

Cultural Research Center



Post-Dobbs, Survey Explains Adoption Perspectives of Prospective Mothers

Dr. George Barna, Director of Research
[Cultural Research Center](#) at Arizona Christian University
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With the recent *Dobbs v. Jackson's Women's Health Organization* decision rendered by the U.S. Supreme Court, returning abortion policy to the people and their elected officials, the insights regarding women's personal decision-making when it comes to pregnancy obtained from a recent national survey, conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University and commissioned by the Opt Institute, take on a new importance.

Now more than ever, understanding what motivates women to make a decision about how to handle a pregnancy—especially their views of adoption—becomes even more significant.

The study, [Adoption and Its Competitors in American Society](#), was conducted by George Barna and the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University for the Opt Institute, a non-profit research foundation and think tank dedicated to improving access to and support for private infant adoption. It seeks to promote better understanding of women's decision-making in the context of expected pregnancies, and to helping mothers consider adoption as a meaningful option.

Influences on Birthing Decision

Women who become pregnant have three options: give birth and raise the child; give birth and place the child for adoption; or abort the child prior to its birth. In this survey, women of prime childbearing age (15 to 44) were asked about the influences on their decision of how to handle a pregnancy.

It appears that women seek guidance from multiple sources and make decisions based on a variety of factors. Two particular factors had far more influence than any others: figuring out what is best for the child (mentioned by 45%) and determining whether the mother has the financial ability to adequately care for the child. Five other factors were listed by at least one out of 10 women.

The research revealed that factors influencing decision-making varied by both the age and the religious background of the women.

For example, teenage women (15-19) were much more likely than older women to acknowledge the influence of whether they have the personal maturity to raise a child.

When it comes to the impact of faith, the survey showed that seven out of 10 women who possess a biblical worldview stated that their religious beliefs would have the greatest influence on their decision, making them the only religious subgroup for which more than three out of 10 women cited their faith as a major influence.

Women who are theologically defined as born-again Christians were more likely than less committed Christians, women of non-Christian faiths, and women of no faith to identify their religious beliefs as highly impactful, and less likely to cite their financial condition and their personal maturity as considerations.

In contrast, women who said they have no religious faith consider more pragmatic or material concerns. They were more likely than woman of faith to list the potential impact of the child’s birth on their own future as a major influence. Similar to with women connected to a non-Christian faith, they were also more likely to examine the financial realities of their choices.

Greatest Influences on Decision to Raise, Adopt, or Abort Their Child								
Consideration	Current Age of the Woman					Self-Identified Faith		
	All	Teens	20s	30s	40s	Christian	Other	None
Child’s best interests	45%	53%	43%	46%	37%	43%	50%	46%
Financial realities	28	27	28	31	24	25	31	32
Preparedness to parent	16	32	18	9	9	15	16	17
Impact on your future/plans	16	22	17	14	10	15	10	21
Religious beliefs/convictions	15	11	12	17	18	20	16	4
Child’s father	13	11	14	12	12	13	12	12
Past personal experiences	10	7	9	11	14	9	8	13
Family-related pressure	9	11	13	6	6	10	10	6

Source: *Adoption and Its Competitors in American Society*, research conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University for The Opt Institute; N=1,091 women of childbearing age (15-44); 2022.

Sources of Information

The women were also asked from which, if any, of 11 specified sources of guidance they would be very likely to seek advice on how to handle an unintended pregnancy. Just two out of every 10 women (20%) said they would make an independent decision, without regard to input from external sources.

The most common sources of guidance women would seek were family members and friends (50%) and people from the medical and healthcare fields (43%). The next most common source was Planned Parenthood, named by one out of six women (17%) as a very likely source of guidance.

Once again, though, there were significant differences related to the age and religiosity of the woman.

Teenage women were likely to seek out a greater number of sources than were their older counterparts. Teenage women were also the age group most likely to gather insights from family (51%), friends (40%), doctors and other medical professionals (36%), counselors and psychologists (30%), books and other materials (17%), and abortion clinics (12%).

The outlook changes dramatically as women age. Women in their 30s and 40s were the most likely to make a decision without seeking outside counsel of any type (27%). Those who would pursue external guidance were most likely to rely upon family (39%), doctors and medical professionals (30%), friends (20%), and counselors or psychologists (16%). Once a woman reaches her 40s, she is highly unlikely to seek input from abortion, adoption or government organizations, or from books and other materials. Across age groups, women are very unlikely to seek advice from adoption organizations.

Faith perspectives also correlate with sources of information for women of childbearing age.

Women with a biblical worldview were far more likely than other women to rely upon their church and religious leaders (51% compared to 9% of all other women).

Women associated with the Christian faith were more likely than woman aligned with a non-Christian faith or with no faith at all to lean on church and religious leaders (18% vs. 11% vs. 1%, respectively), and family members (46% vs. 37% vs. 33%, respectively).

Women who self-identified as Christian were half as likely as other women to seek advice from abortion clinics (6% vs. 12%), and only slightly more likely to seek advice from adoption organizations (6% vs. 4%).

Preferred Sources of Information in Response to an Unintended Pregnancy								
Consideration	Current Age of the Woman					Self-Identified Faith		
	All	Teens	20s	30s	40s	Christian	Other	None
Your family	41%	51%	38%	38%	42%	46%	37%	33%
Doctors/medical professionals	34	36	38	30	29	32	34	36
Your friends and peers	25	40	24	21	19	26	23	24
Counselors, psychologists	20	30	22	17	14	20	20	20
None: you would make an independent decision	20	11	15	26	28	19	20	21
Planned Parenthood	17	22	21	14	8	16	19	18
Your church/religious leaders	12	9	13	11	14	18	11	1
Books, reports, other materials	10	17	12	8	3	11	14	7
Abortion clinics	9	12	12	6	3	6	12	11
Adoption organizations	6	7	7	5	5	6	7	4
Government laws and agencies	4	5	5	3	2	4	4	4

Source: *Adoption and Its Competitors in American Society*, research conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University for The Opt Institute; N=1,091 women of childbearing age (15-44); 2022.

Influence on Opinions about Adoption

The Opt Institute study also noted that there is no single type of information source that harbors substantial influence on women’s opinions about adoption.

When the sample of women of childbearing age was asked to indicate how much influence each of 10 sources had upon their own attitudes and opinions related to adoption, only one source was said to have “a lot” of influence by at least one out of every four women: family, listed by 28%.

Perhaps surprisingly, their personal religious leaders ranked second, with 22% of women claiming those leaders had a lot of influence on their thinking about adoption.

Teenage women were more likely than older women to credit a lot of influence about adoption to their family (37%), and also the segment most likely to list friends (22%) and doctors or medical professionals (25%). Women in their 30s and 40s were the least likely to ascribe “a lot” of influence on their thoughts about adoption to doctors or medical professionals, the Internet, Planned Parenthood, and family.

Religious background also reflected its impact on such influence. Women with a biblical worldview were most likely to assign “a lot of influence” on their thinking about adoption to their religious beliefs (62%) and their church and religious leaders (43%). They were notably less likely than other women to say that government agencies, information from the Internet, and Planned Parenthood have had “a lot of influence” on their adoption perceptions.

Women who identify as Christian were somewhat more likely than those who do not to give credit for influencing their views on adoption to family and to their church leaders.

Women affiliated with a non-Christian religion were more likely than others to identify doctors or medical professionals as significant influences upon their adoption views. Women who claim no religious engagement were not only the segment least likely to mention churches and religious leaders, but also to list family as a major influence on their adoption perspectives.

Entities with "A Lot" of Influence on Opinions about Adoption								
Consideration	Current Age of the Woman					Self-Identified Faith		
	All	Teens	20s	30s	40s	Christian	Other	None
Your family	28%	37%	30%	25%	22%	34%	27%	19%
Your personal religious beliefs	22	19	22	23	24	30	28	7
Doctors/medical professionals	17	25	21	14	8	18	25	13
Your friends and peers	16	22	15	15	14	18	15	14
Adopted people you've known	16	13	18	17	14	18	19	12
Planned Parenthood	14	17	17	11	8	14	15	13
Your church/religious leaders	13	12	15	13	12	19	14	3
Information from the Internet	13	13	17	12	6	15	14	10
Government laws/agencies	9	8	12	9	6	11	10	7
Adoption organizations	8	13	9	6	6	10	8	6

Source: *Adoption and Its Competitors in American Society*, research conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University for The Opt Institute; N=1,091 women of childbearing age (15-44); 2022.

Women Are Seeking Trustworthy Advice

According to John Knox, founder of The Opt Institute, the research is important in understanding better women's decision-making in the context of unplanned pregnancy. In particular, it highlighted the trusted sources that women rely upon to guide them in making decisions and identifies the chief factors that inform their discernment.

Opt Institute is dedicated to improving access to and support for private infant adoption. In furtherance of its mission, Opt Institute supports research to better understand the factors and influences that guide women's decision-making in unplanned or unexpected pregnancies.

Knox explained, "This research provides valuable insight into who is influencing women. We know that family members are the strongest influence on women across all ages. But perhaps surprisingly, we learned that, for many women, doctors and medical professionals have a greater influence than friends and peers."

He continued, "Young women are also heavily influenced by counselors and psychologists. This tells us that we should do more to equip medical and mental health professionals to understand fully the benefits of adoption so that they can provide the most accurate, helpful information to the women they serve. Opt Institute is committed to educating and supporting the advisors that women trust."

"The research also tells us that the single greatest factor that is important to a woman in these circumstances is her child's best interests. We know from other research that women often confuse private adoption with foster care or do not realize that they can maintain an open relationship after placing a child for adoption. Knowing women place the highest priority on the child's best interests will help us to correct these misunderstandings and to educate women about the benefits of adoption for women and children," Knox said.

“This research also tells us that Planned Parenthood exerts more influence (14% overall) on women’s opinions about adoption than adoption organizations (8%). This data should be a challenge to adoption organizations to do more to reach women struggling with an unplanned pregnancy and to promote adoption as a meaningful choice,” he said.

“This research also identifies gaps. Very few women, even those who identify as Christian, rely on church leaders as sources of information about adoption when responding to an unplanned pregnancy. Church leaders should take this as a challenge to speak more clearly and more often on the life-giving choice of adoption. Christianity has a rich and beautiful theological tradition that can help frame the beauty of the self-sacrificial choice of adoption, and church leaders should not be afraid to proclaim that truth.”

According to Knox, private infant adoption has all but disappeared from our society and this research gives insight into some of the reasons.

“Adoption is a sacrificial loving option that’s surprisingly not talked about in most churches. Too many churches are afraid of getting political but now with *Roe v. Wade* being overturned, the Church has a wonderful opportunity to lead and reintroduce adoption back into the conversation. When faced with an unintended pregnancy, research shows women feel they only have two choices: abortion and parenting. We know from a biblical standpoint that adoption is an option that has been modeled from the beginning.”

“This research shows more education needs to be done to support women who are facing an unintended pregnancy. The Church needs to be prepared to be a voice, especially to teenagers who are caught off-guard by pregnancy, and encourage adoption. Helping women see they have three options, not two, is transformative.”

Knox also pointed to the importance of reaching out to women with sensitivity to their stage of life. “Although teenagers rely most heavily on family and friends, they are also influenced by a wide variety of people and organizations, so we need to continue to work to promote adoption as a meaningful option in the broader culture. Young women also consider their preparedness to parent and the child’s impact on their future plans to a greater extent than older women. This tells us that we need to better communicate how adoption can be a positive choice for women, one which provides a loving home for a child and provides freedom for women to pursue their hopes and dreams.”

Finally, Knox noted that the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* provided a important moment to emphasize the positive role of adoption. “While adoption has always been an option for women, the Supreme Court’s decision has many people talking about the choices that women have when facing an unplanned pregnancy,” Knox said. “Those of us who have been touched by adoption have experienced what a life-giving and positive choice it is, and this moment in history provides us with the opportunity to share that message with others.”

About the Research

This research was commissioned by the Opt Institute, a national adoption research and information center, to better understand perceptions and expectations related to adoption in the United States. The research was conducted among a qualified national sample of the women who are considered to be of prime childbearing age (15 to 44). There are an estimated 65 million women currently in that age segment.

The survey data with qualified women was collected several months before the Supreme Court ruling was handed down. There were 1,091 interviews completed in January 2022 among a national sample of

women between the ages of 15 and 44. The survey interviews consisted of 64 closed-ended questions and lasted an average of 16 minutes apiece. The interviews were completed via an intentional mixed-mode data collection process, with 505 women interviewed via telephone and 586 via online surveys. All respondents were randomly sampled, with geographic quotas established and multiple contact attempts per potential respondent.

The full report, *Adoption and Its Competitors in American Society: Results of a National Survey Regarding Adoption in the U.S. in 2022* by George Barna, is available [here](#).

About the Cultural Research Center

The Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University in Glendale, Arizona, conducts the annual *American Worldview Inventory*, other nationwide surveys regarding cultural transformation, and worldview-related surveys among the ACU student population. The groundbreaking ACU Student Worldview Inventory is administered to every ACU student at the start of each academic year, and a final administration is undertaken among students just prior to their graduation, enabling the University to track and address the worldview development of its students.

CRC is guided by George Barna, Director of Research, and Tracy Munsil, Executive Director. Like ACU, CRC embraces biblical Christianity, as described in the school's statement of faith. The Center works in cooperation with a variety of Bible-centric, theologically conservative Christian ministries and remains politically non-partisan. Access to the results from past surveys conducted by CRC and information about the Cultural Research Center is accessible at www.CulturalResearchCenter.com. Further information about Arizona Christian University is available at www.ArizonaChristian.edu.