



Robert Wood Johnson
Foundation

U.S. Public Opinion on Vulnerable Populations

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Research Highlight

Background

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) supports promising ideas that address the ways health and health care problems intersect with social factors such as housing, poverty and inadequate education. The Foundation's work in this area examines how society's most vulnerable people—including low-income children and their families, frail older adults, adults with disabilities, the homeless, those with HIV/AIDS and recent immigrants and refugees—are affected by these factors.

Understanding the perceptions of the American public is important to informing the Foundation's work with vulnerable populations. This document highlights results from a telephone survey conducted in June 2006 by the Harvard School of Public Health and RWJF. The team surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,100 adults age 18 and older. The survey focused on public perceptions of issues related to legal immigrant children, foster children, community violence and long-term care.

Key Findings

Immigrant Children

- One in three Americans think the government should spend more to help children of legal immigrants. Twenty percent think the government should spend less, while 40 percent think it should spend about the same.
- Hispanic Americans are significantly more likely to support spending more (almost 70% are in favor), compared to whites and African Americans. Almost half of Americans aged 18 to 29 think the government should spend more, compared to only one in five among those over age 60.

Foster Children

- More than half of the respondents think the government should continue support services for children between the ages of 18 and 25 who are part of the foster care system; about 40 percent oppose continuing services.
- Women (compared to men in the sample), adults aged 18 to 29 (compared to adults over age 60), and African American and Hispanic Americans (compared to whites) are all significantly more likely to think the government should continue support services.

Community Violence

- A majority of respondents (55%) think domestic violence is a "very serious" or "somewhat serious" issue in their community. African Americans and Hispanic Americans are significantly more likely than whites to see this issue as "very serious."
- More than 40 percent of Americans see gun violence as a "very serious" or "somewhat serious" issue in their community. Both African Americans and Hispanic Americans are significantly more likely than whites to think this is a "very serious" issue.

Long-Term Care

Long-Term Care Service Preferences

- If they were older or in need of help for an extended period of time, nearly two out of three Americans would prefer to receive care in their own home with paid services. Whites are significantly more likely than Hispanic Americans to prefer this option. Hispanic Americans are significantly more likely than whites and African Americans to want to live with their children or other relatives.
- Fewer Americans would prefer to receive long-term care outside their home. Approximately one in seven say they would like to live in an assisted living facility and only 3 percent would like to live in a nursing home.

Who Should Pay for Long-Term Care Services?

- A majority of Americans (55%) believe the federal or state government should be mainly responsible for paying for long-term care for older adults. Both African Americans and Hispanic Americans are significantly more likely than whites to say the government should be mainly responsible.
- One-third of respondents said individuals and families should be mainly responsible for paying for their own long-term care. Whites are more likely than African Americans and Hispanic Americans to say individuals and families should be mainly responsible for paying.

Long-Term Care Insurance

- More than half of Americans have heard of long-term care insurance. Whites are significantly more likely than African Americans and Hispanic Americans to have heard of long-term care insurance, while African Americans are significantly more likely than Hispanic Americans to have heard of it.
- Fewer than one in five Americans say they have a private long-term care insurance policy. Of those who have heard of long-term care insurance and report not having a policy, nearly half say the reason is that it costs too much. Forty percent of these same respondents say they do not need it. An additional 4 percent say they are unable to buy a policy.
- Of respondents who have heard of long-term care insurance and do not have a policy, almost 40 percent say they would not pay for a policy even if it cost only \$100 per month.

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