

Economic Security and the COVID-19 Pandemic Among Youth Living in Kinship & Foster Care in Washington State



Economic Security and the COVID-19 Pandemic Among Young People Living Apart from their Parents

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically altered life across the world. In the United States, a 2022 national survey by the American Psychological Association (APA) found that over 60% of Americans said their life had been changed negatively due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and many reported feelings of grief, loss, and added stressors associated with the pandemic.¹ For young people in the United States, the pandemic presented physical and mental health challenges associated with the loss of key supports and resources as schools closed, stay-at-home mandates were issued, and many families struggled with illness, loss, and financial anxieties.²

Young people's experiences of isolation and stress throughout the Covid-19 pandemic have concerned health professionals who foresee severe impacts on healthy psychosocial functioning, mental health, and long-term wellness.³ Nationwide, over 160,000 young people under the age of 18 lost one of their primary caregivers due to COVID-19. More than 70,000 lost a parent, and approximately 13,000 lost their sole caregiver.^{4 5} These young people were disproportionately low-income and members of socially and economically marginalized communities.⁵

Compared to their peers living with their parents, the COVID-19 pandemic had an especially negative impact on youth living apart from their families of origin, such as young people involved in the foster care system.^{6 7} Many youth living in out-of-home care and their caregivers have experienced difficulties accessing needed services and support throughout the pandemic.⁸ Many have experienced increased placement disruptions,⁹ and struggled to transition to virtual learning environments.¹⁰ This was particularly acute among students with learning disabilities.^{9 10} Young people living in foster care have often experienced more adverse childhood experiences than their peers living with their parents,¹¹ have moved more frequently and experienced more school instability, and experience economic insecurity at high rates.^{12 13 14} Although youth living in both foster care and kinship care have experienced significantly more challenges during the pandemic than youth living with their parents, youth living in kinship care have experienced less economic instability, stronger community bonds, and less anxiety related to the pandemic than youth living in foster care. Placement stability, strong family supports, and prosocial community connections are protective factors for youth.^{15 16}

What is Kinship Care?

Kinship care refers to the full-time care of a minor by a relative or another adult who has a close relationship with the youth and their family.¹⁷ For youth who are unable to live with their parents, kinship care arrangements offer an important opportunity to keep youth with their families and in their communities. Kinship care helps maintain family relationships and culture and helps foster a sense of belonging that promotes healthy psychosocial development.¹⁸ Kinship care also has been shown to minimize the trauma of being removed from parental care.¹⁹ Being placed with family members improves well-being, increases permanency,²⁰ improves behavioral and mental health outcomes, and preserves cultural identity and community connections.^{19 21 22 23 24} Ensuring that kinship caregivers have adequate supports and financial resources to care for youth during the COVID-19 pandemic is important vital to protecting vulnerable young people from the material and psychosocial challenges many have faced.

Washington State Healthy Youth Survey

This fact sheet used data from the 2021 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey (HYS) to compare experiences between youth living in kinship care and youth living in foster care related to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The HYS is a biannual survey that includes 8th, 10th, and 12th grade public school students. The survey offers a representative sample of young people in Washington State and provides important details about their health and well-being.²⁵

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Student Population Changes

From the academic year (AY) 2018-19 to AY 2021-22, there was a 2.4% increase in enrollment among all 8th, 10th, and 12th graders in Washington State. However, enrollment among students involved in the foster care system decreased by 31.7%.²⁶

School often functions as the primary site for mental and behavioral health services for youth experiencing housing and parental care instability,¹⁵ and disruptions to in-person school limit access for many students involved in the foster care system.^{27 28} The COVID-19 pandemic intensified school disconnection among youth involved in the foster care system,^{29 30 31} and HYS participation among youth living in kinship care and foster care dropped dramatically with lower enrollment rates.²⁵ As a result, the findings from the 2021 HYS likely undercount health and wellness disparities among young people involved in foster care.

Living in Kinship Care

- 2.7% (3,469 Youth)
- 35.9% decrease in HYS participation from the 2018-19 academic year.

Living in Foster Care

- 0.4% (463 Youth)
- 41.7% decrease in HYS participation from the 2018-19 academic year.

Note: Sample size N=125,996.

Based upon the HYS Question: Who did you live with most of the time in the last 30 days? 95.8% (142,296 Youth) were living with their parents.

Among all students, there was a 15.2% decrease in HYS participation from the 2018-19 academic year to 2020-21. academic year.

Economic Security

Youth living in kinship care experience significantly greater economic stability. Compared to youth living in kinship care:

- The rate of qualifying for free and or reduced-price school lunch was **1.3** times higher among youth living in foster care.
- Being a member of a migrant family who moved for seasonal work in the past three years was **1.5** times higher among youth living in foster care.
- Losing their home because their family could not afford housing was **1.5** times higher among youth living in foster care.

Community Bonds

Youth living in kinship care experienced stronger community bonds. Compared to youth living in kinship care:

- The risk of low neighborhood attachment (e.g., not liking their neighborhood or community, and feeling as though they would not miss the neighborhood or community they lived in if they had to move) was **1.2** times higher among youth living in foster care.
- Reporting they felt like they had few opportunities for prosocial community involvement, such as joining a club, sports teams, 4H, etc. was **1.4** times higher among youth living in foster care.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

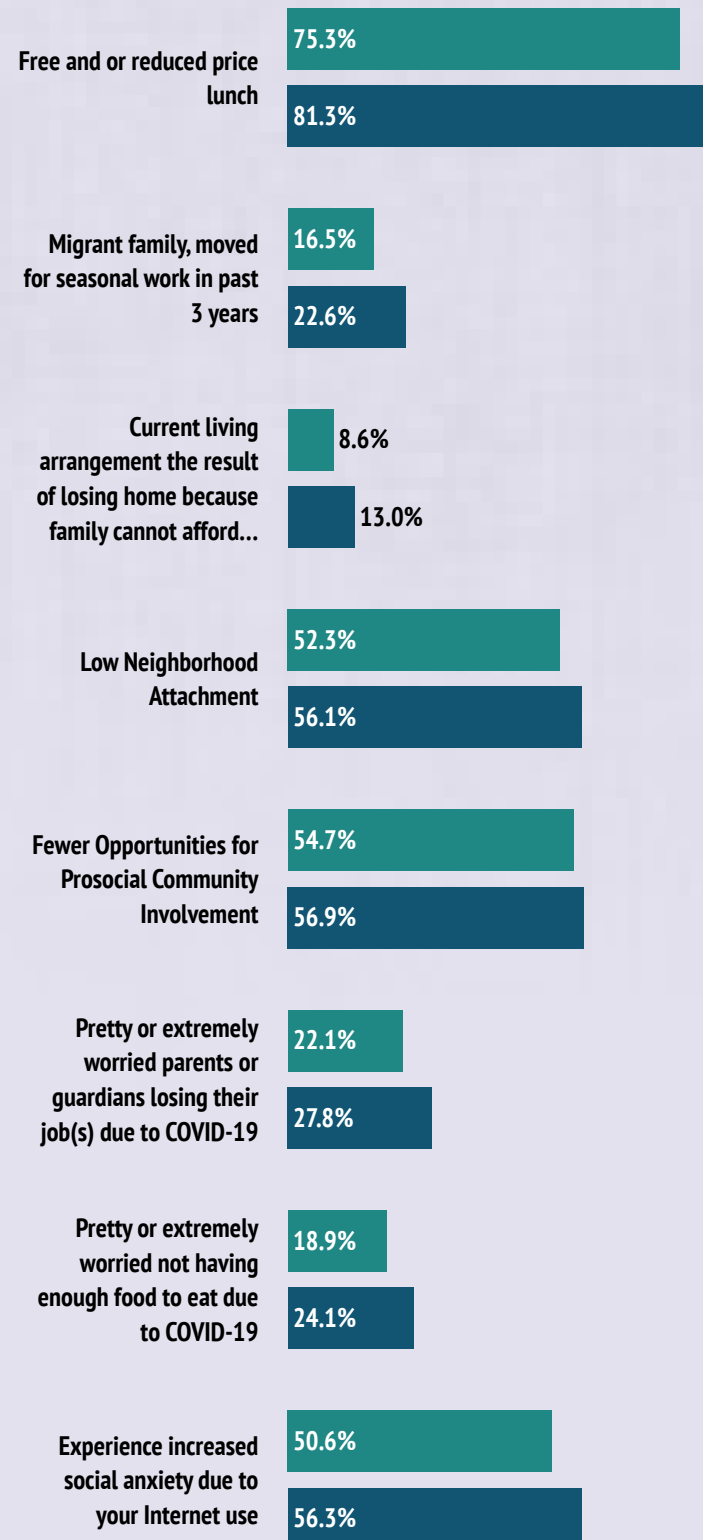
Youth living in kinship care experience significantly less anxiety related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Compared to youth living in kinship care:

- Feeling worried that their parents or guardians would lose their job due to COVID-19 was **1.3** times higher among youth living in foster care.
- Feeling worried about not having enough food to eat due to COVID-19 was **1.4** times higher among youth living in foster care.
- Experiencing increased social anxiety due to internet use during the pandemic was 1.1 times higher among youth living in foster care.

Key Takeaways from the Washington Healthy Youth Survey

- The COVID-19 pandemic had a disproportionately negative impact on young people experiencing economic, housing, and parental care instability. Young people involved in the foster care system were particularly impacted.
- Kinship care can be an important support for young people experiencing housing and parental care instability.

● Living in Kinship Care ● Living in Foster Care



Economic Security and the COVID-19 Pandemic Among Youth Living in Kinship & Foster Care in Washington State



References

1. American Psychological Association (2022). Stress in America: Money, inflation, war pile on to nation stuck in COVID-19 survival mode. American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2022/march-2022-survival-mode>
2. Whitt-Woosley, A., Sprang, G., & Eslinger, J. (2022). Foster care during the COVID-19 pandemic: A qualitative analysis of caregiver and professional experiences. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 124, 105444.
3. Washington Courts (2022) COVID-19 Impact on the mental health of children and youth in care. Washington Courts, Family and Youth Justice Program. <https://www.wacita.org/covid-19-impact-on-the-mental-health-of-children-and-youth-in-care/>
4. Span, P. (2022, April 12) As families grieve, grandparents step up. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/04/12/well/family/covid-deaths-parents-grandparents.html>
5. Treglia, D., Cutuli, J. J., Arasteh, K., J. Bridgeland, J.M., Edson, G., Phillips, S., Balakrishna, A. (2021). Hidden pain: Children who lost a parent or caregiver to COVID-19 and what the nation can do to help them. COVID Collaborative. <https://www.covidcollaborative.us/assets/uploads/pdf/HIDDEN-PAIN.Report.Final.pdf>
6. Blake, S., Fung, S., Haspel, J., Kniffen, S., Manwaring, R., Tran, S., & Wondra, D. (2020). The Impact of COVID-19 on Students in Foster Care. *Children Now*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED610710.pdf>
7. Hanlon, R., Kim, J., Woo, C., Day, A., Vanderwill, L., & Dallimore, E. (2022). An exploratory study of the impact of COVID-19 on foster parenting. *Child & Family Social Work*, 27(3): 371-380.
8. Beal, S. J., Nause, K., & Greiner, M. V. (2022). Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on stress and Access to Services for Licensed and Kinship Caregivers and Youth in Foster Care. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 1-8.
9. Musser, E. D., Riopelle, C., & Latham, R. (2021). Child maltreatment in the time of COVID-19: Changes in the Florida foster care system surrounding the COVID-19 safer-at-home order. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 116, 104945.
10. Platt, C., & Gephart, S. M. (2022). Placement disruption of children with disabilities in foster care. *Journal of Pediatric Nursing*, 66, 30-35.
11. Xu, Y., Jedwab, M., Lee, K. A., & Levkoff, S. E. (2022). The Negative Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on Behavioral Problems of Children in Kinship Care: The Protective Role of Kinship Caregivers' Mental Health. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 10634266221076475.
12. Ahrens, K. R., Garrison, M. M., & Courtney, M. E. (2014). Health outcomes in young adults from foster care and economically diverse backgrounds. *Pediatrics*, 134(6), 1067-1074.
13. Barth, R. P., Wildfire, J., & Green, R. L. (2006). Placement into foster care and the interplay of urbanicity, child behavior problems, and poverty. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 76(3), 358-366.
14. McGuinness, T. M., & Schneider, K. (2007). Poverty, child maltreatment, and foster care. *Journal of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association*, 13(5), 296-303.
15. Crumé, H. J., Nurius, P. S., & Fleming, C. M. (2019). Cumulative adversity profiles among youth experiencing housing and parental care instability. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 100, 129-135.
16. Storer, H. L., Barkan, S. E., Stenhouse, L. L., Eichenlaub, C., Mallillin, A., & Haggerty, K. P. (2014). In search of connection: The foster youth and caregiver relationship. *Children and Youth Services review*, 42, 110-117.
17. Child Welfare Information Gateway (2022a). Kinship care. Child Welfare Information Gateway, Children's Bureau Administration for Children and Families U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/outofhome/kinship/>
18. Ybarra, V., Klinman, D., and Luna, H. (2022). Child outcomes in kinship care in Washington state – A research brief. Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families – Office of Innovation, Alignment, and Accountability. <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov>
19. Child Welfare Information Gateway (2022b). Kinship care and the child welfare system. Child Welfare Information Gateway, Children's Bureau Administration for Children and Families U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.childwelfare.gov>
20. Bell, T., & Romano, E. (2017). Permanency and safety among children in foster family and kinship care: A scoping review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 18(3), 268-286.
21. Redlich-Epstein, H. (2017) Kinship care is better for children and families. American Bar Association. <https://www.americanbar.org>
22. Winokur, M. A., Crawford, G. A., Longobardi, R. C., & Valentine, D. P. (2008). Matched comparison of children in kinship care and foster care on child welfare outcomes. *Families in Society*, 89(3), 338-346.
23. Winokur, M. A., Holtan, A., & Batchelder, K. E. (2018). Systematic review of kinship care effects on safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 28(1), 19-32.
24. Wu, Q., White, K. R., & Coleman, K. L. (2015). Effects of kinship care on behavioral problems by child age: A propensity score analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 57, 1-8.
25. Washington State Department of Health (2022). The Healthy Youth Survey. Washington State Department of Health. <https://doh.wa.gov/data-statistical-reports/data-systems/healthy-youth-survey>
26. OSPI (2022). Enrollment Reporting. Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. <https://www.k12.wa.us>
27. Chatterji, P., & Li, Y. (2021). Effects of COVID-19 on school enrollment. *Economics of Education Review*, 83, 102128.
28. Rautkis, M. E., Tang, F., Sgourakis, A., Huguley, J., & Robertson, R. (2021). Supporting the education of youth in foster care during the pandemic: foster parent and agency perspectives. <http://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/40355/>
29. Beal, S. J., Nause, K., & Greiner, M. V. (2022). Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on stress and Access to Services for Licensed and Kinship Caregivers and Youth in Foster Care. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 1-8.
30. Loria, H., McLeigh, J., Wolfe, K., Conner, E., Smith, V., Greeley, C. S., & Keefe, R. J. (2021). Caring for children in foster and kinship care during a pandemic: lessons learned and recommendations. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 1-24.
31. Rosenberg, R., Sun, S., Flannigan, A., & O'Meara, M. (2022). Impact of COVID-19 among young people currently and formerly in foster care. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 123, 105383.