

# Youth who age out of foster care show higher educational attainment

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Children in foster care often suffer detrimental effects that can carry over into adulthood and infect future relationships. However, new Penn State research indicates youth who age out of foster care attain higher educational achievement than those who exit foster care and are reunited with their families.

Sarah Font, assistant professor of sociology and Social Science Research Institute co-funded faculty member, explains that the [foster care](#) system serves at-risk children and families and is intended to be a temporary intervention for children who are unable to be safely cared for at home.

"Reunification with families is a priority, but many parents are unable or unwilling to meet the requirements for reunification, leaving children to be adopted or aged out of the system," said Font. "Unfortunately, there hasn't been much research on the implications of these arrangements for child well-being. Few studies have compared outcomes for youth with different foster care exit types, and previous research has only compared outcomes of foster youth with the general population."

The research, published recently in the *American Sociological Review*, utilized linked longitudinal administrative data from the Wisconsin Multi-Sample Person File and administrative data from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction for the years 2004 to 2015.

Font and her research team found that youth who aged out of care had significantly higher odds of graduating high school and enrolling in college than did reunified youth and youth who exited to guardianship.

"We found foster youth who aged out of the system had similar odds as children who were adopted, which suggest reunification with their families is not an indicator of education and economic attainment," Font explained.

One reason for this may be that [foster youth](#) typically receive more resources than other youth, such as financial support, and access to therapeutic services, support groups, and trainings. By contrast, children who are reunified with their families typically receive no long-term supports or resources.

"This research suggests resources may need to be spread out among youth with other outcomes," said Font.

In the future, Font would like to conduct similar research in other states, such as Pennsylvania.

"Wisconsin has a very well developed and integrated data system; Pennsylvania is currently trying to develop a similar system," Font reported.

**More information:** Sarah A. Font et al. Permanency and the Educational and Economic Attainment of Former Foster Children in Early Adulthood, *American Sociological Review* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/0003122418781791](https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122418781791)

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