

Do mental health support policies improve the wellbeing of adopted children? Quasi-experimental evidence from the UK

Authors:

Liming Li, King's College London

Mauricio Avendano, University of Lausanne

Craig Morgan, King's College London

Abstract:

Adopted children face significant mental health and behavioural problems as a result of adverse experiences during childhood, yet there is limited evidence on the impact of policies that can enhance access to mental health support for children and their families. In this study, we examine the impact of the Adoptive Support Fund (ASF), a national policy administered by local authorities in the UK that offered adoptive families and children funding support to access mental health services. Based on data from the Longitudinal Study of Adoptive Parents, the Millennium Cohort Study and the UK Household Longitudinal Study, we use a difference-in-differences approach to investigate the impact of the ASF policy on children's Strengths and Difficulties (SDQ) scores. We find mixed effects of the policy on adopted children: the ASF policy did not improve adopted children's total or sub-scale mean SDQ scores. However, it led to a significantly large reduction by 10-percentage points in the risks of having a high degree of emotional and behavioural difficulties (score > 17). Our findings highlight the need for complementary approaches that consider the broader needs of adopted children and their adoptive families.