

Chapter 1 : Introduction

Kinship and Adoptive Families

Kinship caregivers include relatives or close friends that become responsible for a child in their extended family or social network and, collectively, they account for the care of more than 2.5 million children in the United States. The circumstances leading to the caregiving arrangement can vary significantly but often follow a family crisis, during which there may be little to no preparation prior to bringing the child into the new home. The majority of these placements are “informal” meaning that the arrangement was made voluntarily, with or without the involvement of child welfare services. In addition, over 1.5 million children in the U.S. are living in adoptive families, and these two populations overlap. Of U.S. children adopted in FY 2018, 36% were adopted by relatives, while another 52% were adopted by foster parents, some of whom were likely relative or non-relative kin ⁵ . Historically, kinship care has been especially prevalent among communities of color affected by colonization, slavery, and mass incarceration ⁶ . Currently, in the U.S., Black and Latino, refugee, immigrant, and non-English-speaking families are overrepresented in kinship care ⁷ . While these placements reflect the strength of family ties and the resilience of these communities, they also point to the intersectionality of challenges ⁸ . For instance, the poverty rates for kinship families are double the U.S. average, underscoring their need for support services, such as financial and social services. Moreover, the child’s transition into the new home often puts added pressure on limited household resources and creates the need to navigate a host of new service systems related to the child’s needs (e.g., legal, medical, mental health) ⁹ . Adoptive families tend to have higher incomes than kinship families on average, but many are also in need of material resource and specialized supports to address changes in family dynamics over time.

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