

American Indian/Alaska Native Findings from the Casey National Study – Analyses of Mental Health, Education, and Employment Outcomes –¹

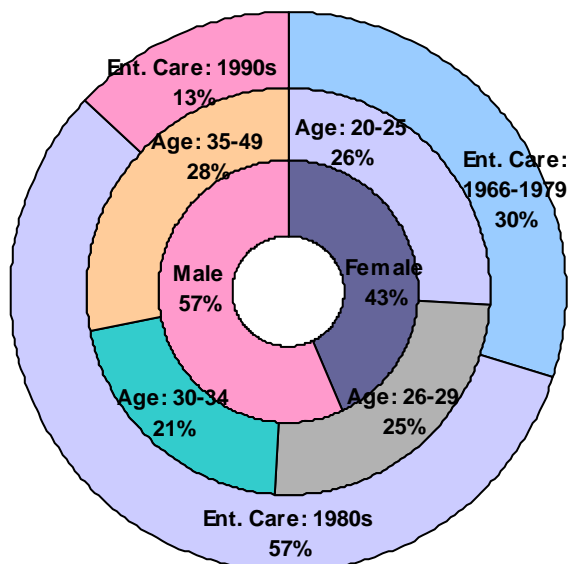
Background. On any given day in the United States, over half a million children are served in foster care—participants in a child welfare system that costs more than \$24 billion annually (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) youth and alumni are an under-examined, over-represented population served in this system representing two percent of youth in care and only one percent of children 18 and younger in the general population (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006; Kids Count, 2006). Further, AI/AN youth are more than three times more likely to be in foster care than White youth.

Although the financial investment in foster care is substantial, little is known about the outcomes of adults formerly served (“alumni”), especially AI/AN alumni. To address this knowledge gap, special analyses of the Casey National Alumni Study were conducted to examine the long-term mental health, education, and employment outcomes for AI/AN alumni of foster care. This brief report summarizes the demographics, risk factors, foster care experiences, and outcomes for 243 AI/AN alumni and a comparison group of 574 White alumni.

Participants. To be in the Casey National Alumni Study, Alumni had to have been:

1. Served by one of Casey’s field offices between 1966 and 1998.
2. Served in family foster care for at least 12 months.
3. Discharged 12 months before study began.
4. Mentally capable of completing an interview.

This report includes alumni who met the above criteria and reported either being AI/AN (n=243) or White (n=574). A demographic summary for the AI/AN alumni is presented to the right (White alumni did not differ significantly on demographics).



Risk Factors & Foster Care Experiences. Although many variables were examined, very few differences were found between AI/AN and White alumni. Differences are summarized below. When compared to White alumni, AI/AN alumni were more likely to be:

- Placed in care initially because of birth parents’ substance abuse (AI/AN: 43.6%; White: 27.5%).
- Diagnosed with impairments such as drug exposure, Fetal Alcohol Effect (FAE), Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), or have a visual/hearing impairment before or during care (AI/AN: 11.9%; White: 6.3%).
- In care for longer (AI/AN: 10.1 years; White: 8.6 years).

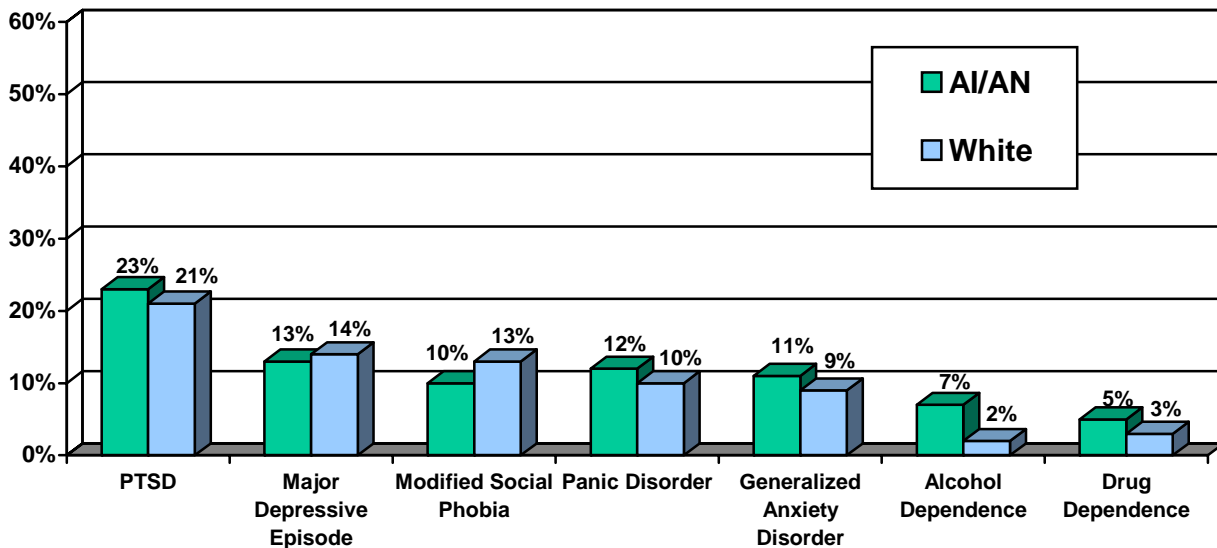
¹ Revised: 2-18-07. for Casey Family Programs. For more information, please contact Dr. Kirk O’Brien or Dr. Peter Pecora at 206-282-7300. E-Mail: Kobrien@casey.org or Ppecora@casey.org. Website: www.casey.org

- A runaway while in foster care (AI/AN: 26.3%; White: 19.3%) and live with unlicensed friends/relatives (AI/AN: 12.3%; White: 8.1%).
- Engaged in both fun activities and religious activities with their foster family (AI/AN: 62.1%; White: 53.7%).
- In possession of health insurance at exit from foster care (AI/AN: 45.0%; White: 36.5%).
- Overprotected by their foster mother (AI/AN: 67.5%; White: 58.5%).

When compared to AI/AN alumni, White alumni were more likely to have:

- Been placed in care initially because of child behavior problems (AI/AN: 14.0%; White: 25.8%).
- Access to therapeutic services and supports (AI/AN: 84.7%; White: 90.3%).
- A driver's license at exit from foster care (AI/AN: 47.3%; White: 58.6%).

Outcomes. Mental Health: AI/AN were more likely to exhibit alcohol dependence than White alumni. No differences were found on any other mental health disorders.



Education & Employment/Finance. In comparison to mental health, AI/AN exhibited poorer functioning on nine of the 14 education and employment/finance outcomes. When compared to AI/AN alumni, White alumni were more likely to:

- Complete high school with a diploma (AI/AN: 57.0%; White: 69.8%).
- Complete college or more (AI/AN: 2.9%; White: 10.7%).
- Be employed (AI/AN: 61.5%; White: 77.7%).
- Own a house or apartment (AI/AN: 20.3%; White: 31.9%).
- Have a household income at the poverty line (AI/AN: 64.7%; White: 80.5%) or have a household income greater than three times the poverty line (AI/AN: 18.3%; White: 33.6%).
- Never have received any public assistance or welfare since turning 18 (AI/AN: 39.5%; White: 55.5%).
- Not be receiving public assistance currently (AI/AN: 80.7%; White: 91.1%).
- Not have had household members receive public assistance in the past 6 months (AI/AN: 53.7%; White: 65.6%).

Summary. Although few differences existed on demographics, risk factors, foster care experiences, and mental health outcomes, White alumni exhibited more positive education and employment/finance outcomes. Except for college completion, multivariate analyses found that all outcome differences described above persisted after controlling for demographics, risk factors, and foster care experiences.