

Adoption and Children Survey 2015

First 4 Adoption commissioned Future Foundation, a consumer trends agency, to survey British consumers on their attitudes towards adoption and children, and their wider aspirations for family and personal fulfilment.

The research was conducted in August 2015. The sample was nationally representative, totalling 1,240 British consumers.

Here we outline the key top-line findings:

Having children in later life promotes a younger mindset

There is a widely held misperception that having children makes one feel old and consequently only young people should be active parents. However, our figures show that having children at an older age actually promotes a sense of being younger - 54% of parents aged 41-66 felt young compared to 46% of non-parents.

In fact, a higher proportion of older parents (those aged 41 to 66) felt young compared to parents in their 30s; 54% of parents aged 41-66 felt young versus merely 39% of parents aged 31-40. This suggests that having children later in life can actually help reverse the traditional sense of ageing mindsets.

Firsthand experience of parenting encourages a more pragmatic view on the demands of child raising at different ages

The second major misperception discovered was on the relative demands of children at different ages. People without children believed that children were just as demanding after age 4 as they were as babies. However, when we asked parents with young children the same question, they believed that children over the age of 4 were less demanding.

Overall, only 13% of the total population believed that children are less demanding after the age of 4. However, the agreement amongst parents rises to 23%.

The survey found that parents who have direct, first-hand experience of looking after children were more likely than non-parents to see differences in the demands of children of different ages.

Starting a family remains a core aspiration for Britons

Despite changes in personal relationships and life-stages, the survey found that a majority of British people do still want a family.

Nearly two thirds of British people stated that they would like to have or raise a family (61%). One third of British people said they strongly feel the need to raise a family (33%).

Young Britons, aged 18-24, are the most likely to say that having a family is an important need (68%). As well as differences between age groups, we observe a gender gap; British women are more likely than British men to want a family (65% of women vs. 56% of men).

However, this distinction is not evident amongst people under the age of 34. When looking at middle-aged people, the gender gap is more apparent - British men aged 35-54 are significantly less likely to want a family than British women of the same age (46% of men vs. 64% of women).

Families are key to life fulfilment

We found a majority of British people agreed that life is more fulfilling when you have children (56%). One in five British people agreed that people do not truly become adults until they have children (19%).

We found that non-white British people had especially strong opinions on life being more fulfilling with children than white British people (70% of 45+ non-white Britons vs. 58% of white 45+ Britons).

What's more, one third of single people above the age of 35 stated that it was never too late to start a family (33%).

Overall it seems clear that, despite changing family structures and lifestyles, the desire to have a family remains a cornerstone of British society.

A person's career remains a significant barrier to starting families naturally

More than half (56%) of respondents claimed that it is difficult to raise children while fulfilling career ambitions.

Despite these career barriers, 52% in Britain feel that women should not have a child naturally after the age of 50. This presents a significant obstacle for British people, especially women, who have important and time-consuming career demands as well as biological clock constraints.

Unlike in natural child birth, the age constraints are less for adoption. A significant minority (33%) support the view that one is never too old to adopt a child. This figure rises to 47% among those in the early stages of their career (18-34s).

Non-white British families embrace older age families

Our survey found that there were significant differences between white British people and non-white British people's attitudes towards family. The most significant difference between non-white and white Britons was the willingness of non-white people to embrace having children later in life.

Non-white women were twice as likely as white women to agree that one is never too old to adopt a child (58% vs. 30% respectively).

The readiness of non-white women to have children later in life could be linked to their self-perception of age - the non-white population seem to feel more ageless than their white counterparts. Indeed, 57% of the non-white population aged 18-45 claimed to feel young, with a similar proportion of the population aged 45+ (55%) also claiming to feel young. Conversely, 58% of white 18-45 year-olds stated that they felt young compared with just 42% of the population aged over 45.

Evidence of rising openness to adoption in the UK

Almost one in four respondents surveyed stated that they would consider adopting a child (24%). Moreover, a further 26% were undecided whether they would adopt a child.

Little preference for adopting young children or children with similar ethnic background

The vast majority of people (83%) disagreed that adopting a child of a young age was an important factor. Similarly, 84% of people disagreed that adopting a child of the same ethnicity as themselves was the most important factor to consider.

Instead, we found that the chief factor for consideration when adopting a child was the mental and physical needs of the child – 65% stated this factor as the most influential.

People who volunteer are the most likely to consider adoption

People who volunteer are the most likely group to consider adoption. 56% of volunteers aged 18-45 state that they would consider adoption. People who do not volunteer were only half as likely to consider adoption.