

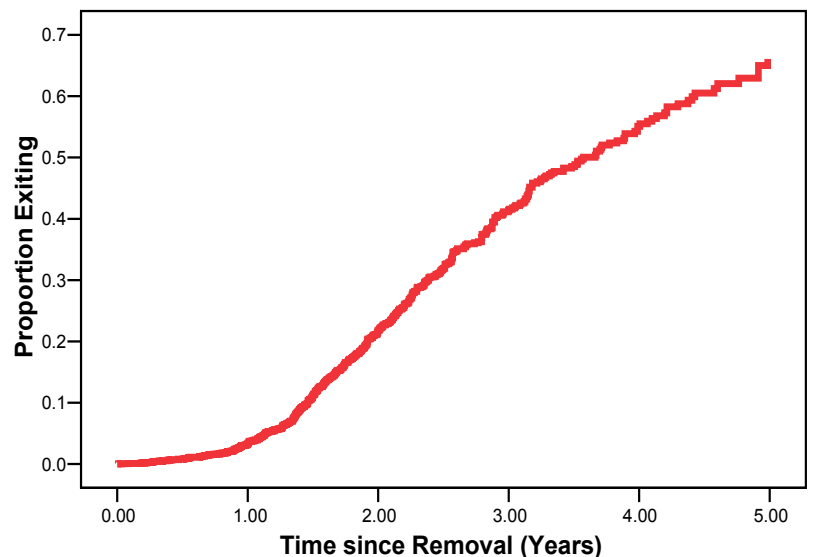


## Foster Care Exits to Adoption: Impact of Child & Case Characteristics

This Rhode Island Data Analytic Center Research Brief summarizes findings from a recent study of children in foster care with data obtained from the Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST). RICHIST data was available for 5,725 children who entered foster care between 1998 and 2002. Only a child's first episode of foster care during that period was considered. Analyses examined whether adoption was related to specific child characteristics (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, gender), case characteristics (e.g., the reason the child was removed from the home, history of prior removals from the home), or the types of service settings a child experienced in foster care (e.g., foster care with a relative, foster care with a non-relative, or placement in a group home or shelter).

Of the 5,725 children in the study, 55% were boys, 58% were White, 19% African American, 15% Hispanic, and 4% were of another racial/ethnic background. In addition, 18% were 1 year old or younger, 14% 2-5 years old, 15% 6-10 years old, 34% 11-15 years old, and 17% were 16 years of age or older. A total of 25% were placed in foster care primarily for child neglect, 22% for physical abuse, 3% for sexual abuse, 10% for parental substance abuse, 30% for child behavior problems, and 9% for other reasons. One-third of these initial foster care episodes began in a non-relative foster care home, 22% in relative foster care placements, 22% in group home or residential settings, and 20% in an emergency shelter placement. 15% had at least one prior foster care episode.

Figure 1: Overall Pattern of Adoption Exits



As is shown in Figure 1, under 10% of children are adopted within one year of being removed from their home. The rate of adoption increases steadily after about 15 months so that at 2 years approximately 20% of children have been adopted, at 3 years about 40% have been adopted, at 4 years about 55% have been adopted, and at 5 years approximately 62% of children have exited the foster care system to adoption.

### Case Characteristics

**Previous Removals:** Children with a previous removal from their home were more likely to be adopted. Compared to children with no prior removal from their home, children with one prior removal were 50% more likely to be adopted while those with two or more removals were about twice as likely to be adopted.

**Reasons for Removal:** The reasons a child was removed was also examined for its relationship to adoption. Reasons for removal were first organized by the severity of the abuse, with cases involving sexual abuse ranked as the most severe, followed by physical abuse, neglect, parental alcohol/drug problems, child behavior problems, and "other reasons" (e.g., housing problems, parental ability to cope, abandonment, relinquishment). Each reason for removal was then compared with removal due to neglect. Study findings show that children removed due to sexual abuse were 58% less likely to be adopted.

# Foster Care Exits to Adoption: Impact of Child & Case Characteristics

**Current Placement Service Setting:** A few studies have found that children in foster care with a relative tend to remain in foster care longer than children in other settings [1, 2]. Our analyses tracked children across all service settings that occurred during each foster care episode to see how a child's current placement setting influenced his or her chance of leaving foster care. Findings showed that, compared to children placed in a relative foster care home, children with an emergency shelter placement, were 88% less likely to exit to adoption, while those in group home placement were about 90% less likely. Children placed in institutions and supervised independent living were even more unlikely to exit through adoption (100% less likely).

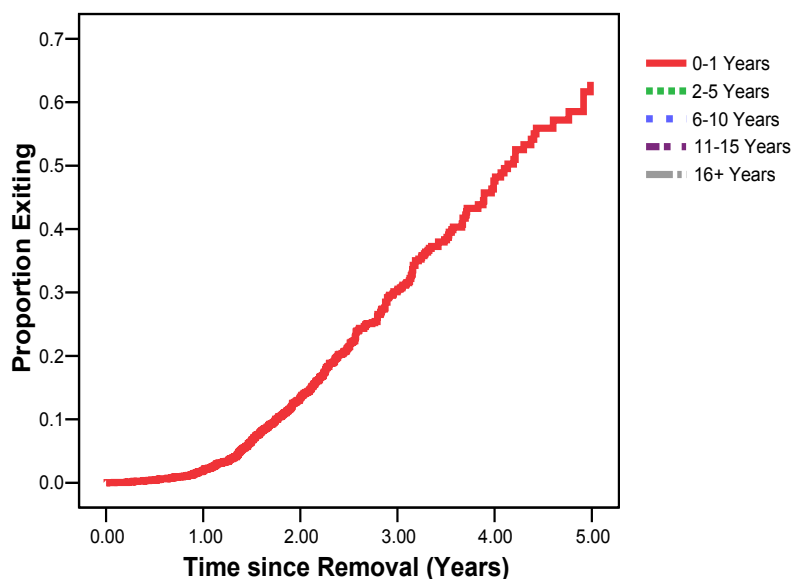
## Child Characteristics

**Age:** Several studies have found that infants are more likely to be adopted as compared to older children [1, 3, 4]. In Rhode Island, infants (ages 0 to 1) were also found to have the highest rate of adoption. As shown in Figure 2, the adoption rate also decreased gradually with age – children ages 2 - 5 were 43% less likely to be adopted than infants, those ages 6 - 10 were 60% less likely, those ages 11 - 15 were 88% less likely, and those over 16 were 95% less likely to be adopted.

**Gender:** In Rhode Island, boys and girls appear to have about the same chance of being adopted.

**Race/Ethnicity:** The rate of adoption did not differ by the child's racial or ethnic group. This differs from other studies that have shown that adoption rates from foster care vary by the child's race or ethnicity [3, 4, 5-7].

Figure 2: Age and Adoption Rates



### Summary of Major Findings

- Less than 10% of children are adopted within 1 year, about 20% within 2 years, and about 40% within 3 years.
- Children who have had a prior removal from their home are more likely to be adopted.
- Children who have been sexually abused are less likely to be adopted.
- Compared to children who are in relative foster care, those in some form of institutional foster care, such as an emergency shelter, group home, or residential placement are less likely to be adopted.
- The rates of adoption decrease gradually with age, with infants more likely to be adopted than any other age group.

**References:** (1) Goerge, R.M., The reunification process in substitute care. Social Service Review, 1990. 64: p. 422-457. (2) Courtney, M.E., Factors associated with the reunification of foster children with their families. Social Service Review, 1994. 68: p. 81-108. (3) Courtney, M.E., I. Piliavin, and B.R. Entner-Wright, Transitions from and returns to out-of-home care. Social Service Review, 1997. 71: p. 652-667. (4) Courtney, M.E. and Y.I. Wong, Comparing the timing of exits from substitute care. Children & Youth Services Review, 1996. 18: p. 307-334 (5) Glisson, C., J.W. Bailey, and J.A. Post, Predicting the time children spend in state custody. Social Service Review, 2000. 74: p. 253-280. (6) Wells, K. and S. Guo, Reunification and reentry of foster children. Children & Youth Services Review, 1999. 21: p. 273-294. (7) McMurtry, S.L. and G. Lie, Differential exit rates of minority children in foster care. Social Work Research & Abstracts, 1992. 28: p. 42-48.