



Predictors of children in foster care being adopted: A classification tree analysis ☆

Jessica Snowden ^{*,1}, Scott Leon, Jeffrey Sieracki

Loyola University Chicago, Department of Psychology, Chicago, Illinois, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 6 December 2007

Received in revised form 30 March 2008

Accepted 30 March 2008

Available online 9 April 2008

Keywords:

Adoption

AFCARS

Foster care

Optimal Data Analysis

Child welfare system

Exiting foster care

ABSTRACT

When returning home is not a viable option, adoption is the primary means by which youth in substitute care achieve permanency. Therefore, understanding the factors that impact adoption is critical to both evaluating and improving the child welfare system. Prior research has mostly studied “main effects” in regard to adoption rates and has not explored the ways in which youth and foster family variables might interact in complex ways to predict adoption. This study uses a classification tree analysis approach known as Optimal Data Analysis (ODA) to predict probability of adoption in 2003 using Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data. 30,000 adopted youth and 30,000 non-adopted youth were randomly selected for participation in the study. Similar to previous studies, univariate analyses revealed that age, foster parent race/ethnicity, foster parent marital status, and number of previous placements all predicted probability of adoption. However, going further, several combinations of individual variables (multivariate ODA) improved prediction accuracy (e.g., age×structure of foster family×number of previous placements). Results also suggested that the impact of the state on adoption rates varied when essentially controlling for youth and family variables, supporting concerns regarding the crude use of AFCARS data when comparing states.

© 2008 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Approximately 800,000 children are currently served by the child welfare system, with 500,000 of these children in the foster care system. Of these children, approximately 50,000 are adopted each year (U.S. Children's Bureau, 2007). Until 1997, the number of children in child welfare was even greater; recent decreases are due in part to the emphasis on family reunification for children in the system. Recognizing that children were literally growing up in foster care, the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) was enacted in 1997 by the federal government (Hannett, 2007). The primary goal of ASFA is to focus on permanency for children in foster care (Gittens, 1994; Hannett, 2007). When returning home is safe and appropriate for the child, this is, of course, the preferred method of achieving permanency. However, in many cases, family reunification is either not feasible or not in the best interest of the child. When returning home is not a viable option, adoption is the primary way that children can achieve permanency. Therefore, understanding the factors that impact adoption is critical to both evaluating and improving the child welfare system.

☆ The data used in this publication were made available by the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, and have been used with permission. Data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) were originally collected by the Children's Bureau. Funding for the project was provided by the Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The collector of the original data, the funder, the Archive, Cornell University and their agents or employees bear no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here.

* Corresponding author. 5242 Royal Cypress Circle, Tampa, FL 33647, United States. Tel.: +1 813 974 1988.

E-mail address: jsnowde@luc.edu (J. Snowden).

¹ Department of Psychology, Loyola University Chicago, 6525 North Sheridan Road, Damen Hall, 653, Chicago, Illinois, 60626, United States.

Prior research has primarily studied “main effects” in regard to adoption rates and has not explored the ways in which variables (e.g., race/ethnicity, age, mental health status, state of adoption) might interact in complex ways to predict adoption. It is the primary hypothesis of this study that the probability of being adopted is determined by a multitude of interacting factors, creating multiple unique pathways to adoption. This study uses an exploratory multivariate analysis technique known as Optimal Data Analysis (ODA) to determine possible multiple pathways to adoption using Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data.

2. Predictors of adoption

Prior research has uncovered numerous individual variables that predict adoption in “main effects” multivariate analyses. These factors include demographic variables, such as age and ethnicity, presence of mental illness/symptomology, and factors related to prior placement in the child welfare system, such as number of previous placements, type of placement, and state of placement.

2.1. Demographic variables

Age is amongst the most frequently studied variable in adoption research. Not surprisingly, previous research has found that the older children are the less likely to be adopted (Courtney & Wong, 1996; Earth, 1997; Kirton, Beecham, & Ogilvie, 2006). In general, infants are the most likely to be adopted, and the likelihood for being adopted decreases as age increases (Connell, Katz, Saunders, & Tebes, 2006). Although a specific cutoff age is difficult to ascertain, McMurtry and Lie (1992) found that children over the age of 8.6 were not likely to be adopted. Possible explanations for the increased probability of younger children being adopted included case worker concerns over the safety of young children and a greater interest in adopting younger children (Connell et al., 2006). In addition, older children are also at an increased risk for placement disruption after adoption, for this reason, they may be viewed as less attractive to potential families (Fensbo, 2004; Rosenthal, Schmidt, & Conner, 1988; Rushton & Dance, 2006).

In addition to age, researchers have examined the relationship between other demographics and likelihood of adoption. Previous research has not linked gender to adoption status (Brooks, Sigrid, & Barth, 2002; Connell et al., 2006); however, several racial differences in adoption rates have been documented. For instance, Earth (1997) found that after controlling for the age of the child, African American children are five times less likely than Caucasian children and two and a half times less likely than Latino children to be adopted. Other studies have also offered evidence that Caucasian children are more likely to be adopted than African American and Latino children (Brooks, James, & Barth, 2002; Courtney & Wong, 1996). However, the relationship between race/ethnicity and adoption is inconclusive; previous research using retrospective data has found no difference across ethnic groups on rates of exit into adoption (McMurtry & Lie, 1992). It may be that the inclusive results found in previous studies reflect the fact that researchers have primarily examined whether race or ethnicity impacts probability of adoption under specific conditions, such as adopting across racial/ethnic backgrounds.

2.2. Mental and physical health status variables

Children in foster care are up to nine times more likely to have a mental illness than children not in foster care (McIntyre & Keesler, 1986), and 50% to 80% of children in foster care are in need of mental health services (Armsden, Pecora, Payne, & Szakiewicz, 2000; Landsverk & Garland, 1999; Thompson & Fuhr, 1992). In addition, children in foster care are at risk for a variety of problems, including health problems (25% have a chronic health problem and 30% have a disability) and school problems (Vandiver, Chalk, & Moore, 2003). Researchers have attempted to determine the relationship between mental and physical health variables and adoption, however, the results vary. While several studies have found that having a disability puts children at risk for not being adopted (e.g., McMurtry & Lie, 1992), others have found that this variable is unrelated to adoption status (Connell et al., 2006). Courtney and Wong (1996) found that children with health problems or mental disabilities were less likely to be adopted. When examining solely mental health disabilities, Connell et al. (2006) found having a diagnosed emotional or behavioral disorder to lead to a decrease in adoption.

2.3. Family and placement variables

Factors surrounding the child's birth family, reason for removal, and placements in foster care have also been examined as they relate to likelihood of adoption, although the research on these factors is scarcer than on demographic factors. Regarding the child's birth family, Courtney and Wong (1996) found that while the structure of the birth family was not related to adoption, increased levels of poverty of the birth family were associated with decreased likelihood of adoption. Connell et al. (2006) found that children who are removed due to sexual abuse, housing problems, parents' inability to cope with the child, or child abandonment are less likely to be adopted than children who are removed for other reasons. Although children who were removed for physical abuse, child behavior problems, or parental substance abuse did not have different outcomes than children who were removed due to neglect, children who were removed due to a history of sexual abuse were less likely to be adopted (Connell et al., 2006). On the other hand, Courtney and Wong (1996) found that physical abuse put children at risk for a longer period in the child welfare system until adoption.

The child's current and prior placements in foster care have been linked to adoption. Placement in any setting other than a foster home (i.e., group homes, residential treatment, etc.) places children at less likelihood for adoption (Courtney & Wong, 1996). Similarly, other research has found that children in group homes have been found to be less likely than children in foster homes to be adopted

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/346825>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/346825>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)