

Children living with relatives struggle with physical, mental health issues

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It is well-known that children in foster care are at increased risk for physical and mental health problems. But what about kids who live with relatives other than their birth parents?

Children who live in "kinship care" often fly under the radar of child welfare agencies, and little research has been done on this group of children — until now.

Sara B. Eleoff, MD, and her colleagues, used data from a 2007 national survey of more than 91,000 children to identify those living in kinship care and compare their health and family characteristics to children living with at least one birth parent. Dr. Eleoff will present their findings on Sunday, May 2 at the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) annual meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

The researchers found that about 2.8 million children live with relatives, compared to about 800,000 in foster care. And like children in [foster care](#), those in kinship care experience a multitude of health issues.

"Children who live in kinship care with a relative have more special health care needs, [mental health problems](#) such as ADHD and depression, and dental problems compared with children who live with their parents," said Dr. Eleoff, from the University Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry in New York.

These children also are more likely to be black (48 percent vs. 17

percent), older than 9 years (59 percent vs. 48 percent), have public health insurance (72 percent vs. 30 percent) and live in households with incomes at or near the poverty level (31 percent vs. 18 percent). In addition, their caregivers frequently report having fair or poor overall health or [mental health](#).

"These children and their families may need additional services and supports," Dr. Eleoff said. "Therefore, health care providers, educators and public health agencies should ask about children's living situations and consider the risk of special needs among [children](#) in kinship care."

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

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