

# Persons Seeking to Adopt

## Introduction

Most Americans favor adoption; many have at some point considered adoption. However, relatively few have taken concrete steps toward adopting a child, and fewer still have actually adopted a child. This factsheet examines some of the more recent statistics and trends regarding American adults who seek to adopt an infant or child. The majority of data come from the National Survey of Family Growth (Jones, 2008, 2009) and the National Foster Care Adoption Attitudes Survey (Harris Interactive and the Dave Thomas Foundation, 2007).

## How Many People Are Seeking to Adopt?

About 30 percent of Americans have considered adopting (Harris, 2007), but as of 2002, only 2.0 percent have done so (Jones, 2009). Somewhere between those percentages lies the number of people seeking to adopt—that is, those who have taken concrete steps to adopt a child.

In its sixth cycle of data collection, the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) included responses of more than 12,500 men and women who were interviewed about topics that included adoption. Analysis of the data using weighted national estimates led to the following conclusions (Jones, 2008):

- In 2002, there were 18.5 million women ages 18-44 who *had ever considered adoption*. This number amounted to approximately one-third (33.1 percent) of all American women and included 12.8 million women who had ever been married (35.8 percent of ever-married women).
- Of women who had considered adoption, about 2.6 million (14.3 percent) had actually *taken concrete steps toward adoption*. This included 2.1 million ever-married women (16.8 percent).
- Of women who had taken concrete steps toward adoption, 614,000 (23.2 percent) had *completed an adoption*. This included 507,000 ever-married women (23.6 percent).

Overall, only 1.1 percent of all women aged 18 to 44 years had adopted a child, and this included 1.4 percent of ever-married women. Among adopters, 17 percent of women had never been married.

The 2002 NSFG was the first time that data on adoption were collected from men. Results show that men were twice as likely to have adopted as women. Among all men 18-44 years of age, 2.3 percent had adopted, and this figure was higher for ever-married men, at 3.8 percent. The NSFG report suggests that this is due, in part, to the fact that men who remarry are more likely to adopt their stepchildren than are women who remarry (Jones, 2008).

## Who Are the People Seeking to Adopt?

The 2002 NSFG also reported on the characteristics of the adopters and those seeking to adopt or considering adoption (Jones, 2008). Results show that women who had adopted were more likely to be 40-44 years old, currently married, and have incomes that were one-and-a-half times the poverty level. Adoption for women was also associated with infertility: They were more likely to have never given birth (nulliparous) and to have used infertility services. This latter finding contrasted with the finding for men: Men who had fathered children were more likely to have adopted a child compared with men who had not fathered children (Jones, 2009).

The NSFG found the following results among those currently seeking to adopt in 2002 (Jones, 2008):

- At the time of the survey, 1.6 percent of women, including 2.0 percent of ever-married women, were seeking to adopt.
- Hispanic women and Black women were more likely to be seeking to adopt than White women.
- Three-quarters of women seeking to adopt had impaired fecundity or were infertile.

The goal of the National Foster Care Adoption Attitudes Survey of 1,660 American adults was to capture detailed information about what Americans think and believe about adoption in general as well as specific types of adoption (Harris, 2007). The findings reveal that, of the 30 percent of Americans who had ever considered or were considering adoption:

- More than 20 percent had considered adoption “very seriously.”
- The greatest percentage (71 percent) had considered adopting from foster care. In contrast, 63 percent had considered adopting an infant domestically; 40 percent had considered intercountry adoption.
- Having family or friends who were adopted tended to increase consideration of adoption.

The Harris survey also examined how potential adopters felt about different kinds of adoption. Among those who had seriously considered adoption, the following results were found (2007):

- Blacks, females, those with some college education, and those with incomes of \$25K to \$50K were more likely to consider very seriously foster care adoption than other types of adoption.
- Whites, men, married couples, those aged 25 to 34 years, and those with a high school education or less were more likely to very seriously considered domestic infant adoption than other types of adoption.
- Hispanics and those with high incomes were more likely to consider very seriously intercountry adoption than other types of adoption.

## Why Don't All Adoption Seekers Adopt?

Both the NSFG and the Harris study found a significant discrepancy in percentages between those who have considered adoption and those who actually adopted. The NSFG study also showed a discrepancy in percentages between those who took steps to adopt and those who actually adopted. The reasons for these discrepancies may be attributed, at least in part, to the types of children that prospective adoptive parents are seeking.

While there are 115,000 children in public foster care awaiting adoption (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010), potential adoptive parents do not always seek to adopt from the foster care system. Public foster care includes a disproportionate number of children of color and many older children, as well children in sibling groups and children who have experienced maltreatment.

The NSFG survey found that women currently seeking to adopt indicated a preference for a child younger than 2 years old, without a disability, and a single child rather than a sibling group—characteristics that are less common in children in the foster care system than other traits. But while high percentages of women would accept a child with other characteristics, they expressed concern about adopting children with health or behavioral problems.

The Harris study also pointed up some misconceptions that the general public has about children in foster care, which may keep them from considering this type of adoption. For instance, nearly half of the respondents in this study incorrectly thought that

## What Are Some Trends in Adoption Seeking?

children entered foster care because of juvenile delinquency; more than 60 percent underestimated the number of children in foster care awaiting adoptive families.

Looking at data across a number of cycles of the NSFG studies, the 2002 NSFG report noted a several trends (Jones, 2008):

- The percentage of ever-married women who adopted declined from 2.1 percent in 1973 to 1.4 percent in 2002.
- The percentage of ever-married women who considered adopting a child rose from 26 percent in 1995 to 36 percent in 2002.
- However, among women who considered adoption, the percentage who actually took steps to adopt decreased from 24 percent in 1995 to 17 percent in 2002.

While there are no hard and fast statistics on how many adults are seeking to adopt, these statistics provide some indication of the numbers and trends surrounding adoption in the United States in the last decade.

## References

Harris Interactive and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption (2007). *National foster care adoption attitudes survey*. Retrieved January 20, 2011, from [www.davethomasfoundation.org/getdoc/9999a5f5-33ed-40fb-aedc-a676adc98546/Harris\\_DTFA-Report\\_FINAL\\_2\\_29\\_08](http://www.davethomasfoundation.org/getdoc/9999a5f5-33ed-40fb-aedc-a676adc98546/Harris_DTFA-Report_FINAL_2_29_08)

Jones, J. (2008). Adoption experiences of women and men and demand for children to adopt by women 18-44 years of age in the United States, 2002. *Vital and Health Statistics* 23(27). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved January 20, 2011, from [www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr\\_23/sr23\\_027.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_23/sr23_027.pdf)

Jones, J. (2009). Who adopts? Characteristics of women and men who have adopted children. *NCHS Data Brief*, 12. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved January 22, 2011, from [www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db12.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db12.htm)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2010). *The AFCARS Report. Preliminary FY 2009 Estimates as of July 2010 (17)*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved January 22, 2011, from the Children's Bureau website: [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats\\_research/afcars/tar/report17.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report17.htm)

### **Suggested Citation:**

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2011). *Persons seeking to adopt*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.