

Adoption Works Well: A Synthesis of the Literature

Dr. Patrick F. Fagan¹

November 29, 2010

Adoption is life-alteringly beneficial for children. Such is the general conclusion from a review of the literature.

Adoption in the first 12 months of the child's life produces the best outcomes, but all children will benefit, regardless of their age at placement. Adopted children outperform their non-adopted peers and non-adopted siblings.

Family Relationships:

- Children adopted in their first year have the same ability to form secure attachments as non-adopted children.
- Married parents adjust more successfully than unmarried parents.
- Adoptive mother sensitivity contributes to a rich, positive home life.
- Birth mothers who relinquish their children for adoption are more likely to finish school and are less likely to live in poverty or receive public assistance.

Social and Family Adjustment:

- Most adoptees do not receive serious negative reactions regarding racial or ethnic differences between them and their adoptive families.
- Age at adoption strongly affects adjustment: the earlier, the better.
- Adopted women have more social support than non-adopted women; boys struggle with adjusting to adoption and enjoy less social support when they become men.

¹ Senior Fellow and Director of the Marriage and Religion Research Institute, Family Research Council.

Development:

- Less developed adoptees catch up to their age group in height, weight, and general health.
- Adoption almost completely mitigates the effects of *in utero* drug exposure.
- Adoptees' self-esteem is lower than that of children in intact families and they may struggle with identity development, but they enjoy equally good psychological health.

Behavior:

- Adoptees are no more prone to aggressive antisocial behavior than are non-adoptees, but they are more prone to non-aggressive antisocial behavior.
- History of abuse aggravates adoptee tendency toward antisocial behavior; parental closeness can lessen it.

Educational attainment:

- Early adoption facilitates language acquisition.
- Adoptees are no different in problem or pro-social behavior from non-adoptees.
- Adoptees do not lag significantly behind the general population in academic performance. They strongly outperform their non-adopted birth peers.
- Adoptive families influence their children's cognitive capabilities.

On the whole, parents are very satisfied with their adopted children. These children, their biological mothers, and their adoptive families all benefit from and feel their lives are enriched by the experience.