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## **Nationally Representative Data on Openness in Adoption: Findings from the 2007 National Survey of Adoptive Parents**

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# Nationally Representative Data on Openness in Adoption: Findings from the 2007 National Survey of Adoptive Parents

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Contact Between Adoptive and Birth Families: What Works?  
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# Overview

- Background and aims of present analysis
- Data: NSAP
- Descriptive findings about openness among adopted children
- Characteristics independently associated with openness
- Differences in well-being indicators for children with open and closed adoptions
- Secondary data sources on adoption

# Background

- Openness (post-adoption birth-family contact) in adoptions is an increasing trend, with potential benefits for all triad members  
(Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013: [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_openadopt.pdf](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_openadopt.pdf))
- Post-adoption contact agreements (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2005 & 2012: [https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/cooperative.pdf](https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/cooperative.pdf))
  - Usually specify mode and minimum frequency of contact; may be written and/or verbal; can occur in any type of adoption (private/public); usually established prior to finalization
  - Birth parents may be more amenable to adoptive parents who will agree to openness
  - 22 as of 2005, ~26 states as of 2011 have legally enforceable agreements

## Background

- Adoption mediation: Adoptions in which an agreement for post-adoption contact is established through mediation (e.g., Etter, 1993)
  - In foster care adoptions, birth parents may be motivated to agree to relinquish their rights following mediation rather than face a termination of parental rights trial
  - (Note: The term “mediated adoption” is sometimes used to refer to “semi-open” adoption in which families do not have direct contact)
- Do power imbalances in the adoption triad, and the process for adoption mediation, affect the level of contact to which all parties will agree? And in turn, how are contact agreements and the opportunity for mediated adoption related to actual contact post-adoption?

# Prior analyses of open adoption using NSAP by Faulkner & Madden (2012)

- Examined domestic open adoption, focusing on comparisons of children adopted privately by non-kin vs. through foster care.
- Post-adoption birth-family contact more likely if:
  - Child was adopted privately
  - A post-adoption contact agreement was in place
  - Child had ever lived with birth family
- Factors not associated with openness:
  - Transracial adoption, child age at adoption, child gender, child's age at time of survey, parents' perceptions of child's maltreatment history

# Aims of the present study

- Expand on Faulkner & Madden's work by presenting descriptive portrait of openness among all children adopted by non-kin
- Examine factors independently associated with post-adoption contact, including potential correlates not examined previously
  - How are post-adoption contact agreements and options for adoption mediation associated with contact, net of parents' desires for a closed adoption?
  - While age at finalization may not be associated with contact, is age at initial placement?
- Take an initial look at association of well-being with openness

# The National Survey of Adoptive Parents (NSAP)

- Module of the State and Local Area Integrated Telephone Survey (SLAITS)
- Conducted in 2007-2008 by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS)
- Jointly funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and the Administration for Children & Families
- Respondents were adoptive parents of children identified as adopted in the 2007 NSCH
- Parents of 2,089 adopted focal children were interviewed
- 30-minute phone interview
- NSAP represents 1.8 million adopted U.S. children under age 18 in English-speaking households in 2007



## Types of adoption in NSAP

- NSAP includes children adopted in 3 ways:
  1. Foster care
  2. Private domestic
  3. International
- Relatives caring for children without a parent present in the NSCH were asked whether they had legally adopted the child in their care. Those children are included if they had been legally adopted.
- Step-parent adoptions (in which one parent in the household is a biological parent) are NOT included

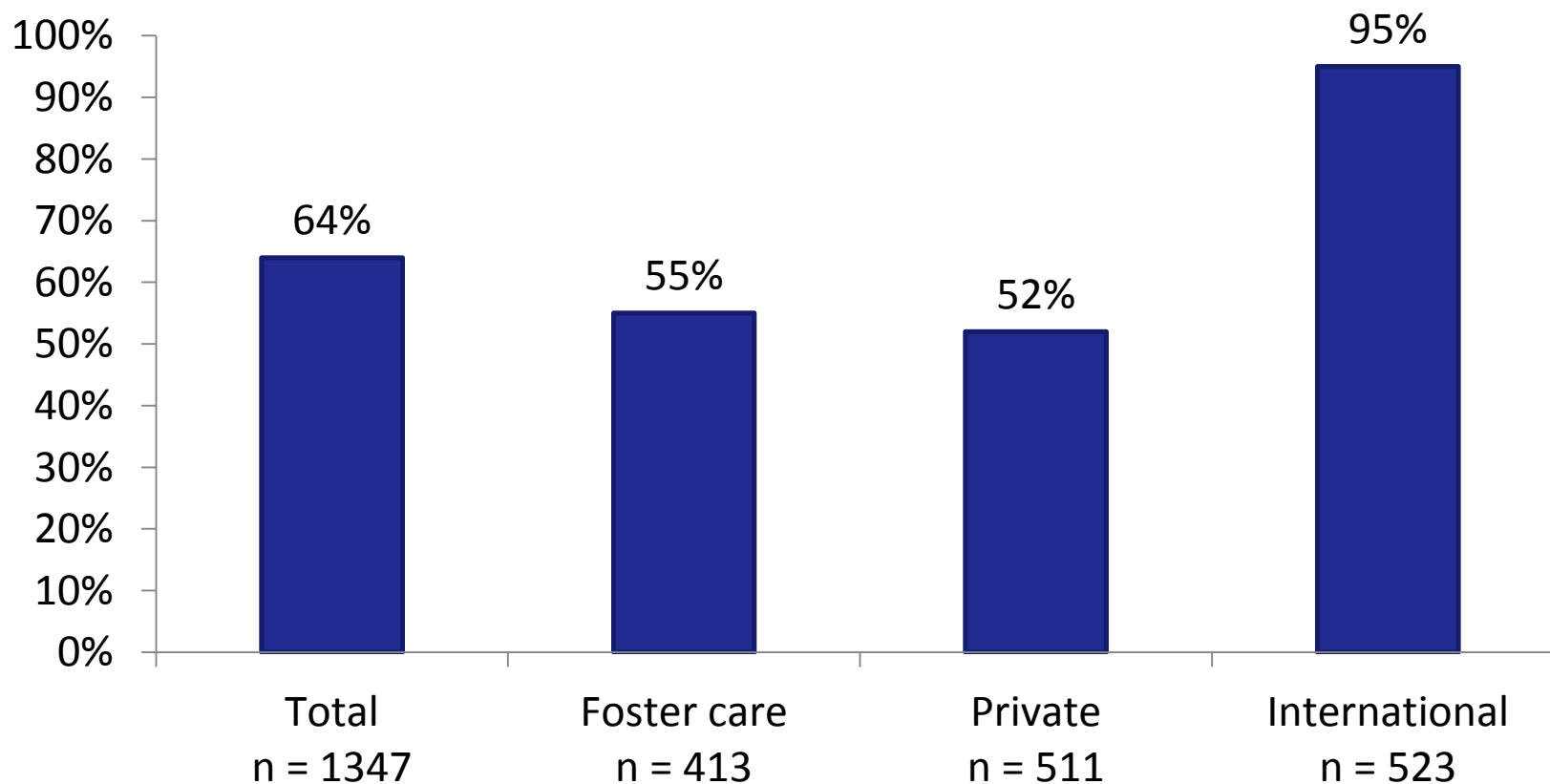
## Questions on openness asked of parents of children adopted by non-kin

- Identifying children adopted by non-kin:
  - “Before you [and your spouse/partner] adopted [S.C.], were you ... already related to him/her? For example, were you ... [S.C.]’s grandparent, aunt/uncle, or other relative?”
  - Did you [and your spouse/partner] know [S.C.] before [you considered adopting [him/her]/being matched with [him/her] for adoption]?
- Identifying open adoptions:
  - “Since the time of [S.C.]’s adoption, have you [or your spouse/partner], or SC ever had contact with his/her birth family members?” *includes letters, emails, phone calls, in-person*

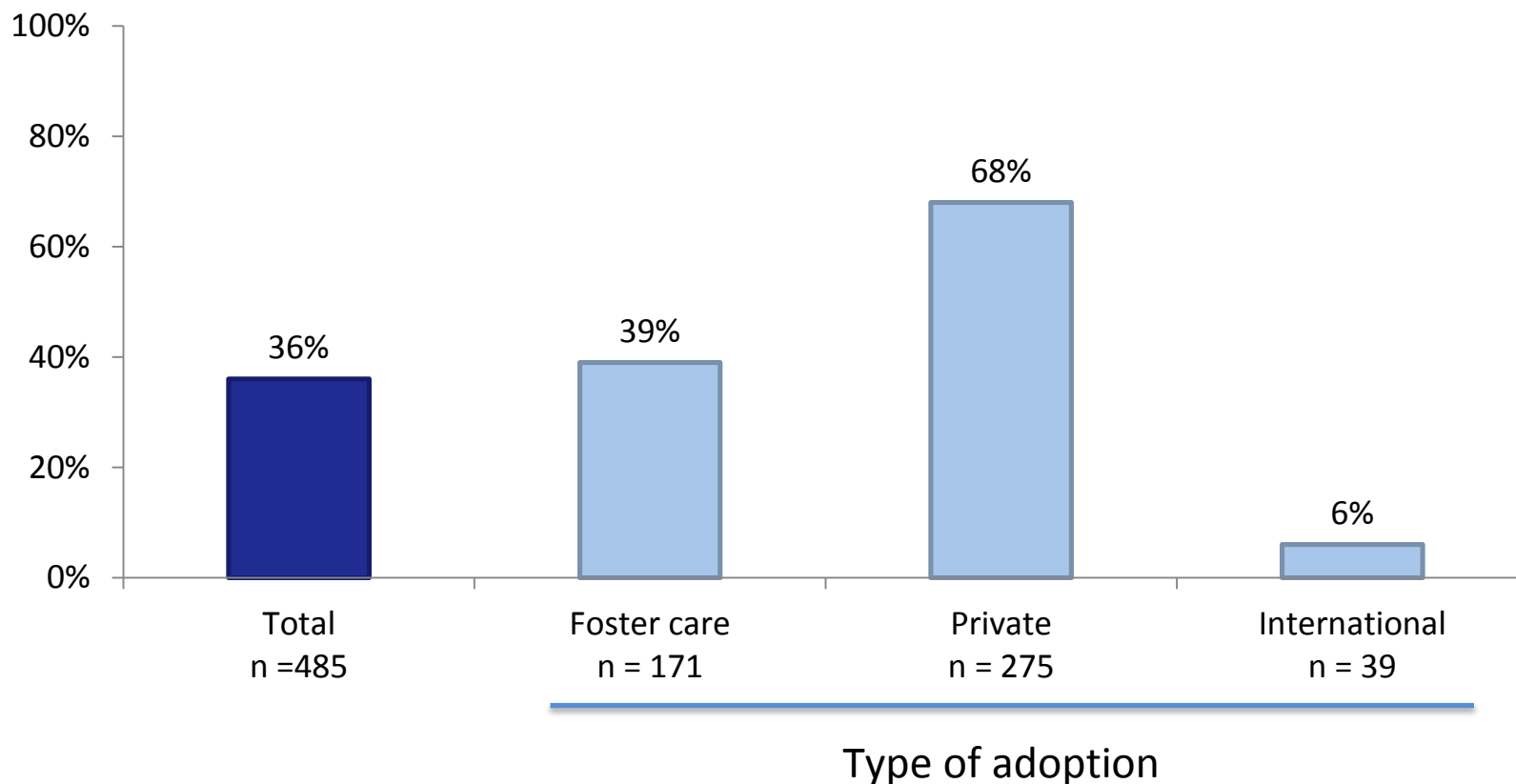
## NSAP questions on openness

- Question for all non-kin adoptions:
  - Post-adoption openness agreement: “Was there any kind of pre-adoption agreement in which you agreed to provide information about [S.C.] to one or both of his/her birth parents or other birth family members?”
  - Option for adoption mediation: “At the time of the adoption, did the adoption agency or attorney offer any options for an open adoption?”
- Questions for all non-kin open adoptions:
  - Frequency of post-adoption contact
  - Who had the contact (parent and/or child)
  - Whether contact was with birth parents, birth siblings, and/or other relatives
  - Parents’ comfort with the contact

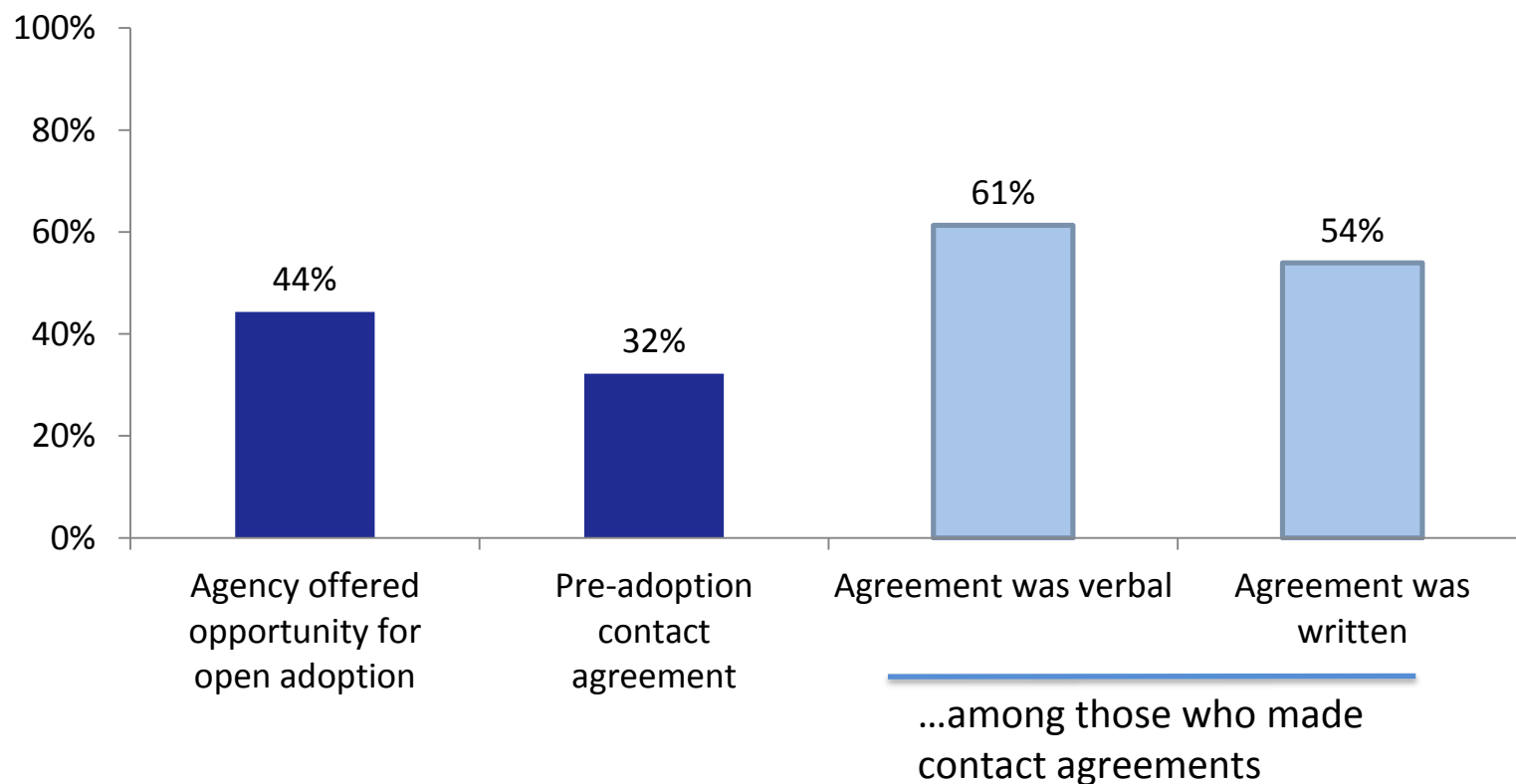
## Percentage of adopted children adopted by non-kin, by adoption type



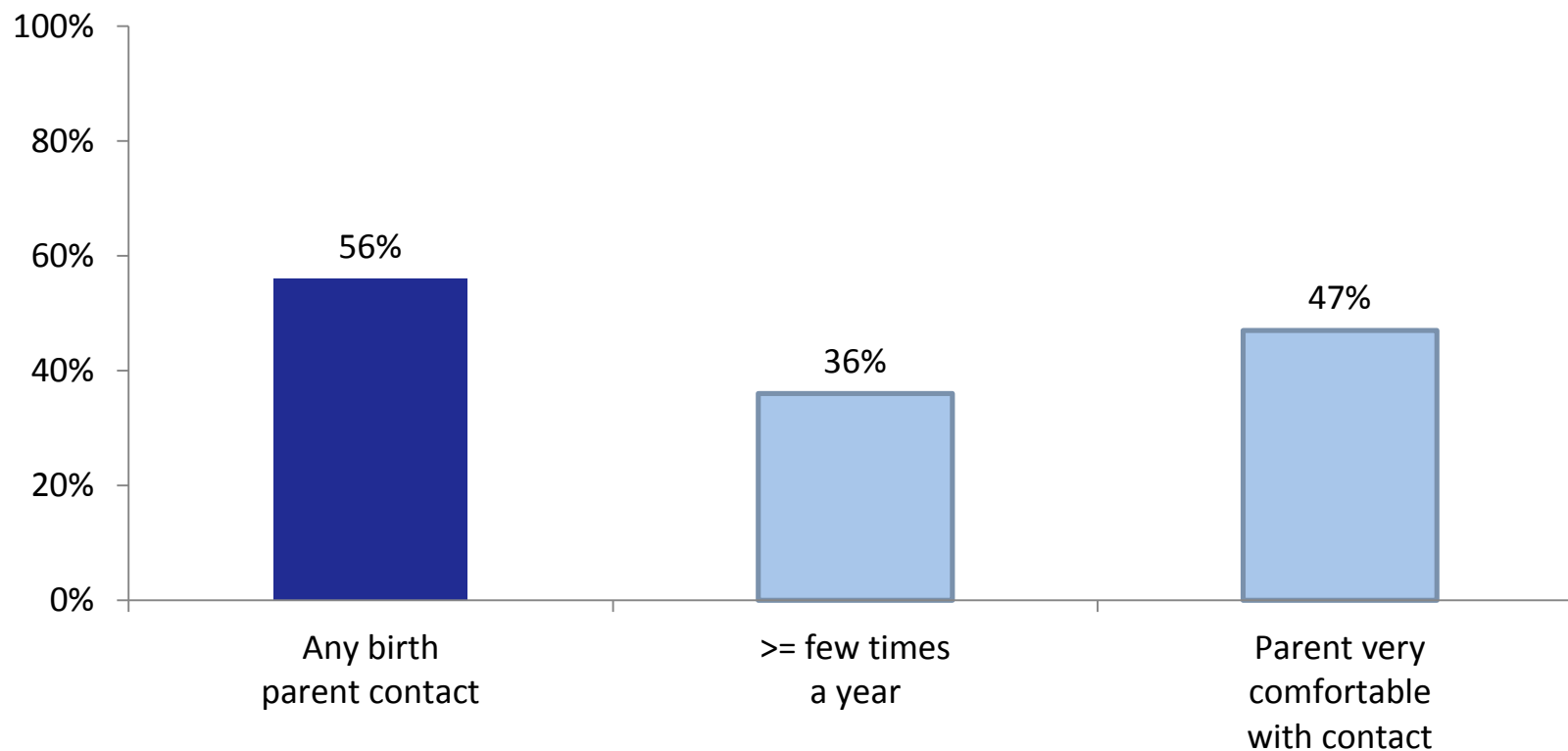
## Among children adopted by non-kin: Percentage with open adoptions, by adoption type



## Opportunity for open adoption and existence of contact agreements among children adopted by non-kin

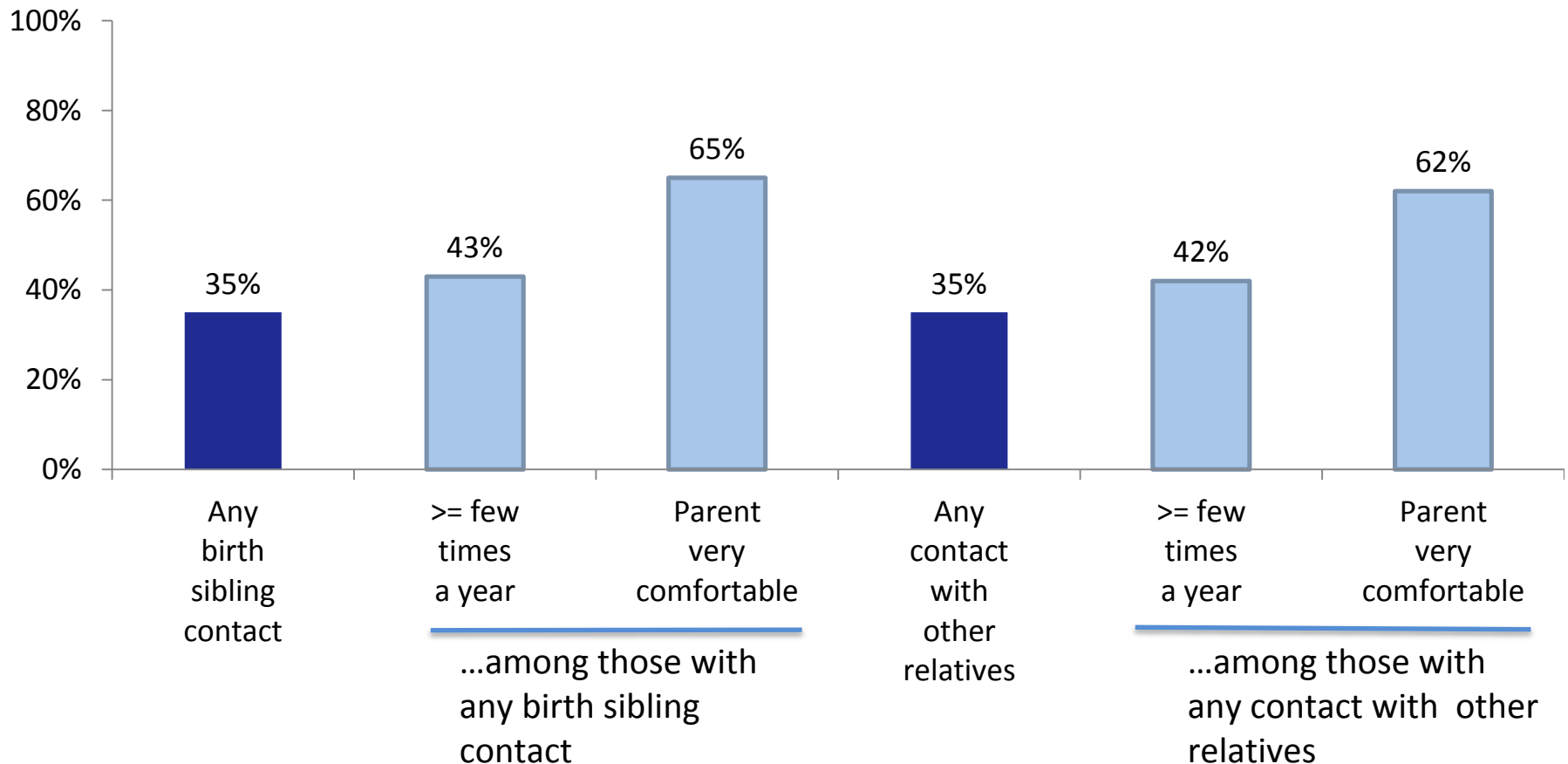


## Child-birth parent contact, among children in open adoptions



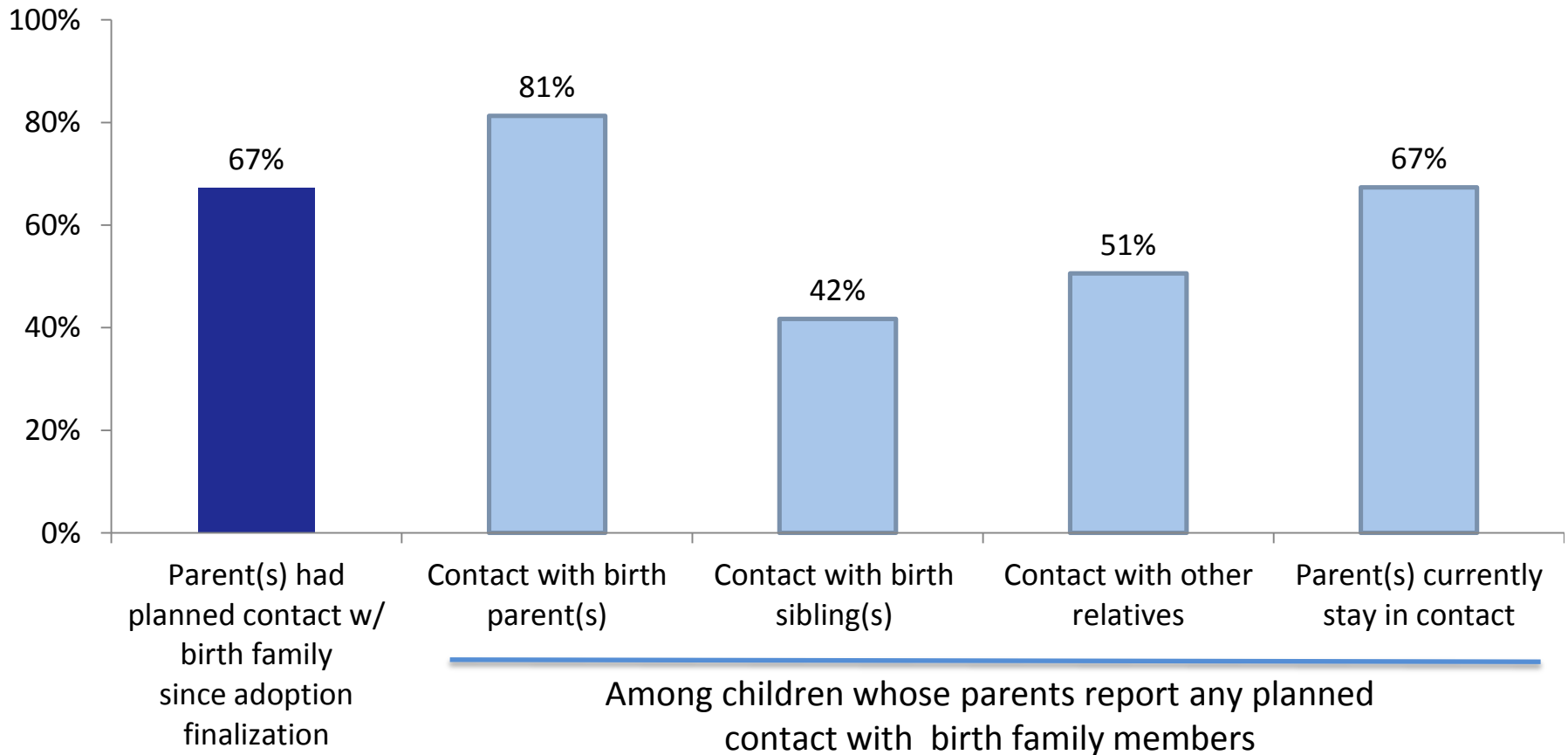
...among those with any birth parent contact

# Child-birth sibling and child-other relative contact, among children in open adoptions





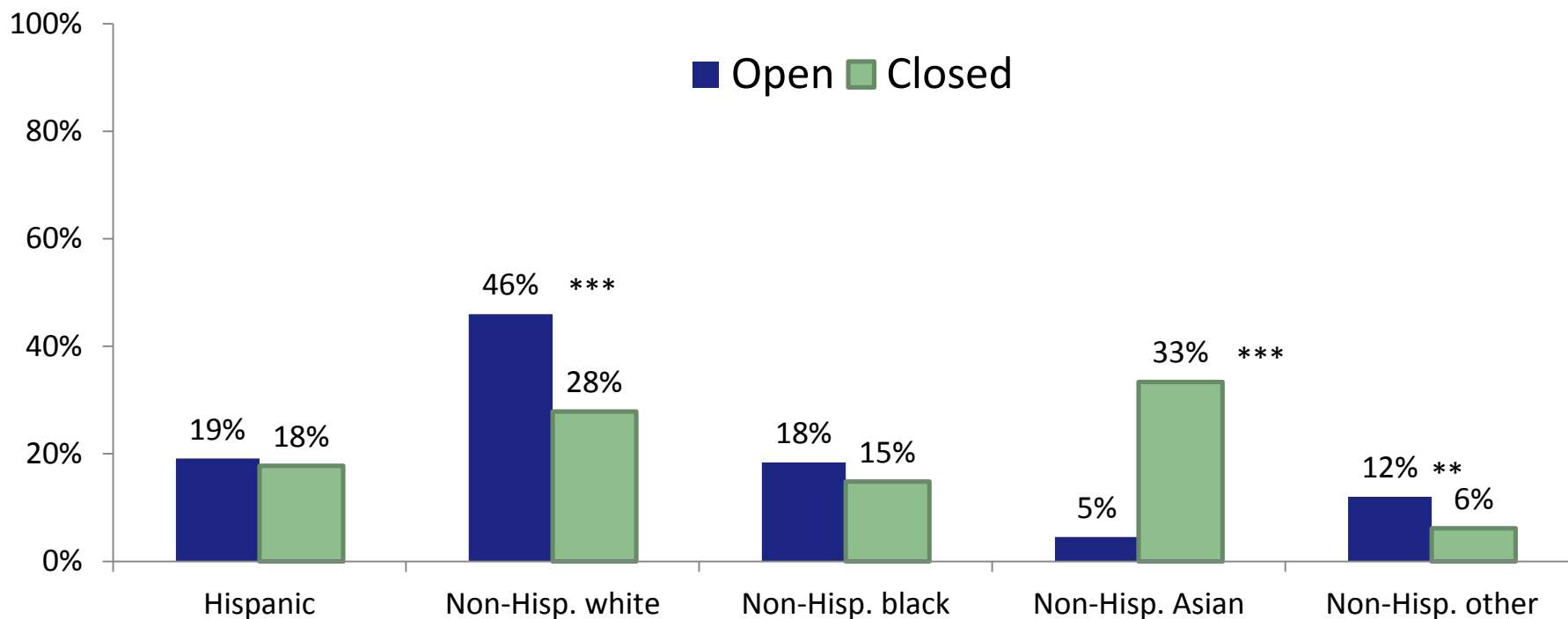
# Parent-birth family contact, among children in open adoptions



## Similar %'s of children in open and closed adoptions...

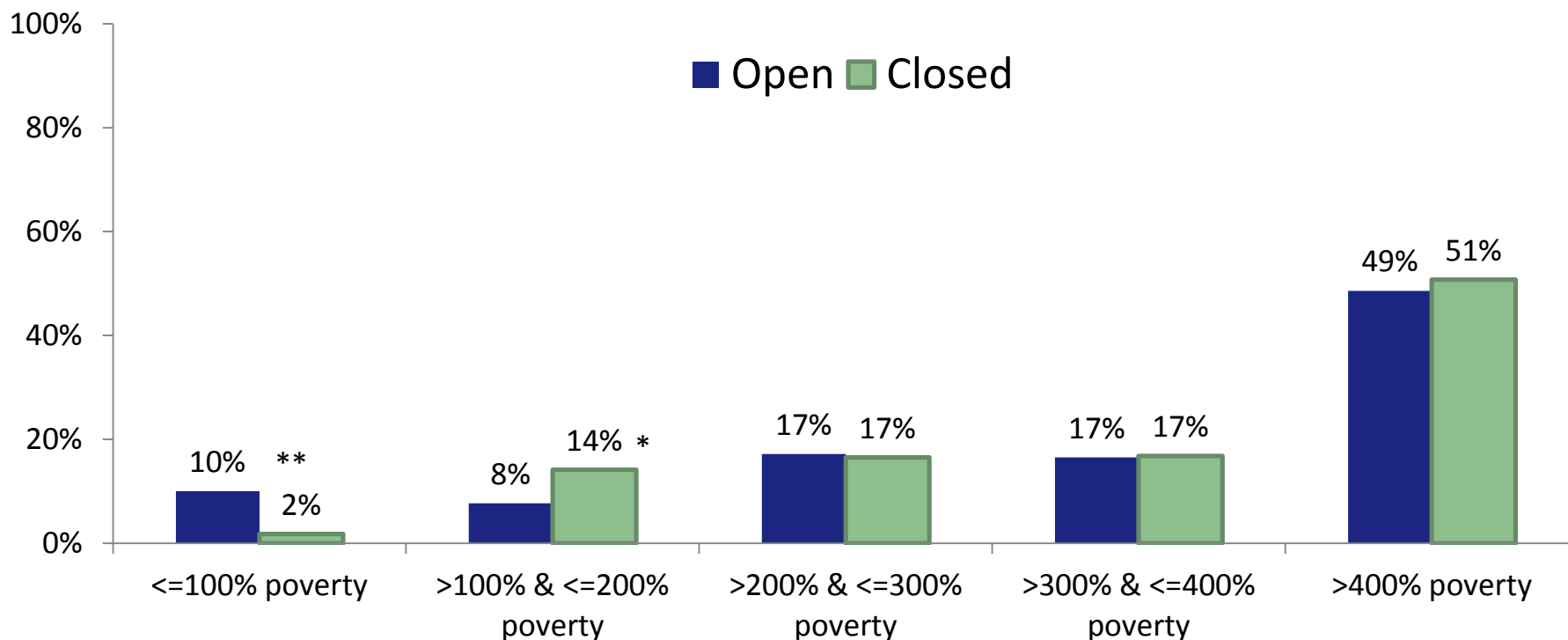
- Have a parent who was satisfied/very satisfied with the adoption agency or attorney (83%)
- Ever lived with their birth family (26%)
- Have known birth siblings living elsewhere (62%)
- Have a parent motivated to adopt due to infertility (74%)
- Are male (47%)
- Have special health care needs (37%)
- Have a parent who believes the child has a history of physical abuse (20%), neglect (33%), and sexual abuse (10%)
- They are also similar in terms of age at the time of the survey and the length of time since the adoption finalization

## Children in open adoptions more likely to be white, less likely to be Asian than those with closed adoptions



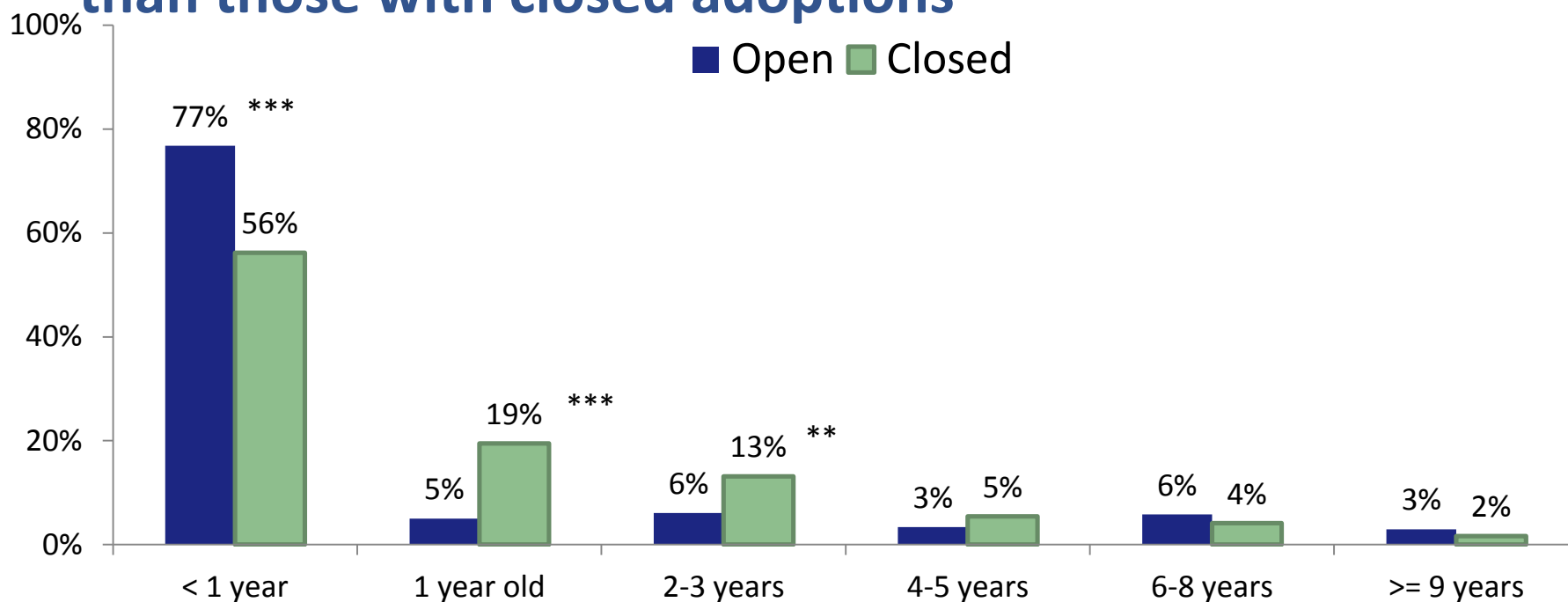
\* Percentages are statistically significantly different for children with open versus closed adoptions (\*:  $p < .10$ , \*\*:  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*:  $p < .01$ )

# Children in open adoptions more likely to live in poor households than those with closed adoptions



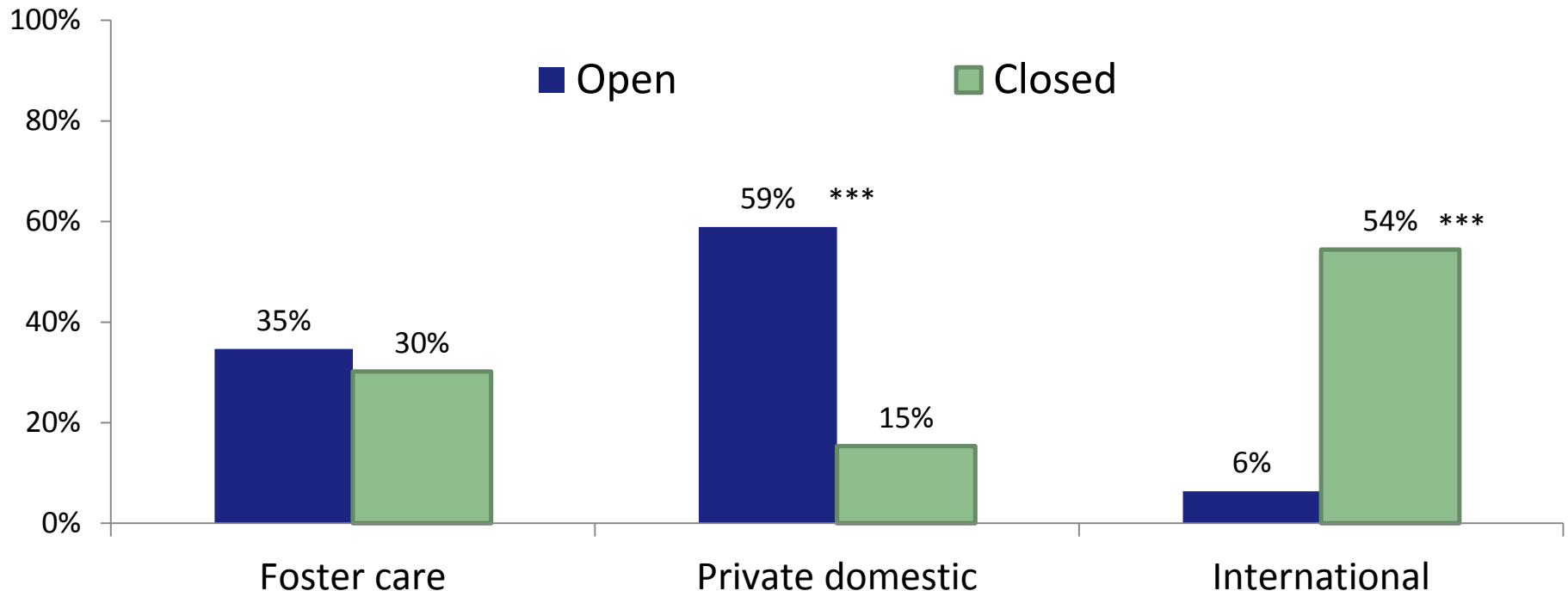
\* Percentages are statistically significantly different for children with open versus closed adoptions (\*: p<.10, \*\*: p< .05, \*\*\*: p< .01)

# Children in open adoptions more likely to have begun living with their families as infants, less likely as toddlers than those with closed adoptions



\* Percentages are statistically significantly different for children with open versus closed adoptions (\*:  $p < .10$ , \*\*:  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*:  $p < .01$ )

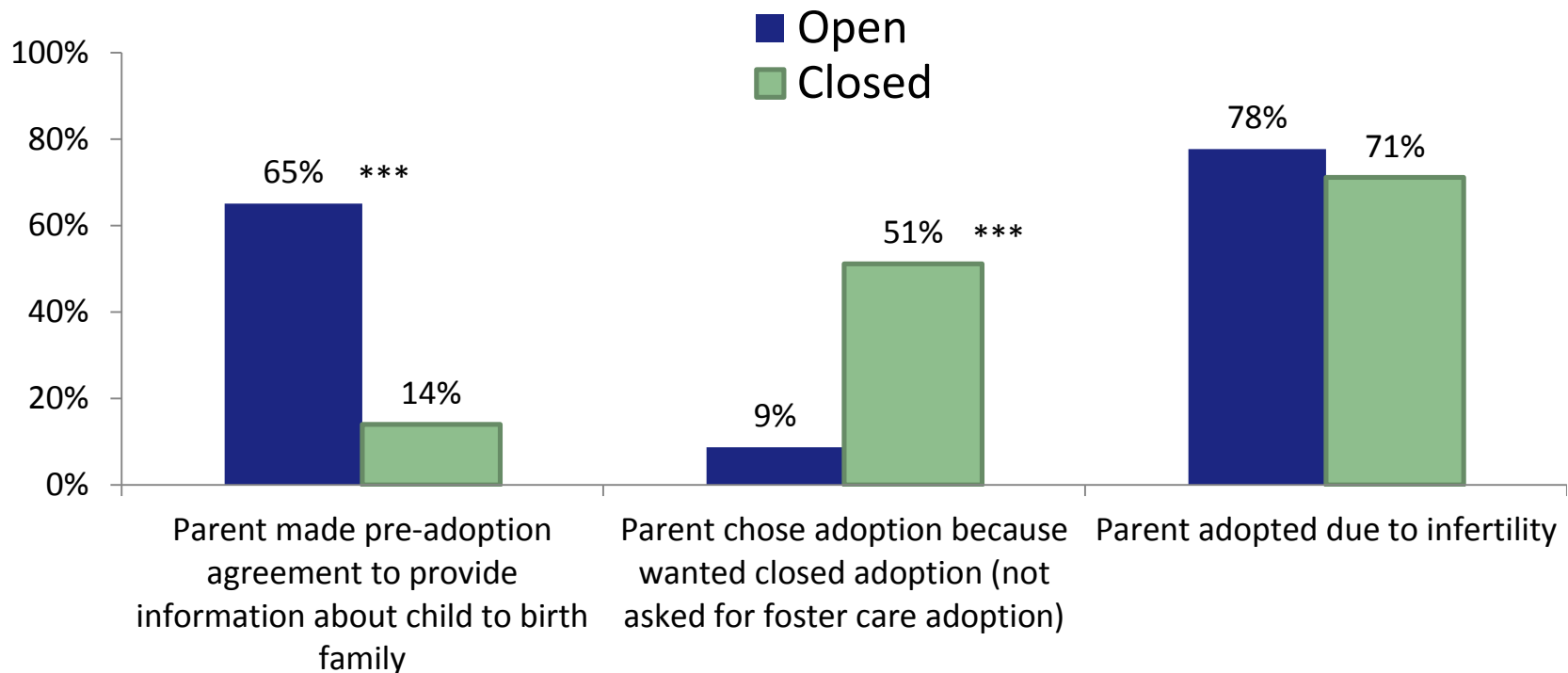
# Children in open adoptions more likely to have adopted privately in U.S., less likely internationally, than those with closed adoptions



\* Percentages are statistically significantly different for children with open versus closed adoptions

(\*:  $p < .10$ , \*\*:  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*:  $p < .01$ )

# Children in open adoptions more likely to have contact agreement, less likely to have parent who wanted closed adoption than those with closed adoptions



\* Percentages are statistically significantly different for children with open versus closed adoptions (\*:  $p < .10$ , \*\*:  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*:  $p < .01$ )

# Factors associated with openness: Odds ratios

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<b>Adoption type chosen/desire for closed adoption (<i>foster care</i>)</b>				
International, b/c wanted closed adoption	0.1 ***	--	0.1 **	--
Private U.S., b/c wanted closed adoption	1.4	--	1.5	--
International, <u>not</u> b/c wanted closed adoption	0.3 *	--	0.3 *	--
Private U.S., but <u>not</u> b/c wanted closed adoption (Foster care)	7.6 ***	--	10.1 ***	--
<b>Type of adoption (<i>foster care</i>)</b>				
International	--	0.2 **	--	0.2 **
Private domestic	--	5.3 ***	--	6.6 ***
<b>Child age when first joined family (<i>infant</i>)</b>				
Age 1-3	0.8	0.8	0.9	1.0
Over age 3	2.7	3.5 *	3.0	4.1 *
Agency/attorney offered opportunity for open adoption	2.4 **	3.2 ***	2.7 **	3.6 ***
<b>Post-adoption contact agreement (<i>no agreement</i>)</b>				
Any agreement, whether written or verbal	4.7 ***	5.4 ***	--	--
Written agreement (may also be verbal)	--	--	2.6 **	3.1 ***
Verbal agreement only	--	--	11.7 ***	13.4 ***
Child ever lived with birth parent(s)	3.7 ***	3.1 ***	4.2 ***	3.4 ***

\*: p<.10 (\*), p<.05 (\*\*), p<.01 (\*\*\*)



## Factors not significantly independently associated with likelihood of openness

- Child race and Hispanic origin
- Adoption was transracial/trans-cultural/trans-ethnic
- Parents were motivated to adopt due to infertility
- Family's income-to-poverty ratio
- Parent's experience with agency/attorney was positive
- Parent's believe that child had history of physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse

# Comparison with Faulkner and Madden's findings

- Consistent:
  - Openness more likely among children adopted privately in the U.S. than from foster care BUT (new finding) only if the parents did NOT report choosing private U.S. adoption because they wanted a closed adoption
  - Child ever lived with birth family → more openness
  - Pre-adoption contact agreement → more openness BUT (new finding) having verbal agreement only → greater likelihood of openness than if no agreement or if written agreement
- New (not necessarily inconsistent):
  - Children who began living with adoptive families over age 3 → more openness (marginally significant); prior study found no association with child age (at adoption, at data collection)
  - Agency/attorney offered option for open adoption → more openness

## **% of children faring well on child & family well-being measures similar for those with open & closed adoptions**

- Parent's relationship with child is very warm and close (82%)
- Parent usually/always could not understand child in past month (9%)
- Parent usually/always trusted child in past month (82%)
- Parent-child relationship has been more difficult than ever expected (16%)
- Child feels positive/mostly positive about adoption (91%)
- Parent would definitely make the same decision to adopt (86%)
- Child has ever been diagnosed with attachment disorder (10%)
- Child has ever been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (4%)
- Excellent/very good reading/language arts performance (65%)
- Excellent/very good math performance (59%)

## Implications/unanswered questions

- If openness is desirable, perhaps it could be promoted through post-adoption contact agreements, through options for mediated adoptions.
- Is a verbal post-adoption contact agreement a proxy for the adoptive and birth families having established a relationship prior to the adoption? If so, perhaps agencies/attorneys could support openness by facilitating direct adoptive parent/birth parent communication prior to the adoption.
- How does the legal enforceability of post-adoption contact agreements affect openness?
- Causal link between openness and child well-being is not clear; could be confounded by factors associated with likelihood of openness.

## Limitations

- Cross-sectional study limits strengths of inferences
  - Also, the longer ago the adoption was finalized, the younger the children are who are included in the sample; limits the analyses of how age at adoption and tenure of adoption are associated with openness
- Definitions of contact agreement, and adoption mediation not ideal
- Info on openness not available for children adopted by kin
- Not known whether post-adoption contact agreements were legally enforceable (could be examined with restricted data)
- No information on mode/frequency of post-adoption contact
- Data based only on parent reports
- Limited child well-being measures
- Potential researcher biases?

## **Additional Secondary Data Sources on Adoption**



## Surveys using the State and Local Area Integrated Telephone Survey (SLAITS)



- National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH)
  - Cross-sectional sample of ~90,000, nationally representative of children ages 0-17
  - Data collected in 2003, 2007, 2011/12
  - 2007 survey includes 2,737 adopted children
  - Content: Demographics, child well-being (focus on health), family processes, parent health, neighborhood context, medical homes, health insurance, access to needed services
  - Respondent is parent or guardian
  - Adoption identifiers available on restricted file

## Surveys using the State and Local Area Integrated Telephone Survey (SLAITS)



- National Survey of Adoptive Parents (NSAP)
  - Follow-up survey administered to parents of children who were identified as adopted in the 2007 NSCH
  - Cross-sectional sample of 2,089, nationally representative of adopted children ages 0-17 in 2007
  - Respondent is parent or guardian
  - Content: Demographic characteristics, pre-adoption experiences, and post-adoption support experiences
  - With restricted access, records can be linked across the NSCH and NSAP



## Surveys using the State and Local Area Integrated Telephone Survey (SLAITS)



- National Survey of Children with Special Health Care Needs (NSCSHCN)
  - Similar to NSCH, but focuses on children with special health care needs (CSHCN)
  - Cross-sectional sample of ~40,000, nationally representative of CSHCN ages 0-17
  - Data collected in 2001, 2005-6, 2009-10
  - 2005-6 survey includes 1,898 adopted children
  - Content: Similar to NSCH, also functional difficulties, transition services, shared decision-making, and satisfaction with care
  - Respondent is parent or guardian
  - Adoption identifiers available on restricted file

## Surveys using the State and Local Area Integrated Telephone Survey (SLAITS)



- National Survey of Adoptive Parents of Children with Special Health Care Needs (NSAP-SN)
  - Follow-up survey administered to parents of children who were identified as adopted in the 2005-6 NSCSHCN
  - Cross-sectional sample of 1,003, nationally representative of adopted CSHCN ages 0-15 as of 2005-06
  - Data collected in 2008
  - Content: Similar to NSAP
  - Respondent is parent or guardian
  - With restricted access, records can be linked across the NSCSHCN and NSAP-SN



## National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect

- Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System (AFCARS)
  - Child-level data extracted from statewide automated child welfare information systems (SACWIS)
  - Cross-sectional, annual data files 1995-2011 (with data prior to 2000 less reliable)
  - Separate foster care and adoption files; includes children with public child welfare agency involvement
  - Content: Disabilities, basic demographics on child & adoptive parents, state identifiers, pre-adoptive child-parent relationship, subsidy-receipt, TPR & adoption dates
  - Foster care file includes whether child exited due to adoption



# National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect

- National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-being (NSCAW I)
  - CPS sample: 5,501 children ages 0-14, who had an investigation closed between Oct. 1999-Dec. 2000
  - One-year in foster care sample: 727 children, who were in out-of-home care for ~12 months
  - Follow-up interviews after 12, 18, & 36 months & 5-6 years
- Second National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW II)
  - 5,873 children ages 0-17.5, who had an investigation closed between Feb. 2008 – Apr. 2009
  - 18-month follow-up
- Both studies: Multiple informants

# National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health)



- Carried out in response to Congressional mandate
- Nationally representative sample of ~ 20,000 U.S. adolescents in grades 7-12 in 1994-95, with supplemental sample of adopted youth
- Respondents: Youth (and other sources)
- Longitudinal, 4 waves of data collection (most recent in 2008)
- Topics: Causes of adolescent health and health behavior with emphasis on the effects of multiple contexts of adolescent life
- 609 adopted youth. See: Miller et al. (2001.) Who is adopted? Measuring adoption status using national survey data. *Adoption Quarterly*, 5(1) 23-43.
- See: Mullan Harris. (2011.) Design Features of Add Health. <http://www.cpc.unc.edu/projects/addhealth/data/guides/design%20paper%20WI-IV.pdf>

# Early Growth and Development Study

- 561 triads of birth parents, adoptive parents, and adopted children; toddler and prenatal cohort.
- 4 recruitment sites recruited agencies nationwide.
- Longitudinal; data collected every 9 months through age 3, then annually through age 9. Launched in 2002.
- Carried out by: Oregon Social Learning Center, Penn State University, Yale University, University of New Orleans, University of California Riverside, University of Pittsburgh; funding from multiple sources.
- Content: child temperament and well-being; birth and adoptive parent personality, well-being, competence, stress, context, substance use, parenting, and marital relations; pre-natal drugs use and maternal stress. DNA and salivary cortisol samples.
- Not yet publicly available.
- See: Leve, Neiderhauser, Shaw, Ganiban, Natsuaki, & Reiss. (2012.) The Early Growth and Development Study: A prospective adoption study from birth through middle childhood. *Twin Research & Human Genetics*, 16(1): 412-423.

# National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97)

- Carried out by Bureau of Labor Statistics
- Nationally representative sample ~9000 youth age 12-16 as of end of 1996
- Respondent: Youth and (in round 1) parent
- Longitudinal, youths interviewed annually
- Content: topics related to employment and education; also Youths' relationships with parents, contact with absent parents, marital and fertility histories (incl. whether have adopted children), dating, sexual activity, onset of puberty, training, participation in government assistance programs, expectations, time use, criminal behavior, and alcohol and drug use.
- 182 legally adopted youth (according to parent respondent)
  - Whether youth has adoptive parent(s)
  - Whether youth was legally adopted, year adoption occurred
  - Whether youth ever live with biological parent

## Other possible data sources

- Consortium for Longitudinal Studies of Child Maltreatment (LONGSCAN): see <http://www.iprc.unc.edu/longscan/> & NDACAN
- International Adoption Project: see <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ICD/research/IAP/>
- Feigelman, W., Bachrach, C., Chandra, A., & Wilson, J. (1998). Using archival datasets to study adoption-related questions. *Adoption Quarterly*, 2(2): 79-88.
  - National Survey of Family Growth
  - National Health Interview Survey – Child Health and Adoption Supplements
  - National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979
  - National Survey of Families and Households
- Others?



# Questions

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