



# PROFILES IN ADOPTION

*A Survey of Adoptive Parents and  
Secondary Data Analysis of Federal Adoption Files*

By Ryan Hanlon, PhD and Matthew Quade, PhD

Profiles in Adoption: Part One®

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Current Printing (last digit)

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN: 979-8-88757-469-1



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# Introduction

National Council For Adoption is pleased to issue this report following a large survey of adoptive parents and secondary data analysis of federal adoption data. Full of descriptive statistics describing who is adopting and who is being adopted, this report also features information about the adoption process (e.g., cost, length of time), adoptive parents' motivation to adopt, their children's educational experiences, and much more.

While we hope this report is useful for policymakers, members of the media, and others interested in adoption, our primary purpose is to equip adoption professionals, adoptive families, and prospective adoptive parents with information to help them in their role as part of the larger adoption community.

## Highlights from the Report

- Although a diverse group, adoptive parents overall tend to be very highly educated and have relatively high household incomes.
- Most adoptive parents report being very satisfied with their adoption decisions.
- Adoptive parents have a range of motivations to pursue adoption, which vary in part by the type of adoption being pursued.
- Adopted individuals have very positive educational outcomes according to their parents, and they often have an IEP or 504 plan.
- Adoptees often obtain diagnoses and/or receive therapeutic services after a placement.
- Over time, significantly more private domestic adoptions include contact with birth families.
- The percentage of children with special needs being placed for intercountry adoption is increasing over time, with the majority of children placed for intercountry adoption now having a known special need at the time of placement.
- A large majority of adoptive parents who have a child of a different race/ethnicity seek to participate in activities to incorporate elements of the child's race, ethnicity, and culture.



# Sample

In 2021, National Council For Adoption launched the *Profiles in Adoption* national survey of adoptive parents. The three main types of adoption were near equally represented among the respondents. Stepparent adoptions were excluded from the study. The result is the largest study of adoptive families ever conducted, with responses from 4,212 adoptive parents—representing 4,135 households and parents to 6,608 adopted individuals—residing in all 50 states and Washington, D.C.

The adopted individuals studied represent private domestic adoption ( $n = 2,289$ ), intercountry adoptions ( $n = 2,115$ ), adoptions from foster care ( $n = 2,033$ ), and embryo adoptions ( $n = 79$ ). These adoptions occurred between 1966 and August 2021, with 74.9% completed since 2010, including 55.9% since 2015.

Among the 4,212 adoptive parent respondents, 83.3% were female and their average age at the time of the most recent (or only) adoption was 37.0 years ( $SD = 6.94$ ). Additionally, 84.8% of respondents were married with an average length of marriage at the time of the most recent (or only) adoption of 10.34 years ( $SD = 6.25$ ).

While the majority of the respondents were White (90.1%), respondents also included adoptive parents who were Hispanic and/or Latino(a) (3.1%), Black (non-Hispanic) (2.1%), Asian/Pacific Islander (1.8%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (1.2%), Multiracial (1.1), with 0.6% reporting “other.” With regards to education, 37.8% had a bachelor’s degree, 31.4% had a master’s degree, 13.3% had some college experience, 8.7% had a doctoral degree or equivalent, 6.1% had an associate’s degree, 2.4% had a high school diploma, and 0.2% had earned a GED. Multiple religious affiliations were represented in the sample, including 54.6% Protestant/Christian, 24.1% Catholic/Christian, 1.6% Jewish, 0.4% Muslim, 0.3% Hindu, 0.3% Buddhist, and 3.0% “other;” 15.7% of respondents reported “no religious affiliation.”



# Methodology

The *Profiles in Adoption* national survey of adoptive parents was conducted in August 2021. Participants were recruited via email and listserv invitations via National Council For Adoption (NCFA), its stakeholders, and adoption community contacts as well as postings on NCFA’s social media. Participants joined the study by clicking on a link sent via email from a listserv to which they subscribe or from their adoption agency or other adoption advocacy organization or by clicking the survey link shared in a social media post. Respondents completed a one-time survey about their experiences as an adoptive parent as well as the experiences of their adopted child. At the conclusion of the survey, participants were given the option to send a link to the survey to other adoptive parents. All participants had the option to enter to win one of 150 individual \$25 Amazon gift cards. The final sample consisted of 4,212 unique adoptive parents, which represented 4,135 adoptive households and 6,608 unique adopted individuals. Participants were made up of residents of all 50 states as well as the District of Columbia.

In the survey, adoptive parents were asked to report the number of children they had adopted and were able to record responses to questions pertaining to each adopted child as well as a more extensive list of questions that pertained only to the most recent adoption. This restriction was designed to limit the length of the survey as well as help reduce recall bias.

The final portion of this report includes secondary data analysis of federal child welfare data on adoption from foster care, and is based on all federally reported adoption cases from the three-year time-frame examined.



# *Characteristics & Descriptive Statistics of Adoptive Parents*

Adoptive parents were asked common demographic questions to help illuminate their characteristics. In Table 1, adoptive parents are counted for each adopted individual and therefore may be counted more than once. In other words, a parent who has adopted two children would be counted twice in Table 1.

The findings show that adoptive parents are highly educated, with the majority having a college degree and many having advanced degrees.





TABLE 1. CHARACTERISTICS OF ADOPTIVE PARENTS

	Private Domestic Adoption		Intercountry Adoption		Adoption from Foster Care	
	N = 2,335		N = 2,166		N = 2,044	
Education						
GED	5	0.2%	1	0.0%	7	0.3%
High School	52	2.2%	34	1.6%	82	4.0%
Some college	228	9.8%	183	8.4%	452	22.1%
Associate’s degree	135	5.8%	108	5.0%	204	10.0%
Bachelor’s degree	935	40.0%	787	36.3%	707	34.6%
Master’s degree	765	32.8%	805	37.2%	489	23.9%
Doctoral degree or equivalent	215	9.2%	248	11.4%	103	5.0%
Religion						
Buddhism	7	0.3%	6	0.3%	9	0.4%
Catholic/Christianity	546	23.4%	432	19.9%	501	24.5%
Protestant/Christianity	1,276	54.6%	1,368	63.2%	1,116	54.6%
Hinduism	7	0.3%	6	0.3%	4	0.2%
Islam	7	0.3%	1	0.0%	11	0.5%
Judaism	47	2.0%	48	2.2%	12	0.6%
No religious affiliation	361	15.5%	254	11.7%	293	14.3%
Other	83	3.6%	50	2.3%	98	4.8%
Military Service (Current or Past)						
Parent Survey Respondent						
Yes	84	3.6%	95	4.4%	123	6.0%
No	2,251	96.4%	2,071	95.6%	1,921	94.0%
Survey Respondent’s Spouse						
Yes	213	10.0%	232	12.5%	228	14.7%
No	1,925	90.0%	1,627	87.5%	1,319	85.3%
LGBT						
Yes	161	6.9%	34	1.6%	166	8.1%
No	2,166	92.8%	2,127	98.2%	1,868	91.4%
Prefer not to answer	8	0.3%	5	0.2%	10	0.5%
Disability						
Yes	114	4.9%	77	3.6%	126	6.2%
No	2,193	93.9%	2,061	95.2%	1,888	92.4%
Prefer not to answer	28	1.2%	28	1.3%	30	1.5%

# Number of Children in the Adoptive Household

While many children who are adopted are the first child to join a household, the majority are joining a household with other children already in the family. Among the 4,135 households represented in the study, the number of children adopted and the number of children in the household, including the adopted child, at the time of the most recent (or only) adoption were as follows:

TABLE 2. NUMBER OF CHILDREN ADOPTED PER HOUSEHOLD

Num. of Children Adopted	Num. of Households
1	2,530
2	1,089
3	300
4	108
5	108

TABLE 3. TOTAL NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN ADOPTIVE HOUSEHOLD

Num. of Children in Household	Num. of Households
1	1,739
2	1,046
3	564
4	351
5	195
6	104
7	59
8	26
9	14
10	37



# Income of Adoptive Parents

Adoptive parents' income levels are reflected in Table 4. Adoptive parents' incomes have an impact on their spending power, ability to pay for what may be an expensive adoption process, and ability to provide resources to their child by adoption, (see pages 16–17). Income levels may also have a direct impact on parents' future tax liability and therefore their eligibility to receive the federal adoption tax credit.

Household income levels varied significantly based on type of adoption, with the parents who completed a private domestic adoption having larger household incomes than those who completed an intercountry adoption and those who completed an adoption from foster care.



TABLE 4. HOUSEHOLD INCOME AT TIME OF MOST RECENT OR ONLY ADOPTION

	Private Domestic Adoption		Intercountry Adoption		Adoption From Foster Care	
	N = 1,249		N = 920		N = 880	
Income Range						
\$25,000 or less	17	1.4%	10	1.1%	23	2.6%
\$25,001-\$50,000	78	6.2%	84	9.1%	101	11.5%
\$50,001-\$75,000	212	17.0%	221	24.0%	249	28.3%
\$75,001-\$100,000	301	24.1%	184	20.0%	227	25.8%
\$100,001-\$125,000	200	16.0%	143	15.5%	133	15.1%
\$125,001-\$150,000	149	11.9%	82	8.9%	75	8.5%
More than \$150,000	255	20.4%	166	18.0%	48	5.5%
Prefer not to answer	37	3.0%	30	3.3%	24	2.7%

# Adoptive Parents' Satisfaction

Adoptive parents were asked five questions related to their satisfaction with adoption. Overall, adoptive parents expressed very significant satisfaction. The overall satisfaction score for adoptive parents who completed a private domestic adoption was 4.66 (on a scale of 1 to 5). Parents who completed an intercountry adoption had an average score of 4.58, and parents who adopted from foster care had an average score of 4.22.

## Key Takeaways

- A large majority of adoptive parents find their role to be rewarding and satisfying.
- With the perspective of lived experience, adoptive parents report they would still make the same decision to adopt their child.





TABLE 5. SATISFACTION WITH ADOPTION

1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree	Private Domestic Adoption  N = 1,601	Intercountry Adoption  N = 1,292	Adoption from Foster Care  N = 1,133
Overall, I am satisfied with the decision to adopt.	4.69 (0.82)	4.60 (0.96)	4.25 (1.01)
Given my experience of adopting a child, I would recommend adoption to others.	4.31 (1.00)	4.33 (1.08)	3.94 (1.08)
I find being my child's parent to be a rewarding experience.	4.74 (0.76)	4.58 (0.93)	4.21 (1.01)
I have never taken an action to end this adoption (i.e., adoption dissolution).	4.81 (0.72)	4.80 (0.73)	4.5 (0.90)
Given everything you know, you still would have accepted this adoption placement for your family.	4.76 (0.76)	4.57 (0.99)	4.19 (1.09)
Total Satisfaction	4.66	4.58	4.22



# Perceived Cost as a Barrier to Adoption

Parents were asked to recall their perception of cost as a barrier before they adopted and then again to reflect on whether it truly was a barrier for them after they had adopted. Given that this is a survey of families who completed adoptions, it does not capture families for whom costs truly were a preventative barrier that prohibited their adoption. Nonetheless, perceptions before and after adoption differ significantly. Of the 4,076 adoptive parents who responded to this question, over half (51.4%) believed cost was a barrier prior to adoption. After adoption, only about a quarter of adoptive parents (24.7%) indicated cost was a moderate or extreme barrier.

## Before Adoption

Parents were asked, “Did you perceive the cost of an adoption to be a barrier when you began your adoption process?” The responses are given by type of adoption.

TABLE 6. PERCEPTION OF COST AS A BARRIER BEFORE ADOPTION

	Private Domestic Adoption	Intercountry Adoption	Adoption From Foster Care	Embryo Adoption	Total
No	597 (37.3%)	633 (49%)	735 (64.8%)	17 (34.7%)	1,982 (48.6%)
Yes	1,004 (62.7%)	659 (51%)	399 (35.2%)	32 (65.3%)	2,094 (51.4%)
Total	1,601	1,292	1,134	49	4,076



## After Adoption

Parents were then asked, “Looking back, how much of a barrier to your adoption process was the cost of adoption?” They could choose between the four options listed below.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTION OF COST AS A BARRIER  
AFTER ADOPTION

	Private Domestic Adoption	Intercountry Adoption	Adoption from Foster Care	Embryo Adoption	Total
Not a barrier	606 (37.9%)	561 (43.4%)	796 (70.2%)	15 (30.6%)	1,978 (48.5%)
Somewhat of a barrier	522 (32.6%)	424 (32.8%)	130 (11.5%)	15 (30.6%)	1,091 (26.7%)
A moderate barrier	354 (22.1%)	234 (18.1%)	130 (11.5%)	13 (26.5%)	731 (17.9%)
An extreme barrier	119 (7.4%)	73 (5.6%)	78 (6.8%)	6 (12.2%)	276 (6.8%)
Total	1,601	1,292	1,134	49	4,076

## Key Takeaways

- Just over half of adoptive parent respondents stated that prior to their adoption they perceived cost of adoption process to be a barrier.
- After adoption, a quarter of adoptive parent respondents reported that the cost of the adoption process was a moderate or extreme barrier in their adoption process.

# Motivation to Adopt

Adoptive parents often have multiple reasons and motives to pursue growing their family by adoption. This survey first asked parents to select all motives and then to select their primary motive for pursuing adoption. Responses vary according to type of adoption, with “infertility” the most frequently chosen response by parents who completed a private domestic adoption (37.3%). The most frequently chosen response by parents who completed an intercountry adoption was “extend family” (25.49%). The most frequently chosen motivation for parents who adopted from foster care was “provide a permanent home for a child” (37.77%).

TABLE 8. PRIMARY MOTIVATION TO ADOPT

	Private Domestic Adoption		Intercountry Adoption		Adoption From Foster Care	
	N = 1,580		N = 1,271		N = 1,096	
Motivations						
Infertility	590	37.3%	217	17.1%	177	16.2%
Provide a permanent home for a child	185	11.7%	302	23.8%	414	37.8%
Extend family	497	31.5%	324	25.5%	139	12.7%
Give child a sibling	67	4.2%	52	4.1%	62	5.7%
Adopted child was related	13	0.8%	3	0.2%	50	4.6%
Religious calling	101	6.4%	223	17.6%	112	10.2%
Altruistic desire to help a child	45	2.9%	92	7.2%	90	8.2%
Other	82	5.2%	58	4.6%	52	4.7%



## Key Takeaways

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- Parents have a wide range of motivations for pursuing adoption.
- Infertility is not the primary motivation for adoption, though it is a significantly greater motivation among adoptive parents who completed private domestic adoptions than among those who completed intercountry adoptions and those who completed adoptions from foster care.



# Meeting Children's Needs After Adoption

Adoptive parents were asked questions about whether their child had received a specific diagnosis by a clinician (Table 9) or had received therapeutic services (Table 10). Additionally, parents were asked if they perceived their child to have experienced significant sleep disturbances or eating issues (Table 11). The potential diagnoses, services, and problems experienced are not comprehensive.

This information can be helpful to better understand post-adoption experiences as well as to prepare and set expectations for families considering adoption. At the same time, labels can be both misleading and stigmatizing. Knowing a child has a diagnosis and/or has received therapeutic services reveals little more than that initial steps were taken toward treatment or health-oriented outcomes.

Comparisons between types of adoption are limited by the fact that many states provide post-adoption services only to children placed from the child welfare system (and not to those placed through private domestic and intercountry adoptions).

Parents were asked if the child they most recently adopted (or their only adoption) had been diagnosed with an attachment disorder, sensory processing disorder, learning disorder, and/or ADD or ADHD. The results are shown in the table below.

TABLE 9. PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN WHO ARE ADOPTED AND HAVE A DIAGNOSIS

	Private Domestic Adoption N = 2,289	Intercountry Adoption N = 2,111	Adoption from Foster Care N = 2,033
Attachment Disorder	5.4%	15.8%	27.4%
Sensory Processing Disorder	10.6%	16.0%	23.0%
Learning Disorder	12.4%	26.0%	31.0%
ADD or ADHD	17.4%	22.4%	41.1%





Parents were asked if the child they most recently adopted (or through their only adoption) had received speech therapy, occupational therapy, and/or mental health services. The results are shown in the table below.

TABLE 10. PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN WHO ARE ADOPTED AND HAVE RECEIVED THERAPEUTIC SERVICES

	Private Domestic Adoption N = 2,289	Intercountry Adoption N = 2,111	Adoption From Foster Care N = 2,033
Speech Therapy	22.4%	40.2%	32.6%
Occupational Therapy	19.9%	29.0%	31.8%
Mental Health Services	21.4%	39.8%	54.2%

Parents were asked if the child they most recently adopted (or through their only adoption) had significant sleep or eating issues after being placed for adoption.

TABLE 11. PARENTAL REPORT OF THEIR CHILD'S SIGNIFICANT SLEEP DISTURBANCES AND EATING ISSUES

	Private Domestic Adoption N = 2,289	Intercountry Adoption N = 2,111	Adoption from Foster Care N = 2,033
Significant Sleep Disturbances	15.0%	26.6%	35.1%
Significant Eating Issues	11.2%	18.5%	24.7%

Key Takeaways

- Adoption professionals should help normalize for adoptive families the need to obtain services post-adoption.
- Going into an adoption, it is crucial that families have health insurance that enables children to receive post-adoption services.
- Prospective adoptive parents should anticipate spending significant time, expenses, and effort to help meet their children’s post-adoption needs.

# Educational Experiences

As shown in Table 12 below, many adoptive parents describe their child's educational performance in a positive way. Most parents who completed private domestic and intercountry adoptions rated their child's educational performance as either "excellent" or "very good." The majority of parents who adopted from foster care described their children's educational performance as "excellent," "very good," or "good."

Additionally, parents were also asked whether their child had an educational accommodation—revealing that a large percentage of children had either an individualized education plan (IEP) or 504 plan.

TABLE 12. EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES FOR ADOPTED CHILDREN

	Private Domestic Adoption		Intercountry Adoption		Adoption from Foster Care	
Education Performance	N = 1,131		N = 1,945		N = 1,603	
Excellent	307	27.1%	545	28.0%	208	13.0%
Very Good	339	30.0%	490	25.2%	355	22.2%
Good	255	22.6%	428	22.0%	452	28.2%
Fair	158	14.0%	311	16.0%	385	24.0%
Poor	72	6.4%	171	8.8%	203	12.7%
Education Accommodation	N = 1,140		N = 1,937		N = 1,574	
None	704	61.8%	1,025	52.9%	648	41.2%
IEP Plan	308	27.0%	626	32.3%	699	44.4%
504 Plan	85	7.5%	152	7.9%	166	10.6%
Other	43	3.8%	134	6.9%	61	3.9%

## Key Takeaways

- The majority of adoptees' parents provide a positive report on educational performance.
- It is important that parents understand their children's rights to access and participate in educational accommodation programs since the need for these programs is common among children who are adopted.



# Contact with Birth Family After Adoption

Parents were asked if they have contact with their child's birth family. Nearly three-quarters of those with recent private domestic adoptions said "yes," which is significantly more than those who completed other types of adoption. Respondents who said "no" to having current contact with the birth family were asked whether they would want contact with the birth family if it were possible. Results are displayed in the table below by type of adoption as well as by timeframe in which the adoptive placement occurred.



TABLE 13. PERCENTAGE OF ADOPTIVE FAMILIES IN CONTACT WITH BIRTH FAMILY

	Num. of Respondents	Have Contact with Birth Family	Num. of Respondents	Would Want Contact with Birth Family If Possible
<b>Private Domestic</b>				
2011-2021	1,385	74.7%	351	55.8%
2001-2010	142	55.6%	63	41.3%
1991-2000	43	60.5%	17	29.4%
<b>Intercountry</b>				
2011-2021	758	10.6%	678	60.2%
2001-2010	402	11.4%	356	57.3%
1991-2000	102	10.8%	91	50.5%
<b>Adoption from Foster Care</b>				
2011-2021	992	43.4%	561	12.8%
2001-2010	112	42.9%	64	21.9%
1991-2000	21	52.4%	10	20.0%

# Parenting a Child Who Is a Different Race or Ethnicity

Adoptive households in which both parents (or the sole parent) reported a different race or ethnicity from that of their most recent (or only) child by adoption were asked questions about their experiences and activities. This was also limited to those who had completed an adoption more than six months prior and in which the child was at least one year old at the time the survey was completed.

Parents were asked to rate the acceptance (by others) of their child's race/ethnicity on a scale of 1-5:

TABLE 14. ACCEPTANCE BY OTHERS OF CHILD'S RACE/ETHNICITY

Statement	Average Rating
My friends and extended family have been fully accepting of my child's race/ethnicity.	4.40
My community (i.e., schools, neighborhoods, etc.) has been fully accepting of my child's race/ethnicity.	4.31

Parents were then asked to select "true" or "false" for 10 questions about their participation in activities or relationships. Table 15 shows the percentage of those who selected "true" to each item and are arranged by type of adoption.





TABLE 15. PARTICIPATION IN ACTIVITIES BY FAMILIES  
WHOSE CHILD BY ADOPTION IS A DIFFERENT RACE

	Private Domestic Adoption N = 550	Intercountry Adoption N = 1,057	Adoption From Foster Care N = 373
Has friends who share child's racial, ethnic, or cultural background	82.4%	76.4%	83.7%
Prepares foods associated with child's racial, ethnic, or cultural background	70.4%	86.0%	78.3%
Participates in racial/ethnic holidays or events that reflect child's race, ethnicity, or culture	65.1%	76.3%	68.4%
Has chosen entertainment such as TV shows or movies that reflect child's race, ethnicity, or culture	86.6%	81.1%	85.5%
Has participated in religious, social, or other groups or activities that reflect child's race, ethnicity, or culture	66.4%	70.6%	67.8%
Reads books to child about his/her racial, ethnic, or cultural groups or heritage	87.45%	90.54%	85.79%
Sees other families that look like our family	88.0%	88.2%	87.9%
Educates ourselves about any stereotypes/prejudices associated with child's racial, ethnic, or cultural background	94.2%	95.7%	92.5%
Has age-appropriate conversations about race, ethnicity, and/or culture	95.3%	96.7%	94.4%
Actively sought social groups or mentors that reflect child's racial, ethnic, or cultural background	68.0%	67.1%	66.5%



# *Private Domestic Adoption*



# Characteristics of Adoptive Parents – Private Domestic

This section of the report highlights information specific to private domestic adoption. The results show that most children placed for private domestic adoption are placed with White, married parents. The mean age of the parents at the time of adoption is 35.1 and the average length of marriage among married couples is 8.5 years at the time of adoption.

TABLE 16. CHARACTERISTICS OF PARENTS WHO  
COMPLETED PRIVATE DOMESTIC ADOPTIONS

N = 2,335		
Age		
Avg. Age at Time of Adoption	35.1 years	SD = 6.08
Race		
American Indian/Alaskan Native	19	0.8%
Asian/Pacific Islander	31	1.3%
Black (non-Hispanic)	51	2.2%
Hispanic and/or Latino(a)	60	2.6%
White (non-Hispanic)	2,129	91.2%
Multiracial	31	1.3%
Other	14	0.6%
Marital Status		
Married	2,177	93.2%
Not Married	158	6.8%
Avg. Length of Marriage at Time of Adoption	8.5 years	SD = 4.84

# Cost of Private Domestic Adoption

Parents who completed private domestic adoptions were asked the following question:

How much would you estimate [child's name]'s adoption cost in total? Please consider all costs including agency, paperwork, travel, government, and other adoption-process fees. Please do not include costs associated with extra family members' travel or sightseeing.

The results are displayed below based upon two distinct time periods:

TABLE 17. COST OF PRIVATE DOMESTIC ADOPTION

	2010 and beyond N = 1,388	Prior to 2010 N = 192
Average	\$33,141.83	\$17,017.96
Median	\$32,000.00	\$13,000.00





# Special Needs Status

Whether or not a child placed for private domestic adoption has a special need was self-reported by the adoptive parents and not connected to other measures (e.g., receipt of an adoption subsidy). The results are reported in two distinct time frames, notable for the lack of change between these two time periods.

TABLE 18. PRIVATE DOMESTIC ADOPTIONS THAT WERE SELF-REPORTED AS SPECIAL NEEDS

	Private Domestic Adoptions	
	2010 and beyond	Prior to 2010
Special Needs Adoption	N = 1,877	N = 412
Yes	247 (13.2%)	54 (13.1%)
No	1,630 (86.8%)	358 (86.9%)



## Relationship with Birth Mother Prior to Adoption

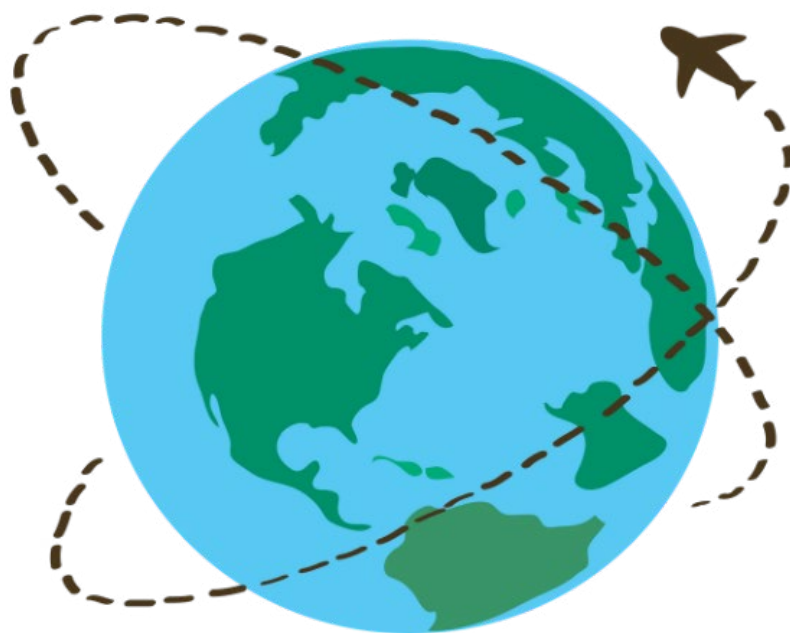
Parents who completed a private domestic adoption since 2010 were asked whether they had a prior relationship with the birth mother.

TABLE 19. ADOPTIVE PARENTS HAD PRIOR RELATIONSHIP WITH BIRTH MOTHER

N = 1,385	
Yes	85.3%
No	14.7%



# *Intercountry Adoption*





# Characteristics of Adoptive Parents – Intercountry

The table below presents basic demographic information about adoptive parents who have completed intercountry adoptions. The results indicate that the majority of intercountry adoptees are placed with parents who are White and married, with the mean age of the parents 38.6 years at the time of adoption and the average length of marriage being 12 years at the time of adoption.

TABLE 20. CHARACTERISTICS OF PARENTS WHO  
COMPLETED INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTIONS

N = 2,166		
Age		
Avg. Age at Time of Adoption	38.6 years	SD = 6.77
Race		
American Indian/Alaskan Native	11	0.5%
Asian/Pacific Islander	51	2.4%
Black (non-Hispanic)	12	0.6%
Hispanic and/or Latino(a)	40	1.8%
White (non-Hispanic)	2,027	93.6%
Multiracial	17	0.8%
Other	8	0.4%
Marital Status		
Married	1,889	87.2%
Not Married	277	12.8%
Avg. length of marriage at time of adoption	12.0 years	SD = 6.61

# Percentage of Special Needs Adoptions by Year

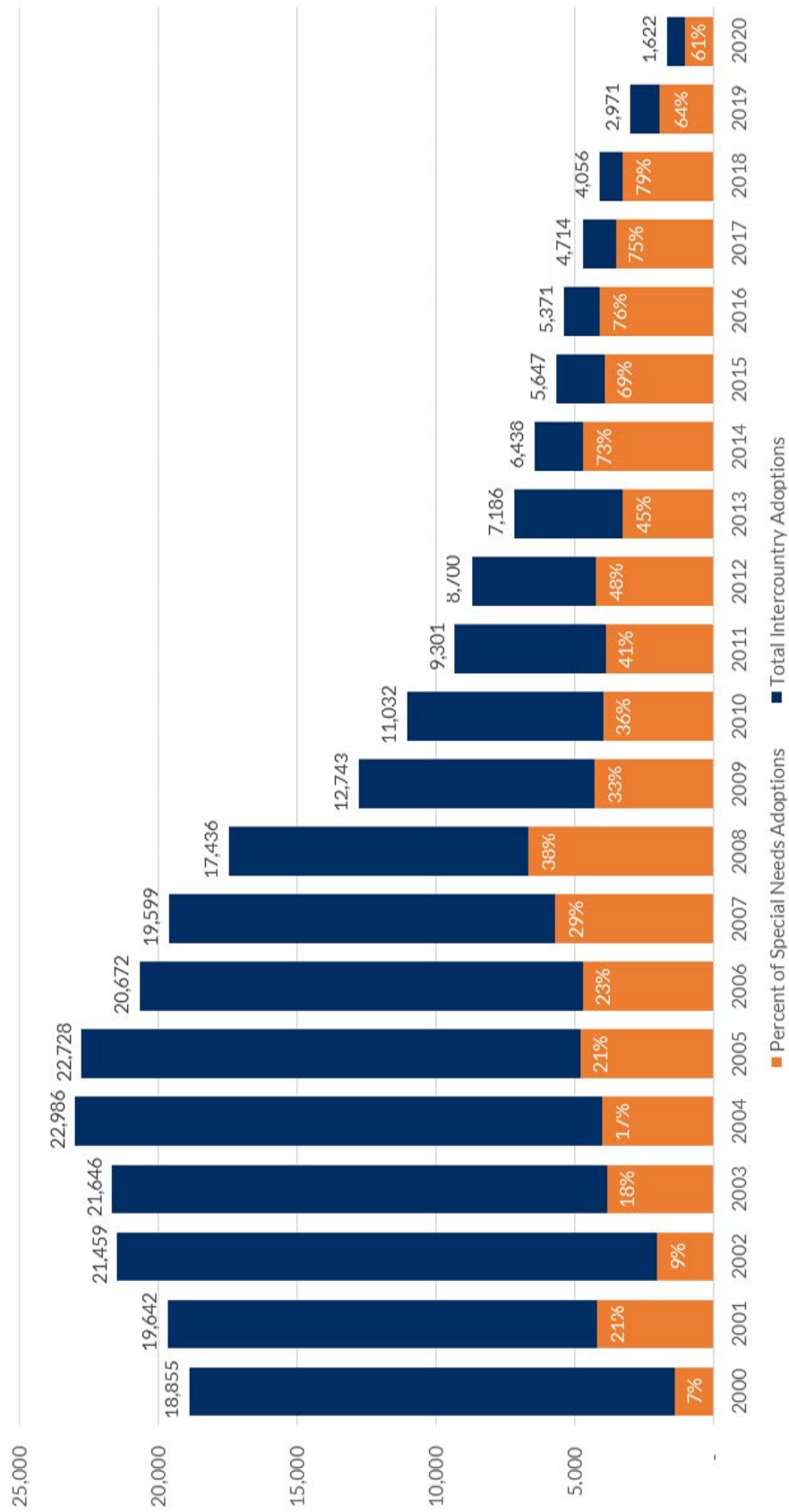
One of the most significant trends in intercountry adoption is the increase, over time, in the percentage of children with special needs. Beginning in 2014, the majority of parents who completed an intercountry adoption reported that their child had a known special need at the time of adoption.

TABLE 21. PERCENTAGE OF INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTIONS CONSIDERED SPECIAL NEEDS BY YEAR

	N	Special Needs Adoption		N	Special Needs Adoption
2000	41	7.3%	2011	70	41.4%
2001	66	21.2%	2012	89	48.3%
2002	43	9.3%	2013	102	45.1%
2003	79	17.7%	2014	80	72.5%
2004	81	17.3%	2015	113	69.0%
2005	71	21.1%	2016	118	76.3%
2006	66	22.7%	2017	150	74.7%
2007	62	29.0%	2018	140	79.3%
2008	89	38.2%	2019	115	63.5%
2009	75	33.3%	2020	77	61.0%
2010	92	35.9%			



FIGURE 1. PERCENTAGE OF SPECIAL NEEDS INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTIONS BY YEAR





# Length of Intercountry Adoption Process

Parents who completed an intercountry adoption were asked to estimate the length of time from when they started an adoption process until their child came to the United States. The results are displayed by number of months.

TABLE 22. LENGTH OF INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION PROCESS (IN MONTHS)

	N = 1,280
Mean	22.52
Median	16.00
SD	19.93



# Cost of Intercountry Adoption

Parents who completed intercountry adoptions were asked the following question:

*How much would you estimate [child's name]'s adoption cost in total? Please consider all costs including agency, paperwork, travel, government, and other adoption-process fees. Please do not include costs associated with extra family members' travel or sight-seeing.*

The results are displayed below based upon two distinct time periods:

TABLE 23. COST OF INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION

	2010 and beyond N = 793 reported	Prior to 2010 N = 469 reported
Average	\$36,776.21	\$22,245.67
Median	\$35,000.00	\$20,000.00



# Satisfaction with Intercountry Adoption Service Providers

Adoptive parents who completed intercountry adoptions were asked: Based on your personal experience, please indicate how strongly you agree that the following adoption workers were helpful toward you. The results are reported below.

TABLE 24. ADOPTIVE PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF HELPFULNESS  
OF INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION PARTICIPANTS

1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree	N = 1,280	
	Mean	SD
Adoption placement agency workers	4.24	1.04
Adoption agency's foreign-country representatives	4.21	1.07
Local home study worker	4.15	1.04
U.S. government officials	3.25	1.03
Orphanage/child care workers	3.74	1.06
Foreign government officials	3.29	1.05



# Adoption from Foster Care

In addition to sharing the results of direct survey research, this report also includes analyses of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) for fiscal years 2017, 2018, and 2019. The only AFCARS data that was analyzed pertained to instances of a child adopted from within the foster care system whose adoption was finalized during one of those three federal fiscal years. Thus, these analyses do not represent all children in the foster care system, but rather only those who were adopted.

Each of three separate datasets, one for each fiscal year, were merged into a more comprehensive single dataset for larger analyses. There were 59,469 cases in FY2017, 63,036 in FY2018, and 66,111 in FY2019—resulting in a total potential sample size of 188,616 adoptions from foster care in a three-year window. However, the sample size on any variable investigated varies due to missing data for a particular child on a particular variable. Cases were excluded from related analyses (i.e., those that pertained to the variable in question) if it could be determined that the information provided was not valid. For example, it is not possible to adopt a child if you are not a legal adult. Thus, if the adoptive mother or father was younger than age 18, that person was excluded from any analyses related to adoptive parents' age.



# Who Is Adopting from Foster Care?

The secondary data analysis presents a snapshot of basic demographic information about those who adopted from foster care from 2017–2019.

TABLE 25. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF PARENTS WHO COMPLETED ADOPTIONS FROM FOSTER CARE BY FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR

2017			2018		2019		Total	
Average Age - Mother								
Sample Size	56,709		60,346		63,379		180,434	
Average	45.2		45.2		45.1		45.2	
Median	44.0		44.0		44.0		44.0	
Average Age - Father								
Sample Size	43,768		46,572		48,871		139,211	
Average	45.8		45.8		45.7		45.7	
Median	45.0		45.0		44.0		45.0	
Race - Mother								
White	37,476	67.4%	39,823	67.7%	41,827	67.6%	119,126	67.5%
Black	8,538	15.4%	8,860	15.1%	9,527	15.4%	26,925	15.3%
American Indian	792	1.4%	861	1.5%	803	1.3%	2,456	1.4%
Asian	346	0.6%	396	0.7%	430	0.7%	1,172	0.7%
Hawaiian Pacific	117	0.2%	139	0.2%	163	0.3%	419	0.2%
Hispanic	7,687	13.8%	8,189	13.9%	8,369	13.5%	24,245	13.7%
Multiple Races	658	1.2%	590	1.0%	766	1.2%	2,014	1.1%
Total	55,614		58,858		61,885		176,357	
Race - Father								
White	31,552	73.5%	33,804	74.1%	35,228	73.7%	100,584	73.8%
Black	4,572	10.6%	4,534	9.9%	4,973	10.4%	14,079	10.3%
American Indian	457	1.1%	555	1.2%	556	1.2%	1,568	1.1%
Asian	273	0.6%	326	0.7%	357	0.7%	956	0.7%
Hawaiian Pacific	111	0.3%	162	0.4%	128	0.3%	401	0.3%
Hispanic	5,537	12.9%	5,784	12.7%	6,061	12.7%	17,382	12.7%
Multiple Races	447	1.0%	449	1.0%	482	1.0%	1,378	1.0%
Total	42,949		45,614		47,785		136,348	

Continued

(CONTINUED) TABLE 25. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF PARENTS WHO COMPLETED ADOPTIONS FROM FOSTER CARE BY FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR

	2017		2018		2019		Total	
Relationship with Child Prior to Adoption								
Stepparent	97	0.1%	83	0.1%	113	0.1%	293	0.1%
Other relative	20,377	26.5%	22,050	27.0%	23,331	26.8%	65,758	26.8%
Foster parent	36,867	48.0%	39,275	48.1%	41,922	48.2%	118,064	48.1%
Non-relative	19,495	25.4%	20,197	24.7%	21,580	24.8%	61,272	25.0%
Total	76,836		81,605		86,946		245,387	
Adoptive Family Structure								
Married couple	40,160	52.3%	42,402	52.0%	44,242	50.9%	126,804	51.7%
Unmarried couple	1,870	2.4%	2,154	2.6%	2,235	2.6%	6,259	2.6%
Single female	14,824	19.3%	15,832	19.4%	16,818	19.3%	47,474	19.3%
Single male	1,986	2.6%	2,081	2.6%	2,220	2.6%	6,287	2.6%
Total	58,840		62,469		65,515		186,824	



# Financial Assistance for Adoption from Foster Care

Adoptions from foster care are often financially supported to both incentivize and support placement permanency. The table below shows the percentage of adoptions that claimed IV-E assistance, a monthly subsidy, and the average amount of subsidy.



TABLE 26. ADOPTION ASSISTANCE AND FINANCING

2017			2018		2019		Total	
IV-E Assistance Claimed								
Yes	47,820	80.4%	50,954	80.8%	53,101	80.3%	151,875	80.5%
No	11,649	19.6%	12,082	19.2%	13,007	19.7%	36,738	19.5%
Total	59,469		63,036		66,108		188,613	
Receiving Monthly Subsidy								
Yes	54,684	92.0%	58,515	92.9%	61,434	93.0%	174,633	92.7%
No	4,724	8.0%	4,482	7.1%	4,628	7.0%	13,834	7.3%
Total	59,408		62,997		66,062		188,467	
Monthly Subsidy								
Average	\$585.97		\$596.74		\$620.39		\$601.85	
Median	\$506.00		\$506.00		\$506.00		\$506.00	

# Race of Unmarried Women Who Adopted from Foster Care

Table 27 indicates that 15.3% of adoptive mothers are Black, but when examining unmarried women who adopt from foster care, the breakdown by race is significantly different, with 32.4% of unmarried adoptive mothers reported as Black.

TABLE 27. RACE OF UNMARRIED WOMEN WHO ADOPTED A CHILD, BY FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR

	2017		2018		2019		Total	
Race								
White	6,526	44.0%	6,777	42.8%	7,384	43.9%	20,687	43.6%
Black	4,802	32.4%	5,221	33.0%	5,586	33.2%	15,609	32.9%
American Indian	274	1.8%	286	1.8%	278	1.7%	838	1.8%
Asian	73	0.5%	88	0.6%	83	0.5%	244	0.5%
Hawaiian Pacific	38	0.3%	33	0.2%	39	0.2%	110	0.2%
Hispanic	2,506	16.9%	2,748	17.4%	2,790	16.6%	8,044	16.9%
Multiple Races	222	1.5%	179	1.1%	225	1.3%	626	1.3%
Not Reported	383	2.6%	500	3.2%	433	2.6%	1,316	2.8%
Total	14,824		15,832		16,818		47,474	



# Age Ranges of Parents Who Adopted from Foster Care

The ages of adoptive fathers and adoptive mothers range widely, with only modest differences between adoptive fathers and mothers as seen in the tables below:

TABLE 28. AGE RANGE FOR ADOPTIVE FATHERS

Age Range	Count	Percentage
18-19	16	0.0%
20-29	6,050	4.3%
30-39	39,267	28.2%
40-49	46,120	33.1%
50-59	30,837	22.2%
60-69	13,557	9.7%
70-79	3,052	2.2%
80-89	312	0.2%
Total	139,211	

TABLE 29. AGE RANGE FOR ADOPTIVE MOTHERS

Age Range	Count	Percentage
18-19	37	0.0%
20-29	10,406	5.8%
30-39	51,639	28.6%
40-49	57,606	31.9%
50-59	40,959	22.7%
60-69	16,609	9.2%
70-79	2,996	1.7%
80-89	182	0.1%
Total	180,434	

While the ages of parents who adopt children from foster care may seem older than in other types of adoption, it is important to remember that children placed for adoption from foster care are themselves often older than children placed for other types of adoption. Table 30 helps contextualize age ranges by comparing the ages of adoptive mothers to age ranges of the child at the time of adoption from foster care.

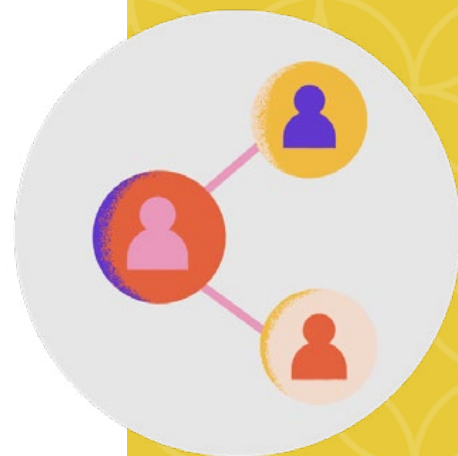


TABLE 30. AGE RANGE OF ADOPTIVE MOTHER BY AGE RANGE OF ADOPTED CHILD

Age Range of Adoptive Mother (Years)	Infant (Under 1 year)		Toddler (1 - 2 Years)		Preschool (3 - 5 Years)		Elementary (6 - 12 Years)		Teen/Adolescent (13 - 19 years)		Total	
	Count	Pct.	Count	Pct.	Count	Pct.	Count	Pct.	Count	Pct.	Count	Pct.
18-19	0	0.0%	9	0.0%	6	0.0%	17	0.0%	5	0.0%	37	0.0%
20-29	281	7.5%	3,190	6.6%	2,875	5.7%	3,109	5.1%	950	5.5%	10,405	5.8%
30-39	1,647	43.7%	17,393	35.9%	14,542	29.0%	14,094	23.2%	3,955	22.8%	51,631	28.6%
40-49	1,272	33.7%	16,458	34.0%	16,852	33.6%	18,220	30.0%	4,795	27.6%	57,597	31.9%
50-59	440	11.7%	8,141	16.8%	10,989	21.9%	16,645	27.4%	4,731	27.2%	40,946	22.7%
60-69	115	3.0%	2,782	5.7%	4,161	8.3%	7,148	11.8%	2,398	13.8%	16,604	9.2%
70-79	16	0.4%	399	0.8%	675	1.3%	1,411	2.3%	495	2.8%	2,996	1.7%
80-89	0	0.0%	13	0.0%	33	0.1%	89	0.1%	47	0.3%	182	0.1%
Total	3,771		48,385		50,133		60,733		17,376		180,398	



# Who Is Being Adopted from Foster Care?

The secondary data analysis was not just limited to the demographics of adoptive parents; it also provided insight into who was adopted. Descriptive statistical information about children's gender, age, race, special needs status, and the basis of special needs is provided in the table below.

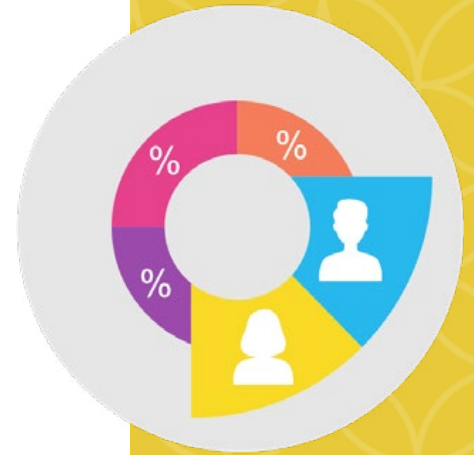


TABLE 31. ADOPTED CHILD STATISTICS BY FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR

2017			2018		2019		Total	
Gender								
Male	30,505	51.3%	32,062	50.9%	33,666	50.9%	96,233	51.0%
Female	28,956	48.7%	30,969	49.1%	32,431	49.1%	92,356	49.0%
Total	59,461		63,031		66,097		188,589	
Age at Time of Adoption (in years)								
Sample Size	59,460		63,030		66,102		188,592	
Average	5.8		5.9		5.9		5.9	
Median	5.0		5.0		5.0		5.0	
Race								
White	28,890	48.6%	30,894	49.0%	32,859	49.7%	92,644	49.1%
Black	10,341	17.4%	10,770	17.1%	11,666	17.6%	32,777	17.4%
American Indian	1,115	1.9%	1,059	1.7%	1,107	1.7%	3,281	1.7%
Asian	206	0.3%	269	0.4%	267	0.4%	742	0.4%
Hawaiian Pacific	89	0.1%	113	0.2%	118	0.2%	320	0.2%
Hispanic	12,625	21.2%	13,310	21.1%	13,567	20.5%	39,502	20.9%
Multiple Races	5,343	9.0%	5,594	8.9%	5,675	8.6%	16,612	8.8%
Not Reported	860	1.4%	1,027	1.6%	852	1.3%	2,739	1.5%
Total	59,469		63,036		66,111		188,616	

Continued

(CONTINUED) TABLE 31. ADOPTED CHILD STATISTICS BY FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR

2017			2018		2019		Total	
Transracial Adoption								
Not Transracial	40,726	68.5%	42,631	67.6%	45,867	69.4%	129,224	68.5%
Child not White; Parents White	10,718	18.0%	11,396	18.1%	11,467	17.3%	33,581	17.8%
Child White; Parents not White	1,543	2.6%	1,806	2.9%	1,772	2.7%	5,121	2.7%
Other Transracial	3,658	6.2%	3,985	6.3%	4,030	6.1%	11,673	6.2%
Insufficient Race Info	2,824	4.7%	3,218	5.1%	2,975	4.5%	9,017	4.8%
Total	59,469		63,036		66,111		188,616	
Special Needs								
Yes	50,877	86.1%	55,881	89.4%	58,296	88.9%	165,054	88.2%
No	8,225	13.9%	6,626	10.6%	7,290	11.1%	22,141	11.8%
Total	59,102		62,507		65,586		187,195	
Special Needs Basis								
Not applicable	6,737	11.6%	4,903	8.0%	5,891	9.1%	17,531	9.6%
Racial/ original background	4,445	7.7%	4,437	7.3%	4,724	7.3%	13,606	7.4%
Age	9,194	15.9%	10,362	17.0%	11,284	17.5%	30,840	16.8%
Sibling group member	15,085	26.1%	16,277	26.7%	17,391	27.0%	48,753	26.6%
Medical condition or disability	11,583	20.0%	11,775	19.3%	12,044	18.7%	35,402	19.3%
Other	10,860	18.8%	13,282	21.8%	13,124	20.4%	37,266	20.3%
Total	57,904		61,036		64,458		183,398	
Mental Retardation								
Yes	1,131	2.1%	1,324	2.3%	1,582	2.7%	4,037	2.4%
No	51,700	97.9%	55,875	97.7%	57,422	97.3%	164,997	97.6%
Total	52,831		57,199		59,004		169,034	
Visually or Hearing Impaired								
Yes	1,732	3.3%	941	1.6%	921	1.6%	3,594	2.1%
No	51,430	96.7%	56,258	98.4%	58,105	98.4%	165,793	97.9%
Total	53,162		57,199		59,026		169,387	

Continued

(CONTINUED) TABLE 31. ADOPTED CHILD STATISTICS BY FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR

2017			2018		2019		Total	
Physically Disabled								
Yes	740	1.4%	729	1.3%	769	1.3%	2,238	1.3%
No	51,763	98.6%	56,473	98.7%	58,271	98.7%	166,507	98.7%
Total	52,503		57,202		59,040		168,745	
Emotionally Disturbed								
Yes	5,782	10.9%	6,375	11.1%	7,279	12.2%	19,436	11.4%
No	47,292	89.1%	51,001	88.9%	52,225	87.8%	150,518	88.6%
Total	53,074		57,376		59,504		169,954	
Other Diagnosed Condition								
Yes	7,151	13.2%	7,367	12.7%	7,625	12.7%	22,143	12.8%
No	46,824	86.8%	50,838	87.3%	52,644	87.3%	150,306	87.2%
Total	53,975		58,205		60,269		172,449	

## Length of Process to Adopt from Foster Care

The full length of time a child spends in foster care is dependent upon many factors. When examining the length of an adoption process, only the timeframe after the child's birth parents' parental rights were terminated until the date the adoption was finalized was used to make an estimate. For children with two dates of termination of parental rights, the most recent date was used. The mean and median results are displayed by family structure in the table below.

TABLE 32. LENGTH OF ADOPTION PROCESS BY FAMILY STRUCTURE (IN DAYS)

Family Structure	Sample Size	Mean	Median
Married Couple	126,744	335.3	251.0
Unmarried Couple	6,249	376.3	296.0
Single Female	47,452	373.6	280.0
Single Male	6,284	429.8	309.0



# Future Research

National Council For Adoption views this report as just Part One of a three-part series examining profiles in adoption. There is no single survey, focus group, or data set that can tell us everything we would like to know about adoption. In Part One, we heard from adoptive parents. We also intend to hear from birth parents and adopted individuals in upcoming research reports. Taken together, the three reports in this series will give us a fuller picture of adoption.





## Limitations

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Some of the questions we asked during our survey relied upon individuals to recall past experiences. Such recall has obvious limits, and that is especially true for responses that are further in the past. Additionally, although our survey has a very large sample size and wide geographic diversity (representing every state and Washington, D.C.), it is difficult to determine how closely it matches the population of adoptive parents in the United States.

## Institutional Review Board (IRB)

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This research was conducted based on an Exempt Review per Baylor University IRB.

## National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN)

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Three secondary data sets were analyzed as part of this research report.

Data Set Number	Study Title
241	Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, Adoption File 2019
240	Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, Adoption File 2018
226	Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, Adoption File 2017

The secondary data analyses used in this publication were made available by the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, and have been used with permission. Data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) were originally reported to the Children's Bureau. Funding for the project was provided by the Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The receiver of the original data, the funder, the Archive, Cornell University and their agents or employees bear no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented in this report.

# Acknowledgements

## Funding

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The survey of adoptive parents was generously grant-funded by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption®.



Dave Thomas  
Foundation  
for Adoption®

Forever Families for Children in Foster Care

The secondary data analysis was funded by the Gift of Adoption Fund with generous support from Lucy Wyka.



**Thank you!**

## Content Reviewers

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Prior to launching the survey, National Council For Adoption piloted the survey on adoptive parents in each type of adoption category, asking them to provide feedback about the clarity of the questions and their experience completing the survey.

In addition, we engaged subject matter experts in survey building and child welfare research as well as professionals involved with each type of adoption to help us build a meaningful, robust, and accurate survey.

Our survey was improved due to the helpful feedback we received from these adoptive parents and professionals.

**Thank you!**

## Survey Participants

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Finally, a survey of this breadth and depth would not be possible without the willingness of participants to tell us about their experiences. We believe each of these participants completed the survey out of a desire to improve the general knowledge about adoption and to ensure we have more information for policymakers and especially for future adoptive families.

**Thank you!**

# About the Authors

**Ryan Hanlon, PhD**, is the President and CEO of the National Council For Adoption. His areas of research interest include adoption, foster care, and child welfare. Ryan is an adoptive parent. As corresponding author of this report, he can be reached at [RHanlon@adoptioncouncil.org](mailto:RHanlon@adoptioncouncil.org).



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## About National Council For Adoption

Founded in 1980, National Council For Adoption (NCFA) is a leading authoritative voice for adoption and is passionately committed to the belief that every child deserves to thrive in a nurturing permanent family. NCFA's nonprofit work promotes a culture of adoption through education, research, advocacy, and collaboration that aims to serve children, expectant and birth parents, adopted individuals, adoptive families, and adoption professionals.



For more research and  
resources, visit  
*[adoptioncouncil.org](http://adoptioncouncil.org)*



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