Part 2:

The Adoption Process

Part 2 presents findings about the adoption process. Information presented includes parents' motivation to adopt, parental satisfaction with the agency or attorney that assisted them in the adoption, and adoption expenses. In addition, this section includes information about the openness of adoptions as well as on the post-adoption services and supports families receive. Because this section includes information specific to the adoption process, comparisons with children in the general population are not included.

KEY FINDINGS

- Adopted children typically have parents who said they chose to adopt in order to provide a permanent home for a child, to expand their family, and/or because of infertility. Among the three adoption types, children adopted from foster care are least likely to have parents report infertility as a motivation for adoption, and most likely to report being motivated because they had previously adopted the child's sibling.
- Nearly nine out of ten adopted children have a parent who was satisfied with their adoption attorney or agency; more than nine out of ten believe that the agency disclosed all important information prior to the adoption. Children adopted from foster care are slightly less likely to have parents who were satisfied with the adoption agency or attorney, but the perception of failure to disclose important information prior to the adoption was rare across all three groups of adopted children.
- Adoption expenses for children adopted privately in the United States or internationally are considerably higher than for children adopted from foster care.
- Almost all adopted children ages 5 and older (97 percent) know they were adopted. Among children adopted by non-relatives, about one-third have a pre-adoption agreement regarding openness, and roughly one-third have had post-adoption contact with birth family members.
- Three out of ten adopted children have a parent who reported that at least one adoption-specific support they needed was not received. Such supports include meeting with agency staff, child and parent adoption support groups, parent training, and web-based resources. Receipt of these services varies by adoption type, with children adopted internationally typically the most likely to have parents who received particular services.
- Just over one out of five adopted children (21 percent) has a parent who reported not receiving at least one needed service not specific to adoption. Such services include child mental health care, family and crisis counseling, child residential treatment or hospitalization, and child drug or alcohol services, tutoring, and mentoring. In a few cases, receipt of services varies by adoption type, with children adopted from foster care typically more likely than other adopted children to have received particular services.
- More than three-fourths of children adopted from foster care receive an adoption subsidy (78 percent); 64 percent have an adoption agreement that allows for both a subsidy and health insurance coverage.

Parents' motivation to adopt

This section examines adoptive parents' motivation to adopt. Examining why parents choose to adopt and how those reasons are similar and different across adoption types may inform agencies' recruitment efforts. See Appendix Table 15 on page 74 for detailed data on each indicator.

Adopted children typically have parents who said they chose to adopt in order to provide a permanent home for a child, to expand their family, and/or because of infertility. Children's parents reported whether five possible reasons for choosing to adopt applied to them. The most commonly reported reason was to provide a permanent home for a child in need (81 percent), followed by a desire to expand their family (69 percent), inability to have a biological child (52 percent), wanting a sibling for another child (24 percent), and having previously adopted the child's sibling (7 percent). Some respondents also volunteered additional reasons for adopting, including being related to the child prior to the adoption, having already formed a bond with or loved the child, loving children in general, and helping a child avoid foster care.

The reported motivation to adopt differs by adoption type. Although the ordering of the frequency with which these reasons are reported is generally the same across adoption types, the percentages of children whose parents reported each reason differ. For example, children adopted internationally are more likely than children adopted from foster care or privately adopted U.S. children to have parents report that they were motivated by a desire to expand their family (92 percent compared with 61 and 60 percent, respectively), by infertility (72 percent compared with 39 and 52 percent), or by a desire for a sibling for their child (36 percent compared with 24 and 16 percent). Additionally, children adopted internationally are more likely than privately adopted U.S. children to have parents report being motivated by a desire to provide a permanent home for a child (90 percent compared with 70 percent); see Figure 35. Among the three adoption types, children adopted from foster care are least likely to have parents report infertility as a motivation for adoption, and most likely to report being motivated because they had previously adopted their child's sibling.[i]

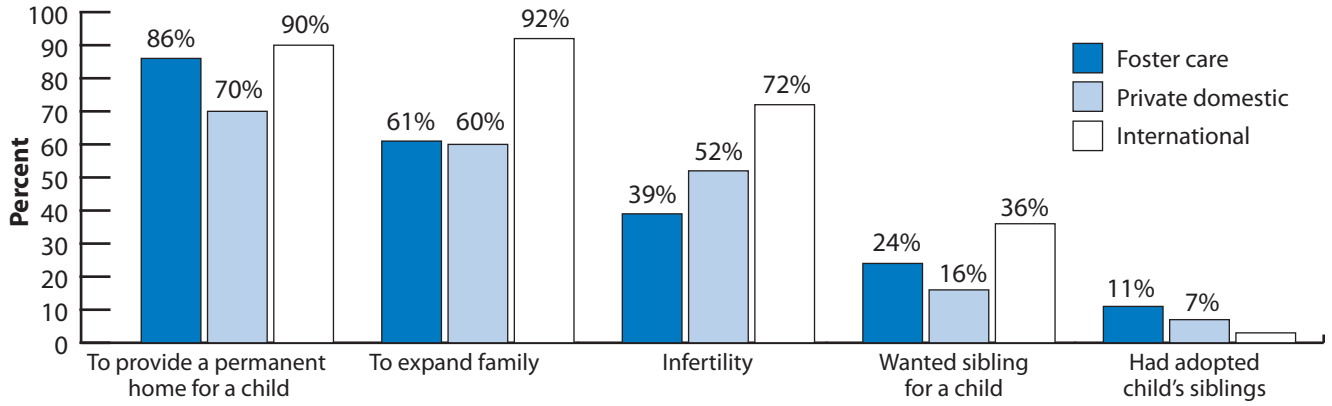
MEASURES OF PARENTS' MOTIVATION TO ADOPT

To assess parents' motivations for adopting, the NSAP interviewer asked parents to report whether each of a series of possible reasons for deciding to adopt a child applied to them. The motivations included:

- inability to have a biological child,
- wanting to expand their family,
- wanting a sibling for another child,
- already having adopted their child's sibling, and
- wanting to adopt a child in need of a permanent family.

Additionally, parents were asked whether there was any other reason. Some of the most common additional explanations were that the parent had already formed a bond with or loved the child, or that the parent was related to the child.

Figure 35. Percentage of adopted children by parents' reasons for choosing to adopt, by adoption type



Note: Values corresponding to unreliable percentage estimates have been suppressed in this figure.

[i] The difference in percentages of children adopted from foster care and those adopted from other domestic sources is marginally significant for reports that parents were motivated by already having adopted their child's sibling (p<.10).

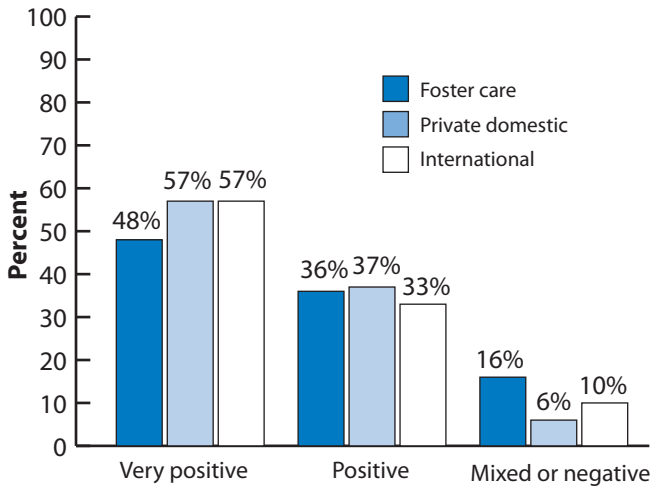
Parents' satisfaction with their agency or attorney

This section examines adoptive parents' satisfaction with their adoption agency or attorney. See Appendix Table 16 on page 75 for detailed data on each indicator.

Nearly nine out of ten adopted children have a parent who is satisfied with their adoption attorney or agency; more than nine out of ten believe that the agency disclosed all important information prior to the adoption. Specifically, 89 percent of adopted children have parents who reported either a "very positive" or "positive" experience with their attorney or agency. Overall, 8 percent of adopted children have a parent who reported that they believe important information was not disclosed to them prior to the adoption.

Satisfaction with the adoption agency or attorney varies by adoption type. Children adopted from foster care are somewhat less likely to have parents who had a "very positive" experience than U.S. children adopted privately or those adopted internationally (48 percent, compared with 57 percent for both of the other groups);[i] see Figure 36.

Figure 36. Percentage distribution of adopted children by parents' reported experience with adoption agency or attorney, by adoption type



MEASURES PERTAINING TO PARENTS' SATISFACTION WITH AGENCY OR ATTORNEY

Parents' satisfaction with their adoption attorney or agency was assessed based on whether parents reported that overall their experience was "very positive, positive, mixed, negative, or very negative." A small portion of adopted children (1 percent) had parents who reported having used neither an adoption agency nor an attorney for the adoption. These children were excluded from the analysis regarding their parents' satisfaction with their agency or attorney.

Disclosure of important information prior to the adoption: Parents reported whether they "believe that the agency knew important information" about their child that the agency did not share prior to the finalization of the adoption.

Note: Two additional measures relevant to foster care adoption are reported in Appendix Table 16. These asked foster parents who fostered prior to the adoption: 1) whether options other than adoption were discussed with parent(s), and 2) whether the parent(s) felt pressured by the agency to adopt the child.

[i] The difference for internationally adopted children is marginally significant (p<.10).

Adoption expenses

This section examines adoption expenses and sources of reimbursement for expenses, including filing for the federal adoption tax credit, reimbursement for some or all costs by the adoption agency (for children adopted from foster care only), and employer-provided financial assistance. The federal adoption tax credit was established in 1996 to reimburse parents for adoption-related expenses. As of 2008, the maximum reimbursement amount was $11,650; it is phased out for families with adjusted gross incomes between $174,730 and $214,730.[31] See Appendix Table 17 on page 76 for detailed data on each indicator.

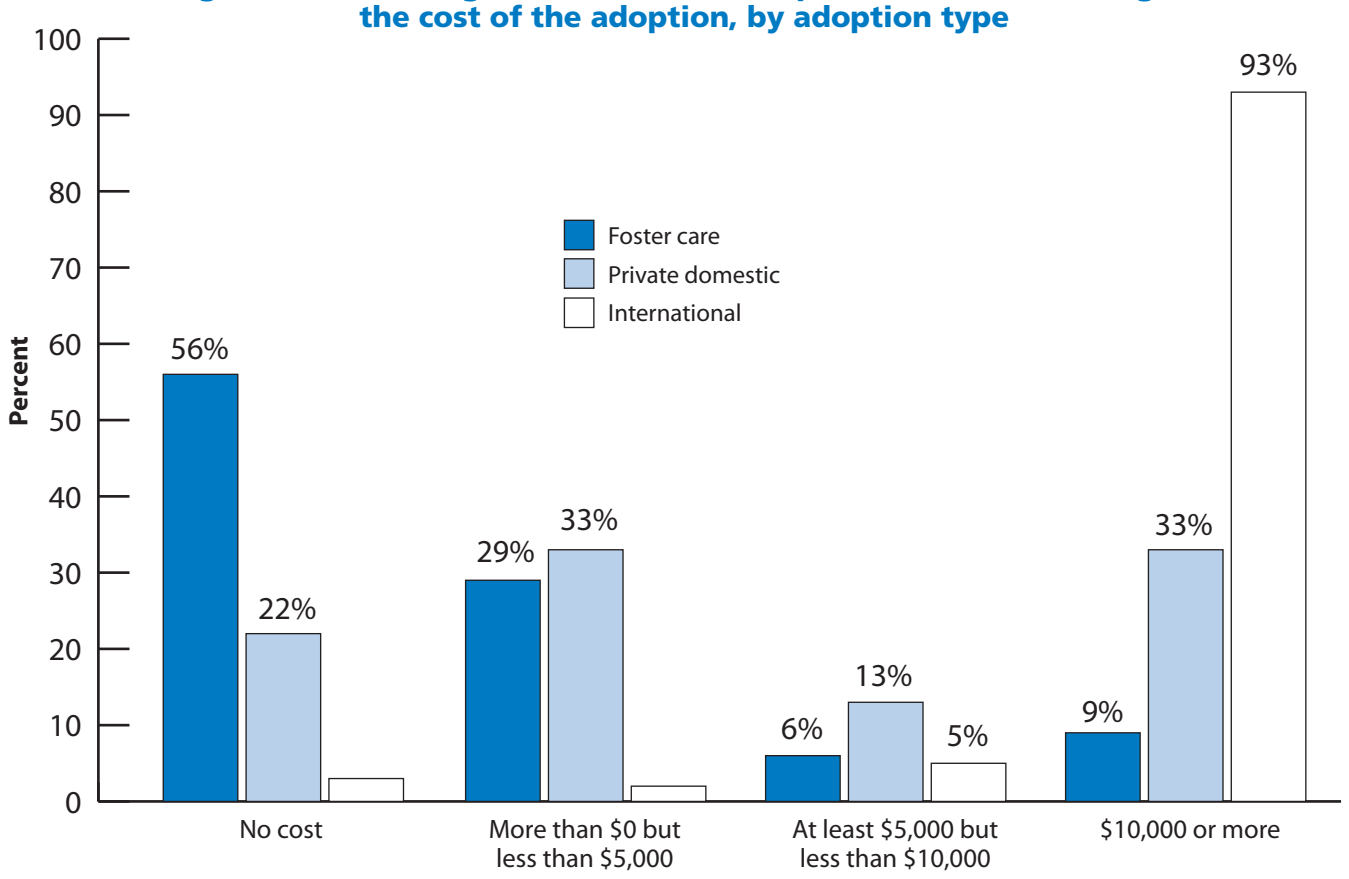
For about one out of three adopted children, their parents reported paying no adoption-related expenses; for four out of ten, expenses were $10,000 or more. Among children whose adoptions occurred in 1997 or later, eight out of ten have parents who filed for the federal adoption tax credit. Among all adopted children, 13 percent have a parent who reported receiving employer-provided financial assistance.

Adoption-related expenses for the majority of children adopted from foster care are low. Fifty-six percent of children adopted from foster care have parents who reported incurring no adoption expenses; parents of an additional 29 percent reported expenses that were less than $5,000. Fewer than one in ten children adopted from foster care have parents who said the cost was $10,000 or more; see Figure 37.

Adoption expenses for children adopted privately in the United States or internationally are typically much higher than for children adopted from foster care. Costs were substantial for a large proportion of privately adopted U.S. children, with 20 percent having adoption costs ranging from $10,000 to $20,000 and 12 percent with expenses of $20,000 or more. However, for 22 percent of children adopted privately in the United States, parents reported paying no adoption-related costs. In general, adoption costs are lower when children are adopted by relatives, and this is particularly so among children adopted privately. Among these children, 94 percent of those adopted by relatives had expenses less than $5,000, compared with 27 percent of those adopted by non-relatives. International adoption expenses tend to be even greater than for privately adopted U.S. children. Adoption expenses were $20,000 or more for 49 percent of children adopted internationally.

Children adopted from foster care are less likely than other adopted children to have a parent use the adoption tax credit or to receive employer-provided financial assistance. Children adopted internationally are more likely than other adopted children to have parents who reported obtaining employer-provided financial assistance to cover adoption-related expenses. Twenty-two percent of children adopted internationally have parents who reported this type of financial assistance, while these figures are 6 and 13 percent, respectively, for children adopted from foster care and privately from the United States. Similarly, the percentage of parents who claimed the tax credit is higher for those who adopted privately from the United States (84 percent) and internationally (86 percent) than for those who adopted from foster care (66 percent). However, these lower rates among parents adopting from foster care may reflect their use of different financial supports. In most states, the public child welfare agency reimburses families for most, if not all, of adoption-related costs for parents who adopt children from foster care. Accordingly, substantial proportions of children adopted from foster care have parents who reported no adoption-related costs (56 percent) or having been reimbursed by their adoption agency (39 percent).

Figure 37. Percentage distribution of adopted children according to the cost of the adoption, by adoption type



Note: Values corresponding to unreliable percentage estimates have been suppressed in this figure.

MEASURES PERTAINING TO ADOPTION EXPENSES

Adoption expenses: The survey initially asked parents, "Did you pay anything at the time of the adoption, for example, did you pay for a home study or pay an attorney?" Those who said "no" were not asked any further questions about cost or about whether they were reimbursed for any costs. It is not clear whether families who were fully reimbursed for adoption-related expenses would have responded that they incurred any costs at the time of the adoption, or whether they would have reported no adoption expenses. Among those who responded "yes," they had paid something at the time of the adoption, information on adoption-related costs was collected differently depending on adoption type. Parents of children adopted privately in the United States or internationally reported costs in increments of $5,000 up to "$40,000 or more." Parents of children adopted from foster care reported costs in increments of $5,000 up to "$10,000 or more." See Appendix Table 18 for details on adoption expenses for children adopted privately or internationally.

Sources of reimbursement for adoption expenses: Parents reported whether they were aware of and had filed for the federal adoption tax credit, whether their adoption agency had reimbursed all, some, or none of these expenses, and whether they or their spouse's employer had provided financial assistance for the adoption.

Adoption openness

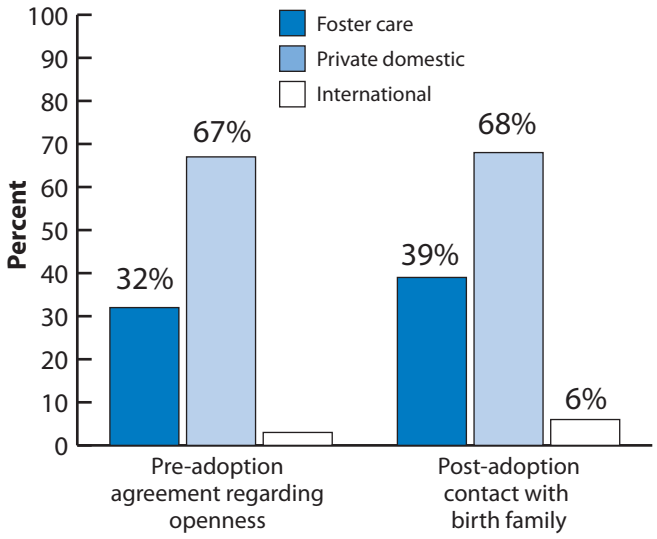
In the adoption process, "openness" refers to the extent to which all parties (including the adopted child and birth-family members) are informed about past and present relationships, and are able to initiate and maintain contact with each other. To examine adoption openness, this section first identifies whether or not children are aware that they have been adopted. This section also describes whether children's families have pre-adoption agreements regarding openness, and whether adopted children have had post-adoption contact with members of their birth family. In "closed" adoptions, birth and adoptive parents had no contact with each other; often knowing very little—if anything—about each other. In some cases, adoptive parents did not tell their children that they had been adopted. The 1960s brought a shift toward more openness in adoption.[32] Although the effect of continued contact and communication between adopted individuals and birth parents has been difficult to study, its proponents believe it can facilitate the psychological well-being of both groups.[33] In many states, agreements about post-adoption contact—both for privately adopted children and for children adopted from foster care—are legally enforceable, providing some assurance to birth parents of the continued openness of an adoption.[34] See Appendix Table 18 on page 77 for detailed data on each indicator.

Almost all adopted children ages 5 and older (97 percent) know they were adopted. There are small differences across adoption type, with children adopted from foster care slightly less likely to know they were adopted (94 percent), compared with other adopted children.

Among children adopted by non-relatives,[i] *about one-third have a pre-adoption agreement regarding openness. Roughly one-third have had post-adoption contact with birth family members.* Specifically, the parents of 32 percent of adopted children reported pre-adoption agreements regarding contact, such as visits or phone calls with birth family members, or the exchange of photographs. For 36 percent, either the child or the child's parents have had post-adoption contact with the child's birth family, either in person, or through letters or email.

Pre-adoption agreements and post-adoption contact are most common among children adopted privately from within the United States. Specifically, 67 percent of privately adopted U.S. children have pre-adoption agreements compared with 32 percent of children adopted from foster care. Respondents who adopted internationally reported pre-adoption agreements so rarely that a reliable estimate cannot be generated. Similarly, over two-thirds of privately adopted U.S. children (68 percent) have had contact with their birth families following the adoption, as have almost two-fifths of children adopted from foster care (39 percent). Six percent of children adopted internationally have had post-adoption contact with their birth families; see Figure 38.

Figure 38. Percentage of children adopted by non-relatives who have pre-adoption agreements regarding openness and who have had post-adoption contact with birth family members, by adoption type



Note: Values corresponding to unreliable percentage estimates have been suppressed in this figure.

[i] Parents who were related to their child prior to the adoption were not asked about whether they had pre-adoption agreements regarding openness.

MEASURES PERTAINING TO OPENNESS IN ADOPTION

Child knows he/she was adopted: We derived this measure from a question to parents of children ages 5 and older regarding how their children feel about being adopted. In response, some parents volunteered that their children did not know they had been adopted.

Pre-adoption agreement regarding openness: A pre-adoption agreement regarding openness may range from informal discussion to a written, signed contract regarding contact between adopted children and members of their birth family following the adoption. Such agreements are also sometimes called "cooperative adoption" or "open adoption" agreements. In the NSAP, interviewers asked parents whether there was "any kind of pre-adoption agreement in which you agreed to provide information about [your child] to one or both of his/her birth parents or other birth family members." Children whose parents were related to them prior to the adoption were excluded from this analysis because they were not asked about pre-adoption openness agreements.

Post-adoption contact with birth family members: This measure was based on parental report about whether they, their spouse or partner, or their child have "ever had contact with his/her birth family members" since the time of the adoption. Note that the contact may have been between the birth family and the adoptive parents rather than directly with the child, and that contact may have been via letter, email or in person. Children whose parents were related to them prior to the adoption were excluded from this analysis because they were not asked about post-adoption contact.

Post-adoption supports

Post-adoption supports include an array of services and other assistance that families may receive after adopting a child.[35] In this section, we discuss several categories of supports. Supports specific to adoption include meeting with agency staff, child and parent adoption support groups, parent training, and web-based resources. Financial supports available specifically for children adopted from foster care include monthly adoption subsidy payments and health insurance coverage (i.e., Medicaid coverage). Rehabilitative services not specific to adoption include child mental health care, family and crisis counseling, child residential treatment or hospitalization, and child drug or alcohol services. In this section we also look at other supports not specific to adoption, including mentoring and tutoring. See Appendix Table 19 on page 78 for detailed data on each indicator.

ADOPTION-SPECIFIC SUPPORTS

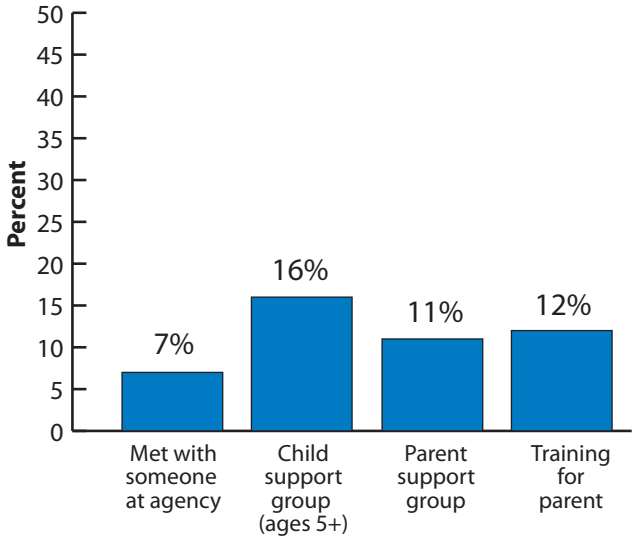
The most commonly reported service received was meeting with someone from the adoption agency to discuss post-adoption services (35 percent). Participating in a parent support group, participating in parent trainings, and using web-based resources are services that the parents of about three out of ten children received regardless of adoption type. A less common service is participation in support groups for children; 11 percent of adopted children ages 5 and older have ever participated in such a group.

A minority of parents said they wanted but did not receive services. For example, few adopted children (7 percent) have a parent who reported not having met with someone at the agency to discuss post-adoption services, but wanting to. For each of the other services, just over one out of ten children had a parent who reported having wanted but not received a service (16 percent for children's support groups, 12 percent for parent trainings, 11 percent for parent support groups); see Figure 39. Overall, three out of ten adopted children have a parent who reported that at least one needed adoption-specific support was not received.

Receipt of post-adoption services varies by adoption type, with children adopted internationally typically the most likely to have parents who received particular services. One-half of children adopted internationally (50 percent) have a parent who met with someone from the adoption agency to discuss post-adoption services, compared with just over one-third of children adopted from foster care and one-quarter of those adopted domestically through other sources (36 and 25 percent, respectively). Similarly, children adopted internationally are more likely to have participated in a support group for children ages 5 and up, to have had a parent participate in a support group,[i] and to have a parent who used web-based resources about adoption. However, the percentage of adopted children with a parent who participated in parent training after the adoption was finalized is higher for foster care adoptions than for private domestic or international adoptions (38 percent, compared with 25 and 29 percent, respectively);[ii] see Figure 40.

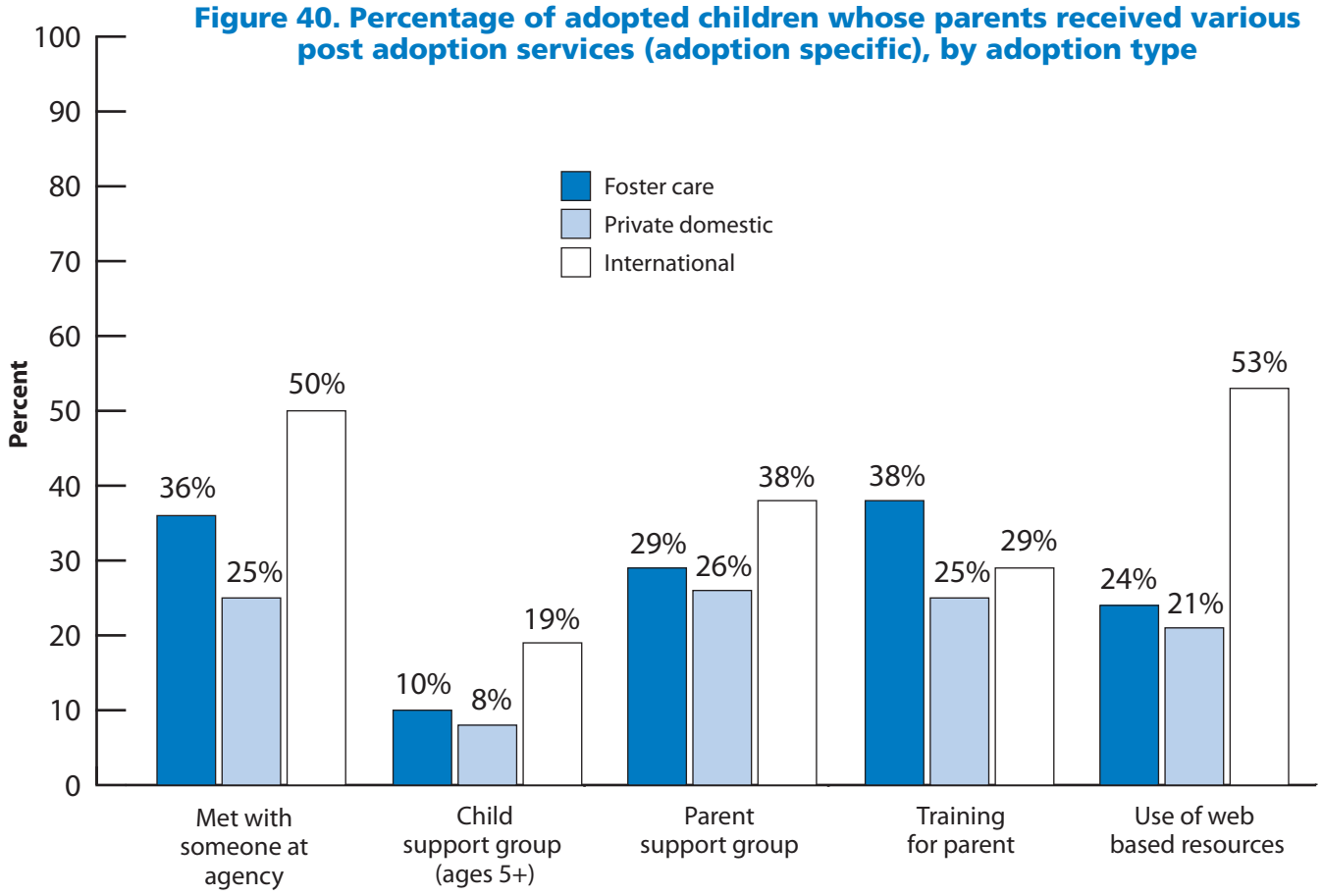
The majority of children adopted from foster care receive an adoption subsidy and health insurance coverage through an adoption agreement. Over three-quarters of children adopted from foster care (78 percent) receive a monthly adoption subsidy payment. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) have an adoption agreement guaranteeing both an adoption subsidy and health insurance coverage.

Figure 39. Percentage of adopted children whose parents wanted to receive various post-adoption services (adoption specific) but did not



[i] This difference is marginally significant (p<.10).

[ii] The difference in percentages for children adopted from foster care and children adopted internationally (38 compared with 29 percent) is marginally significant (p<.10).



MEASURES RELATED TO POST-ADOPTION SUPPORTS

Adoption agreement, health insurance coverage, and monthly subsidies: Parents reported whether they had an adoption agreement at the time of their child's adoption. Such agreements may include monthly maintenance payments from the agency, health insurance coverage, and other services such as therapy. For parents who volunteered that they receive a monthly financial subsidy or whose child was covered by public health insurance, we examined whether these supports were part of the adoption agreement.

Other supports: Parents reported whether they or their child had received a variety of services and whether they had wanted to receive each service. The services included:

- Parents meeting with someone at an adoption agency after the adoption was finalized to discuss post-adoption services and supports
- Adoption support groups for children ages 5 and older
- Adoption support groups for parents
- Classes, conferences, lectures, or seminars for parents about adoption
- Internet-based resources with information on adoption-related issues
- Family counseling
- Crisis counseling
- Mental health care or counseling for children ages 5 and older
- Psychiatric hospital, group home, or residential treatment center for children ages 8 and older
- Alcohol or drug evaluation and/or treatment for children ages 13 and older
- A mentor for children ages 5 and older
- An academic tutor for children ages 5 and older

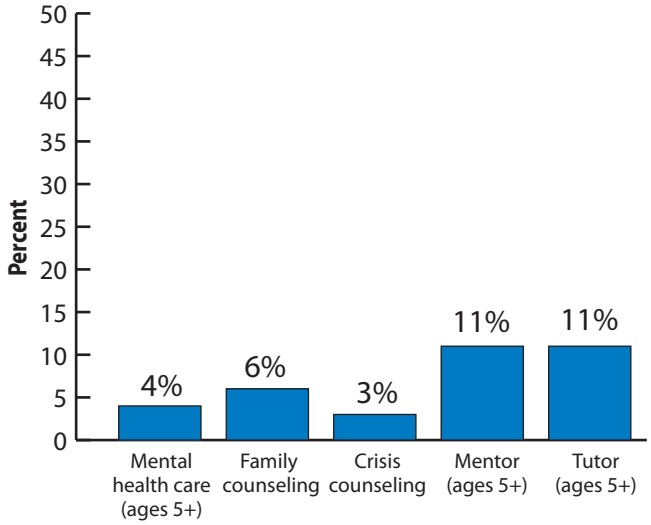
Rehabilitative services: The rehabilitative services considered here include family counseling; crisis counseling; mental health care or counseling for children; treatment in a psychiatric hospital, group home, or residential treatment center; and alcohol or drug evaluation and/or treatment for children.

REHABILITATIVE SERVICES AND OTHER SUPPORTS NOT SPECIFIC TO ADOPTION

Mental health care and tutoring were the most common services received by adopted children that were not specifically designed for or targeted to adoptive families. Among adopted children ages 5 and over, 39 percent received mental health care and 36 percent received tutoring. Families of one out of five adopted children received family counseling (20 percent). Thirteen percent of adopted children ages 5 or older had ever had a mentor. Less common services include psychiatric residential treatment or hospitalization, and drug and alcohol services for adopted adolescents, as well as crisis counseling. Over one-third of adopted children received at least one rehabilitative service, such as family or crisis counseling, in-patient or out-patient mental health care, or drug or alcohol treatment services.

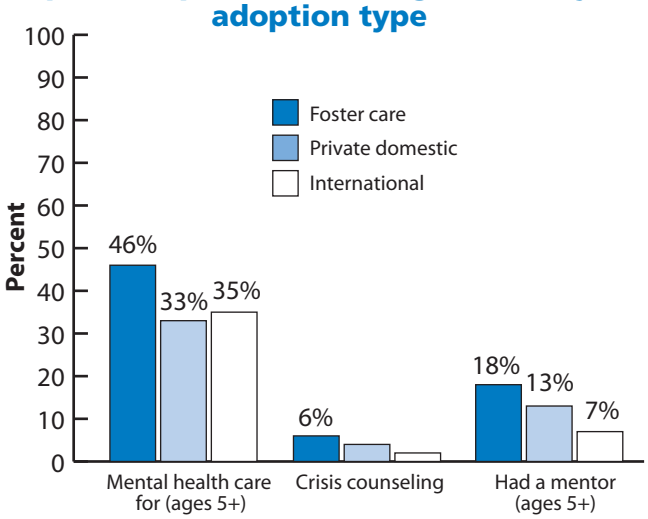
For most services not specifically designed for or targeted to adoptive families, fewer than one out of ten adopted children have parents who said they wanted but did not receive each particular service. The most frequently mentioned services that had been desired but not received were mentoring and tutoring (11 percent for each service). For other services, reports that services were needed but not received were rarer; see Figure 41. Looking across all of the supports not specific to adoption, just over one out of five parents (21 percent) reported that at least one needed support was not received.

Figure 41. Percentage of adopted children whose parents wanted to receive various post-adoption services (general) but did not



Receipt of a few services varies by adoption type; typically, children adopted from foster care are more likely than other adopted children to have received each service. In particular, nearly half of children adopted from foster care have received some type of rehabilitative service (46 percent), compared with 34 percent of children adopted from other domestic sources and 29 percent of children adopted internationally. Nearly one-half of children ages 5 and older adopted from foster care (46 percent) received mental health care compared with about one-third of children adopted domestically through other sources or internationally (33 and 35 percent, respectively).[i]

Figure 42. Percentage of adopted children whose parents received various post-adoption services (general), by adoption type



Note: Values corresponding to unreliable percentage estimates have been suppressed in this figure.

Children adopted from foster care are also more likely than U.S. children adopted privately or internationally adopted children to have received crisis counseling, and, among those ages 5 and older, they are more likely than internationally adopted children to have had a mentor; see Figure 42. The percentage of adopted children who failed to receive at least one needed service also varies by adoption type. Twenty-six percent of children adopted from foster care have parents who reported an unfilled need compared with 16 percent of children adopted internationally.

[i] The differences are marginally significant (p<.10).