Religion’s Influence on Adoption Practices

Kristy Krivickas & Krista Kay Payne
National Center for Family & Marriage Research
Bowling Green State University

Introduction
• Currently, over 130,000 children in the United States are in foster care
• Recruiting adoptive parents remains elusive
• Finding placements is critical to the emotional and physical well-being of children in substitute care
• Little is known regarding the influence of religion as a social institution on adopting behavior

Research Questions
• Do levels of religiosity influence the likelihood of adopting a child? Do religious individuals affect the decision to adopt?
• Is there variation if the adoption is a relative or non-relative adoption?

Theoretical Framework: Symbolic Interactionism (S.I.)
• S.I. focuses on socialization, roles, and identity (Stryker 1968)
• Religious individuals are socialized to be altruistic—to help those in need and do good deeds
• Research shows a positive relationship between religiosity and certain forms of altruism (e.g. Batson and Gray 1981; Hunsberger & Platonow 1986; Watson, Hood, Morris, & Hall 1984)
• We argue that, for some, adopting a child may be an altruistic gesture

Background Literature
• Previous research finds age, marital status, number of children, race, and income as strong predictors of adopting a child (Jones 2009)
• Additionally, women who are sterile or subfertile, and those who have difficulties bearing children, are more likely to adopt children (Bonham 1977, Bachrach 1983, Stolley 1993, Chandra et al. 1999)
• Research has examined the importance of religion among adoption seekers (Hollingsworth 2000)

Hypotheses
• If religion is a salient aspect of an individual’s identity, then more religious individuals should be more likely to adopt
• More religious individuals should also be more likely to adopt a non-related child compared to a related child

Data and Methods
• Wave I of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH)
  - Nationally representative
  - Collected in 1987-1988
  - Numerous questions regarding religiosity
  - Extensive information regarding adoption
• Dependent Variables
  - Whether the respondent has adopted a child
  - Whether adopted child in household is a related or non-related child
• Independent Variables
  - Religiosity and religious affiliation
  - Control Variables
  - Measures of marital and parenthood histories
  - Sociodemographic characteristics

Logistic Regression Results of Religiosity on Having a Non-Related Adopted Child in the Household (N=187)

Major Findings
• More religious respondents are more likely to adopt a non-related child
• Education, age, being female, and being white are positively associated with adopting a non-related child compared to a related child
• Women’s odds of adopting a non-related child are 4 ½ times greater than men’s
• Having more biological children is negatively associated with being a non-related child

Conclusions
• Religiosity does appear to be related to both adopting a child and adopting a non-related child,
  - therefore, it does appear that the altruistic socialization associated with religiosity may be manifested in adoption behavior
• Our sociodemographic controls are consistent with previous findings
• Adoption agencies may benefit by focusing attention on individuals who actively participate in religious organizations

Limitations
• Small sample sizes reduced the interpretability of the effect of religious affiliation
• The NSFH does not contain detailed accounts of infertility

Future Research
• Distinguish between the effects of religious behavior and religious ideology
• Replicate findings across other data sets
• Determine if adoptive parents’ religiosity influences child’s religiosity

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