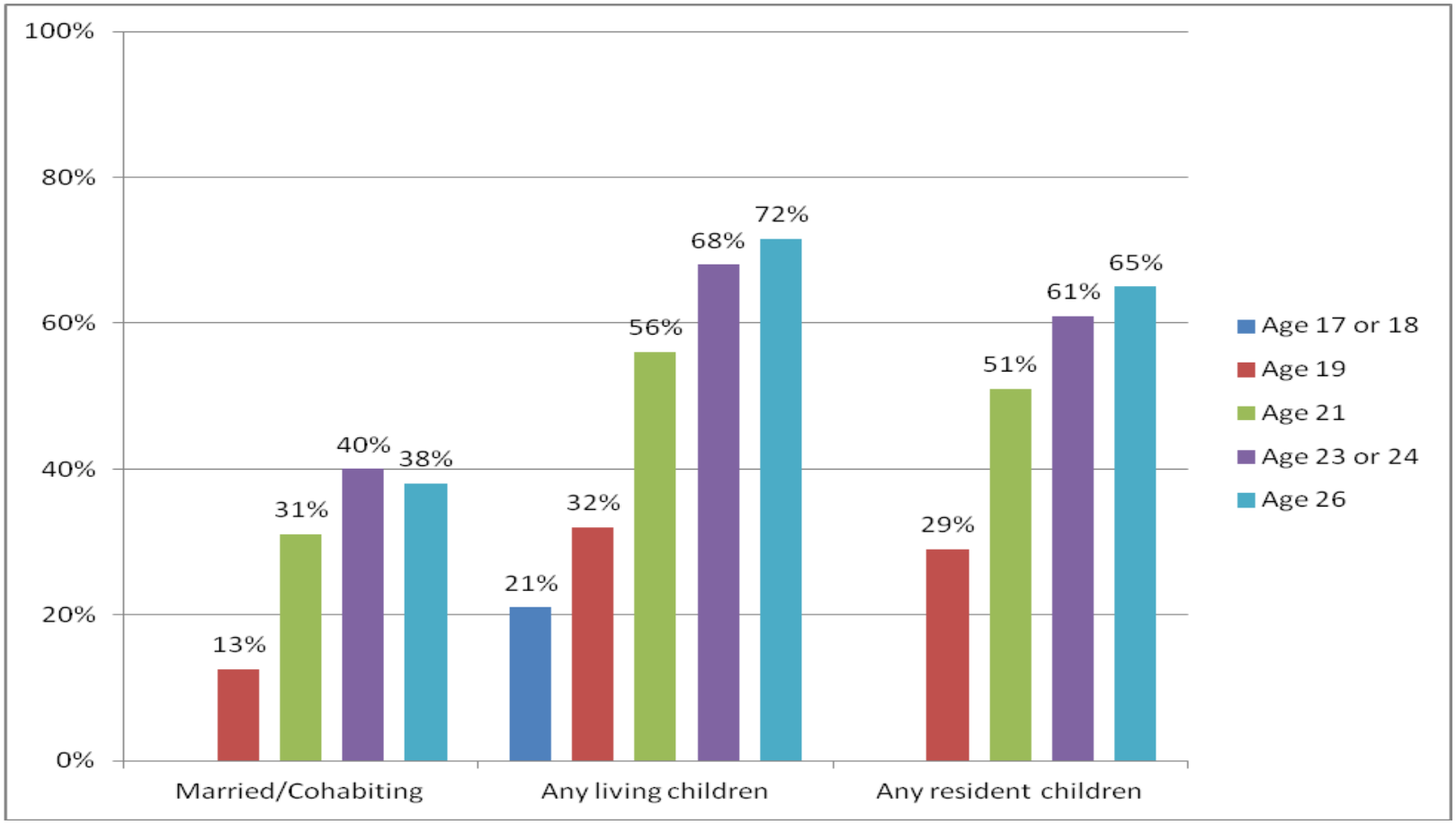


Young Men's and Young Women's Employment



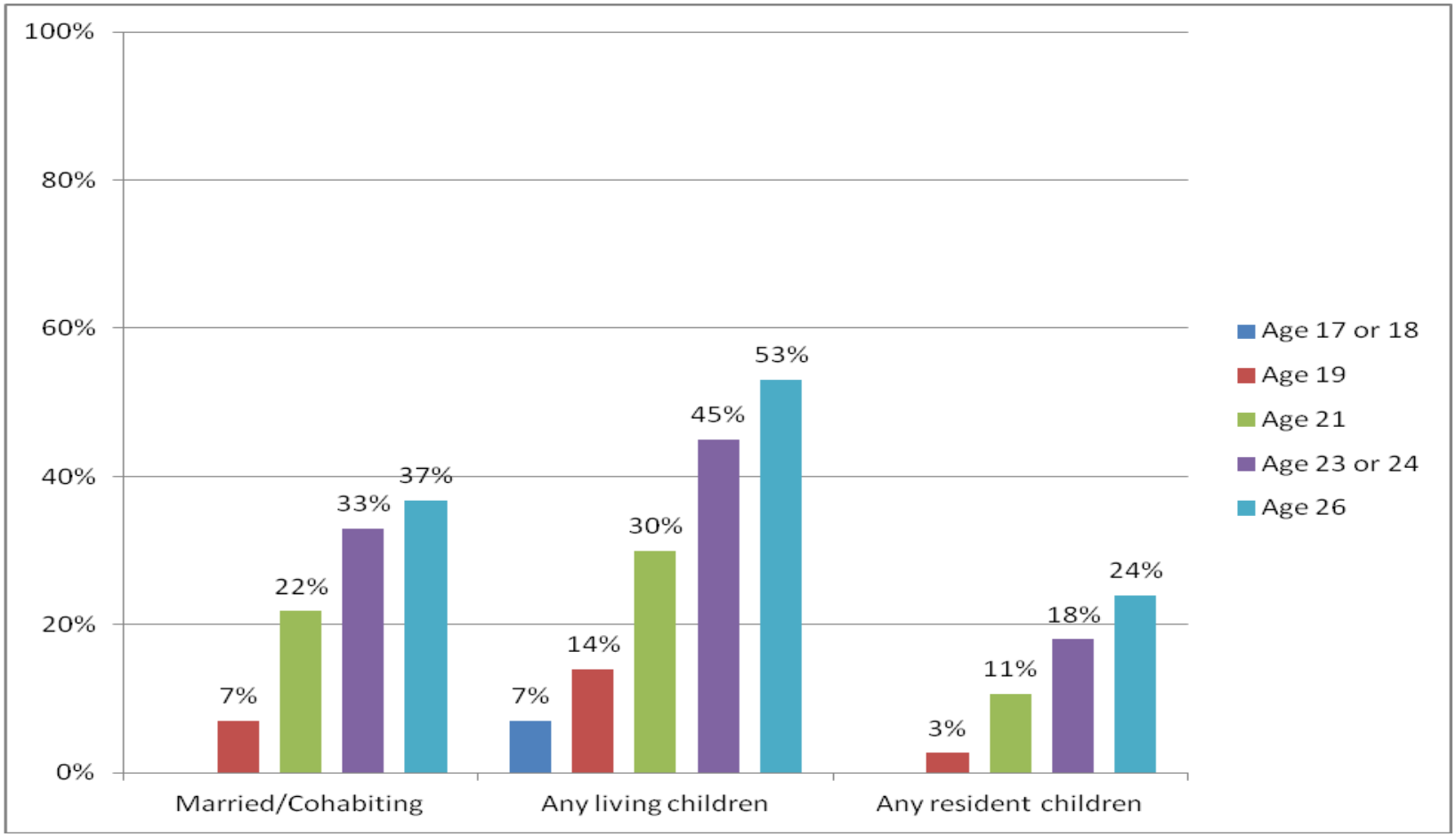
72% employed during year; mean earnings among employed = $13,989

Family Formation Among Young Women



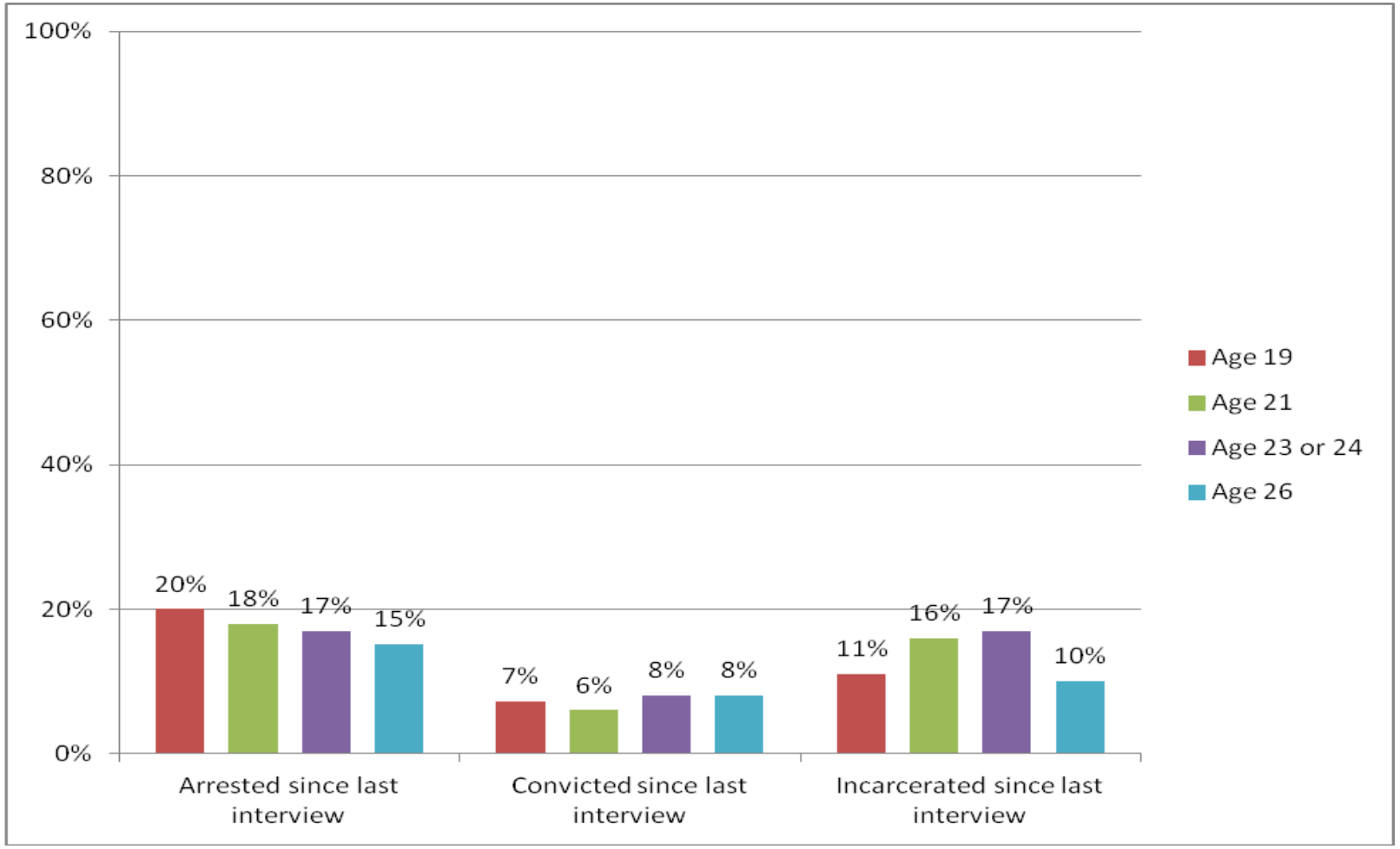
19% of women with children have a nonresident child

Family Formation Among Young Men

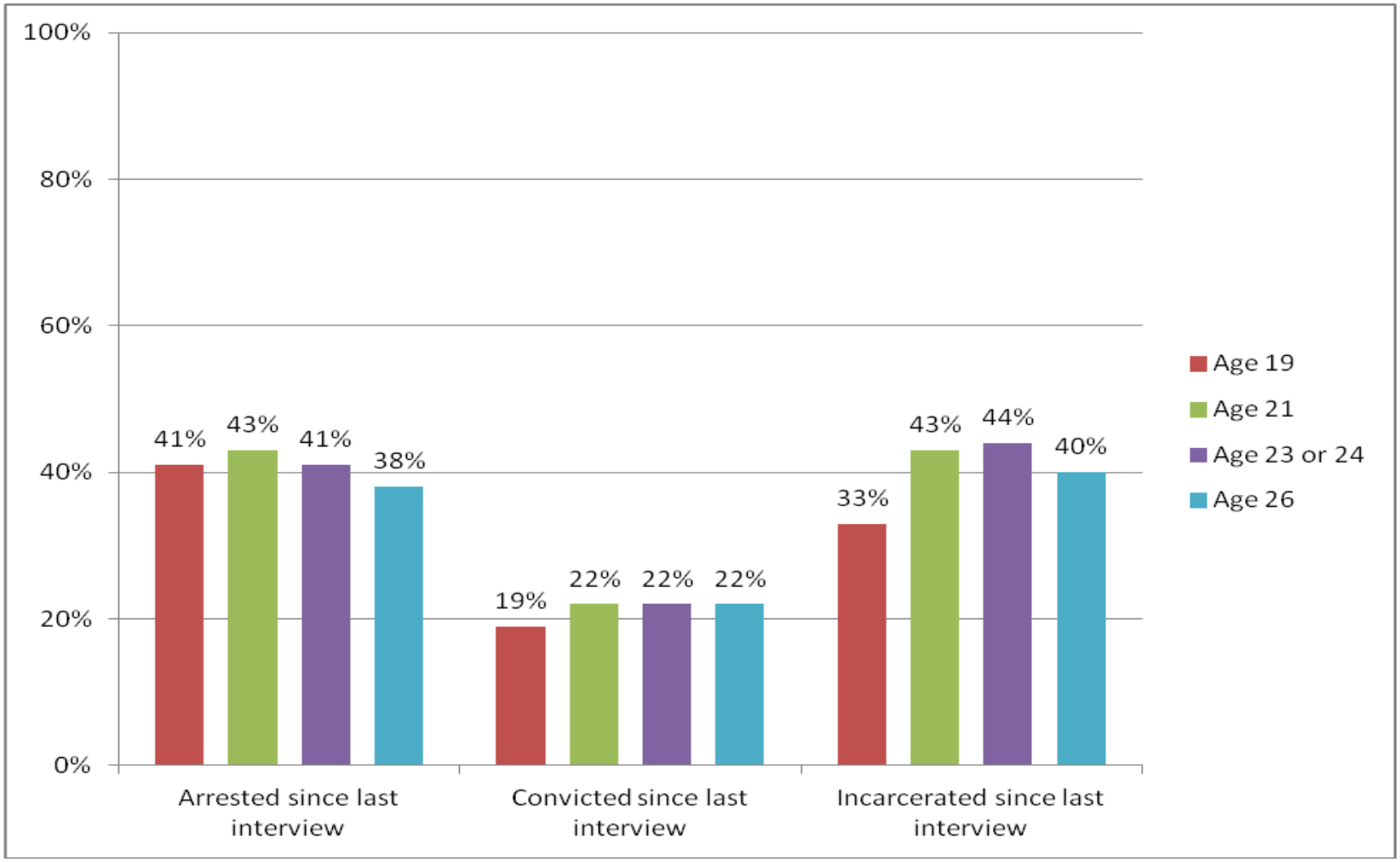


66% of men with children have a nonresident child

Young Women's Criminal Justice System Involvement



Young Men's Criminal Justice System Involvement



Summary of Early Adult Outcomes Post 1999

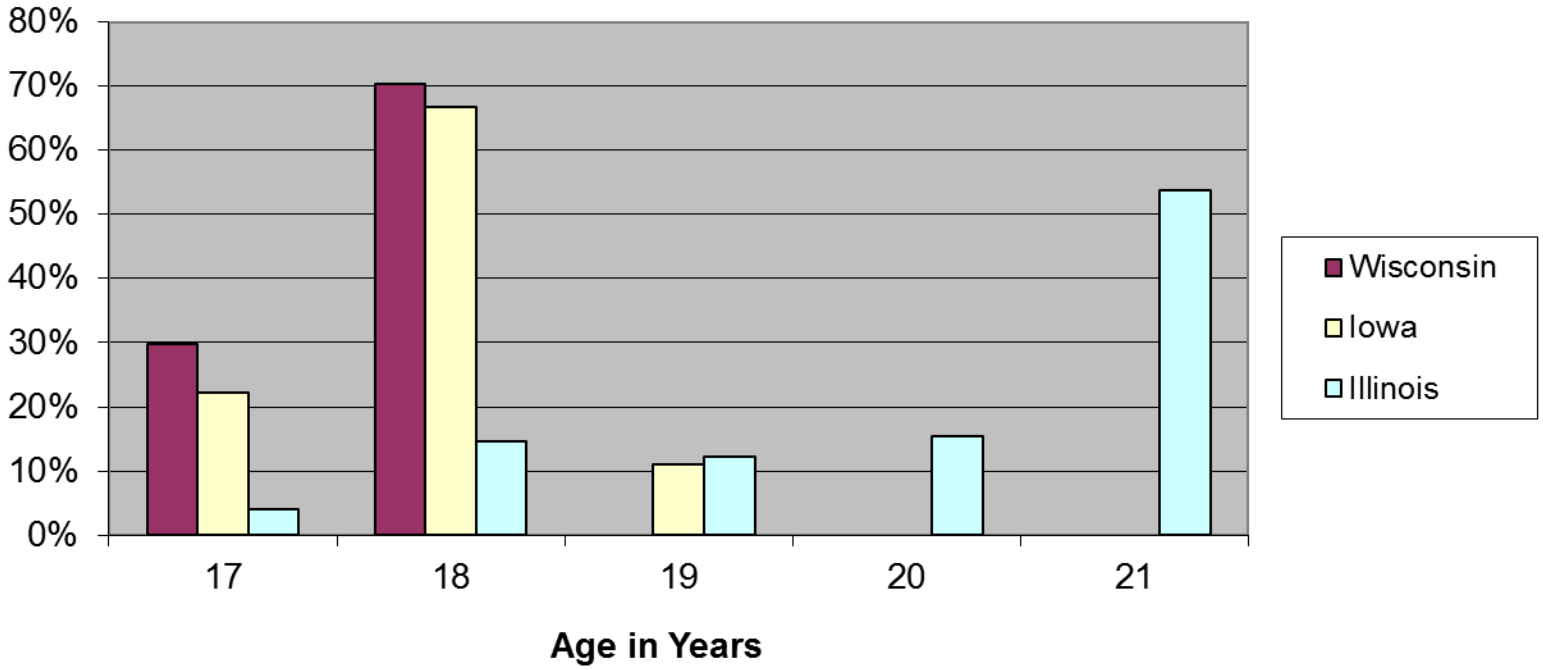
- *Outcomes are relatively poor across a variety of important transition domains*
- *Outcomes vary by gender; males fare worse*
- *Despite a sobering picture overall, many young people leaving the care of the state do well*

What is a concerned parent (policymaker) to do about these poor outcomes?

Testing the Wisdom of Extended Care: A Natural Experiment

- *Ability of foster youth to remain "in care" beyond age 18 varies across states*
- *Illinois was at the time one of the few jurisdictions where courts could and did routinely extend care and supervision until age 21*
- *Wisconsin and Iowa generally discharged youth around their 18th birthday during the study period*
  - Exception for Iowa foster youth who were on track to graduate from high school
  - Exception for Wisconsin foster youth who were pregnant

Age at Discharge by State



Mean age at discharge Wisconsin=17.8 Iowa=17.9 Illinois=20.0

Summary of Findings on Extending Care

Overall outcomes obscure between-state differences driven by extended care in Illinois; policy does matter!

- *Allowing foster youth to remain in care until age 21 is associated with:*
  - Increased likelihood of obtaining post-secondary education (Courtney, Dworsky, & Pollack, 2007); though few youth have completed a degree by age 26, many remain in college
  - Increased earnings (Hook & Courtney, 2011)
  - Delayed pregnancy (Dworsky & Courtney, 2010)
  - Reduced crime among females (Lee, Courtney, & Hook, 2012)
  - Delayed homelessness (Dworsky, Napolitano, & Courtney, 2013)
- *Allowing foster youth to remain in care until age 21 also increases their likelihood of receiving independent living services after age 18 (Courtney, Lee, & Perez, 2011).*

A Brave New World: The Fostering Connections to Success Act of 2008

- *Extends Federal Title IV-E funding (including guardianship and adoption subsidies), at state option, to age 21*
  - Youth must be 1) completing high school or an equivalency program; 2) enrolled in post-secondary or vocational school; 3) participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers to, employment; 4) employed for at least 80 hours per month; or 5) incapable of doing any of these activities due to a medical condition
- *Foster Care Independence Program remains intact (i.e., $140 million; ETVs)*

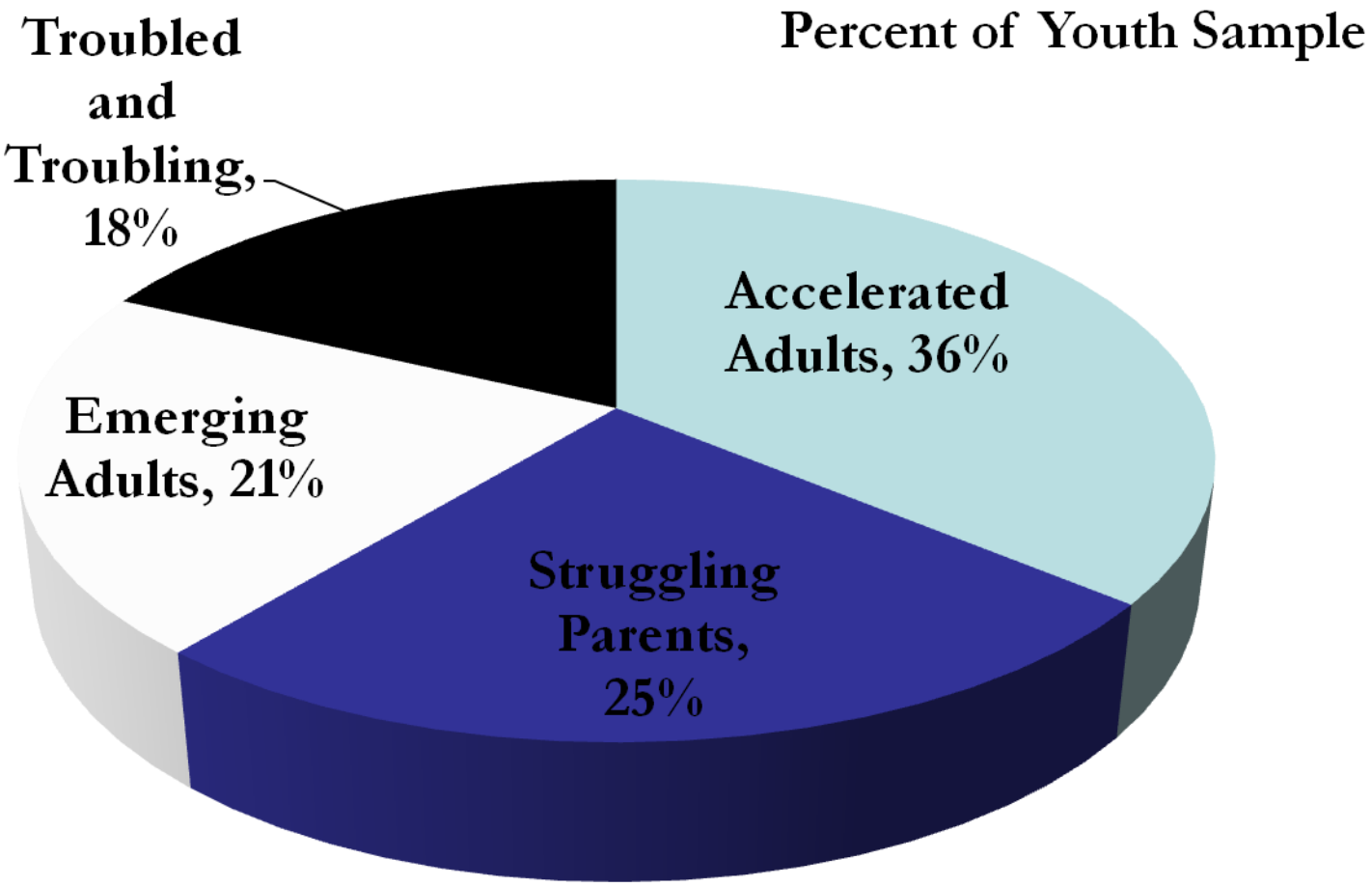
State option implies great inter-state variability!

Okay, so let's not abandon our youth at 18, but how do we best parent young adults?

Understanding Heterogeneity Provides Direction for Policy and Practice

- *Keller, Cusick, & Courtney (2007) used Latent Class Analysis (LCA) to identify subpopulations at age 17-18 (n = 732) defined by distinctive profiles on indicators reflecting multiple domains of life experience*
- *Analysis resulted in four distinctive groups: Distressed and Disconnected 43%; Competent and Connected 38%; Struggling but Staying 14%; Hindered but Homebound 5%*
  - Some of the most challenged youth were also unlikely to be easily engaged
- *Group membership at 17-18 is strongly associated with several distinct transition outcomes at age 21: education; employment; parenthood; incarceration*
- *More recent study (Courtney, Hook, & Lee, 2012) used key transition indicators to classify youth using LCA at age 23-24 (n = 584): living arrangement; educational attainment; employment; resident and non-resident children; conviction since 18*

Distribution of Former Foster Youth by Latent Class at Age 23-24



(Courtney, Hook, & Lee, 2012)

Implications for Policy (and Practice)

- *Distinct subgroups at the age of majority and during early adulthood suggest the need for targeted, developmentally appropriate policy and practice*
  - A large group--like many other young people--mainly needs support making the transition to higher education and succeeding there and likely does not need intensive interventions
  - 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
- *A wide variety of public systems should be accountable:* ***corporate parenting*** *that includes active participation of* ***young adults*** *(Courtney, 2009)*

But what about evidence-based practice?

Implications of research for practice…the good news

- *Handful of longitudinal studies have identified some predictors of later outcomes, mostly fairly obvious risk and protective factors (e.g., prior education; prior employment; mental and behavioral health; connections to supportive adults)*
- *Qualitative and descriptive studies have identified some of the strengths and needs of foster youth in transition (e.g., broad conception of "family" and lasting connections to family of origin; connections to other foster youth)*
- *Studies seeking the opinions of young people and professionals who serve them have identified promising practices and programs*
  - Supports for transitions to higher education
  - Asset development programs
  - Transitional housing (Youth Villages Transitional Living RCT!)
  - Mentoring

Implications of research for practice…the bad news

- *Cochrane collaboration review of evaluation research on IL programs (Montgomery et al, 2006) found no rigorous studies: "Further research incorporating randomized designs is both feasible and necessary"*
- *Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs:*
  - USDHHS Administration for Children and Families sponsored randomized experimental evaluations
  - No impact of life skills training, tutoring/mentoring, and employment support (Courtney et al, 2008, 2011)
  - Massachusetts Adolescent Outreach had some positive effects, but those appear to be mediated by the program's impact on youth remaining in care past age 18 (Courtney et al, 2011)

The bottom line: Too many interventions and programs are poorly targeted, have poorly developed logic models, and/or are not intensive enough to influence outcomes for youth making the transition to adulthood from foster care(Courtney et al, 2014)

So, let's get serious about learning from all of the experimenting going on now…

- *Learn from early adopters of the extended care provisions of the Fostering Connections Act*
  - CalYOUTH study in California (N = 727, interviews at **17**, 19, and 21)
  - National Governors Association state working group
- *National Youth in Transition Database*
  - State-level data on selected outcomes at 17, 19, and 21
  - Build on developing learning community of state child welfare agencies and researchers (NYTD-Plus: APHSA and Chapin Hall)
  - Potentially powerful data platform for between-state comparison of populations and the impact of policies on youth outcomes
- *Rigorous evaluation is possible, and ethical!*
  - Midwest Study and Multisite Evaluation show that follow-up is possible
  - Most programs do not serve all of the target population…we ration services all the time
  - It's time to stop treating foster youth as guinea pigs in an ongoing experiment with no human subjects protections!!!

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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

Midwest Study Collaborators:
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