

Child Adoption in the United States: Historical Trends and the Determinants of Adoption Demand and Supply, 1951-2002

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Abstract:

Adoption, as an alternative to child bearing, is a widely accepted means of forming a family in many modern societies. In this paper, we first provide a comprehensive overview of the U.S. adoption market and its historical development. We then document trends in adoptions in the U.S. by adoption type using aggregate-level data from 1951 to 2002 and explore possible reasons for the observed historical patterns. Finally, compiling two micro-level datasets covering the period between 1973 and 2002, we estimate individual women's propensities to adopt a child, as well as their propensities to relinquish a child for adoption. In our empirical analysis, we evaluate alternative hypotheses concerning adoption demand and supply, exploiting both across-time and across-group variations in the data.