

1-page summary: Impact of Extended Foster Care on College Outcomes

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Purpose

This study draws on data from a natural experiment of three states (Midwest Study) to evaluate the impact of extended foster care (EFC) on three postsecondary education outcomes:

1. Enrolling in college
2. Persisting in college
3. Completing a college degree

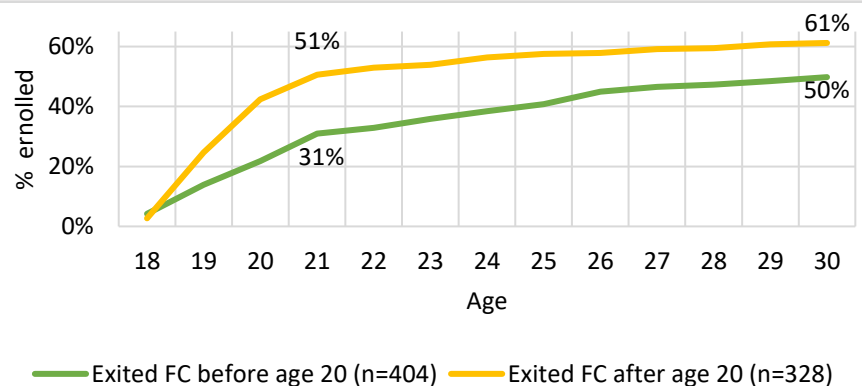
Data & Methods

Sample: The sample includes 732 young people who participated in the Midwest Study (2003-2012), a longitudinal study of 17-year-olds in foster care in three Midwestern states. Data on participants' college outcomes were obtained from the National Student Clearinghouse in 2015, when participants were 29/30 years old. At the time of the study, Illinois allowed youth to remain in foster care up to age 21, while the foster care age limit in Iowa and Wisconsin was age 18 (except under special circumstances). These state policy differences could be leveraged to estimate the impact of EFC.

Analytic methods: The three outcomes were whether youth enrolled in college by age 21 (yes/no), persisted through their first three semesters in college by age 21 (yes/no), and completed a 2-year or 4-year college degree by age 29/30 (yes/no). The amount of time youth spent in EFC was obtained from state child welfare administrative records. We used a sophisticated econometric analysis called an instrumental variable to obtain a more accurate estimate of the expected impact of the number of years spent in EFC on each of the college outcomes. We also statistically controlled for several sets of alternative explanations (plausible confounders).

Main Findings

- Time in EFC was found to statistically significantly ($p < .05$) college enrollment, but not the other two outcomes.
- Each year youth spent in foster care past their 18th birthday increased the probability that youth enrolled in college by about 8-10 percentage points.
- EFC was not found to significantly impact the probability of youth persisting through their first two (or first three) semesters in college by age 21.
- EFC also did not significantly impact youths' probability of completing a college degree by age 29/30.



Implications

- EFC was found to have a strong, positive influence on youth enrolling in college. The estimated impact in this study (an increase in 8-10 percentage points per year in EFC) was similar to those found in the CalYOUTH Study (an increase of 8.5 percentage points per year in EFC, Courtney, Okpych, & Park, 2018).
- While EFC elevated youths' likelihood of going to college, it was not found to impact their chances of persisting in college or completing college.
- While EFC helps meet youths' basic needs (e.g., funding for housing) and potentially connects youth to professionals and resources, completing college is an arduous and long journey that likely requires more intensive supports (e.g., campus-based wraparound support).
- Given the myriad, ongoing demands that are tied to making it through college, the resources afforded by EFC may be necessary but insufficient ingredients to increasing rates of persistence and degree completion.