

How does academic achievement differ for children in kinship vs. non-kin out-of-home care?

WASHINGTON, T., STEWART, C.J., & ROSE, R. A. (2021). ACADEMIC TRAJECTORIES OF CHILDREN IN FORMAL AND INFORMAL KINSHIP CARE. *CHILD DEVELOPMENT*, 92(6), 2299-2316.

What can we learn from this study?

Research has established that children in out-of-home care fare worse academically than their peers in the general population, but few studies have examined the differences in academic achievement by placement type. In particular, very little is known about the academic achievement of children living with informal kinship caregivers compared to children with formal kinship caregivers, even though the vast majority of children living with kin are in informal kinship care.

Study details:

- **Population:** Students who were in third to sixth grade in North Carolina schools during 2009-10 (N=511,858 in the general population; N=7,448 in out-of-home care)
- **Data sources:** End-of-grade math and reading test scores and student characteristics, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) data, out-of-home placement data, and child abuse and neglect data
- **Methodology:** Linear multilevel modeling
- **Dates:** 2009-10 to 2012-13 school years

What are the critical findings?

This study examined differences in reading and math scores on end-of-grade standardized tests between children in the general population and in out-of-home care (non-kin foster care, formal kinship care, and informal kinship care), controlling for demographic characteristics and household socioeconomic status.

- **Children in formal kinship care achieved math scores on par with their peers in the general population.** This suggests that living with relatives while receiving formal resources and services can support academic performance, potentially mitigating the effects of the trauma that results from being separated from one's parents.
- **Children in both formal and informal kinship care had higher achievement in math than children in non-kin foster care.** Children in formal and informal kinship care demonstrated about four months and two months of additional learning in math, respectively, compared to children in non-kin foster care.
- **There were no differences in reading achievement among children in informal kinship care, formal kinship care, or non-kin foster care.**

Why is this important for our work?

Given that children in out-of-home care tend to have worse academic outcomes than their peers in the general population, the finding that children living in formal kinship care achieved math scores on par with their peers in their general population is promising. This finding underscores the importance of continued efforts to place children with kin. However, formal kin caregivers represent a small fraction of all kinship placements. Children living in informal kin placements need more resources to support their academic performance, as do children living in non-kin foster care.

To learn more, please review additional resources on [kinship care](#) and [education](#).

For additional information about this article, see the [abstract](#), read this [brief](#), or contact KMResources@casey.org.