Chapter 9
Conclusion

Adoptions are not a common topic for demographic analysis. Compared to marriage or childbirth, adoptions represent a relatively rare means of forming a family. The United Nations (2009, p. xv) reports that on an annual basis 426,000 children are adopted globally with almost half of those (127,000 in 2007) adopted in the U. S. In 2000 the U. S. Census reported 8 percent or 6.7 of the 84 million children in U.S. households were reported as adopted children. Of these 119,136 or 12.6 percent were foreign born adoptees (U. S. Census, 2003). If one considers adults who were adopted, five million Americans alive today are adoptees, and 2–4 percent of all families have adopted (Adoption History Project, 2008). Thus, this book has responded to the need for a discourse on the social demography of adoptions with researchers agreeing that adoption research is limited by data issues.

9.1 Data Issues

Future demographic research can be enhanced as better data, both nationally and internationally, become available. In the U. S improved data compilation appears to be on the horizon from three sources: vital statistics or registration data, U. S. census data and, large scale national surveys such as the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) surveys the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) and The National Survey of Adoptive Parents (NSAP).

International data is also on the cusp of standardization through Hague Convention statistical reports and the United Nations position supporting uniform reporting of Intercountry adoptions.

The first recommendation would be for including standardized adoption records in vital statistics or registration data. Vital statistics data currently includes birth, marriage, divorce and death records but not adoption data. The registration of adoptions would be facilitated through a standardization of the state court system's administrative records. Flango (2008) supports the National Center for State Courts instituting a standardized reporting mechanism with a national data sharing protocol. If all adoptions were documented through a standardization of the state court system's administrative records then this information could be maintained

M.A. Davis, *Children for Families or Families for Children*, The Springer Series on Demographic Methods and Population Analysis 29, DOI 10.1007/978-90-481-8972-4_9,

nationally with vital statistics or registration data similar to birth, marriage, divorce and death certificates.

Common definitions using uniform variables would simplify data exchanges, already successfully used in the exchange of criminal statistics. This would be a practical step in improving family law legal services through facilitating integrated data exchange and reporting from the variety of jurisdictions, state courts, private attorneys, private agencies, and tribal agencies. These data protocol would not only ensure that the rights of the adoptive child, the relinquishing and adopting parents were protected, they would provide for a standardized way of documenting the numbers and types of adoptions available. As an added benefit a standardized data sharing protocol would provide that information for adoption research. If the family court systems were required to finalize adoptions and document these using standardized reporting mechanisms this would, for the first time, provide accurate statistical information pertaining to formal adoptions in the U. S. whether arranged through the child welfare systems, private agencies, or private attorneys.

Second, is the continuation of adoption as a household membership variable in the U. S. census. The relationship of adopted child was included as a census question in the years 1880 through 1930 omitted from 1940 through 1990 but included in the 2000 and 2010 census. The U. S census data are updated each decade and, more frequently, through the American Community survey. The household membership questions provide a longitudinal approach to examining the changes in household composition.

The third recommendation is to expand the two large scale national surveys from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS); National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) and The National Survey of Adoptive Parents (NSAP) (see Chapter 3 for additional information) for more in depth analyses of adoptions. Currently, both surveys have limitations. The NSFG, currently in a seventh, ongoing wave, has historically only included a small number of adoptive parents in their samples. Note in Section 3.4.3.2, the size of the sample which has averaged around 150 (Groves, Mosher, Lepkowski, & Kirgis, 2009).

The NSAP is also limited, in spite of targeting only adoptive families. The NSAP was a follow-up survey to the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) of the English-speaking households who were identified as having an adopted person in the households. (Adopted children living with one biological parent were considered to be step-parent adoptees and excluded.) The NSAP survey included 2,089 households who had adopted between 1990/1992 and 2007/2008; constrained to English speaking families (Bramlett, Foster, & Frasier, 2010). The NSAP, unlike the multi waved NSFG, was a single survey. Data in the NSAP are further restricted as it excludes questions which were included in the original NSCH survey. This creates the need to link the two surveys for analyses. What is needed is a larger sample of adoptive parents, targeting multiple ethnicities and expanded to multiple languages so as to better reflect the current population of the U. S.

Chapter 3 presents two possibilities for improved data using these surveys. First, adoptive parents could be oversampled in the continuous NSFG, much like racial minorities are currently. Since this is an ongoing longitudinal survey beginning in the early 1970s, this would allow for an analysis of long term adoption trends. Second, the NSFG variables used in adoption research could be included in the

NSAP survey to allow social demographers data concerning current adoption issues (the type of adoption, motivations, etc.) which could be compared to the NSFG data.

International data is also in transition. The United Nations (2009, p. 65) agrees that there are limited international data pertaining to adoptions. Of the 195 countries, 173 allow adoptions; 128 provide data on at least the number of adoptions. Of the 128 countries with adoption data 88 have some data on both domestic and ICAs; 23 on all adoptions; nine only on ICAs and; eight only on domestic adoptions (United Nations, 2009, p. 65). Although Hague Convention data are another recent source of analyses about inter-country adoptions with statistical reports from member nations required annually, improvement is still needed. The United Nations (2009, pp. 137–142) recommends uniform standards for both domestic adoptions presented in Box 9.1 and intercountry adoptions in Box 9.2. Note these recommendations would provide uniform data regarding the family status of the adoptee or adopter; the length of time required for placement; whether the adopter has biological children; the location or the placement and legal completion or; the immigration status, and whether exit or entry visas are required. Uniform data would also enable compliance with the Hague Convention standards by requiring documentation that offers transparency about the adoption process.

Box 9.1

Minimum Data Needed for Domestic Adoptions

Date (DD/MM/Year)
Characteristic
Type of adoption
Date when adoption request was received
Date when adoption was granted
Date when adoption came into effect
Authority granting the adoption:
Place of the adoption: Locality (city or town); State/Province

Characteristics of the persons involved in the event

	Persons relinquishing guardianship		Adopted Person	Persons adopting	
	Person 1	Person 2	Person 0	Person 3	Person 4
Sex					
DOB					
Place of habitual residence:					
Locality (city or town)					
State/Province					
Country of Citizenship			Not applicable		
Number of children before			Not applicable		
adoption comes into effect			Not applicable		
Marital Status			Not applicable		
Relationship to adopted person					

Source: United Nations, 2009, p. 137

Box 9.2

Minimum Data Needed for Intercountry Adoptions

Form ID:

Completed by Authorities in Country of Origin	Completed by Authorities in Country of Destination
Country of Origin:	Country of Destination:
Current Date (DD/MM/Year):	Current Date (DD/MM/Year):
Type:	Type:
Date when adoption request was received	Date when adoption abroad was recognized
Date when adoption was granted	Date when adoption was granted
Date when adoption came into effect	Date when adoption came into effect
Place of the adoption:	Place of the adoption:
Locality (city or town);	Locality (city or town);
State/Province	State/Province
Date of departure	Date of Arrival
Type of exit permit (if required):	Type of visa:
	Type or residence permit (if appropriate):

Characteristics of the persons involved in the event

	Persons relinquishing guardianship		Adopted Person	Persons adopting	
	Person 1	Person 2	Person 0	Person 3	Person 4
Sex					
DOB					
Country of habitual residence:					
Locality (city or town)					
State/Province					
Country of Citizenship					
Number of children before			Not applicable		
adoption comes into effect			Not applicable		
Of which, biological children			Not applicable		
Marital Status			Not applicable		
Relationship to adopted person			Not applicable		

Source: United Nations, 2009, p. 142

9.2 How Are Adoptions Quantified?

An important issue regarding adoption analyses is to have a shared language with shared agreement on how adoptions are documented for international and longitudinal comparisons. The frequency of adoptions, while intuitively appearing easy to understand, does not allow for comparisons among countries with vastly different population sizes and age structures. In chapters related to intercountry

adoptions (Chapters 8 and 9) I follow Selman's (2002, 2006) use of the adoption rate per 100,000 population of the sending and receiving country; the adoption rate per 100,000 aged 0–4, as 60 percent of those placed are between these ages; as well as the adoption ratio per 1,000 births. None of these options alone provide a satisfactory comparison. The adoption rate per 100,000 assumes that all in the population are at risk for adoption and, as is noted in Chapter 4, adoptions are not common in all ages. The United Nations (2009) posits that adoptions are primarily of young children up to age five and so uses as the denominator the population aged birth to age five to calculate an under-five adoption rate.

> The domestic under-five adoption rate is calculated by dividing the number of domestic adoptions of children under age five by the number of children under five. If data are not classified by age, it is assumed that 60 percent of adopted children were under age five at the time of adoption (United Nations, 2009, p. 120).

However, the age of children placed in adoption is in flux, so this assumption is also questionable as the age of adoptees is trending upward. Selman (2002, 2006) argues that the adoption ratio per 1,000 births is a better indicator in that the ages and other characteristics of those who give birth are similar to those who adopt. However, this leads to a comparison of infants to a broader age range of adoptees.

In earlier chapters I used four criteria: the number of adoptions, and the adoption rates per 100,000; the adoption rates per 100,000 aged zero to four; and the adoption ratio per 1,000 births. Possibly, until there is agreement, multiple variables should be used for international comparisons.

9.3 What Are the Future Adoption Trends in the U. S.?

Chapters 1, 2, and 4 address the transitioning of who adopts. In 2000 the U. S. census again included the category of adopted child as a household member so that for the first time since 1975 national data were available the number of adoptive children. Kreider (2003, p. 18) reports U. S. census data indicating that in 2000 two percent of U. S. households had an adopted child with an additional two percent having both an adopted and biological child. So it seems intuitive that adoptions will continue to increase.

The National Survey of Adoptive Parents (NSAP), presented in Chapters 1 and 3, sets the stage for future adoption trends. Tables 1.1 through 1.6, provide a summary of the status of adoptions. Private domestic adoptions no longer the norm in the United States. The survey noted there were almost even percentages of foster care and domestic private adoptions, 37 percent and 38 percent respectively with fewer intercountry adoptions, 24.3 percent.[1] Adoptions were racially and ethnically diverse: 15.28 percent were Hispanic, 37.25 percent, (in spite of the survey selecting

[1] The United Nations (2009, p. xvi) reports that globally 85 percent of adoptions are domestic, with only 15 percent intercountry; 57 of the 96 reporting countries reported that over half of the adoptions were domestic.

only English speakers), Non Hispanic White, 23.19 percent Non Hispanic Black, 15.37 Non Hispanic Asian and 8.91 percent Other. Household income levels of adopters covered a broad range. Ten percent of adopters had household incomes of under $19,999; 15.4 percent between $20,000 and $39,999; 21.6 percent had incomes from $40,000 to $59,999; and 53 percent $60,000 or above. This diversity in socioeconomic status is also evident in the education level attained with only 75 percent having above a high school education. Adoptions are not limited to married couples; 65 percent of the households had two adults and 76.8 percent of the adoptees were married.

9.3.1 Fostering as a Pathway to Adoption

Fostering is expected to continue as a direct pathway to adoption as foster parents were the most likely adopters with 55.45 percent of foster children being adopted by foster parents. The NSAP analysis in Table 1.3 reveals that motivations for adopting a foster child include: "thought it would be quicker", 26.8 percent; "less costly" 59 percent; wanted a "special needs" child 23.67 percent; and "were a prior foster child adopter" 22.78 percent. In Table 1.4, NSAP analysis addressing motivation by type reveals that 42.53 percent of Foster parents who adopted had biological children.

The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (2008) (AFCARS) data reported in Table 1.8 reveal that adopted foster children are, as a group, different from domestic private and intercountry adoptees. Foster children who are adopted are older: 44.9 percent under age five, 25.64 percent aged six to nine, 22.29 percent aged ten to fourteen, and 7.18 percent over age fifteen. Foster children typically have special needs which limit their adoptive placement. Table 1.8 reveals that only one percent of foster children adopted in 2004 did not fit into at least one special needs group. They are from both majority and minority races and ethnicities; 22 percent were part of a sibling group; and 26.47 percent had a medical, emotional, or physical condition requiring treatment. Foster children may be part of a sibling group needing a family willing to adopt siblings.

A related issue to foster adoption is presented in Chapter 5, Section 5.2.2, which explores gay male and lesbian adoptions. Congressman Pete Stark proposed a bill (Every Child Deserves a Family Act, H.R.3827, 2009) to promote eliminating barriers to the placement of children in gay male and lesbian adoptive (and foster) homes. He argued that the current barriers are moot as in 2009, 65,000 adopted and 14,000 foster children were placed in gay male and lesbian homes. Gates, Badgett, Macomber, and Chambers (2007) concur, using U. S. census and AFCARS data, that six percent (14,100) of foster children live with gay male and lesbian parents. Also, in 2009 two million gay male or lesbian parent households were interested in adopting or fostering and there were over 125,000 foster children waiting to be adopted.

9.3.2 Infertility and Adoption

Who adopts must be considered in conjunction with changes in fertility. Demographers (Morgan & Rindfuss, 1999; Morgan & Taylor, 2006) agree that

increases in the age of first birth decreased fertility. In the U. S. the age at first birth is increasing. (See Martin, Hamilton, & Sutton, 2010 for the U. S. national vital statistics final data for 2008 which is briefly summarized.) The mean age at first birth was 25.1 compared to the mean age at birth of 27.4. In 2008 the Total Fertility Rate was 2.084, below replacement rate. The overall birth rate fell by two percent with decreased rates for ages 15–39 years. However, the birth rate for women 40–44 years was the highest reported in more than 40 years and the rates for aged 45–50 and over 50 also increased, with 541 births to women over age 50 reported in 2008 (Martin et al., 2010, p. 9). This indicates that there are older women seeking to have children. Adoptions are also sought by older women seeking to have children. Note in Table 4.2 that for every additional year of age, other things being equal, the odds of having adopted a child are multiplied by 1.09, an increase in odds of nine percent.

The CDC reports that about two percent, or 1.2 million, of reproductive aged women have received infertility treatment and about seven percent of married couples report that they were not able to conceive in spite of one year of sexual intercourse with no contraception use (Centers for Disease Control, 2010, p. 3). Instead of relying primarily on adoption, today's infertile couples have multiple options due to additional medical advances not available in the past, including Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART). The number of infants born through ART in the past decade has significantly increased from 30,629 in 1999 to 61,426 in 2008 (Centers for Disease Control, 2010, p. 3). Attempting fertility treatment is also related to an increased likelihood of adoption. In Chapter 4, Table 4.3 shows that the odds of having adopted a child are 4.58 times (358 percent) higher for women who have ever received infertility services than for women who have never received infertility services. So if one considers that of the 1.2 million women who have ever received infertility treatment have an increased likelihood of adoption the numbers of adoptions will continue to increase.

9.3.3 Intercountry Adoptions

Children available for intercountry adoptions are affected by global supply and demand. As pointed out in earlier chapters (Chapters 6, 7, and 8) the flow of adoptees has followed waves driven by push factors from the sending country creating orphaned, abandoned or voluntarily placed children. Thus, sending countries are in continual transition. Chapter 7 describes waves of ICAs to the U. S. that ebb and flow with migratory push factors. For example the flow from China which began in the mid 1990s when China opened to Western trade decreased from a peak of 7,939 adoptions in 2005 to 2,990 in 2009 as the economy in China improved (see Chapter 7). A future trend that appears to be on the cusp is a wave from Africa. Prior to 1995 there were few children adopted from Africa. In 1996 there were 89 ICAs from Africa to the U. S. This has increased to 2,722 ICAs in 2009 with the majority coming from Ethiopia (2,221 in 2009). Globally, African adoptions increased to over ten thousand from 2005 to 2009. This increase does not begin to meet the need. The United Nations report the AIDS epidemic in Africa has led to "an estimated 7.7 million orphans. . . At a global level, the number of adoptions would have

to increase by a factor of 60 to provide families to all AIDS orphans (United Nations, 2009, p. xix)".

The United Nations (2009, p. 18) reports that availability of children for intercountry adoptions may be limited by restrictions set by sending countries. The Republic of Korea set the goal of reducing intercountry adoptions following the negative reporting during the 1988 Seoul Olympics (see Section 6.3.2 for additional information). In 2004 Romania ceased intercountry adoptions by non-relatives (see Section 6.5.3.1 for additional information). Benin, Poland, Viet Nam, and Uruguay will only allow intercountry adoptions as a last resort (United Nations, 2009, p. 18).

Pull factors of the receiving country, especially a strong economy, appear to influence adoption trends. In the U. S., the top recipient of ICAs, there has been a decrease in intercountry adoptions. There has been a total of 421.085 ICAs to the U. S. since 1971. Since 2000 ICAs have averaged 20,000 per year. The peak years of ICAs were 2004 with 22,911 ICAs and 2005 with 22,710 ICAs. Since then the numbers of ICAs has been decreasing to a low of 12,782 in 2009.

Further investigation is necessary to explore the reasons for this decrease. Two possible domestic determinants are events that occurred simultaneously with the decrease in adoptions: the economic recession in the U. S. and the U. S. entry into The Hague Convention which requires meeting global standards protecting the rights of the adoptee. Additionally, future research in the social demography of adoptions is needed to investigate the population at risk for being adopted and the pool of adopters willing and able to expand their families to provide care for the orphaned, abandoned or otherwise dependent children.

The title of this book questions whether the primary purpose of adoptions is to provide children for families or to provide families for children. Throughout the book I have argued for both functions with the underlying assumption that adoptions should function in "the best interest of the child". Thus the final aim of further adoption research is to facilitate the ethical care for dependent children as recommended in the Holt International Adoption Agency's "The Ethics in International Adoption Statement. . . An unfaltering commitment of adoption should be that it is intended as a means to provide families for children, rather than children for families (Cox, n.d.)".

References

Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System. (2008). *The AFCARS report preliminary FY 2005 estimates as of September 2006*. Retrieved January 25, 2008, from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report13.htm

Adoption History Project. (2008). Retrieved January 8, 2008, from http://www.uoregon.edu/~adoption/topics/adoptionhistbrief.htm

Bramlett, M. D., Foster, E. B., Frasier, A. M., et al. (2010). Design and operation of the national adoptive parents. National center for health statistics. *Vital Health Statistics*, *1*(50). Retrieved August 31, 2010, from http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_01/sr01_050.pdf

Centers for Disease Control (American Society for Reproductive Medicine, Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology). (2010). *2008 Assisted reproductive technology success rates:*

National summary and fertility clinic reports. Atlanta: U.S. Department of health and human services. Retrieved December 30, 2010, from http://www.cdc.gov/ART/ART2008/PDF/ART_2008_Full.pdf?source=govdelivery

Cox, S. -K. (n.d.). *Ethics in international adoption*. Retrieved January 8, 2011, from http://www.holtinternational.org/ethics.shtml

Every Child Deserves a Family Act (Introduced in House) HR 3827 IH; 111th CONGRESS. (2009). Retrieved October 31, 2009, from http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c111:H.R.3827

Flango, V. E. (2008). Extending court case management systems: The need for data exchange. United family court connection. Spring : 1–6.

Gates, G., Badgett, L. M. V., Macomber, J. E., & Chambers, K. (2007). *Adoption and foster care by lesbian and gay parents in the United States*. -1-37. Retrieved May 30, 2009, from http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=411437

Groves, R. M., Mosher, W. D., Lepkowski, J., & Kirgis, N. G. (2009). Planning and development of the continuous national survey of family growth. National center for health statistics. *Vital Health Statistics*, *1*(48).

Kreider, R. M. (2003). *Adopted children and stepchildren: 2000 United States census*. Retrieved August 30, 2007, from http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/censr-6.pdf

Martin, J. A., Hamilton, B. E., Sutton, P. D., et al. (2010). *Births: Final data for 2008*. National vital statistics reports; Vol 59, No 1. Hyattsville, MD: National center for health statistics. Retrieved December 30, 2010, from http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr59/nvsr59_01.pdf

Morgan, S. P., & Rindfuss, R. R. (1999). Reexamining the link of early childbearing to marriage and to subsequent fertility. *Demography*, *36*, 59–75.

Morgan, S. P., & Taylor, M. G. (2006). Low fertility at the turn of the twenty-first century. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *32*, 375–399.

Selman, P. (2002). Intercountry adoption in the new millennium: The 'quiet migration' revisited. *Population Research and Policy Review*, *21*, 205–225.

Selman, P. (2006). Trends in intercountry adoption: Analysis of data from 20 receiving countries, 1998–2004. *Journal of Population Research*, *23*(2), 183–204.

The Adoption History Project. (2008a). *Adoption history in brief*. Retrieved January 8, 2008, from http://www.uoregon.edu/~adoption/topics/adoptionhistbrief.htm

United Nations. (2009). *Child adoptions: Trends and policies*. *Sales No. E.10.XIII.4*. Retrieved December 14, 2010, from http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/adoption2010/child_adoption.pdf

United States Census Bureau. (2003). *Census of population and housing, public use microdata sample, United States: Technical documentation, 2003*. Retrieved June 10, 2009, from http://usa.ipums.org/usa/codebooks/2000_PUMS_codebook.pdf