Adoption Outcomes

A number of major research projects, literature overviews, and meta-analyses attest to the overall benefit of adoption.

1. Outcomes for Children

Adopted children benefit significantly from adoption. Many experience a dramatic improvement in socioeconomic status and move into materially advantaged homes and to the care of supportive, educated, adoptive parents who are very interested in all aspects of their child’s development. By being nurtured in a home environment, a child is more likely to have siblings and to acquire goods that otherwise would not be economically possible.\(^1\)

The majority of adopted children live in small families in early childhood,\(^2\) which is to their advantage. Compared to even long-term fostering, adoption provides a greater sense of permanence and familial belonging, more emotional security, and a more lasting psychosocial foundation for life.\(^3\)

Compared to the average child, adopted children fare quite well. Overall, 81 percent of parents who adopt report that their relationship with their child is very warm and close. Compared to children in the general population, adopted children are more likely to read every day as a young child and to participate in extracurricular activities as a school-aged child.\(^4\) Although 85 percent of adopted children are in excellent or very good health, they are more likely to require special health care needs than the average child.\(^5\)

Examination of a large U.S. national data set found that teenagers who were adopted at birth were more likely than children born into intact families to live with two parents in a middle-class family. They scored higher than their middle-class counterparts on indicators of school performance, social competency, optimism, and volunteerism. They were less depressed than children of single parents and less involved in alcohol abuse, vandalism, group fighting, police trouble, weapon use, and theft.\(^6\)

A Dutch meta-analysis gauged the relative rate of development of adopted and non-adopted children. Over 270 studies of 230,000 children and their parents were included in this analysis. Despite performing below their respective age groups in some outcomes, particularly physical growth and attachment, adopted children caught up to their age groups more fully than their non-adopted birth peers (children of similar family, economic and social circumstances who were not adopted). The physical height, school achievement, and psychological attachment of children adopted in their first year most closely resembled those of their general age group. In most outcomes, international adoptees and domestic adoptees caught up to their age groups at similar rates.\(^7\)

In the United Kingdom, a large sample of adults, most of whom were adopted before their first birthday, were compared at age 23 and again at age 33 to a birth comparison group of non-adopted adults (of the same age, from similar birth circumstances) and to the general population (of the same age). Adopted women adjusted positively according to all metrics, often outperforming the general population. Adopted men generally did as well as the general population comparison group, though they had fewer social supports and experienced more employment-related problems. At age 33, most of the adopted men and women were performing much better socially and economically than their birth comparison group.\(^8\)
The Texas Adoption Project yielded similar results in its thirty-year follow-up evaluation of the adopted and biological children of adoptive parents. Both groups showed generally positive educational, occupational, marital, and adult-problem and personality-related outcomes. However, some outcomes for the adopted offspring, though positive, were less so than for the biological offspring.9)

2. Outcomes for the Biological Mothers

Significantly, teenage mothers who choose adoption do better than mothers who choose to be single parents.

- They have higher educational aspirations, are more likely to finish school, and are less likely to live in poverty and receive public assistance.10)
- They are more likely to be employed 12 months after the birth and less likely to repeat out-of-wedlock pregnancy.
- They delay marriage but have a greater probability of ultimately getting married.
- They are no more likely than single mothers to suffer negative psychological consequences, such as depression.11)

All the goals of government programs like job training, supplemental education, and family planning are attained with greater ease, and at lower cost, through adoption.12)

6) Peter L. Benson, Anu R. Sharma, and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, Growing Up Adopted-A Portrait of Adolescents and Their Families (Minneapolis: Search Institute, June 1994).
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