Making Choices: Adoption Seekers’ Preferences and Available Children with Special Needs

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Most children available from public adoption agencies are children with special needs, such as disabilities. This pilot study on the child profile preferences of 5830 adults registered with province-wide adoption agency found that those who were most open to considering children with special needs had been formally seeking to adopt for some time and had completed government-required SAFE assessments and training. Most preferred younger children, and half would consider sibling groups. Between 43% to 60% indicated willingness to consider adopting children with degrees of learning disabilities, emotional behavioral disorders, and physical disabilities, although the willing proportion decreased as the level of each disability’s specified impact progressed from “mild” to “moderate” to “severe.” Most preferred, among 20 categories of available children’s possible exposures and health diagnoses, were past abuse exposures versus diagnosed disabilities or enduring conditions. Possible explanations for these findings and their implications are explored and ideas for further research proposed.

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