

# Benefits of Adoption

*Synthesis Paper:* [Promoting Adoption Reform: Congress Can Give Children Another Chance](#)

## 1. Benefits for Children

Adopted children do as well as or better than their non-adopted counterparts, according to a 1994 study by the Search Institute, a Minneapolis-based public policy research organization specializing in questions of concern to states and cities.<sup>1)</sup> This study concludes that:

- Teens who were adopted at birth are more likely than children born into intact families to live with two parents in a middle-class family.<sup>2)</sup>
- Adopted children score higher than their middle-class counterparts on indicators of school performance, social competency, optimism, and volunteerism.<sup>3)</sup>
- Adopted adolescents generally are less depressed than children of single parents and less involved in alcohol abuse, vandalism, group fighting, police trouble, weapon use, and theft.<sup>4)</sup>
- Adopted adolescents score higher than children of single parents on self-esteem, confidence in their own judgment, self-directedness, positive view of others, and feelings of security within their families.<sup>5)</sup>
- On health measures, adopted children and children of intact families share similarly high scores, and both those groups score significantly higher than children raised by single parents.<sup>6)</sup>
- Adopted children do well at school. In 1981, only 7 percent of children adopted in infancy repeated a grade, while 12 percent of children living with both biological parents repeated a grade.<sup>7)</sup>
- Compared with the general child population, children placed with adoptive couples are better off economically. Their parents are better educated and older than the parents of other children.<sup>8)</sup>
- Adoptive parents are less likely to divorce.<sup>9)</sup>

Virtually all of these findings have been replicated by Nicholas Zill, Vice President and Director of Child and Family Studies at Westat Research Corporation of Maryland, in his analysis of data from the federal government's 1988 National Health Interview Survey on Child Health.<sup>10)</sup> Results from the survey were compared across four groups: adopted children, children of unmarried mothers being raised by the mother, children of intact families, and children being raised by their grandparents. The data indicated that adopted children:

- Enjoy a quality of home environment superior to all the other groups;<sup>11)</sup>
- Have superior access to health care compared to all the other groups;<sup>12)</sup>
- Enjoy health similar to that of children of intact families and superior to that of the other two groups; and
- Do better in educational attainment than single-parent children and children raised by grandparents.<sup>13)</sup>

When compared with those adopted later, born outside of marriage and raised by the single mother, or raised in an intact family, children who are adopted in infancy:

- Repeat grades less often than any other group;
- See mental health professionals less than all other groups, except children of intact families;

- Have better health status than all other groups;
- Have a better standing in their school classes than all other groups, except children raised in intact families; and
- Have fewer behavior problems than all other groups, except children raised in intact families.

## 2. Benefits for Biological Mothers

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

- They have higher educational aspirations, are more likely to finish school, and less likely to live in poverty and receive public assistance than mothers who keep their children.<sup>14)</sup>
- They delay marriage longer and are more likely to marry eventually.
- They are more likely to be employed 12 months after the birth and less likely to repeat out-of-wedlock pregnancy.
- They are no more likely to suffer negative psychological consequences, such as depression, than are mothers who rear children as single parents.<sup>15)</sup>

All the goals of liberal government programs like job training, supplemental education, and family planning are attained with greater ease, and at lower cost, through adoption.<sup>16)</sup>

<sup>1)</sup>, <sup>3)</sup>, <sup>4)</sup> Peter L. Benson, Anu R. Shorma, and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *Growing Up Adopted – A Portrait of Adolescents and Their Families* (Minneapolis: Search Institute, June 1994).

<sup>2)</sup> This finding illustrates the power of early adoption and the need to reform agency practices which keep children in prolonged foster care during their early infancy, when they are highly adoptable.

<sup>5)</sup> Kathleen S. Marquis and Richard A. Detweiler, "Does Adoption Mean Different? An Attributional Analysis," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (1985), pp. 1054-1066. An interesting anomaly has emerged from an analysis of adoption studies. Clinical studies traditionally have shown adopted adolescents to be overrepresented in psychiatric settings. The same occurred here, but these adolescents were found not to have emotional or psychological problems at these rates. Adopted adults are less likely to receive treatment than the general population. This seeming contradiction occurs because adoptive parents are more likely to refer their adopted children for possible treatment. Of all adopted children referred by parents for clinical treatment, only 27 percent had a clinical diagnosis. The remainder – almost 75 percent – received counseling for normal adolescent issues.

<sup>6)</sup> Nicholas Zill, "Behavior and Learning Problems Among Adopted Children: Findings from a U.S. National Survey of Child Health," *Child Trends*, Inc., Washington, D.C.; paper presented to the Society for Research in Child Development, April 27, 1985.

<sup>7)</sup> Nicholas Zill, "Adopted Children in the United States: A Profile Based on a National Survey of Child Health," testimony before the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources, May 1995.

<sup>8)</sup> Christine Bachrach, "Adoption Plans, Adopted Children and Adoptive Mothers," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 48 (May 1986), pp. 243-253; Christine Bachrach, "Children in Families: Characteristics of Biological, Step-, and Adopted Children," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 45 (February 1983), pp. 171-179.

<sup>9)</sup> National Committee for Adoption, *Unmarried Parents Today*, June 25, 1985.

<sup>10)</sup> Nicholas Zill, Mary Jo Cairo, and Barbara Bloom, "Health of Our Nation's Children," *Vital and Health Statistics*, Series 10, No. 191, U.S. Public Health Service, 1994, and Nicholas Zill, "Adopted Children in the United States: A Profile Based on a National Survey of Child Health," testimony before the House

Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources, May 1995.

<sup>11)</sup> As measured by regular bedtime, use of seatbelts, and absence of an adult smoker in the household.

<sup>12)</sup> As measured by insurance coverage, dental visits, and regular provider of sick care.

<sup>13)</sup> As measured by rank in class, repeating a grade, or being suspended.

<sup>14)</sup> Christine A. Bachrach, K.S. Stolley and K.A. London, "Relinquishment of premarital births: evidence from the national survey data," *Family Planning Perspectives*, (1992); see also Christine Bachrach, "Adoption Plans, Adopted Children and Adoptive Mothers," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 48 (May 1986), pp. 243-253

<sup>15)</sup> Steven D. McLaughlin, Diane L. Manninen, and Linda D. Wings, "Do Adolescents Who Relinquish Their Children Fare Better or Worse Than Those Who Raise Them?" *Family Planning Perspectives*, Alan Guttmacher Institute, January-February 1988.

<sup>16)</sup> Patrick F. Fagan, "Liberal Welfare Programs: What the Data Show on Programs for Teenage Mothers," *Heritage Foundation Backgrounder* No. 1031, March 31, 1995.

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