

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute

BENCHMARK ADOPTION SURVEY

Executive Summary

Virtually all Americans agree that adoption serves a useful purpose in our society, and most have a favorable opinion of the institution. But many Americans, even those with very favorable opinions about adoption overall, do harbor doubts about the institution. Half feel adopting a child, while preferable to remaining childless, is not quite as good as having one's own. And a quarter think it is sometimes harder to love an adopted child because the child is not your own flesh and blood.

On the surface these data seem puzzling; Americans have an overwhelmingly favorable opinion of adoption, yet only half say adopting is as good as being a birth parent. A more comprehensive view of adoption attitudes takes these possibly contradictory viewpoints into account. On this basis Americans divide into three groups according to their attitudes toward adoption: 1) Full Supporters, who express unqualified support for adoption; 2) Qualified Supporters, who have a mostly positive opinion about the institution but some hesitancy to fully embrace it and; 3) Marginal Supporters, who while generally more supportive than not, are less convinced than others of adoption's merits.

Americans' opinions about the members of the adoption triad follow a similar pattern to their assessment of the institution. Most say adoptive parents are generous and lucky, but some believe they would have been luckier still to have had their own child. Adopted children, a majority says, are well adjusted and secure, but some think adopted children are insecure, poorly adjusted and more prone to behavioral and academic problems than other children. Lastly, many Americans support birth parents' decisions to place children for adoption, but a notable minority disapproves of decisions to do so, and some even see it as irresponsible or hardhearted.

Attitudes toward adoption divide starkly by social group. Less educated Americans are more skeptical about adoption than others. There are also gender differences; men are more uncertain of adoption's merits than women. Blacks are more skeptical than whites.

Key Findings

These are among the findings of the Benchmark Adoption Survey conducted July 7 through August 8, 1997 for the Adoption Institute by Princeton Survey Research Associates. This probability survey of 1,554 adults is the first in-depth look at American public attitudes toward the institution of adoption and the members of the adoption triad. The survey also examined opinion about open adoption, adoptees' search for their birth parents, and adoption in the context of welfare reform and teenage pregnancy.



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Among other key findings:

- Six in 10 Americans have had personal experience with adoption, meaning they themselves, a family member, or a close friend was adopted, adopted a child, or put a child up for adoption. A third have considered adopting a child at least somewhat seriously. Those with personal experience are more likely than those without to have favorable opinions of adoption.
- Americans are divided over whether it is better for pregnant teenagers to place their babies for adoption or raise them themselves. Americans also are divided over which is better for the child in this situation, although slightly more believe the baby is better off adopted than raised by the birth mother.
- Americans are divided over whether the government should promote adoption as an alternative to welfare. Asked about a California plan in which welfare mothers would be encouraged to place their children for adoption, a slim majority oppose this plan, and substantial minority support it. Americans are somewhat more supportive of the plan for pregnant teenagers.
- The public is ambivalent about open adoption, that is, adoption in which birth parents maintain some contact with the child they have placed for adoption. Most Americans think it is a good idea, but only in a limited number of cases. One in five feel it is always a bad idea for birth mothers to maintain contact with the children they have placed for adoption.
- Americans also have mixed views about the consequences of adoptees searching for and finding their birth parents. In the public's eyes, adoptees are the most likely of the triad to benefit from contacting their birth parents. There is more skepticism about whether adoptive and birth parents benefit.
- Perhaps in reaction to an increase in media stories about international adoptees gone awry, many are skeptical about the prospects for children adopted overseas. Many Americans feel these children are more prone to physical illness and emotional problems than children adopted in the United States. In contrast, Americans are more hopeful than not about the academic promise of children adopted internationally.

This information was taken from The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute's website, where there is additional adoption research and statistical information available.

<http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/>

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