

Study finds broad range of 'independence' for US young adults

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The idea of what it means to become "independent" has evolved significantly in recent generations, and new research from North Carolina State University finds that the concept of being either dependent or independent doesn't apply to almost half of young adults in the United States. Instead, the study finds that young adults can fall into

any of four categories that span the spectrum from full independence to being wholly dependent on parents.

"It used to be that '[independence](#)' was seen as moving into your own home, and that's not necessarily true anymore," says Anna Manzoni, an assistant professor of sociology at NC State and author of a paper describing the work. "Some people live at home, but are financially independent; other people have their own houses or apartments, but still receive financial support from parents. And whether [young people](#) actually consider themselves independent isn't necessarily tied to either circumstance."

For the study, Manzoni looked at data from more than 14,000 young people - aged 18-25 - who participated in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health. Specifically, Manzoni evaluated various indicators of independence: living arrangements, earnings, financial support from parents, and self-perceptions of independence and adulthood.

Based on that analysis, Manzoni found that young people fell into one of four groups -only one of which had all of the indicators of independence. That "independent" group accounted for 28 percent of young people.

At the other extreme was the "dependent" group, which included people who received [financial support](#) from parents and were least likely to live on their own or think of themselves as independent. The dependent group made up 23 percent of young people.

A third group, the "independent non-adults," was made up of people who were independent in terms of the objective residential and financial indicators, but who did not think of themselves as independent adults. Independent non-adults made up 24 percent of young people.

The last group, called "residential dependents," were financially independent and thought of themselves as independent adults, but still lived with their [parents](#). Residential dependents made up 25 percent of young people.

"The fact that we have this diverse range of groups across the spectrum of independence, and that each of these groups is so well-represented in the population, means that we need to stop thinking of independence as a binary concept: either dependent or independent," Manzoni says. "It's more complicated than that. Our research and policies - on everything from education to housing - need to reflect these nuances, because they are important."

The paper, "Conceptualizing and measuring youth independence: A multidimensional approach using latent class analysis," is published in the journal *Acta Sociologica*.

More information: A. Manzoni, Conceptualizing and measuring youth independence multidimensionally in the United States, *Acta Sociologica* (2016). [DOI: 10.1177/0001699316653797](https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699316653797)

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