



U.S. Department of Health and  
Human Services,  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for  
Planning and Evaluation

# **Children Living Apart from Their Parents: Highlights from the National Survey of Children in Nonparental Care**

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## Introduction

This paper highlights the characteristics and experiences of the approximately 2.3 million U.S. children who live with neither biological nor adoptive parents, but instead with relatives or non-relatives in foster care or less formal care arrangements outside the foster care system. It presents an overview of descriptive results from the 2013 National Survey of Children in Nonparental Care (NSCNC), the first large-scale, population-based, nationally-representative survey to focus on issues specific to this group of children. Families were selected for the NSCNC from those who completed the 2011-2012 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) and met the criteria for having children in nonparental care. This report also includes results based on data collected during the NSCH interview.

Children in nonparental care (as these children are referred to throughout this brief) make up just 3.1 percent of all U.S. children and are particularly vulnerable in a number of respects. In particular, they lack a consistent relationship with parents, who typically are a primary force in children's healthy development and social functioning. Disrupted parenting tends to undermine children's sense of security and well-being. The limited studies that have focused on children in this group have demonstrated that children in nonparental care frequently have endured a range of adverse experiences,<sup>1</sup> and as a group they show a tendency for poorer outcomes than children overall on a wide range of health, education, and well-being measures.<sup>2</sup> In addition, a recent study of middle school youth found that of 10 potentially traumatic experiences asked about in a trauma screening tool, separation from a parent was the one that was most associated with traumatic stress.<sup>3</sup> However, few studies, and virtually none that use nationally representative samples, have focused on the particular issues and circumstances of children in nonparental care.

Children in nonparental care come into contact with schools, social services programs, and health care providers on a daily basis. Yet their caregivers may face challenges navigating the range of day-to-day interactions on behalf of the children in their care. Because they often lack legal custody, caregivers may have difficulties enrolling these children in school or consenting to health care for them. In addition, nonparental caregivers may find it impossible to add the child to their own health insurance plan. With respect to social services, the needs of these households may not fit neatly into program service categories and their outcomes may not fit standard program goals that were designed for families headed by a parent. For example, many child-only TANF cases involve children who live apart from their parents, yet TANF is designed to support parental employment. Similarly, the child support program is designed to serve families in which there is one absent parent and one parent with custody of the child.

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<sup>1</sup> Bramlett MD, Radel LF. Adverse family experiences among children in nonparental care, 2011–2012. National health statistics reports; no 74. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Vandivere, S, Yrausquin, A, Allen, T, Malm, K., and McKlindon, A. Children in Nonparental Care: A Review of the Literature and Analysis of Data Gaps. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Woodbridge, M. W., Sumi, W. C., Thornton, S. P., Fabrikant, N., Rouspil, K. M., Langley, A. K., & Kataoka, S. H. (2016). Screening for trauma in early adolescence: Findings from a diverse school district. *School Mental Health*, 8(1), 89-105.

## **Key Findings**

### **Living Situations and Reasons for Nonparental Care**

- Most children in nonparental care lived with grandparents (63.1%). Others lived with foster parents (14.7%, some of whom were related) or with other relatives and nonrelatives such as aunts, godparents, or friends (22.3%).
- Between the time of the NSCH interview (2011-2012) and the follow-up NSCNC survey (2013), 8.2% of children initially in nonparental care had reunited with a parent and 7.5% had been adopted by the nonparental caregiver.
- Reasons children lived apart from both parents include maternal substance abuse (18.9%), paternal substance abuse (14.7%), paternal incarceration (14.4%), and maternal child abuse (12.3%).

### **Demographics, Socioeconomics, and Receipt of Benefits**

- While non-Hispanic Black children made up only 13.5% of all children in the U.S., they made up 35.1% of the children in nonparental care.
- Just over one-third of children in nonparental care lived in poor households (36.5%), another third lived in low income households (30.8%), and the remaining third (32.8%) lived in households with incomes greater than 200% of the federal poverty level.<sup>4</sup>
- About half of children in nonparental care outside the child welfare system (49.7%) and three-quarters of those in foster care (74.5%) had caregivers who received financial support to care for the child, primarily foster care stipends or welfare payments from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

### **Child Well-Being**

- Children in nonparental care were less healthy than children in the general population; they were more likely to have any of 10 common current mental health conditions (27.1% vs. 16.5%) and any of 8 common current physical health conditions (26.6% vs. 13.0%). (Specific conditions and their prevalence estimates are shown in Appendix Table 3.)
- Children in nonparental care were also more likely than all children to have repeated any grade levels in school (21.7% vs. 9.1%).

### **Parental Involvement**

- Children in foster care were less likely than children in other nonparental care arrangements to have visited with their mothers at least once in the past year (63.9% versus 81.9%). Visitation with fathers was less likely and did not vary significantly by child welfare system involvement.
- Caregivers of children residing apart from parents did not often consult the child's parents about issues such as school or daycare decisions or health care. Less than one-third of children with foster parents (28.9%) and half of children with other nonparental caregivers (52.2%) had caregivers who ever consulted with the child's mother about such issues, and many fewer had ever consulted the child's father.

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<sup>4</sup> Poor households are defined as those with incomes less than 100% of the federal poverty threshold (i.e., those in poverty), while low income families are those with incomes between 100% and 200% of the poverty threshold.

## **Expectations for the Future**

- The vast majority of children in nonparental care (85.7%) had caregivers who expected the child would continue to live with them until grown.

## **The National Survey of Children in Nonparental Care**

The data used in this brief are drawn from two national surveys conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS): the 2011-2012 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH), a nationally-representative survey of households with children, and the 2013 National Survey of Children in Nonparental Care (NSCNC), which re-interviewed almost 1,300 households identified as nonparental care households in the NSCH, including foster care, grandparent care, and other households with no parents present. Both surveys were modules of NCHS' State and Local Area Integrated Telephone Survey (SLAITS). NSCH was sponsored by the Health Resources and Services Administration's Maternal and Child Health Bureau, while NSCNC was sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, with supplemental funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

NSCH was a random-digit-dial landline and cell telephone survey that interviewed 95,677 households with children throughout the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The NSCH sample is nationally representative of children ages 0 to 17 years in households in the United States in 2011-2012. One child in each household with children was randomly selected to be the target of the NSCH interview. Respondents were adults in the household who were knowledgeable about the child's health, usually the child's mother.

NSCNC was a follow-back survey 1-2 years after the NSCH for children who had been living in households with no parents present and were still under age 18. Follow-back interviews were conducted via telephone with a current caregiver, in some cases the parent who had reunited with the child since the NSCH interview. The NSCH had a 51% cooperation rate among eligible households but a 23% overall response rate, and NSCNC had a 52% completion rate among eligible households one-to-two years later. The overall NSCNC response rate, including nonresponse to the NSCH, is the product of the NSCH response rate (23%) and the NSCNC completion rate (52%), or 12%.<sup>5</sup>

Because information from the NSCH was available for both NSCNC respondents and nonrespondents, nonresponse bias analysis could precisely identify attributes related to response propensity. Weighting adjustments to match the population estimated by the weighted sample of completed NSCNC interviews to the pool of eligible NSCH households by demographics dramatically reduced estimated nonresponse bias; as a result, remaining nonresponse bias in weighted estimates was consistently smaller than sampling error. Although extensive attempts were made to adjust for nonresponse, the low overall response rate means that nonresponse bias cannot be ruled out. More information about NSCH and NSCNC may be found at:

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<sup>5</sup> Calculations of the "response rate" include in the denominator phone lines that were never answered and may not be eligible households with children. In contrast, the "cooperation rate" is calculated as the percentage of households in which someone answered the phone and the household met survey eligibility criteria. In samples that include cell phones, typically many phones are never answered.

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/slaits.htm> or by referring to the associated documentation published by the SLAITS program.<sup>6 7</sup>

Estimates based on NSCH apply to noninstitutionalized children ages 0-17 in 2011-2012. Body-mass index estimates from NSCH are based on children ages 10-17 in 2011-2012, while academic indicators from NSCH, unless otherwise noted, are based on children ages 6-17 in 2011-2012. Because the sample frame for NSCNC was defined based on the 2011-2012 population, and children who entered nonparental care between then and the 2013 NSCNC survey could not be observed, estimates from NSCNC are based on children who were in nonparental care and ages 0-16 in 2011-2012.

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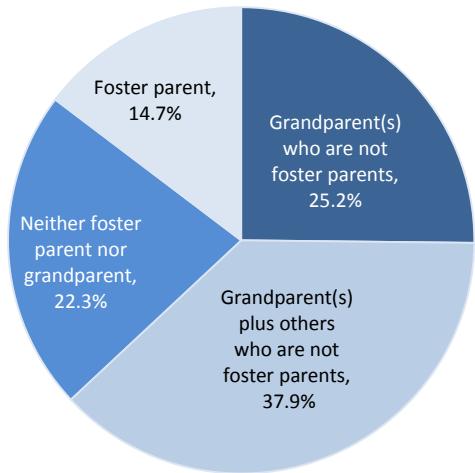
<sup>6</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Health Statistics, State and Local Area Integrated Telephone Survey (2013). 2011-2012 National Survey of Children's Health Frequently Asked Questions. April 2013. Available from: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/slaits/nsch.htm>

<sup>7</sup> CDC, National Center for Health Statistics, State and Local Area Integrated Telephone Survey (2014). National Survey of Children in Nonparental Care: Frequently Asked Questions and Guidelines for Data Users. April 2014. Available from: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/slaits/nsncn.htm>

## When children live apart from their parents, who cares for them?

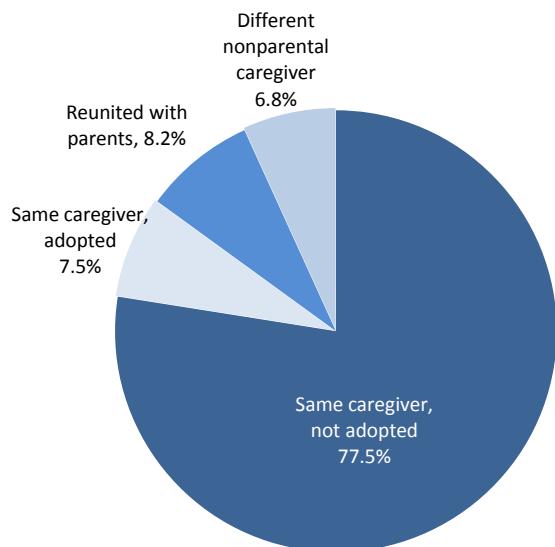
It is important to understand who cares for children when parents are absent because these caregivers play such an essential role in children's lives. This study found that children in nonparental care lived in a variety of care arrangements, including foster care (with either relatives or non-relatives) and more informal settings with grandparents, other relatives, or family friends. Figure 1 shows the percentage of children living with various types of nonparental caregivers in 2011-2012 when children in the study were initially identified. Figure 2 shows the children's living arrangements in 2013 when the follow-up NSCNC survey was conducted.

**Figure 1: Children by nonparental caregiver type in 2011-2012**



Source: NSCH, 2011-2012;

**Figure 2: 2013 caregiver arrangements of children who were ages 0-16 and living in nonparental care in 2011-2012**



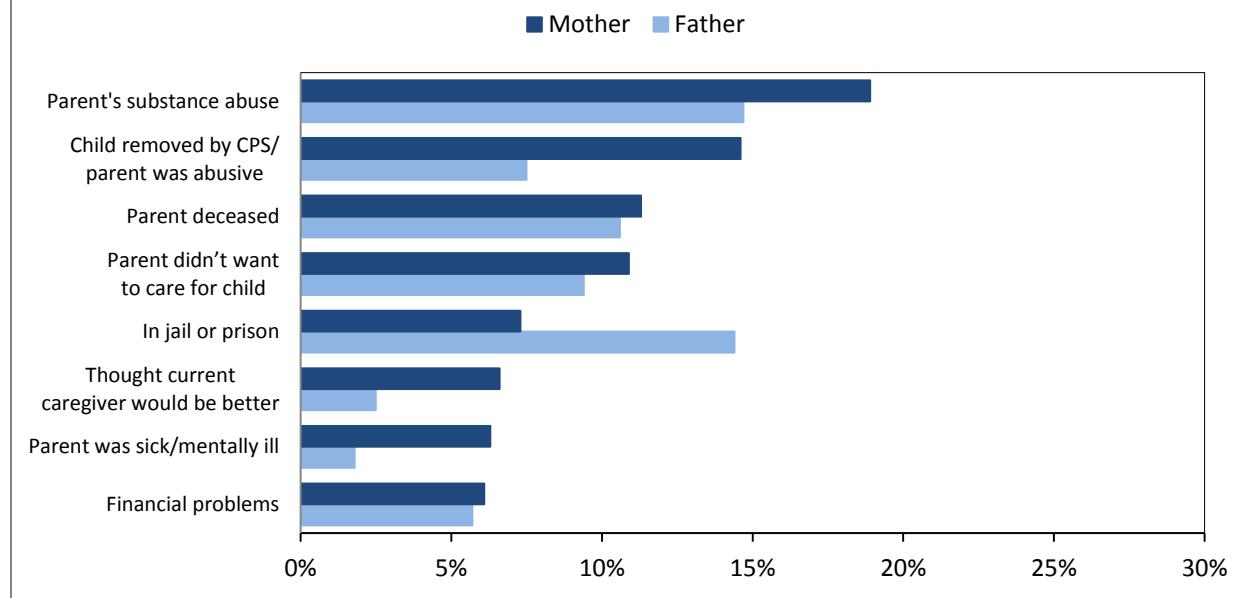
Source: NSCNC, 2013

- In 2011-2012, most children who did not live with parents lived with grandparents, either alone (25.2%) or in combination with other household members (37.9%). Nearly a quarter of children (22.3%) lived with persons who were neither grandparents nor foster parents (e.g., aunts, uncles, adult siblings, or family friends). About one in seven children in nonparental care (14.7%) lived with foster parents (including foster parents who were also relatives).
- The majority of children who were in nonparental care in 2011-2012 were still in nonparental care one to two years later, with over three-quarters (77.5%) living with the same nonparental caregiver.
- By 2013, about 8% of children who were living apart from their parents in 2011-2012 had been reunited with their parent(s) and 7.5% had been adopted by their caregiver.

## Why do children live apart from their parents?

It is important to understand the reasons why children do not live with their parents to identify ways to reduce the number of children in this situation. Figure 3 and Appendix Table 1 display reasons caregivers reported for why each parent did not live with their child. This was an “all that apply” question, so individual children may be associated with multiple reasons.

**Figure 3: Reasons Why Children Live Apart from Their Parents**



Source: NSCNC, 2013

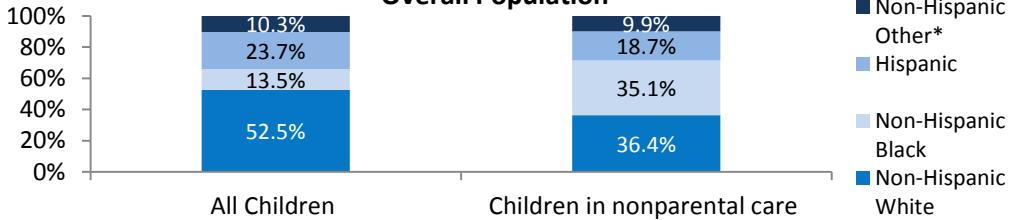
*Note.* Nonparental caregiver respondents were able to provide multiple reasons. Other reasons not listed included mother/father work schedule was too demanding; mother/father had problems with partner; mother/father deported for immigration violation; and mother's/father's neighborhood poor for raising children. These categories were mentioned the least frequently overall (ranging from 0% to 4.8%).

- Children lived apart from their parents for a range of complex reasons, including maternal substance abuse (18.9%), paternal substance abuse (14.7%), paternal incarceration (14.4%), and maternal child abuse or removal of the child by Child Protective Services (14.6%).
- There were also many unique reasons for why children lived apart from their parents that the survey did not capture. Caregivers often endorsed “other” as among the reasons the child did not live with his or her parents (28.7% and 52.4% for mothers and fathers). These “other” responses varied widely.

## What are the demographic characteristics of children who live apart from both parents?

While children of all races and ages live in nonparental care, these arrangements are more common among some subpopulations than others. Figure 4 and Appendix Table 2 show the racial/ethnic distribution of all children in the general population and children in nonparental care in 2011-2012, and Figure 5 shows the age distribution of children in nonparental care by foster care status in 2013.

**Figure 4: Race/ethnicity of Children in Nonparental Care in Comparison to the Overall Population**

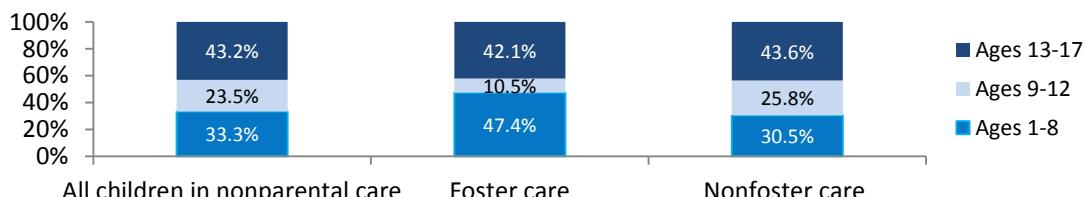


Source: NSCH, 2011-12

\* Other includes American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and multiple races.

- Non-Hispanic Black children were overrepresented among children in nonparental care, representing 13.5% of all children but 35.1% of the children in nonparental care in 2011-2012. In contrast, non-Hispanic White children were underrepresented among children in nonparental care, representing 52.5% of all children but only 36.4% of the children in nonparental care.
- Child race/ethnicity did not significantly differ between those in foster care and those cared for by nonparental caregivers outside of the child welfare system.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 5: Child Age by Type of Nonparental Care**



Source: NSCNC, 2013

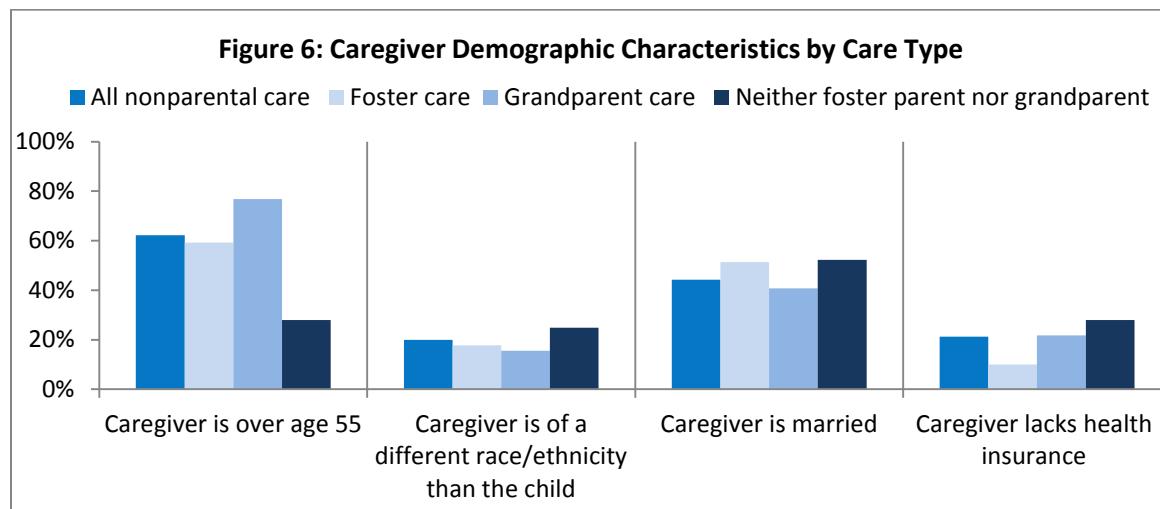
- Older children (ages 13-17) made up the largest share of children in nonparental care (43.2%). A third of children in nonparental care were ages 1-8, and nearly one quarter (23.5%) were ages 9-12.
- Young children (ages 1-8) made up a higher proportion of children living in foster care (47.4%) than of children in nonparental care outside the child welfare system (30.5%).<sup>9</sup> In contrast, children ages 9-12 comprised a higher proportion of children in nonparental care other than foster care (25.8%) than of those in foster care (10.5%).

<sup>8</sup> See Table 2 in the Appendix.

<sup>9</sup> Marginally significant at .10 level.

## What are the demographic characteristics of nonparental caregivers?

This section and Figure 6 (based on data shown in Appendix Table 4) examine the characteristics of the adult caregivers who stepped in to care for children in the absence of parents. While the differences among categories of caregiver type are relatively small, children who lived with neither foster parents nor grandparents tended to have younger caregivers, on average.



Data source: NSCNC, 2013

- The majority of children in nonparental care (62.2%) had caregivers who were over age 55, with an average age of 57 years.<sup>10</sup> Children whose caregivers were neither foster parents nor grandparents had younger caregivers, with the lowest percent (27.9) of children having caregivers older than 55. These children had, on average, caregivers who were significantly younger than grandparents or foster parents, with an average caregiver age of 47.5 versus 60.9 for children in grandparent care and 59.2 for children in foster care.<sup>11</sup>
- About 20 percent of children in nonparental care had a caregiver of a different race/ethnicity, but this varied widely by child race/ethnicity. Nearly all Non-Hispanic White and non-Hispanic Black children in nonparental care had caregivers who matched their race/ethnicity, while fewer than half of Hispanic children (48.9%) or non-Hispanic children of other races (27.7%) had caregivers whose race/ethnicity matched their own.<sup>12</sup>
- A little under half (44.3%) of all children in nonparental care had caregivers who were married, and marital status did not vary by care type.
- Children in grandparent care outside the child welfare system were significantly more likely than children in foster care to have caregivers who lacked health insurance (27.8% vs. 10.0%).

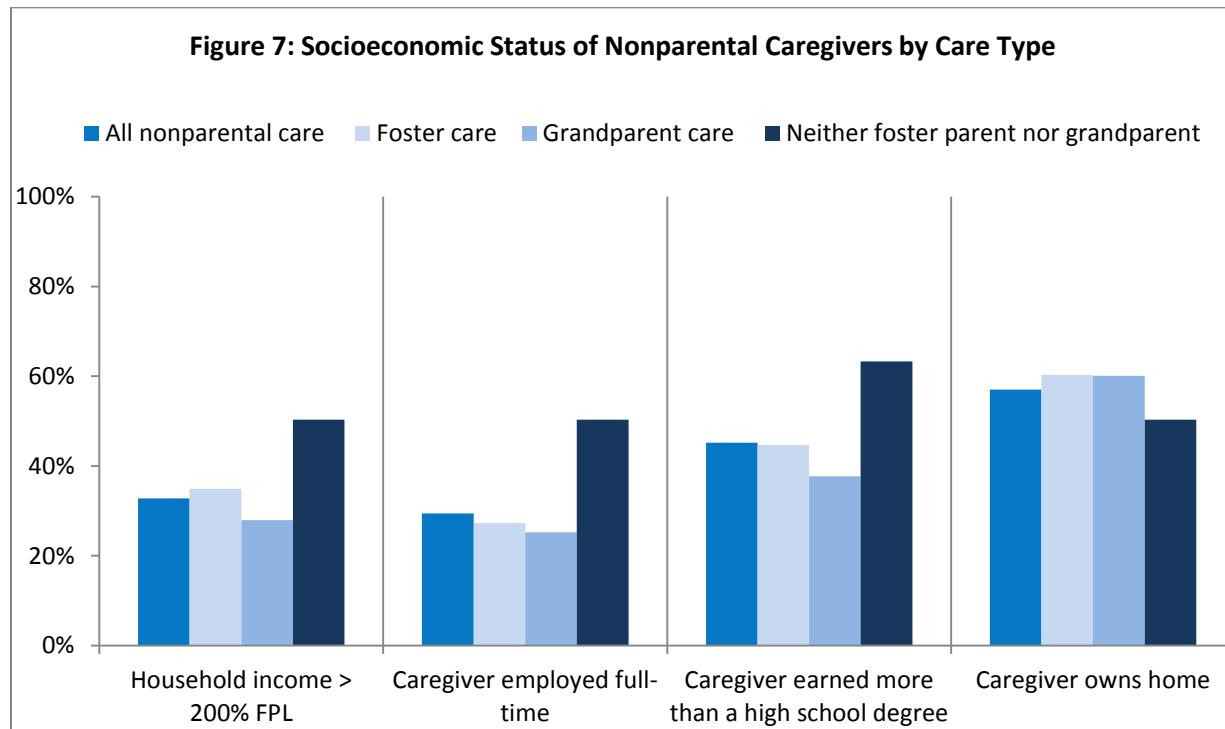
<sup>10</sup> See Table 4 in the Appendix.

<sup>11</sup> See Table 4 in the Appendix.

<sup>12</sup> See Table 6 in the Appendix.

## What are the socioeconomic characteristics of nonparental caregivers?

Figure 7 displays the socioeconomic characteristics of nonparental caregivers. Most of these families appear to be of limited means, though more than half own their homes. Children in nonparental care whose caregivers were neither foster parents nor grandparents stand out as distinct on several measures associated with a higher socioeconomic status. Figure 7 is based on data shown in Appendix Table 4.

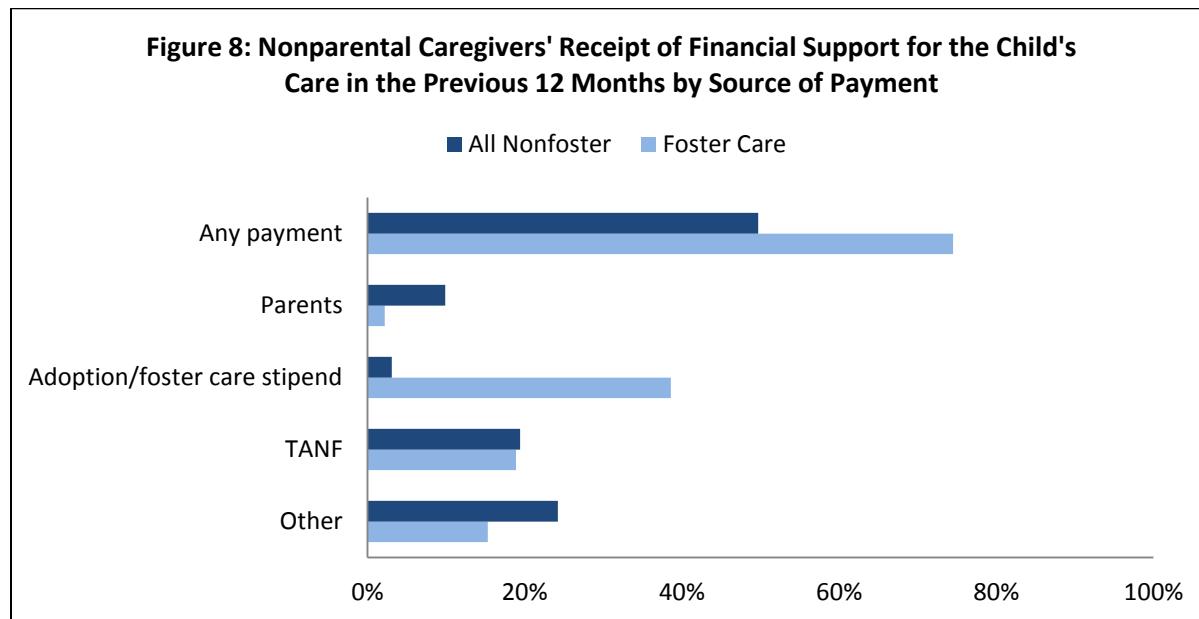


Data Source: NSCNC, 2013

- Many of the households of children in nonparental care faced economic hardship. Only about one-third (32.8%) of children in nonparental care were living in households with incomes greater than 200% of the federal poverty level (i.e., the threshold below which families are typically considered low income).
- Children in nonparental care whose caregivers were neither foster parents nor grandparents tended to have caregivers who were more socioeconomically advantaged than grandparents who were not foster parents. For example, these children were more likely to live in a household with an income more than twice the poverty level (50.3% vs. 27.9% for children in grandparent care) and live with caregivers who had earned more than a high school degree (63.3% vs. 37.7%) and who were employed full-time (49.5% vs. 25.2%). While grandparents may be more likely to be retired and thus not expected to work, with an average age of 61, many grandparents reflected here are not of retirement age. In addition, rates of employment were low across categories.
- Rates of caregiver home ownership were similar across different groups of children in nonparental care, ranging from about 50% for children whose caregivers were neither foster parents nor grandparents to about 60% for children in foster care.

## What types of financial assistance do nonparental caregivers receive?

Many children in nonparental care are eligible for financial assistance through foster care payments or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) child-only payments. Such resources may be particularly important for children in nonparental care, who tend to live in households with fewer economic resources. Caregivers may qualify for assistance based on both their personal eligibility and the child's eligibility. Foster caregivers typically receive financial supports in the form of a foster care stipend. In contrast, nonfoster caregivers may receive TANF child-only payments on behalf of children in their care. Some states permit unlicensed kinship foster parents or do not allow relatives to become licensed. In these states kin may only be eligible for TANF payments. Figure 8 (based on data shown in Appendix Table 5) shows the types of financial support received by caregivers on behalf of the child in their care.



Source: NSCNC, 2013

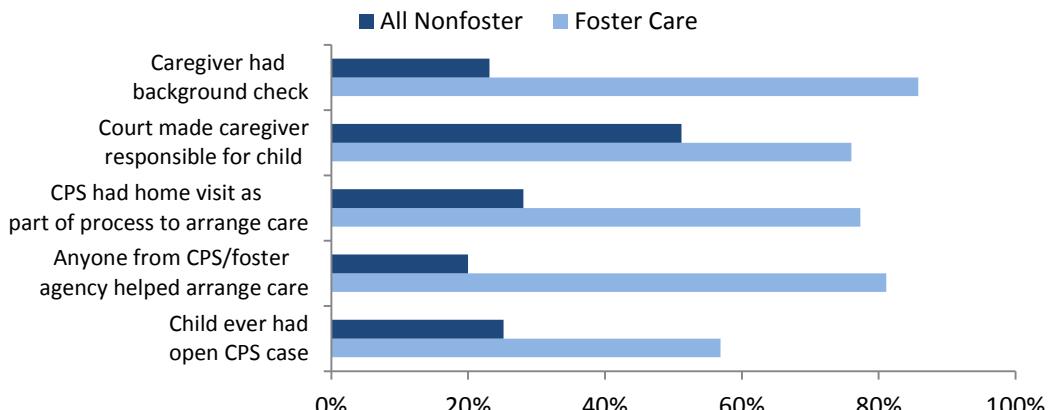
- About half of children in nonparental care outside the child welfare system (49.7%) and three-quarters of those in foster care (74.5%) had caregivers who received financial support to care for the child.<sup>13</sup>
- Children in foster care (38.6%) were, unsurprisingly, much more likely to have caregivers who received a foster care or adoption stipend, while children in nonfoster care (9.9%) were more likely to have caregivers who received payments from the child's parents.
- Just under 20% of children in both foster care and other nonparental care received TANF.

<sup>13</sup> The number of foster parents who report receiving no financial support for the child is higher than expected. It is possible that some relative foster parents receive neither a foster care stipend nor a TANF child only payment. Other possibilities include misreporting by respondents either of their receipt of payments or of their status as foster parents. For example, some may consider themselves foster parents even if they are not part of the state's foster care system.

## How often are child protective services and courts involved in nonparental care arrangements?

A little-understood aspect of nonparental care arrangements, particularly those outside of the formal child welfare system, is the role played by the Child Protective Services (CPS) agency and the courts in facilitating or approving placements. Figure 9 and Appendix Table 5 show caregivers' perceptions of the ways in which CPS and the courts were involved with the child's living arrangements.

**Figure 9: Child Protective Services and Court Involvement in Nonparental Care by Care Type**



Source: NSCNC, 2013

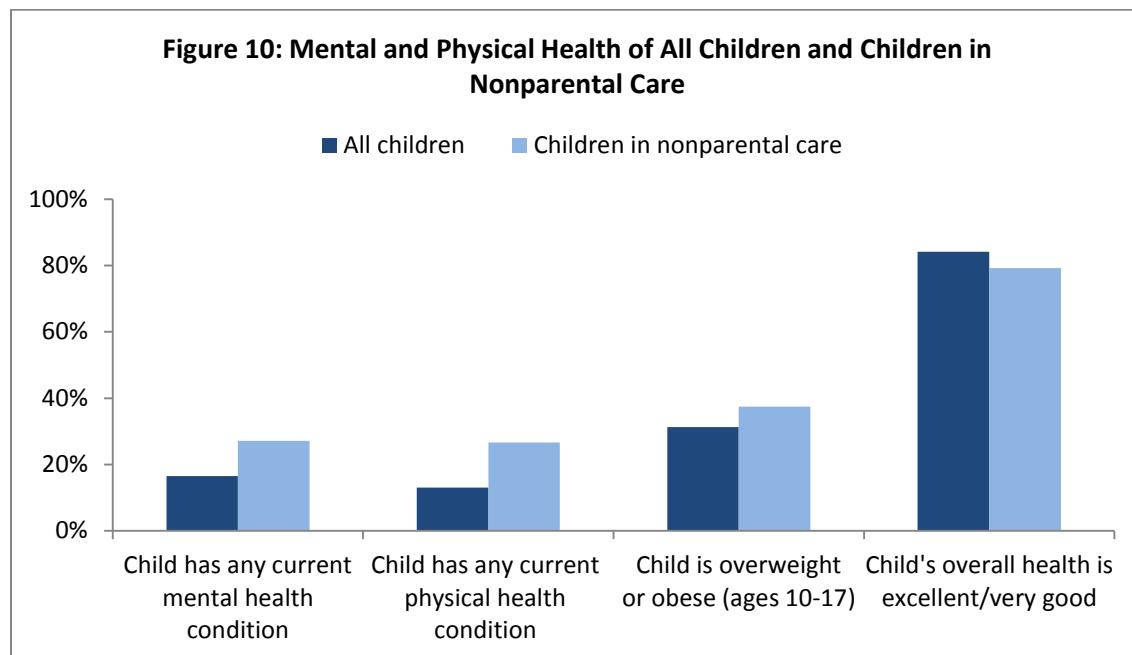
- Children in foster care experienced more CPS and court involvement than nonfoster children. Over half of children in foster care (56.9%) had a prior open CPS case, and in over three-quarters of situations the court made the foster parent responsible for the child (76.0%), and the foster care agency helped to arrange the care (81.1%). More than 85% of children in foster care had foster parents report undergoing a background check, and over three-quarters had foster parents who had had a home visit before the child came to live with them.
- A comparatively smaller share of children in nonfoster care experienced CPS involvement, although more than half (51.2%) had a caregiver who had been made responsible for the child by a court.
- The likelihood of CPS or court involvement differed among subgroups. Young children (ages 1-8) were more likely than teenagers (13-17) to have had more extensive CPS and court involvement in being placed with their nonparental caregiver.<sup>14</sup> In addition, cases in which the court made the caregiver legally responsible for the child were much more common among non-Hispanic White children (71.5%) than in children of other races and ethnicities (43.2% for non-Hispanic Black, 47.9% for Hispanic, and 54.5% for non-Hispanic children of other races).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> See Table 7 in the Appendix.

<sup>15</sup> See Table 6 in the Appendix.

## How is the physical and mental health of children who live apart from their parents?

Figure 10 (and Appendix Table 3) displays measures related to the physical and mental health of children in nonparental care in 2011-2012. By all significant measures, children in nonparental care were less healthy than children generally.



Data Source: NSCH, 2011-12

- Children in nonparental care were more likely than children in the general population to have any of 10 current mental health conditions (27.1% vs. 16.5%). Specifically, they had significantly higher rates of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), learning disabilities, depression, anxiety, behavior/conduct disorder, developmental delays, and intellectual disabilities.<sup>16</sup>
- Children in nonparental care were more likely than children generally to have any of 8 current physical health conditions (26.6% vs. 13.0%) and had significantly higher rates of asthma, vision problems, hearing problems, and epilepsy.<sup>17</sup>
- Children ages 10-17 in nonparental care were more likely to be overweight or obese than all children in that age group (37.4% vs. 31.3%).<sup>18</sup>
- Children in nonparental care were less likely to be in very good or excellent health (based on caregiver report) than children living with parents (79.2% vs. 84.2%).

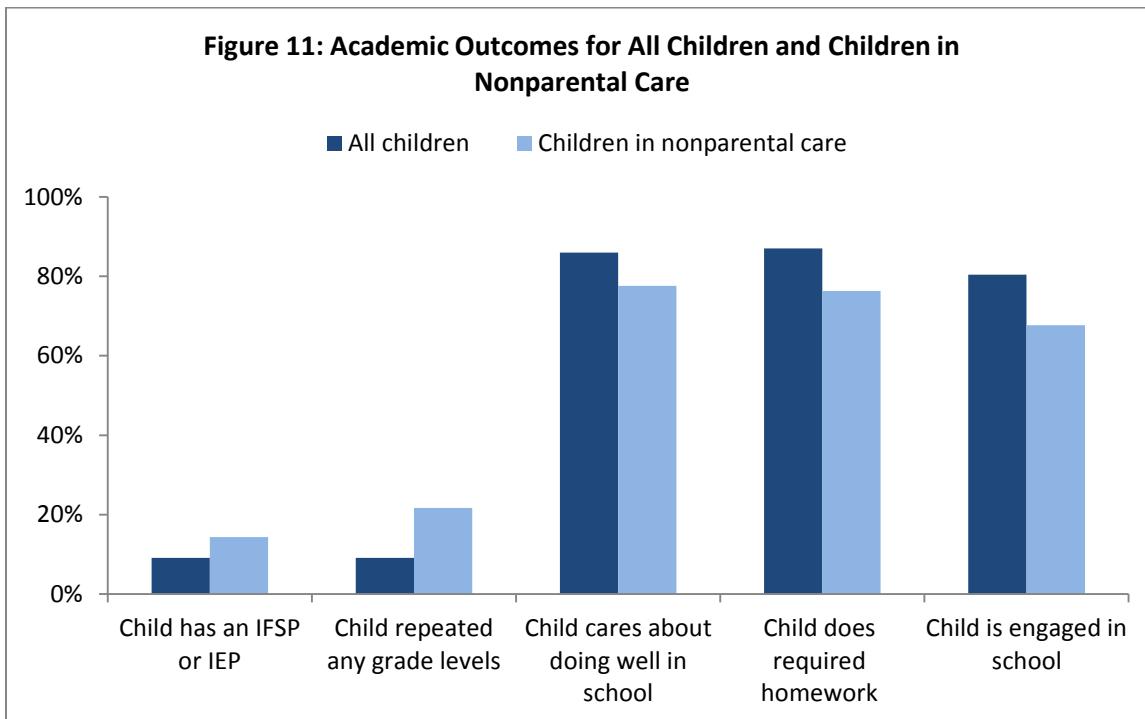
<sup>16</sup> See Table 3 in the Appendix.

<sup>17</sup> See Table 3 in the Appendix.

<sup>18</sup> Survey-based body mass index (BMI) for young children tend to be unreliable, so BMI estimates are suppressed for children under age 10.

## How are children who live apart from their parents doing academically?

Children in nonparental care also were less likely than children in the general population to be succeeding in school. Figure 11 and Appendix Table 2 examine academic outcomes for these children in 2011-2012.

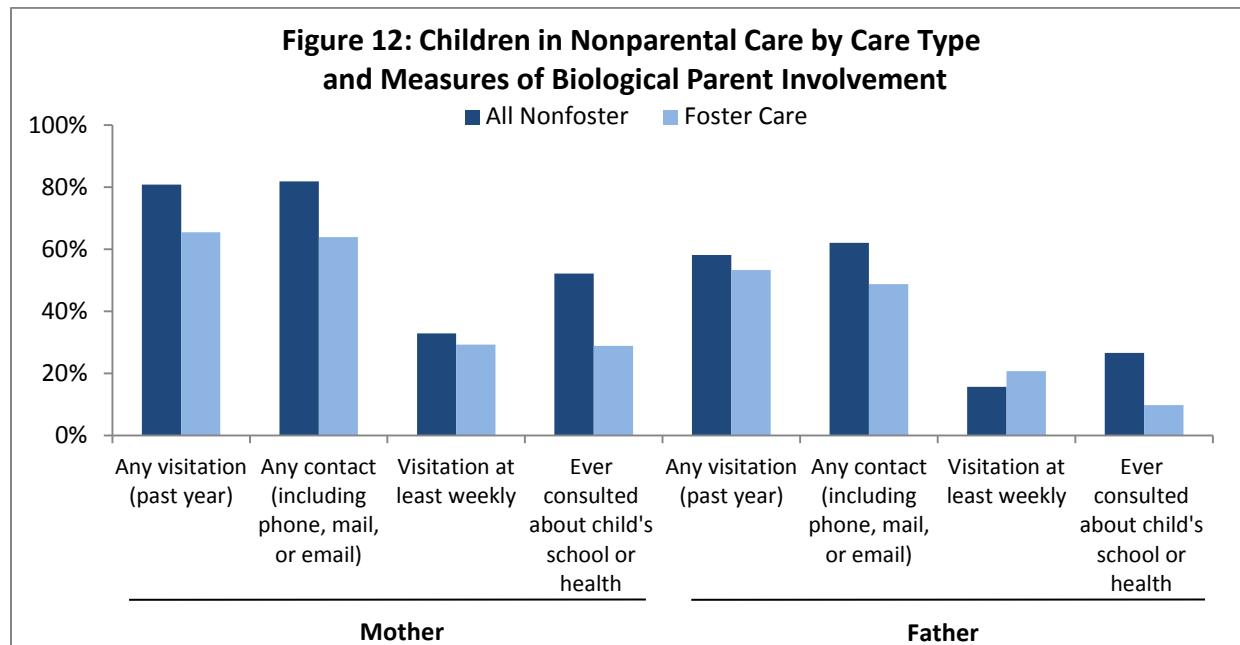


Source: NSCH 2011-12; Note: IFSP is for ages 0-5 while IEP is for ages 6-17; all other indicators are for ages 6-17 only.

- Compared to all children, children in nonparental care were more likely to have an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP, for ages 0-5) or an Individualized Education Program (IEP, for ages 6-17) (14.3% vs. 9.1% for all children).
- Children in nonparental care were also more likely than children in the general population to have repeated any grade levels in school (21.7% vs. 9.1%).
- Children in nonparental care were less likely than children in the general population to be engaged in school (67.7% vs. 80.4%). They were less likely to care about doing well in school (77.6% vs. 86.0%) and to do all required homework (76.3% vs. 87.0%).

## How are biological parents involved in the lives of their children who do not live with them?

Parents often remain involved in the lives of their children even when they do not live with them. Figure 12 and Appendix Table 5 describe parent involvement along several dimensions, separately for mothers and fathers, as well as for children in foster care and for those with nonparental caregivers outside the foster care system.



Source: NSCNC, 2013

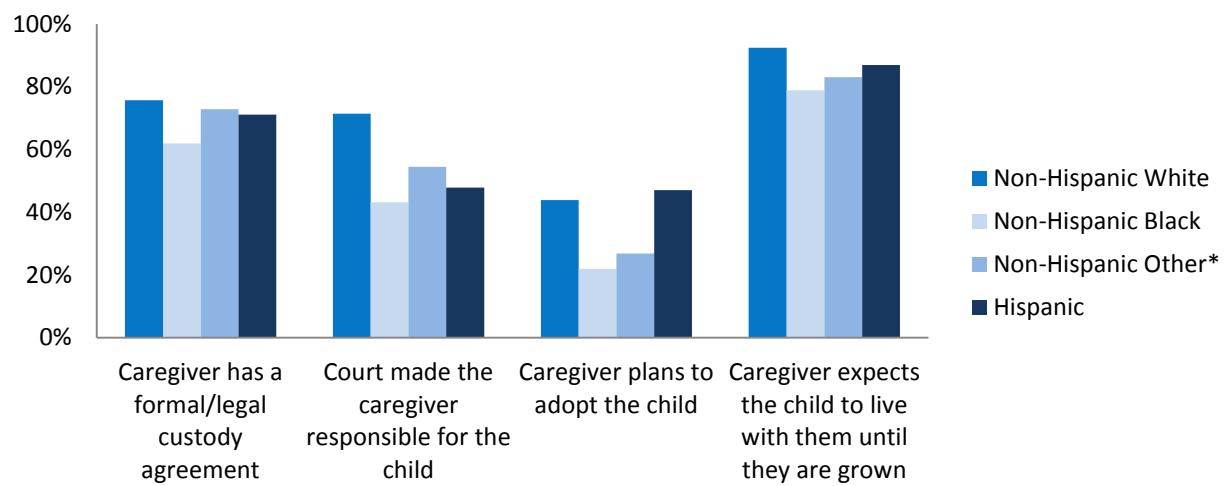
- Children in foster care were less likely than children in nonparental care outside the child welfare system to have visited their birth mothers at least once in the past year (65.5% versus 80.9%).<sup>19</sup> Less than one-third of children in either group visited with either parent weekly, though some still do maintain quite regular contact with mothers and/or fathers.
- Children in foster care were also less likely than children in nonfoster care to have had phone, mail, or email contact with their birth mother in the past year (63.9% vs. 81.9%).
- Children in foster care (28.9% for mothers, 9.8% for fathers) were less likely than children in other nonparental care arrangements (52.2% for mothers, 26.6% for fathers) to have caregivers who had ever consulted the child's mother or father about the child's school or health.
- Children in nonparental care tended to have less visitation, contact, or involvement from their absent fathers than from their absent mothers.

<sup>19</sup> Marginally significant at .10 level

## What are caregivers' expectations regarding permanency for the children in their care?

Nonparental caregivers may initially take over parenting responsibilities expecting the child to need care temporarily. Under such circumstances there may be little attention paid to formal custody issues. However, when nonparental care persists over an extended period of time, custody becomes more important, particularly if there is (or potentially could be) conflict between the parent(s) and the caregiver about the child's care. In addition, the child welfare field has for decades considered permanency an outcome of key importance for children. While less of a focus when the child welfare system is not involved, long term expectations for the child's care remain important for the child's sense of security and identity. Figure 13 and Appendix Table 5 explore custody issues.

**Figure 13. Custody Arrangements and Caregiver Expectations Regarding Permanency for Children in Nonparental Care**



Source: NSCNC, 2013

\* Non-Hispanic Other includes American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and multiple races.

- Roughly two-thirds of children in nonparental care have caregivers with formal or legal custody of the child for whom they were caring. Custody rates did not differ by race.
- Non-Hispanic White children were more likely than children of other races to have caregivers who report that a court had made them responsible for the child (71.5% for non-Hispanic white children versus about half for children of other races).
- Non-Hispanic White children were more likely than non-Hispanic Black children to have caregivers who expect the child would live with them to adulthood (92.5% versus 78.9%).
- Apparent differences in caregiver's adoption plans by child race were not statistically significant.
- While almost all of the caregivers expected to care for the child until grown, considerably fewer had a formal custody agreement for the child's care.

## Conclusion

Children who live apart from their parents are a vulnerable group often hidden from view within national data sets. This paper presents initial analyses of the National Survey of Children in Nonparental Care (NSCNC), a unique dataset that provides more detailed information than previously available on the characteristics, circumstances, and experiences of children living apart from their parents. The data presented suggest a number of issues that merit further consideration:

- **The reasons for parents' absence are complicated.** The NSCNC asked questions about why parents did not live with their children. Response categories were developed from existing research literature and the experience of social workers who interact with families regularly. Yet with respect to nearly one-third of mothers and over half of fathers, caregivers named something "other" than the categories provided as an important reason for parental absence. Further exploration of these "other" reasons will help us understand the experiences of children in nonparental care.
- **The child welfare system plays a behind-the-scenes role in many informal kinship care situations.** While kinship foster care has been studied relatively widely, this analysis provides new insight into ways child welfare agencies are involved with children who live with relatives and other nonparental caregivers outside the foster care system. Background checks, home visits, and past open CPS cases were part of the process through which 20 to 25% of children not in foster care entered nonparental care, and courts had bestowed responsibility for the child's care on just over half of kinship care providers who were not also foster parents (though not necessarily through abuse/neglect proceedings). The role of the child welfare system in kinship care situations where children are not in foster care remains poorly understood.
- **Parents play continuing roles in the lives of children living with other caregivers.** Parents continue to be important to children's social, emotional, and, sometimes, economic well-being even if they do not live with their children. This analysis showed that most parents visit with their children not living with them, at least sporadically and often more frequently. Contact is more frequent for children not in foster care and is more frequent for mothers than fathers.
- **Caregiving expectations and legal status may not match.** Many nonparental caregivers who say they expect to continue caring for the child in their household "until they're grown" lack legal custody or guardianship status. This situation may create eligibility barriers for services or benefits and may leave children without legal protection if the circumstances of the current caregiver change or if a parent who presents risk to a child decides to reassert authority.<sup>20</sup> Many caregivers may not understand the importance of legal status and may be unfamiliar with the processes involved in establishing custody.

While relatively small as a proportion of the entire population of children, the 2.3 million young people living in nonparental care have typically experienced significant adverse circumstances and continue to face challenges as their caregivers seek to provide stable and nurturing homes. This analysis has provided a descriptive overview of their characteristics, living situations, and well-being in several important domains. Future analysis of the National Survey of Children in Nonparental Care will focus on more specific aspects of these children's lives. A public use data set is also available. For more information see: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/slaits/nsncn.htm>.

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<sup>20</sup> Goyer, Amy. Raising Grandkids: Legal Issues. In *Grandfamilies Guide*. American Association for Retired Persons, 2011. Available from: <http://www.aarp.org/relationships/friends-family/info-08-2011/grandfamilies-guide-legal-issues.html>

## Appendix Tables

**Table 1: Reasons why the child didn't live with the parents for children in nonparental care in 2013**

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Percent (standard error)</i>
<b>Reasons why the child didn't live with mother</b>	
Mother's substance abuse	18.9 (2.40)
Child removed by Child Protective Services/mother was abusive	14.6 (2.46)
Mother deceased	11.3 (1.94)
Mother didn't want to care for child	10.9 (2.70)
Mother in jail	7.3 (1.75)
Mother thought current caregiver would be better	6.6 (1.75)
Mother was sick/mentally ill	6.3 (1.33)
Mother's financial problems	6.1 (1.51)
Mother's work schedule too demanding	4.8 (2.31)
Mother had problems with husband/partner	4.7 (1.86)
Mother's neighborhood poor for raising children	0.9 (0.50)
Mother deported/detained for immigration violation	0.1 (0.09)
Other reason	28.7 (3.16)
<b>Reasons why the child didn't live with father</b>	
Father's substance abuse	14.7 (2.34)
Child removed by Child Protective Services/father was abusive	7.5 (1.76)
Father deceased	10.6 (2.02)
Father didn't want to care for child	9.4 (1.66)
Father in jail	14.4 (2.43)
Father thought current caregiver would be better	2.5 (0.73)
Father was sick/mentally ill	1.8 (0.45)
Father's financial problems	5.7 (1.61)
Father's work schedule too demanding	1.3 (0.39)
Father had problems with wife/partner	1.7 (0.89)
Father's neighborhood poor for raising children	1.3 (0.91)
Father deported/detained for immigration violation	0.4 (0.29)
Other reason	52.4 (3.68)

Source: National Survey of Children in Nonparental Care, 2013

**Table 2: Child demographic and academic characteristics for all children in 2011-2012, children in nonparental care in 2013, and by foster care status in 2013**

Characteristic	<i>All children</i>	<i>Children in Nonparental Care</i>		
		<i>All nonparental care</i>	<i>Foster care</i>	<i>Nonfoster care</i>
<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>				
Child Age at NSCNC Interview: 1-8	n/a	33.3 (3.26)	47.4 (8.43)	30.5 (3.53)±
9-12	n/a	23.5 (2.44)	10.5 (2.93)	25.8 (2.85)†
13-17	n/a	43.2 (3.49)	42.1 (8.42)	43.6 (3.83)
Child Race/ethnicity: Hispanic	23.7 (0.37)	18.7 (3.16)	14.3 (5.59)	19.6 (3.61)
Non-Hispanic White	52.5 (0.36)	36.4 (2.82)*	44.9 (7.99)	34.6 (2.97)
Non-Hispanic Black	13.5 (0.25)	35.1 (3.14)*	29.9 (7.89)	36.2 (3.50)
Non-Hispanic Other	10.3 (0.22)	9.9 (1.72)	10.9 (3.15)	9.5 (1.98)
<b>Academic Characteristics</b>				
Child has IFSP (0-5) or IEP (6-17)	9.1 (0.20)	14.3 (1.95)*	11.1 (3.80)	15.0 (2.22)
Child Repeated any Grades	9.1 (0.27)	21.7 (3.64)*	26.4 (9.32)	21.0 (3.99)
Child is Engaged in School	80.4 (0.35)	67.7 (3.88)*	76.2 (8.17)	66.1 (4.31)
Child cares about doing well in school	86.0 (0.31)	77.6 (3.68)*	88.6 (3.80)	75.7 (4.18)†
Child does required homework	87.0 (0.30)	76.3 (3.21)*	79.1 (8.13)	75.7 (3.53)

\*Estimate differs at 0.05 level from that of all children; †Estimate differs at 0.05 level from that of foster care; ±Estimate differs at 0.10 level from that of foster care; NOTE: comparisons of all children versus children in nonparental care are based on NSCH estimates from 2011-2012 while comparisons of foster/nonfoster are based on NSCNC estimates from 2013. Source: National Survey of Children's Health, 2011-2012 & National Survey of Children in Nonparental Care, 2013

**Table 3: Child health characteristics for all children in 2011-2012, children in nonparental care in 2013, and by foster care status in 2013**

Characteristic	<i>All children</i>	<i>Children in Nonparental Care</i>		
		<i>All nonparental care</i>	<i>Foster care</i>	<i>Nonfoster care</i>
<b>Health Characteristics</b>				
Child's Overall Health is Excellent/Very Good	84.2 (0.30)	79.2 (2.46)*	72.1 (8.89)	80.4 (2.31)
Child is Underweight (BMI <5 <sup>th</sup> percentile)	5.8 (0.27)	1.0 (0.41)*	0.8 (0.56)	1.0 (0.47)
Normal weight (BMI >=5 <sup>th</sup> and <85 <sup>th</sup> percentile)	62.9 (0.54)	61.6 (4.70)*	55.9 (12.21)	62.4 (5.16)
Overweight (BMI >=85 <sup>th</sup> and <95 <sup>th</sup> percentile)	15.6 (0.40)	17.8 (4.27)*	15.3 (10.37)	18.4 (4.72)
Obese (BMI >=95 <sup>th</sup> percentile)	15.7 (0.42)	19.6 (3.24)*	27.9 (10.67)	18.2 (3.31)
Any Current Mental Health Conditions	16.5 (0.28)	27.1 (2.96)*	29.2 (7.21)	26.6 (3.28)
Current ADHD (2-17)	7.9 (0.21)	15.0 (1.18)*	25.7 (7.65)	17.2 (2.43)
Current Learning Disability (3-17)	8.0 (0.21)	14.2 (1.29)*	12.5 (4.23)	15.9 (3.06)
Current Depression (2-17)	2.1 (0.12)	6.6 (1.02)*	9.6 (4.62)	4.1 (1.18)
Current Anxiety (2-17)	3.4 (0.13)	6.6 (0.81)*	9.0 (4.30)	4.4 (0.85)
Current Behavior/Conduct Disorder (2-17)	3.2 (0.14)	9.8 (1.03)*	11.8 (4.33)	6.5 (1.07)
Current Autism (2-17)	1.8 (0.10)	1.1 (0.20)*	0.9 (0.59)	0.9 (0.25)
Current Developmental Delay (2-17)	3.6 (0.13)	5.6 (0.65)*	2.9 (1.10)	7.1 (1.27)†
Current Intellectual Disability (2-17)	1.1 (0.08)	2.5 (0.48)*	2.0 (0.88)	1.6 (0.41)
Current Speech Problems (2-17)	4.8 (0.16)	6.2 (0.77)‡	4.9 (1.88)	5.6 (1.10)
Current Tourette's Syndrome (2-17)	0.2 (0.02)	0.3 (0.18)	0.2 (0.22)	0.7 (0.44)
Any Current Physical Health Conditions	13.0 (0.24)	26.6 (3.19)*	18.9 (6.39)	28.3 (3.62)
Current Cerebral Palsy (2-17)	0.2 (0.03)	0.6 (0.29)	0.7 (0.51)	0.6 (0.30)
Current Asthma	8.8 (0.20)	17.2 (1.54)*	14.2 (6.27)	21.2 (3.54)
Current Diabetes	0.3 (0.04)	0.6 (0.19)	0.0 (0.00)	1.2 (0.61)†
Current Epilepsy	0.7 (0.06)	1.5 (0.41)*	0.6 (0.43)	1.2 (0.53)
Current Hearing Problems	1.3 (0.07)	2.6 (0.62)*	0.3 (0.21)	2.1 (1.00)§
Current Vision Problems	1.3 (0.09)	3.2 (0.77)*	2.9 (1.47)	2.1 (0.70)
Current Bone/Joint/Muscle Problems	2.2 (0.11)	2.4 (0.41)	1.3 (0.67)	2.4 (0.58)
Current Brain Injury	0.3 (0.03)	0.5 (0.14)	1.0 (0.61)	0.6 (0.29)

\*Estimate differs at 0.05 level from that of all children; †Estimate differs at 0.05 level from that of foster care; ‡Estimate differs at 0.10 level from that of all children; §Estimate differs at 0.10 level from that of foster care; NOTE: comparisons of all children versus children in nonparental care are based on NSCH estimates from 2011-2012 while comparisons of foster/nonfoster are based on NSCNC estimates from 2013. Source: National Survey of Children's Health, 2011-2012 & National Survey of Children in Nonparental Care, 2013

**Table 4: Caregiver demographic and socioeconomic characteristics for children in nonparental care and by nonparental care type: 2013**

Characteristic	<i>Children in Nonparental Care</i>			
	<i>All Nonparental care</i>	<i>Foster care</i>	<i>Nonfoster care</i>	
			<i>Grandparent care</i>	<i>Nongrandparent</i>
<b>Demographic characteristics</b>	Mean(standard error)			
Age of Caregiver (years)	57.0 (0.83)	56.0 (1.82)	60.9 (0.69)*	47.5 (2.15)*†
	Percent (standard error)			
Caregiver is age 55 or older	62.2 (3.53)	59.2 (8.11)	76.8 (3.74)*	27.9 (6.64)*†
Caregiver and child are transracial	19.9 (2.96)	17.7 (4.38)	15.6 (3.08)	24.9 (7.59)
Caregiver's Marital Status: Married	44.3 (3.39)	51.4 (8.43)	40.8 (3.66)	52.2 (8.99)
Formerly Married	42.8 (3.32)	35.2 (7.99)	49.2 (4.08)	26.3 (6.86)†
Never Married	12.9 (2.51)	13.3 (5.55)	10.0 (3.24)	21.6 (7.49)
Caregiver has health insurance coverage	78.8 (3.71)	90.0 (3.34)	78.2 (4.58)*	72.1 (11.17)
<b>Socioeconomic characteristics</b>				
Household Income Relative to Federal Poverty Level (FPL): 0-50%	17.0 (3.09)	14.7 (6.38)	21.3 (4.65)	8.2 (4.67)†
50-100% FPL	19.5 (2.55)	24.1 (7.48)	21.2 (3.42)	9.5 (3.78)†±
100-200% FPL	30.8 (3.31)	26.3 (6.74)	29.6 (3.61)	32.0 (8.22)
200-400% FPL	22.4 (2.85)	27.8 (7.88)	20.0 (2.69)	29.1 (9.82)
>400% FPL	10.4 (1.89)	7.1 (2.84)	7.9 (1.89)	21.2 (7.28)±§
Caregiver is employed full-time	29.4 (3.16)	27.3 (7.78)	25.2 (3.44)	49.5 (9.42)†±
Caregiver's education level is high school or less	54.8 (3.48)	55.3 (8.15)	62.3 (3.72)	36.7 (7.81)†
More than high school	45.2 (3.48)	44.7 (8.15)	37.7 (3.72)	63.3 (7.81)†
Caregiver owns home	57.0 (3.55)	60.3 (8.44)	60.1 (4.25)	50.3 (9.03)

\*Estimate differs at 0.05 level from that of foster care; †Estimate differs at 0.05 level from that of grandparent care; ± Estimate differs at 0.10 level from that of foster care; §Estimate differs at 0.10 level from that of grandparent care; Source: National Survey of Children in Nonparental Care, 2013

**Table 5: Financial support, child welfare agency involvement, contact with parents, and caregiver expectations for the future for children in nonparental care and by foster care status: 2013**

Characteristic	<i>Children in Nonparental Care</i>		
	<i>All nonparental care</i>	<i>Foster care</i>	<i>Nonfoster care</i>
<b>Financial Support</b>			
Caregiver ever received any payments in previous 12 months	54.0 (3.39)	74.5 (6.95)	49.7 (3.69)*
From parents	8.8 (1.39)	2.2 (1.42)	9.9 (1.62)*
From adoption/foster stipend	9.0 (1.99)	38.6 (8.70)	3.1 (0.88)*
From TANF	19.2 (2.70)	18.9 (7.10)	19.4 (2.98)
From other	22.7 (2.39)	15.3 (4.37)	24.2 (2.75)†
<b>Child welfare agency involvement</b>			
Child ever had open Child Protective Services (CPS) case	30.3 (3.20)	56.9 (8.65)	25.2 (3.39)*
Anyone from CPS/Foster Agency helped arrange care	30.4 (3.00)	81.1 (5.97)	20.0 (2.68)*
CPS had Home Visit as part of process to arrange care	36.4 (3.20)	77.3 (7.15)	28.1 (3.19)*
Court made Caregiver responsible for child	55.6 (3.52)	76.0 (7.28)	51.2 (3.89)*
Caregiver had Background Check	34.0 (3.15)	85.8 (4.03)	23.1 (2.96)*
<b>Parental contact</b>			
Child sees noncoresidential mother: Never	21.8 (2.82)	34.5 (8.27)	19.1 (2.89)†
Sporadic to monthly	46.1 (3.88)	36.3 (8.21)	48.0 (4.40)
Weekly or more often	32.2 (3.80)	29.3 (9.47)	32.9 (4.23)
Any Contact with noncoresidential mother (including phone, mail, email)	78.8 (2.85)	63.9 (9.02)	81.9 (2.75)†
Mother ever consulted about child's school or health	48.0 (3.88)	28.9 (8.07)	52.2 (4.20)*
Child sees noncoresidential father: Never	42.3 (4.16)	46.7 (10.14)	41.8 (4.65)
Sporadic to monthly	40.7 (4.12)	32.5 (9.61)	42.5 (4.57)
Weekly or more often	17.0 (2.63)	20.8 (10.32)	15.7 (2.40)
Any Contact with noncoresidential father (including phone, mail, email)	60.3 (4.23)	48.8 (10.26)	62.1 (4.65)
Father ever consulted about child's school or health	24.6 (3.56)	9.8 (3.77)	26.6 (4.09)*
<b>Caregiver expectations for the future</b>			
Caregiver thinks child will live with them until grown	85.7 (3.18)	74.5 (8.42)	87.7 (3.40)

\*Estimate differs at 0.05 level from that of foster care; †Estimate differs at 0.10 level from that of foster care; Source: National Survey of Children in Nonparental Care, 2013

**Table 6: Transracial status, child welfare agency involvement and permanence indicators for children in nonparental care and by child race/ethnicity: 2013**

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Child Race/ethnicity</i>			
		<i>NH White</i>	<i>NH Black</i>	<i>NH Other</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>
<b>Transracial Status</b>					
Caregiver and child are transracial	19.9 (2.96)	4.4 (1.44)	4.5 (1.98)	72.3 (6.06)*†	51.1 (11.37)*†
<b>Child welfare agency involvement</b>					
Child ever had open Child Protective Services (CPS) case	30.3 (3.20)	38.0 (4.33)	18.2 (4.51)*	30.2 (8.32)	37.6 (10.57)§
Anyone from CPS/Foster Agency helped arrange care	30.4 (3.00)	35.3 (4.30)	28.5 (5.36)	26.1 (6.33)	26.3 (8.16)
CPS had Home Visit as part of process to arrange care	36.4 (3.20)	42.4 (4.25)	38.0 (6.15)	38.1 (8.77)	20.9 (6.94)*§
Court made Caregiver responsible for child	55.6 (3.52)	71.5 (3.44)	43.2 (5.68)*	54.5 (9.64)±	47.9 (11.66)±
Caregiver had Background Check	34.0 (3.15)	37.0 (4.36)	31.1 (5.69)	30.3 (6.94)	35.7 (9.33)
<b>Permanence</b>					
Caregiver has formal/legal custody agreement	69.9 (3.72)	75.7 (4.56)	62.0 (7.35)	72.9 (8.18)	71.2 (9.75)
Caregiver has current plans to adopt child	29.2 (3.88)	43.9 (12.97)	22.0 (4.57)	26.9 (6.24)	41.7 (11.55)
Caregiver thinks child will live with them until grown	85.7 (3.18)	92.5 (2.17)	78.9 (6.70)±	83.1 (10.62)	87.0 (7.43)

\*Estimate differs at 0.05 level from that of NH White; †Estimate differs at 0.05 level from that of NH Black; ±Estimate differs at 0.10 level from that of NH White; §Estimate differs at 0.10 level from that of NH Black; NOTE: NH is Non-Hispanic; Source: National Survey of Children in Nonparental Care, 2013

**Table 7: Child welfare agency involvement for children in nonparental care by child age at NSCNC interview: 2013**

Characteristic	<i>Child age at NSCNC interview</i>		
	1-8	9-12	13-17
Child ever had open CPS case	39.9 (5.33)	27.1 (5.33)±	25.3 (5.22)±
Anyone from CPS/Foster Agency helped arrange care	38.4 (5.71)	30.7 (5.57)	24.2 (4.39)*
CPS had Home Visit as part of process to arrange care	44.1 (5.92)	36.6 (5.69)	30.5 (5.13)±
Court made Caregiver responsible for child	62.6 (5.67)	62.1 (5.63)	46.7 (5.55)*§
Caregiver had Background Check	44.1 (5.50)	33.0 (5.63)	27.2 (4.82)*

\*Estimate differs at 0.05 level from that of ages 1-8; ±Estimate differs at 0.10 level from that of ages 1-8; §Estimate differs at 0.10 level from that of ages 9-12; Source: National Survey of Children in Nonparental Care, 2013