

An Eye on Recruitment: Who Are Ohio's Adoptive Families?

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Prepared for:

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Adoption Services Section

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This report is designed to assist both the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) and the public and private agencies providing adoption services in Ohio in identifying where they need to focus their recruitment and retention efforts for prospective adoptive parents. There are two ways in which an analysis of the families waiting to adopt can provide this type of assistance: it can identify the characteristics of those who actually adopt as a guide to identifying families who are likely to adopt in the future and, it can identify characteristics of families who are underrepresented in the pool of prospective parents and may therefore represent an untapped resource.

As straightforward as this analysis might seem, it is complicated by the fact that more than half of all adoptions of children in the child welfare system are undertaken by foster parents, i.e., by families who already know and are already caring for the child. Including those families in the analysis may be misleading, if one wishes to use the characteristics of adopting families as a guide to the recruitment of new adoptive families. Foster parents who adopt are generally recruited to be foster parents, either without reference to the later potential for adoption or at least as a first step towards a potential adoption. Because foster parenting requires a different relationship with both the agency and the child than does adoption, those families entering the system as foster parents may look much different and have somewhat different motivations than do those entering the system solely as adoptive parents. Thus, recruiting more families for adoption who look like foster adoptive parents may be either more difficult or less useful than expected, or both.

To provide some insight into the kinds of families who should be recruited as adoptive parents while still taking account of the special circumstances of foster parents, this report explores the following questions:

- What were the characteristics of the families who adopted children in federal fiscal year 2004?
- Do the foster families who adopt differ from non-foster families who adopt?
- Do the families adopting through the larger public children services agencies (PCSAs) differ in any significant ways from those in the rest of the state?
- How do the families actually adopting children in FFY 2004 differ from those waiting for children?
- What were the characteristics of the children adopted in FFY 2004?
- Conversely, what were the characteristics of the children waiting at the end of FFY 2004?
- Were there differences between the characteristics of the children adopted by foster parents and those adopted by non-foster parents?

Part 1: Ohio's Prospective and Adoptive Families

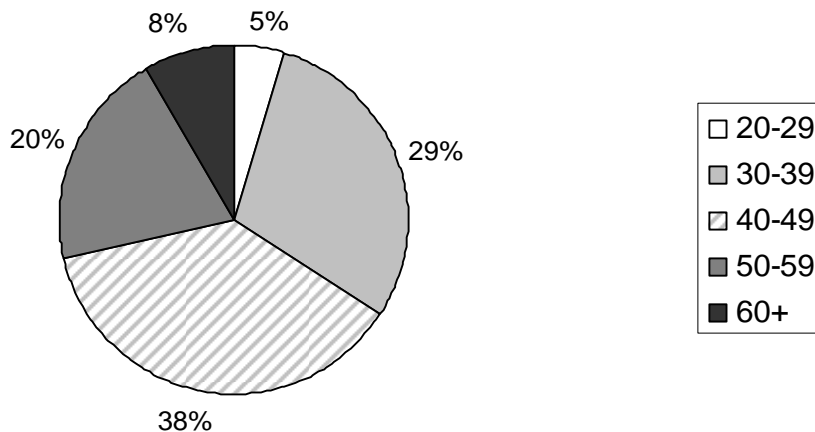
The data available for profiling resource families come from ODJFS' child welfare tracking system,¹ FACSIS, and include age, race, family structure and education. The characteristics used in the following profiles are those of the person listed as the primary caregiver in the adoptive or prospective family.

As mentioned in the introduction, not only does this examination consider demographic characteristics of prospective and adopting families but it breaks adopting families down into two distinct groups. These groups are: 1) families who provided foster care to children prior to adoption and 2) those families who were not foster parents prior to adoption. This is important because one would expect those families initially recruited for foster care to look somewhat different than those recruited specifically for adoption. In an effort to focus recruitment and retention efforts and recognizing that prospective families come into the system through different doors, it should be useful to examine both groups of adoptive parents and to do so separately.

Age

Those who adopted children during FFY 2004 come largely from a thirty-year age range. Roughly one-third is under 40; more than one-third is between 40 and 49; and between one-quarter and one-third is 50 or older. As the chart below shows, however, there are very few people under 30 or over 60 who adopt.

Age of Parents Adopting in FFY 2004

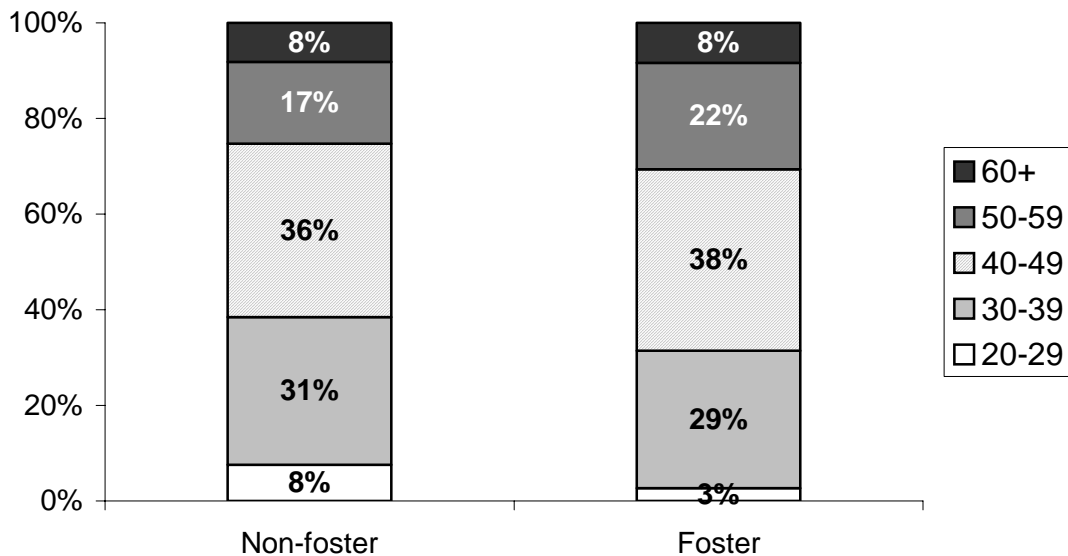


¹ Data contained in this report are from an April 18, 2005 FACSIS download.

It is important, however, to break this population down further, separating foster and non-foster parent adoptions. Foster parents who adopt were presumably recruited for somewhat different purposes than were non-foster adoptive parents, and both their motivations and their expectations may be quite different. If one wishes to recruit families specifically for adoption, it is probably more useful to know the characteristics of those families who have adopted who were also recruited specifically for adoption, that is, the non-foster adoptive families.

When one does the comparison of foster and non-foster adoptive families on the basis of age, few differences appear, except for a small shift from those in their twenties to those in their fifties. While about five percent of all adoptive parents are in their twenties, almost eight percent of non-foster adoptive parents are in their twenties. Conversely, while 20 percent of all adoptive parents are in their fifties, only 17 percent of non-foster adoptive parents are in that age group, leaving 22 percent of foster adoptive parents in that category. Stated somewhat differently, among those who adopt, foster parents are only slightly older on an average basis, but virtually all of the difference is represented in differing proportions of adoptive parents in their twenties and their fifties.

Age of Parents Adopting in FFY 2004

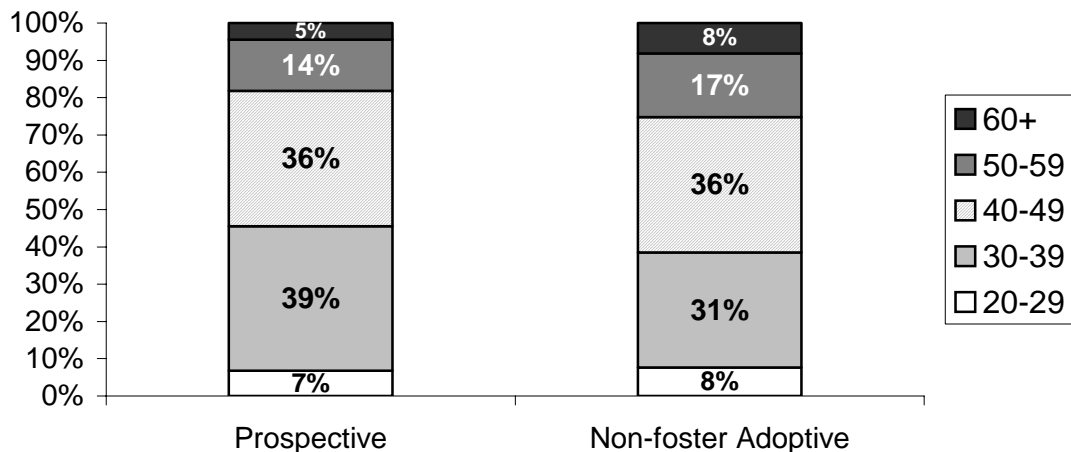


For purposes of recruiting adoptive parents, the question remains whether PCSAs are recruiting those who are most likely to adopt. In other words, do the families waiting to adopt a child look like those who do adopt?

In terms of age, they generally do, and in fact the prospective or waiting adoptive parents look more like the non-foster adoptive parents than they do the foster

adoptive parents. There is, however, one significant age difference between prospective and actual adoptive parents. Substantially more prospective adoptive parents are in their thirties than is the case for the adoptive parents, either foster or non-foster. The chart below compares the age distributions of the prospective parents with those of the non-foster adoptive parents.

Age of Prospective and Non-foster Adopting Parents in FFY 2004



This difference is due largely to the populations of the smaller 80 PCSAs. In these counties, 41 percent of the prospective parents are in their thirties, compared to 32 percent of the non-foster adoptive parents and 35 percent of the foster adoptive parents. This means that the prospective parents who have been recruited but have not yet adopted are substantially different than either group of adopting parents and very different than the parents recruited specifically for adoption who have in fact adopted. In the largest counties the situation is somewhat different. While there are fewer families in all categories in which the primary caregiver is in his or her thirties, waiting parents look more like the non-foster adoptive parents. Thirty-six percent of prospective parents are in their thirties compared to 30 percent of non-foster adoptive parents and just 25 percent of foster adoptive parents.

In sum, families in which the primary caregiver is under 40 often come forward for adoption but are more likely to remain among the prospective families. They are proportionately less likely to adopt than are older families, particularly those in the 50 to 59 year age bracket. On the other hand, this latter group is more likely to adopt after having been foster parents.

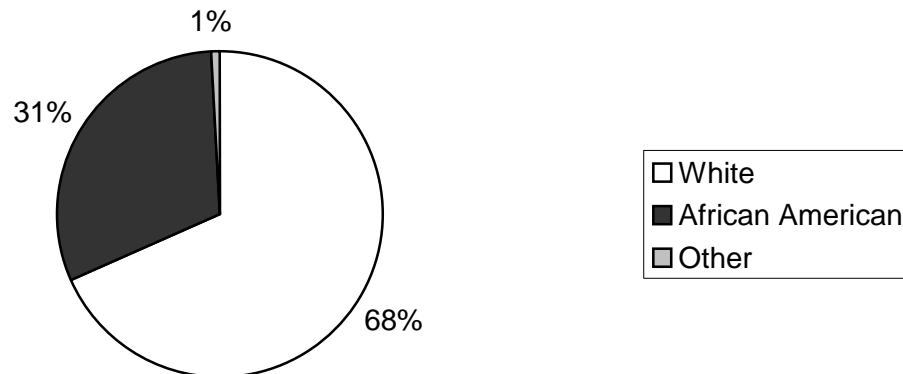
The questions this analysis raises might be framed in either of two ways. One might ask: should PCSAs focus more of their recruitment efforts on parents whose children are nearly or already grown? Or one might ask: what needs to be done to move more of the thirty-something group into actual adoptions? The first question suggests that improving recruitment efforts involves reaching more of the families

who already adopt; the second that success will involve doing a better job with families who do not adopt as often but do pursue the process far enough to be approved.

Race

Roughly two-thirds of all parents adopting children in FFY 2004 are white, while nearly all the remainder is African American. There were slight differences between the foster parents and the non-foster parents who adopted. The former were slightly more likely to be African American (32% compared to 30%), while the latter were slightly more likely to be white (69% compared to 68%). None of the foster parents who adopted fell into the “other race” category.

Race of Parents Adopting in FFY 2004



As was the case with age, prospective parents generally look more like non-foster adoptive parents than they do foster adoptive parents. An even larger proportion of prospective parents are white (74%), with only one in four being African American. As will be seen later, that presents something of an issue, since a much larger proportion of children waiting to be adopted are African American.

The racial breakdowns differ expectedly between the largest eight and the other 80 PCSAs. While 95 percent of the adoptive parents in the smaller counties are white, only 57 percent of those in the larger counties are. Conversely, while fewer than five percent of the adoptive parents in the smaller counties are African American, African Americans comprise 43 percent of the adoptive parents in the larger PCSAs. In this instance, however, the prospective parents look more like the foster adoptive parents than they do the non-foster adoptive parents. Stated differently, the families recruited for adoption who have not yet adopted are more similar to those recruited first as foster parents than they are those recruited specifically for adoption who have already adopted.

Prospective and Adoptive Families by Race

Race	Prospective Parents		Non-foster Adoptive Parents		Foster Adoptive Parents	
	Large PCSAs	Smaller PCSAs	Large PCSAs	Smaller PCSAs	Large PCSAs	Smaller PCSAs
White	57%	94%	52%	95%	59%	96%
African American	43%	6%	46%	4%	41%	4%
Other	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%

These figures, however, deserve special note on at least one point. Many of the families counted as non-foster adoptive parents are not by any means strangers to the child. In fact, more than one-quarter of the African American non-foster adoptive parents are related to the child. This compares to something closer to ten percent of white non-foster adoptive parents. This is undoubtedly part of the explanation as to why the prospective parents do not look more like the non-foster adoptive parents (i.e., those recruited through general recruitment strategies would be expected to be different than those recruited for specific children).

Family Structure

Perhaps the largest difference between foster adoptive parents and other adoptive parents lies in family structure. While “married couple” is by far the largest structure reported for both groups, representing 71 percent of foster parents and 74 percent of non-foster parents who adopt, there is a significant difference in the proportion of households with a family structure of “single female.” Only 20 percent of non-foster adoptive parents report being single females, while over 26 percent of foster parents who adopt fit that category.

Two related things make this difference potentially significant. First is the fact that the percentage of single females among prospective parents is more like the percentage among foster adoptive parents than it is that among non-foster adoptive parents, at least in the largest eight PCSAs (see table below). In other words, more single females are being recruited as adoptive parents than are moving to become adoptive parents.

Prospective and Adoptive Families by Family Structure

Family Structure	Prospective Parents		Non-foster Adoptive Parents		Foster Adoptive Parents	
	Large PCSAs	Smaller PCSAs	Large PCSAs	Smaller PCSAs	Large PCSAs	Smaller PCSAs
Married Couple	59%	85%	65%	87%	64%	92%
Single Female	35%	11%	29%	8%	33%	7%
Other	6%	4%	6%	6%	3%	1%

The second issue making the differences in family structure worth further exploration is the correlation with race. In all categories, i.e., prospective parents, non-foster adoptive parents and foster adoptive parents, a large majority of the single females are African American. Moreover, there were, again for all three categories, more African American single female families than there were African American married couple families. The relative disproportion of African Americans who are single females is most evident in the larger eight PCSAs, but it can be seen to a lesser degree in the smaller PCSAs, as well.

From all of the discussion up to this point, it should be clear that there is not a single, homogeneous population which adopts or wants to adopt children. The populations of adoptive parents exhibit wide variation on a number of characteristics. Moreover, the variation is so large and, at least in some ways so systematic, that one can identify very distinct populations. At least three important populations can be discerned just from family structure and race: white married couples, African American married couples and African American single women. Recruitment and retention strategies may need to be different for each one.

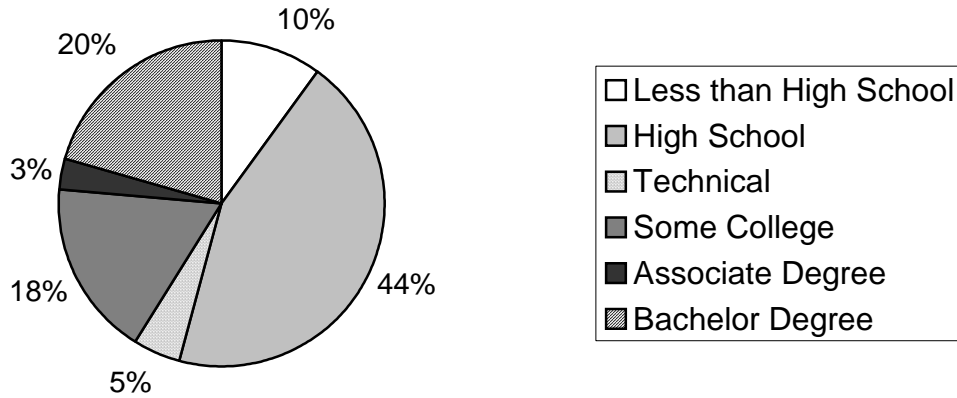
Education

Determining the educational levels of prospective and adoptive parents is difficult, because that information is entered into FACSIS less than any other kind of data about resource families. Between half and two-thirds of all resource families, including all three groups discussed in this report, have no educational information about the primary caregiver in the electronic record. Any information which does exist must, therefore, be interpreted with caution.

The clearest summary of what information does exist can be reduced to the following statements.

- 1) Most adoptive parents' highest level of educational attainment is a high school education;
- 2) Non-foster adoptive parents are slightly more likely to have a college degree; and
- 3) Prospective parents are more likely than either group of adoptive parents to have a college degree.

Education of Parents Adopting in FFY 2004



Summary

Resource parents who are younger, those who are white and those who are single females appear more frequently among those still waiting for children than they do among those who actually adopt. This suggests that there are relatively well-defined groups of prospective parents who make it through the approval process but who are never matched with a child. On the one hand, this means that a substantial amount of work is going into the study and approval of these groups with a reduced impact on the waiting children. On the other hand, it may mean that an increase in effort is required not so much in the recruitment process as in the matching process. Understanding how to address the latter issue requires an examination of the children who are waiting to be adopted.

Part 2: Ohio's Waiting Children

While some families may be generally more inclined to adopt than are others, that inclination will only result in an adoption if a child is available to whom the family is attracted for one reason or another. Just as some prospective families will never adopt because they do not find a child whom they feel to be appropriate for their family, some children will never be adopted because no family is found to fit their needs.

This section, then, focuses on which children get adopted and which are still waiting. The characteristics of interest are age, race and special needs. In addition, this section will complement the previous discussion by considering the differences between children adopted by foster parents and children adopted by other parents.

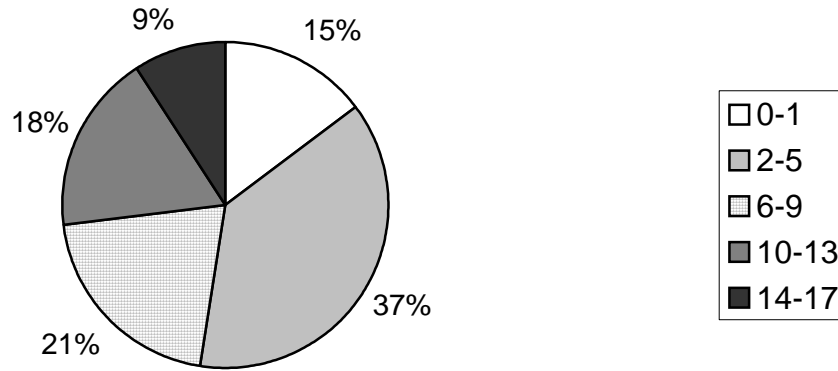
In addition to differentiating among foster and non-foster parents, this section provides a more detailed breakdown by parent type of who is adopting Ohio's children. The adoptive parent types are defined here as follows:

- *Foster* – provided foster care to the child prior to adoption and are not related to the child
- *Kinship* – adoptive parents who are related to the child and who did not provide foster care prior to adoption
- *Foster/Kinship* – adoptive parents who are related to the child and who provided foster care prior to adoption
- *Unrelated* – parents unknown to the child, that is, parents who were not foster care providers and are not related. These types of adoptions are often referred to as “stranger adoptions”

Age

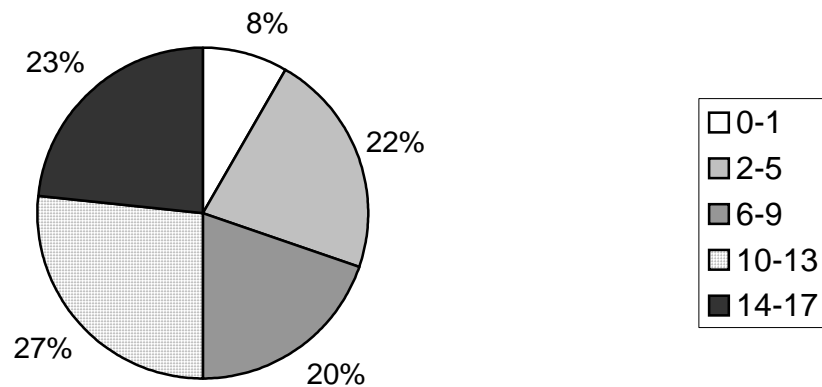
The traditional view of adoption as an event which usually occurs shortly after birth continues to reflect some level of reality. Over half of all adoptions in Ohio occur among children five years of age or under and nearly three-quarters among children under the age of ten.

Age of Children Adopted in FFY 2004



These figures stand in contrast, however, to those describing the children who are waiting to be adopted. Half of the children waiting at the end of FFY 2004 were ten years of age or older and only 30 percent were five or under. One can view the six-to-nine age group as the pivot; for both populations it comprises about 20 percent, with the populations on either side nearly switching percentages when one moves the examination from adopted to waiting children.

Age of Children Waiting at End of FFY 2004



Perhaps unexpectedly, the group of resource families most likely to adopt very young children and least likely to adopt older children are foster parents. Nearly 60

percent of the children adopted by foster parents in FFY 2004 were under the age of six, compared to 45 percent of the children adopted by parents with no relationship to the child and 44 percent of those adopted by relatives.² On the other side of the coin, less than one quarter (23%) of the children adopted by foster parents were ten years of age or older, compared to nearly one-third (32%) each of those adopted by strangers and those adopted by relatives. Stated differently, while foster parents accounted for half (49%) of all adoptions in FFY 2004, they resulted in only 42 percent of adoptions of older children.

Age of Children Adopted by Type of Adoptive Parent

Age of Child	Foster		Kinship		Foster/Kinship		Unrelated	
	Large PCSAs	Smaller PCSAs	Large PCSAs	Smaller PCSAs	Large PCSAs	Smaller PCSAs	Large PCSAs	Smaller PCSAs
0-1	21%	15%	8%	23%	6%	0%	9%	13%
2-5	37%	48%	33%	32%	39%	100%	33%	38%
6-9	17%	19%	25%	16%	25%	0%	26%	20%
10-13	16%	12%	19%	14%	18%	0%	23%	20%
14-17	9%	6%	15%	16%	13%	0%	10%	8%
18+	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%

While the differences are not large, it should be noted, as shown in the table above, that these tendencies are more pronounced among the resource families in largest PCSAs than in the smaller agencies. That is to say, foster parents are more likely to adopt younger children and less likely to adopt older children outside the eight largest counties in the state.

Race

More than half of all children adopted in FFY 2004 are white (54%), with another 44 percent African American. In both the largest eight and the smaller PCSAs, a slightly higher percentage of the children adopted by non-foster parents are African American than is the case for foster parents, but the percentage of children adopted by foster parents in the larger PCSAs is so much higher and the number of African American children adopted in those counties is so much larger, that the statewide figures come out in reverse, with 43 percent of all foster parent adoptions being of African American children, compared to 37 percent of all unrelated adoptions. In fact, in the largest eight PCSAs, the majority of children adopted are African American and that holds for both groups of foster parents.

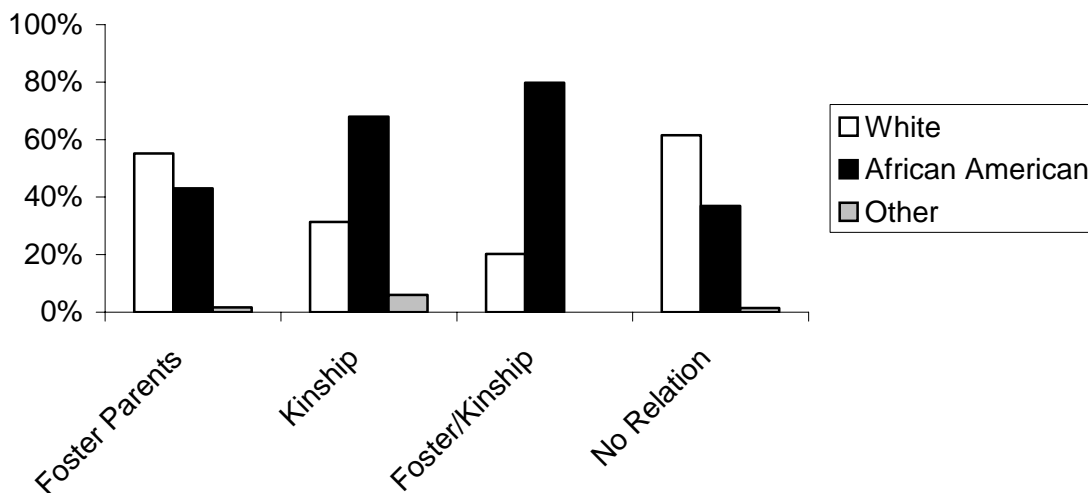
² While twice as many children were adopted by relatives who had not served as their foster parents as by those who had, there was little difference in the age distribution of the children adopted by relatives who were foster parents and those who were not. Forty-three percent of the children adopted by non-foster parent relatives were under the age of six, while 45 percent of the children adopted by foster parent relatives were that young.

When one looks more discretely at who adopts African American children, one finds the figures skewed by kinship adoptions. More than two-thirds of all relative adoptions are of African American children, and nearly 80 percent of the adoptions by relatives who are also foster parents are of African American children. Foster parents (who are not relatives) are somewhat more likely to adopt African American children than are unrelated or “stranger” parents, but the real differences lie in the kinship area.

Identifying the implications of relative adoptions is, however, beyond the scope of this report, because additional data would be needed. If the data available through FACSIS, which is the source for this report, are to be believed, the large differences between relatives and other types of adoptive parents are not particularly significant, simply because relatives account for such a small proportion of adoptions. FACSIS data show only 190 of the 951 adoptions of African American children in FFY 2004 were by relatives. On the other side of the coin, however, FACSIS data are not entirely consistent in recording which adoptive parents are relatives and which are not. It is entirely possible that there are far more relatives adopting than are shown in FACSIS, but another data source would be needed to determine that. If that turned out to be true, it is, of course, also possible that relatives would look much like all other adoptive families.

While African American children comprise a minority of those adopted, they represent 51 percent of the children available (i.e., waiting or placed) for adoption. Moreover, over half of the African American children waiting for adoption are age ten or older, while just under half of white children are in that age category. In other words, African American children make up the largest group of waiting children and half of this group is among those least likely to be adopted (i.e., older children).

Race of Children Adopted by Type of Family



Remember, three-quarters of the children adopted in FFY 2004 were under the age of ten.

In relation to who adopts children, many African American children would appear to be in a difficult position.

- Non-foster parents are more likely to adopt older children, 53 percent of whom are African American, while foster parents are more likely to adopt African Americans, 52 percent of whom are older.
- Even relatives, who are substantially more likely to adopt African American children, are no more likely to adopt older children than are “stranger” adoptive parents.

The older, African American child may not meet any group’s preferences.

Special Needs

Over 80 percent of the children adopted in FFY 2004 showed one or more special needs, and in total foster parents were slightly more likely to adopt a special needs child than were non-foster parents. Within individual categories of special need, however, this was not always the case. For instance, 45 percent of the children adopted by non-foster parents showed age as a special need, compared to 39 percent of foster parents, something already alluded to above. Similar figures apply to the special need of having a sibling with whom the child is adopted. Forty-six percent of non-foster parents adopted sibling groups, compared to 42 percent of foster parents. A smaller difference appeared in relation to emotional special needs, where 20 percent of the children adopted by non-foster parents showed an emotional need, compared to 18 percent of those adopted by foster parents. However, when the special need is related to minority status, ethnicity, medical issues or physical disability, foster parents were more likely to adopt the child. It is, therefore, not possible to give a simple or straightforward answer to the question of which type of resource family is more likely to adopt a special needs child.

Determining the extent to which children waiting for adoption have special needs is difficult in FACSIS, because many PCSAs simply do not record special needs until the child is adopted. Only at that point is there a practical implication, i.e., the eligibility for subsidy. Thus, the information which follows represents a substantial understatement of the special needs of waiting children.

The level of understatement is clear from the fact that FACSIS shows special needs for only 20 percent of the waiting and placed populations. Assuming that all special needs are roughly equally under-reported, the most frequent needs shown for waiting children are, in order, age, minority status, siblings and medical needs. As noted above, non-foster parents are more likely to adopt children with two of those needs, namely, age and siblings, while foster parents are more likely to adopt children who are minorities or have medical needs.

Summary

As was the case with waiting families, waiting children differ noticeably from those who are adopted. While 68 percent of adoptions are of children age nine or under, 50 percent of the waiting children are older. While 54 percent of adoptions are of white children, 51 percent of waiting children are African American.

To make matters more difficult, there is not an obvious correlation between the characteristics of the waiting families and the waiting children. Younger families would, intuitively, be expected to want younger children, especially if they already have children of their own, who are also presumably younger. Yet, there are relatively more younger waiting families and relatively more older children waiting to be adopted.

With race the situation is similar. Federal law requires states to seek to create a pool of prospective parents who are racially similar to the pool of waiting children. As seen above, however, the pool of prospective parents is disproportionately white, both in relation to the characteristics of families who actually adopt and in relation to the characteristics of the children who continue to wait.

Part 3: Implications

This report began by suggesting that examining the families who complete adoptions may provide some hints as to where efforts to improve recruitment should focus. What emerges from the analysis, however, is something a bit more complex. Recruitment efforts are already effective in attracting a wide variety of prospective adoptive parents. When one compares who adopts and who continues to wait for a child, one finds sufficient differences that it is not possible to say that the wrong kinds of families are being recruited and approved, because all kinds of families are coming forward. Many of these families, however, do not adopt the children who are available.

As suggested above, that may mean that two kinds of efforts are needed, one on the recruitment side and one on the matching side. The following recommendations encompass both issues.

Recommendations

If more of the waiting children are to be adopted, ODJFS and the public children services agencies need to do two things.

Recommendation 1: Focus recruitment efforts on those types of parents who more frequently adopt those children who are over-represented in the pool of waiting children.

For African American children, who comprise the majority of the waiting children, this will mean more effective efforts at recruiting African American adoptive parents and, most particularly, the relatives of the waiting African American children. This is obviously not accomplished through broad recruiting efforts but rather through child specific recruitment.

For older children, who also comprise a majority of waiting children, a broad recruitment effort for non-foster adoptive parents appears more likely to lead to success, at least for some of the children. For that group of older children who are also African American, more child specific recruitment of relatives may be in order, but for the white older children the better odds appear to be with unrelated non-foster parents.

Recommendation 2: Increase efforts to match existing prospective parents to the children who are actually waiting.

Part of this effort needs to focus on the younger, white families who apply and are approved with disproportionate frequency but who do not adopt as frequently as

older, African American families. **Emphasis should be placed on providing additional supports to encourage younger, white families to adopt children who are available. If efforts are unsuccessful, these parents should be “counseled out” of the pool of waiting families.** Not only do parents who will likely never adopt because they are waiting for a child atypical of public agencies utilize resources that could potentially be used for families likely to adopt children public agencies have available, but they also add to the challenge the State faces in compliance with the Multi-ethnic Placement Act (MEPA). The more white families in the pool who are not adopting the available children, the less likely it is for Ohio to have a pool of prospective families reflective of the waiting children (the majority of whom are African American).

Part of the matching effort with existing families, however, should also **focus on some of the types of parents who do adopt but who tend to adopt children who are more likely to be adopted in any event.** This is particularly relevant for older children, where an improvement in the percentage of foster parents willing to adopt older children could have a significant impact on that portion of the waiting population. Particular focus might be placed on the older, i.e., 50 and over, foster parents, where efforts to engage them on behalf of older children would seem to have a greater chance of success.