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Participation in the Adoptive Kinship Network Contact: Application for Adoption Competent Family Life Education

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Background

Family life educators (FLE) provide essential support and important resources to the diversity of families found in our communities. Families formed through adoption are unique in their structure which includes possible contact between birth and adoptive families. Adoption Competent-FLEs need to understand that interconnected structure and the impact of contact. The Adoption Kinship Network (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998) is a complex family system which includes the adopted child at the center, but also includes birth family, adoptive family, and extended family members of each. This is the first systematic description of who, across time, is in the network based on reports by AKN members. AC-FLEs can use information regarding possible membership in the AKN to support:

1. AKN members as they negotiate the multiple relationships in their own AKN
2. Adopted persons as they decide what kind of contact and relationships in the network are best for them.

Methods

Participants

Subsamples of adoptive families with cross-network contact from the Minnesota-Texas Adoption Research Project (Grotevant & McRoy, 1988) were included.

Wave 1 (1987-1992) 125 families

Wave 2 (1996-2001) 91 families

Wave 3 (2005-2008) 96 families

Procedures

Interviews were conducted with Adoptive Mothers at Wave 1, Adopted Adolescents at Wave 2, and Adopted Emerging Adults at Wave 3

Coding

Membership in the AKN was coded. Coded contact was limited to interactions within the last year. Each member was coded as a "1" if there was contact or a "0" if there was none.

Results

Figure 1. Significant Change Across Time In Families with Contact - Percentage of Birth Family Members Engaged in Cross-Network Contact within the Last Year at Three Stages of the Family Life Cycle

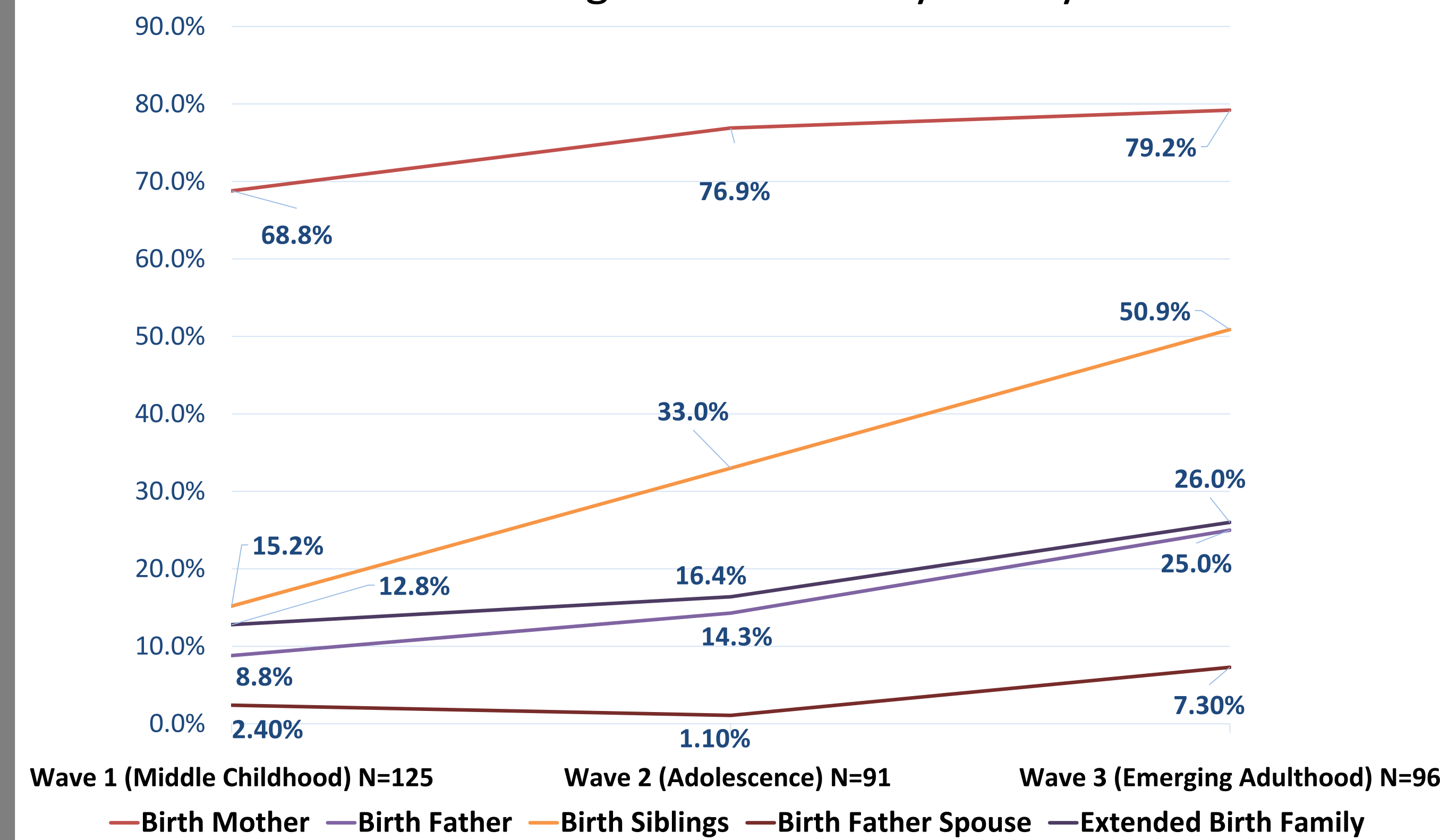
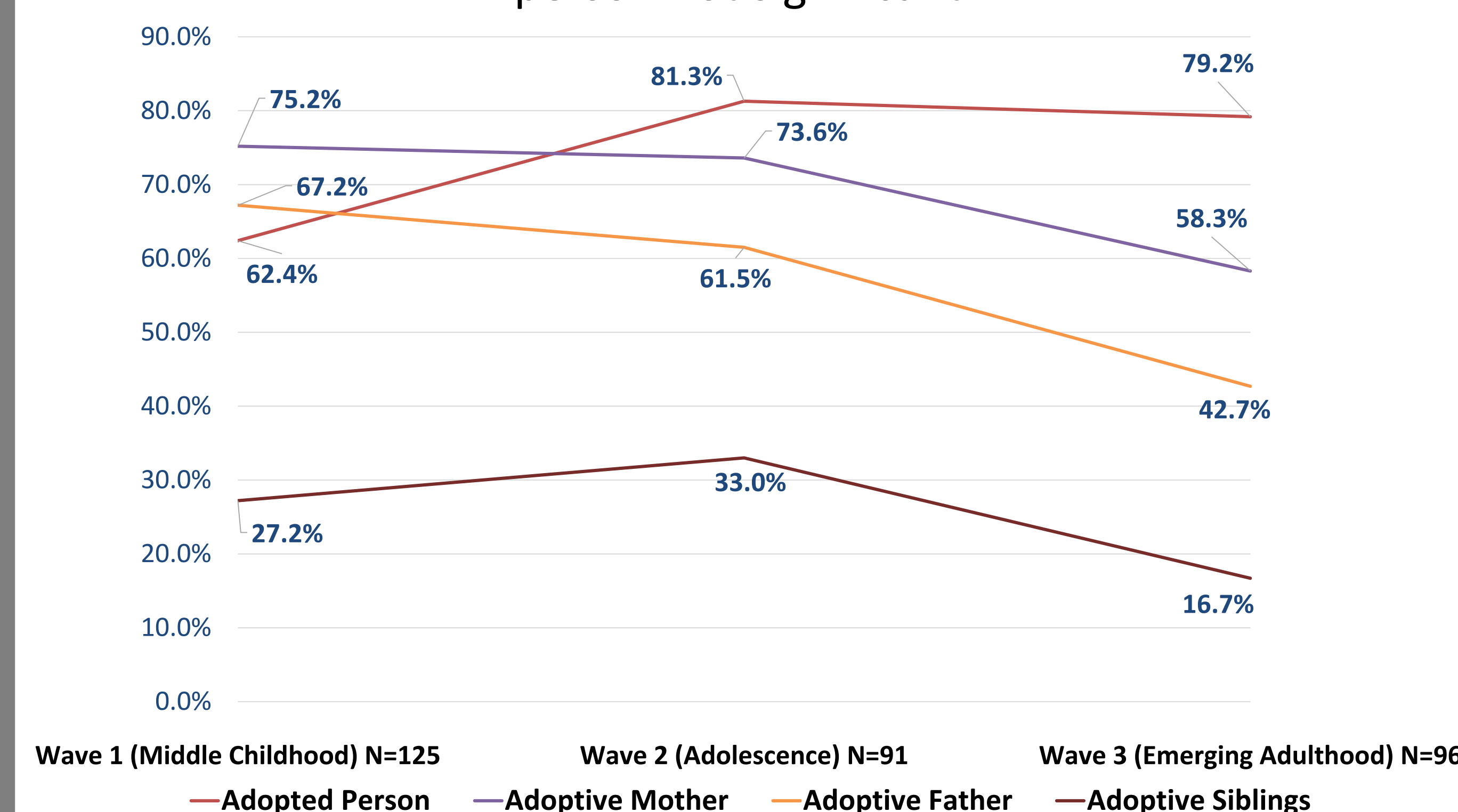


Figure 2. Significant Change Across Time In Families with Contact - Percentage of Adoptive Family Members Engaged in Cross-Network Contact within the Last Year at Three Stages of the Family Life Cycle "Adopted person not significant"



Case Study – David (Identifying information modified)

AKN management of contact across time

Childhood

Contact with the birth mother and birth father was maintained by the adoptive mother through yearly letters sent through the adoption agency. The letters were shared with David

Adolescence

David expressed desire to meet this birth parents. His adoptive parents facilitated the connection with the intent that at adulthood David would maintain the connection. The agreement was that David needed his adoptive parents' permission to have contact with his birth parents until the age of 19.

Emerging Adulthood

David began managing contact with his birth parents at age 18. By age 27, David's fiancée and birth father's spouse were added to the AKN. David expressed no desire to meet any other members of his birth family, wanting to maintain contact only with his birth parents.

Case highlights

1. The changing role, across time, of the adoptive person managing contact in the AKN
2. The role of the adopted person in decisions about who to include in the AKN

Discussion

Adoptive families can find it difficult to access professionals that understand the complexities of the AKN. AC-FLEs can help fill that gap by providing

1. educational support,
2. help to foster connectedness in the AKN,
3. preadoption preparation.

Next Questions

1. How and why does participation in the AKN occur?
2. What are the unique aspects of this change at different stages of the family life cycle?

Reference

Grotevant, H. D., & McRoy, R. G. (1998). *Openness in adoption: Exploring family connections*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage