

**ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN ADOPTEES AND NON-ADOPTEES: MORE SIMILARITIES THAN DIFFERENCES****Carmen Paniagua, Carmen Moreno, Francisco Rivera and Antonia Jiménez-Iglesias**

Manuscript accepted to be published in *British Journal of Social Work* (April 2018)

The main focus in adoption research has changed throughout its history. In the past, research tended to adopt a primarily descriptive approach, which initially focused on comparing psychological problems in adoptees and non-adoptees, and has more recently moved to recovery trajectories after early adversity. Since the year 2000, however, adoption research has also shifted towards a more explanatory approach. The aim of the current study is to understand the underlying factors and adjustment processes in adoptees' developmental growth. Among the questions proposed by recent research, those that focus on understanding the interactive processes that explain adoptive families' relationship dynamics stand out for their implications in intervention (Palacios and Brodzinsky, 2011).

Research on relationships in adoptive families has predominantly focused on two main issues. The first is attachment, whether analysing behaviour in order to classify types of attachment (e.g. meta-analysis by van den Dries et al., 2009), internal attachment models (e.g. Hodges et al., 2005; Román et al., 2012) or attachment disorders (e.g. Rutter et al., 2007). The second is communication, which generally focuses on communication regarding the adoptees' origins, in which recent studies on open adoption stand out (e.g. Grotevant et al., 2005; Skinner-Drawz et al., 2011; Brodzinsky and Goldberg, 2017). Studies on attachment and communication about the adoptees' origins have made essential contributions to developing the field of adoption research. However, these two issues focus on areas of family relationships that emphasise weak aspects of adoptive families compared to non-adoptive ones.

The current trend in psychology of studying the facts from a positive angle, focusing on a person's strengths and virtues instead of their diseases, weaknesses and damage (Seligman, 2005), does not seem to have taken hold in adoption psychology. Evidence of this is the scant research attempting to explain the reasons for adoptees' satisfaction with their family relationships. Therefore, it is increasingly important to take a positive approach to

understanding critical issues of family functioning, such as affection (beyond attachment), communication (beyond origins) or adoptees' perception of family support. Accordingly, in recent decades, psychology has changed approaches when researching family upbringing, focusing on understanding basic family dimensions (Smetana et al., 2006), such as affection, communication, family support or family satisfaction.

Furthermore, given the importance of identity development during adolescence (Côté, 2009), research in this area generally focuses on the search for, and communication about, the adoptees' origins and does not explore other facets of communication or other key variables of family satisfaction. A considerable degree of continuity has been demonstrated between parent-child relationships during infancy and those established in adolescence in a normative population, although it coexists with significant changes in interactions, in which family dynamics adapt themselves to the adolescent's level of maturity and their need for change (Jiménez-Iglesias, 2011). Most research in adopted populations has primarily focused on childhood and early adolescent outcomes of adoptees (Wijedasa and Selwyn, 2011) and there is little research describing interactions in families with adopted adolescents (Rueter et al., 2009). Thus, little is known about this continuity and adaptation to adolescent change and even less regarding whether the adoptees find the new adjustment satisfactory.

Some researchers have explored the family dimensions, as well as other adjustment measures, to better understand the adoptees' reality. For example, Rosnati et al. (2013) compared adoptive and non-adoptive parents' perceptions of their family and social relationships and their psycho-social well-being. In the study by Wijedasa and Selwyn (2011), in addition to exploring traditional aspects, such as risk behaviours, family support, overall well-being or employment were also included. Rueter et al. (2009) compared family interactions in adoptive and non-adoptive adolescents. Their data reported more similarities than differences in adoptive and non-adoptive family interactions, which was similar to the results of other studies on this topic (Rosnati and Marta, 1997; Rosnati et al., 2007; Rueter and Koerner, 2008).

#### Diversity in adoption: domestic and intercountry

It was almost twenty years ago that Haugaard (1998) highlighted the large heterogeneity that exists within the adopted population. Such heterogeneity concerns not only the personal characteristics of the adopted individuals, but also the circumstances that led to their adoption. Notwithstanding the recognition of such diversity (Palacios, 2017), recent adoption studies have also proven difficult to generalise, given that children gather highly idiosyncratic experiences from birth to placement with an adoptive family (Grotevant and McDermott, 2014). Despite this

evidence, most studies still use low-diversity samples or even hide the diversity already present. However, results are usually generalised to the entire adoption population.

Regarding the diversity within different adoption research agendas, contradictory findings have been found. For instance, Grotevant and McDermott (2014) found that domestic adoptees showed better results than intercountry adoptees in some areas. However, other studies have shown a worse developmental trajectory in domestic compared with intercountry adoptees (Moreno et al., 2016a) or even a complete lack of differences among both groups (van den Dries et al., 2009). This apparent contradiction might be a consequence of the target country studied in each case, since the reality of adoption in general and domestic adoption in particular differs largely between countries.

### Adoption in Spain

The demography of adoption has changed completely in Spain. Due to a combination of factors, such as family-preservation programmes, the adoption of healthy Spanish babies has now become the exception, while special needs and intercountry adoptions have become much more common (Palacios and Amorós, 2005). Prior to 1996, intercountry adoption was almost non-existent in Spain and increased only after the ratification of the Hague Convention in that year (Palacios et al., 2005). Despite having a later start than most other countries, the number of intercountry adoptions has increased exponentially (Juffer et al., 2011). Intercountry adoption increased by 273 per cent, with 51,129 intercountry adoptees arriving in Spain between 1998 and 2013 (Selman, 2010). Nevertheless, the number of these types of adoptions has decreased in recent years, similarly to other countries. The amount of intercountry adoption was over 1,000 adoptions per year before 2014. Yet, it was reduced to 824 in 2014 and to 799 in 2015 (Observatorio de la Infancia, 2017). However, domestic adoption has not increased, as did intercountry adoption. In fact, the number of adoptions per year used to be between 800 and 1,000, approximately (Palacios and Amorós, 2005). In recent years, the number of domestic adoptions has remained more stable: 608 adoptions in 2015, the last year for which data are available (Observatorio de la Infancia, 2017).

Adoption by kinship is illegal in Spain; kinship relatives are only allowed to act as foster parents. Open adoption was illegal in Spain until two years ago. Law 26/2015 allowed contact with the birth family as long as it was deemed appropriate by a judge. Despite the new regulation, there are currently only a few cases of contact with the birth parents, although contact with birth siblings is more frequent than with birth parents. The popularity of this option may increase in future years (Diaz, 2017). In light of the current situation, the aim of this study

was to examine adoption using an approach more focused on everyday family life and positive development, in an attempt to uncover the keys to good family functioning in adopted and non-adopted adolescents. To this effect, the relationship between different family dimensions were analysed in both non-adoptees and adoptees to observe the differences between groups on issues describing and/or explaining good family functioning. Furthermore, differences between domestic and intercountry adoptees were studied to provide a better understanding of the adoption phenomenon. Our working hypothesis was that adoptees and non-adoptees would be more similar than different in their family perception.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

This study is part of the 2014 edition of the international World Health Organization (WHO) collaborative Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study in Spain. This survey was approved by the Ethical Research Committee of the University of Seville.

Random multi-stage sampling stratified by conglomerates was employed in order to ensure the representativeness of the sample, taking into account geographic area, type of school (state or private schools) and type of habitat (rural or urban). From the original sample (31,058 adolescents), 28,768 participants aged eleven to eighteen years old were selected, removing adolescents who were living in a foster family, a welfare centre or any other family situation related to the welfare system. From this sample total, 394 were adopted adolescents (1.4 per cent) and 28,374 formed a comparative non-adopted adolescents group (98.6 per cent). Regarding the adoptees, 60.7 per cent come from intercountry adoption and 39.3 per cent come from domestic adoption. Asia (34.8 per cent) and Eastern Europe and Russia (33.5 per cent) were the main origin zones of intercountry adoption, followed by Latin America (21.6 per cent) and Africa (10.1 per cent) (for more information, see Moreno et al., 2016a). Concerning family-type composition, the distribution of the sample can be found in Table 1.

There was a balanced number of boys and girls in both the adopted and non-adopted groups, as shown in Table 2. The mean age was 14.2years (SD = 2.08) in the non-adopted group and 13.8years (SD = 2.08) in the adopted group. Similarly, the mean age was 13.8years in domestic adoptees (SD = 2.20) and 13.8years in intercountry adoptees (SD = 1.99). Because there were significant differences between non-adoptees and adoptees in age, despite the lack of effect size, the following analysis was controlled by gender and age.

**Table 1** Type of families of participants

	Non-adoptees	Adoptees	Domestic	Intercountry
	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)
Traditional nuclear families	81.1 (23022)	66.1 (251)	57.8 (85)	71.2 (166)
Reconstituted families	5.1 (1446)	2.1 (8)	2.0 (3)	2.1 (5)
Single parents	13.1 (3713)	16.8 (64)	17.7 (26)	16.3 (38)
Single mother	51.6 (1916)	75.0 (48)	57.7 (15)	86.8 (33)
Single father	8.4 (313)	6.3 (4)	11.5 (3)	2.6 (1)
Half of time with mother/father	40.0 (1484)	18.8 (12)	30.8 (8)	10.5 (4)

### Instruments

Family context was assessed through scales measuring parental affection, communication with parents, family support and satisfaction with family. Parental affection and communication with parents have maternal and paternal dimensions to be more inclusive of family diversity, allowing us to increase our knowledge regarding the contributions of the father and the mother separately.

#### *Parental affection*

This variable was assessed by means of the four-item care subscale of the Parental Bonding Inventory-Brief Current form (PBI-BC; Klimidis et al., 1992a, 1992b; Parker et al., 1979). The Cronbach alpha was 0.84 for the entire sample, 0.86 for the adopted group and 0.84 for the non-adopted group on the mothers' and fathers' scales.

#### *Ease of communication with parents*

Communication was explored using two items designed by the HBSC International network. Participants were asked: 'How easy is it for you to talk to your mother/father about things that really bother you?' The items ranged from 1 = 'Very difficult' to 4 = 'Very easy'.

**Table 2** Demographic characteristics of participants

		Non-adoptees		Adoptees		Comparison	Phi/Cramer's V
		%	N	%	N		
Sex	Boy	49.5	14,057	47.5	187	$p > 0.1$	0.005
	Girl	50.5	14,317	52.5	207		
Age	11-12	24.3	6,893	30.5	120	$p = 0.021$	0.018
	13-14	31.0	8,807	31.0	122		
	15-16	30.0	8,511	26.9	106		
	17-18	14.7	4,163	11.7	46		
		Domestic adoptees		Intercountry adoptees		Comparison	Phi/Cramer's V
		%	N	%	N		
Sex	Boy	52.3	81	44.4	106	$p > 0.1$	0.077
	Girl	47.7	74	55.6	133		
Age	11-12	32.3	50	29.3	70	$p > 0.1$	0.110
	13-14	31.0	48	31.0	74		
	15-16	21.9	34	30.1	72		
	17-18	14.8	23	9.6	23		

#### *Family support*

This variable was assessed with the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988). This scale ranges from 1 = 'Strongly disagree' to 7 = 'Strongly agree'. The Cronbach alpha was 0.93 for the entire sample, 0.93 for the non-adopted group and 0.92 for the adopted group.

#### *Satisfaction with family relationships*

This variable was measured by means of an item designed by the HBSC International network based on Cantril's Ladder (Cantril, 1965): 'In general how satisfied are you with relationships in your family?'. A quantitative score was obtained that ranged from 0 = 'We have very bad relationships in our family' to 10 = 'We have very good relationships in our family'.

#### *Procedure*

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) were used in data collection. Specifically, a computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI) system was employed that allowed students to fill out the questionnaires over the internet. This computer-assisted procedure made it possible to automatically incorporate answers into the project database, thus reducing potential human errors associated with data entry. For those schools without sufficient computers, data were collected using tablets.

We provided the students' parents with a passive consent form. After carefully reading the form, they may either decide not to authorise the participation of their children or passively agree on its terms by taking no further action. Prior to the onset of the study, students were briefed, provided with instructions regarding the questionnaire, as well as informed that they may choose whether to participate or not.

Data collection complied with the requirements dictated by the HBSC International protocol (Inchley et al., 2016; Moreno et al., 2016b): students answered the questionnaires themselves; anonymity was guaranteed; and the questionnaires were completed at school under the supervision of instructed staff.

### Data analysis

Different statistical analyses were performed in this study using the IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0 software. First, mean comparisons (Student's *t*) and Cohen's *d* effect size tests were used to compare groups, controlling for gender and age. Second, using Spearman's rho correlations, a descriptive analysis of the relationships between affection, communication and support to family satisfaction was obtained. Partial eta-squared scores and Z-scores were used to test whether Spearman's rho correlations were statistically different between groups. Finally, a multivariate analysis (multiple linear regression) was performed to study differences in family satisfaction between groups.

### Results

We report statistically significant differences between adoptees and non-adoptees in three of the measured variables, namely communication with the father, family support and family satisfaction (see Table 3). However, the only family variable that reached a considerable effect size was family satisfaction ( $d = 0.22$ ), which was higher in non-adopted adolescents. Regarding the comparison between domestic and intercountry adoptees, three variables reached a considerable effect size: maternal affection ( $d = 0.29$ ), which was higher in domestic adoptees; family support ( $d = 0.31$ ), which was higher in intercountry adoptees; and family satisfaction ( $d = 0.28$ ), which was higher in intercountry adoptees.

The significant differences we found in family satisfaction for both contrasts (adoptees versus non-adoptees, and domestic versus intercountry adoptees) were not present in other family dimensions (communication, affection and support). Therefore, the correlation between these variables was made secondarily to explain this difference. Table 4 shows the correlation

between adoptees and non-adoptees. In this table, it can be observed that all variables had positive and significant correlations with family satisfaction for both groups.

Finally, to further explore the reported differences in family satisfaction, four multiple linear regression models were tested for non-adoptees, adoptees, domestic adoptees and intercountry adoptees, respectively (see Table 5). For non-adopted adolescents, the model explained 26 per cent of family satisfaction, which is considered statistically significant. All the family dimensions studied were statistically significant; however, they exhibited different effect sizes. Table 5 shows that family support was found to be the dimension with a higher beta ( $\beta = 0.261$ ) and higher effect size (medium). The model for adoptees was statistically significant and explained 30 per cent of family satisfaction. Overall, family support was the variable with the greater capacity to explain adolescents' family satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.392$ ). It is the only significant variable and the only variable with a medium effect size.

The model for domestic adoptees was statistically significant and explained 44 per cent of family satisfaction (see Table 5). Family support—the only significant variable in this model—showed the highest effect size, and therefore the greater capacity to explain adolescents' family satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.419$ ). Regarding intercountry adoptees, the model was statistically significant and explained 21 per cent of family satisfaction. Overall, family support was the only significant variable, showed the highest effect size and thus had the greatest capacity to explain adolescents' family satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.377$ ).



**Table 3** Mean comparison and effect size in different family dimensions

		<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> ( <i>Mz</i> *)	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>t</i>	Comparison	<i>d</i>
Communication with the mother	Non-adoptees	26,640	3.0 (-0.0)	0.85	0.30	$p > 0.1$	0.04
	Adoptees	298	3.0 (-0.0)	0.89			
	Domestic	102	2.9 (-0.2)	0.97	1.42	$p > 0.1$	0.17
	Intercountry	196	3.0 (0.0)	0.85			
Communication with the father	Non-adoptees	23,943	2.7 (-0.0)	0.95	2.00	$p = 0.046$	0.13
	Adoptees	253	2.8 (0.1)	0.94			
	Domestic	92	2.8 (0.1)	1.05	0.87	$p > 0.1$	0.12
	Intercountry	161	2.8 (0.2)	0.88			
Maternal affection	Non-adoptees	26,402	1.7 (0.0)	0.38	1.92	$p = 0.056$	0.14
	Adoptees	291	1.7 (-0.1)	0.45			
	Domestic	99	1.6 (-0.4)	0.56	2.10	$p = 0.038$	0.29
	Intercountry	192	1.7 (-0.0)	0.38			
Paternal affection	Non-adoptees	23,589	1.6 (0.0)	0.49	0.54	$p > 0.1$	0.03
	Adoptees	245	1.6 (-0.0)	0.52			
	Domestic	85	1.5 (-0.1)	0.57	0.74	$p > 0.1$	0.10
	Intercountry	160	1.6 (0.0)	0.49			
Family support	Non-adoptees	27,169	5.9 (0.0)	1.56	2.27	$p = 0.024$	0.14
	Adoptees	367	5.7 (-0.1)	1.77			
	Domestic	142	5.4 (-0.3)	1.95	2.79	$p = 0.006$	0.31
	Intercountry	225	5.9 (0.0)	1.62			
Family satisfaction	Non-adoptees	26,769	9.4 (0.0)	2.13	4.06	$p = 0.005$	0.22
	Adoptees	352	9.1 (-0.2)	2.78			
	Domestic	136	8.6 (-0.4)	3.13	2.41	$p = 0.017$	0.28
	Intercountry	216	9.4	2.5			

(-0.16)

\*Standardised mean controlling for age and gender.

**Table 4** Correlation between family satisfaction and other family-related variables (communication, affection and family support), controlling for age and gender

		N	<i>Rho Spearman</i>	Correlation	<i>Partial Eta squared</i>	<i>Z value</i>	<i>Z p</i>
Communication with the mother	Non-adoptees	25,744	0.31	$p < 0.001$	0.10	0.93	$p > 0.1$
	Adoptees	279	0.26	$p < 0.001$	0.07		
	Domestic	98	0.23	$p = 0.022$	0.05		
	Intercountry	181	0.26	$p < 0.001$	0.07		
Communication with the father	Non-adoptees	23,127	0.29	$p < 0.001$	0.08	0.33	$p > 0.1$
	Adoptees	235	0.31	$p < 0.001$	0.10		
	Domestic	88	0.44	$p < 0.001$	0.19		
	Intercountry	147	0.21	$p = 0.013$	0.04		
Maternal affection	Non-adoptees	26,617	0.53	$p < 0.001$	0.28	0.05	$p > 0.1$
	Adoptees	351	0.53	$p < 0.001$	0.28		
	Domestic	95	0.44	$p < 0.001$	0.19		
	Intercountry	177	0.31	$p < 0.001$	0.09		
Paternal affection	Non-adoptees	25,526	0.42	$p < 0.001$	0.17	1.08	$p > 0.1$
	Adoptees	272	0.36	$p < 0.001$	0.13		
	Domestic	81	0.54	$p < 0.001$	0.29		
	Intercountry	148	0.41	$p < 0.001$	0.17		
Family support	Non-adoptees	22,804	0.41	$p < 0.001$	0.17	0.92	$p > 0.1$
	Adoptees	229	0.46	$p < 0.001$	0.21		
	Domestic	135	0.61	$p < 0.001$	0.37		
	Intercountry	216	0.45	$p < 0.001$	0.20		

**Table 5** Indices corresponding to the multiple linear regression models, controlling for age and gender

		B	Standard Error	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial eta squared
Non-adoptees	Communication with the mother	0.06	0.01	.059	7.71	<i>p</i> < .001	0.003
	Communication with the father	0.02	0.01	.026	3.20	<i>p</i> = 0.001	< 0.001
	Maternal affection	0.16	0.01	.164	21.00	<i>p</i> < .001	0.020
	Paternal affection	0.15	0.01	.160	20.15	<i>p</i> < .001	0.018
	Family support	0.25	0.01	.261	37.93	<i>p</i> < .001	0.063
Adoptees	Communication with the mother	0.01	0.07	.006	0.09	<i>p</i> > 0.1	< 0.001
	Communication with the father	0.12	0.07	.116	1.67	<i>p</i> = 0.097	0.013
	Maternal affection	0.11	0.06	.130	1.77	<i>p</i> = 0.079	0.015
	Paternal affection	0.09	0.07	.091	1.28	<i>p</i> > 0.1	0.008
	Family support	0.40	0.07	.392	5.55	<i>p</i> < .001	0.130
Domestic	Communication with the mother	0.07	0.10	.075	0.68	<i>p</i> > 0.1	0.007
	Communication with the father	0.11	0.10	.118	1.13	<i>p</i> > 0.1	0.018
	Maternal affection	0.09	0.08	.131	1.12	<i>p</i> > 0.1	0.017
	Paternal affection	0.14	0.10	.163	1.42	<i>p</i> > 0.1	0.028
	Family support	0.39	0.10	.419	3.93	<i>p</i> < .001	0.181
Intercountry	Communication with the mother	-0.04	0.10	-.037	0.40	<i>p</i> > 0.1	0.001
	Communication with the father	0.13	0.10	.120	1.31	<i>p</i> > 0.1	0.013
	Maternal affection	0.12	0.09	.118	1.26	<i>p</i> > 0.1	0.012
	Paternal affection	0.04	0.09	.041	0.45	<i>p</i> > 0.1	0.002
	Family support	0.41	0.10	.377	4.03	<i>p</i> < .001	0.112

## Discussion

This study attempted to analyse aspects of family dynamics rarely explored in classic adoption research, which typically focuses more on difficulties and pathologies. Specifically, the goal was to understand the keys to a well-functioning family as perceived by adopted and non-adopted adolescents. Furthermore, differences between domestic and intercountry adoptees were also explored in an attempt to abovementioned diversity within adoption research. To this end, the relationships between different fundamental aspects of family dynamics and family satisfaction were analysed, using a positive approach that does not assume such aspects to necessarily be challenges for adoptees. The main conclusion to be drawn from the results of this study is that, when family relationships are explored from a perspective of normality (not focusing on specifically challenging areas for adoption), the adopted and non-adopted adolescents showed very similar results. With respect to domestic and intercountry adoptees, the main conclusion of the present study is that a great share of diversity is hidden within the concept of adoption. In the following, we will first discuss our results regarding the comparison between non-adoptees and adoptees, followed by the contrast between domestic and intercountry adoptees.

The comparative analysis of family dimensions, with the exception of family satisfaction, showed a normative vision of adoptive families inasmuch as adoptees showed the same levels of communication, affection and family support as non-adoptees. Thus, it appears that, by asking about affection and not about attachment relationships, or about ease of communication with parents and not about how the adoptees' origins are spoken about, both types of adolescents are very similar in the aforementioned dimensions. Based on this observation, these results raise the question of whether the majority of adoption research has focused too heavily on negative or weak aspects of adoptive families, consequently over-emphasising their importance, instead of focusing on those indicators of success that show them to be as successful as families who have not experienced the adoption process. Another question that should be raised is whether the positive family dimensions that behave identically in adopted and non-adopted adolescents (communication, affection and family support) really have the same capacity to explain family satisfaction for both types of adolescents.

In an attempt to answer the aforementioned question, in this study, two multiple linear regression analyses were performed independently for adoptees and non-adoptees. In this regard, the role that family support plays in family satisfaction for both groups was a relevant finding. The results of the two models indicate that, for adolescents, despite experiencing a developmental stage characterised by the desire for independence from their parents (Côté,

2009; McElhaney et al., 2009), counting on family support is very important for their satisfaction in this key developmental context. This relationship proved stronger in adopted adolescents, for whom the role of family support is even more important. This finding is supported by other research, such as the English and Romanian Adoptees study (Kreppner, 2016), which analysed three groups of adoptees and found that adoptees reported higher scores in perceived family support than the non-adoptee control group.

The fact that family support seems to be less important for the family satisfaction of non-adopted adolescents could be because, at this age, the peer group gains more importance (e.g. Brown and Larson, 2009). However, it is possible that, given the adoptees' early experience of adversity and the associated emotional consequences (Palacios et al., 2014; Rueter et al., 2009), this developmental process is slower and occurs later than in their non-adopted peers. In fact, another study using this same sample (Moreno et al., 2016a) reported higher scores in satisfaction with friend and perceived friend support in non-adopted than in adopted adolescents. Therefore, adoptees could require more support and family presence beyond infancy. A possible reason for the lesser influence of family support in non-adoptees is that maternal affection is more important in the non-adopted group than in the adopted group, so this dimension could decrease the strength of family support, as happens with the mother's role in the adopted group. Another explanation may be that fathers are more important in the adopted group, so their more active role could increase the strength of family support, in which both the mother and the father are included. The latter hypothesis received support from Harris and Ryan (2004), who reported higher levels of involvement and, thus, similar levels of support and interaction from both parents in adopted children. That is, while mothers (adoptive or not) are typically more involved with children than fathers, adoptive fathers demonstrate more involvement than non-adoptive fathers.

Regarding affection and communication, paternal and maternal dimensions have different roles in adoptive and non-adoptive families. For non-adoptive families, the maternal affection and communication variables better explain family satisfaction than those same paternal variables. However, for adoptees, the father has a more active role in family satisfaction. Despite the maternal figure being more important in affection, the adoptive father stands out in communication. This finding was to be expected. Adoptive families go through a screening process for eligibility and training before beginning the adoption process (Palacios, 2009). Therefore, adoptive families have generally planned to be a family, in addition to receiving extensive information regarding family functioning. The adoptive fathers tend to be very involved in the family project that they have initiated—an aspect that, unfortunately, is not

always present in non-adoptive fathers (e.g. Harris and Ryan, 2004). However, it is necessary to make an important clarification regarding these findings: the fact that the paternal dimensions' betas are stronger inevitably affects the score for the mother in adoptees, causing it to diminish. This does not mean that communication with the mother is less important for adoptees, but rather that the parental role is more evenly distributed between the mother and father than in the case of the non-adoptees, where the principal protagonist tends to be the mother.

Some research has shown that adoptive fathers score higher in involvement and nurturing than biological fathers (Schwartz and Finley, 2006). In this line, Harris and Ryan (2004) found a higher degree of involvement in adoptive fathers (42 per cent) than in biological fathers (30.7 per cent) or stepfathers (16.9 per cent). Other studies have found a relationship between the father's implication and care and communication with their children, as reported in the findings of Rosnati et al. (2007) and Rosnati and Marta (1997), in which intercountry adoptees showed higher-quality communication with their parents than adolescents living with their biological families or in foster families. Gogineni and Fallon (2013) also found that adoptees feel that they are able to talk with their fathers more than non-adoptees.

Regarding differences between mothers and fathers, for centuries, scientists have debated about the extent to which women and men are different or the same. Clearly, there are many similarities; however, scientific research has also noted many differences. For example, the results of the meta-analysis made by Jeynes (2016) indicated that fathers supply a unique contribution that is associated with positive psychological, social and academic outcomes. However, as Lamb (2012) indicates, these differences are the result of differential socialisation between men and women that condition. Despite these differences, mothers and fathers influence the development of their children in the same way, independently of gender.

Finally, family satisfaction was the only statistically significant variable, and the only variable with sufficient effect size, when comparing adopted and non-adopted adolescents, showing lower mean values in adoptees than in non-adoptees. Finding this difference in a sample of adolescent boys and girls is directly related to the fact that adoptees face the inherent challenges of adolescence, such as identity formation (Côté, 2009), as well as challenges specifically related to their situation as adoptees (Rueter et al., 2009; Brodzinsky et al., 2011). For adoptees, the process of identity formation involves not only discovering who they are, but also who they are with respect to the adoption. Adoptees that develop an identity achievement usually have families that allow them to speak about their adoption and help them to understand how their role as adoptees fits into in their overall evaluation of themselves

(Brodzinsky et al., 2011). Achieving an identity may be very difficult when essential pieces are missing from their life history. Accepting the absence of this information and integrating it into their identity is a difficult task that may make adoptees question their personal and family situation.

Additionally, adolescence involves other phenomena that may specifically affect adoptees more. The majority of non-adopted adolescents enter this developmental stage already accepting that their parents can have two facets: caring for them as well as educating and controlling them. That is to say, they accept their parents' ambivalence. However, most adoptees do not arrive at this conclusion and do not resolve the family romance fantasy (as Brodzinsky calls it) until reaching adolescence or even adulthood. The existence of a second set of parents, the biological parents, makes this issue more difficult to resolve, since, when the adolescent rebels against the adoptive families' rules and restrictions, they may idealise the biological family and fantasise that they would have more freedom with them (Brodzinsky et al., 2011). These situations, unique to the adoptees' adolescence, could be the cause of their lower family satisfaction during this stage, despite having affection, communication and support from their parents.

These results are related to those found in a study by Howe (1996), in which a longitudinal study was done on three different adoptive families with the aim of comparing the family relationships in adolescence and adulthood. This study found that the behaviour of a small but significant number of adoptees was becoming problematic during adolescence, inevitably affecting parent-child relationships whereas, in early adulthood, these problems diminished. These changes are probably due to a slower and more complex emotional development in adoptees, seeming to indicate that they need more time to handle their feelings of anxiety, doubt and anger, and develop feelings of self-confidence and self-assurance.

A vital contrast in the present analyses concerns the distinction between domestic and intercountry adoptees. We found differences in family satisfaction, maternal affection and family support when comparing domestic to intercountry adoptees. With respect to the influence of the family dimensions in family satisfaction, fathers were found to be more relevant for domestic than intercountry adoptees, where the contribution of mothers and fathers is more balanced.

Said differences between domestic and intercountry adoptees are congruent with previous findings showing a great heterogeneity and diversity within the adoption population (Haugaard, 1998; Grotevant and McDermott, 2014; Palacios, 2017). Therefore, it is eminently

problematic to generalise adoption research results, and any generalisation must be done cautiously. Spanish domestic adoptees have early adversity, maltreatment and abuse before the adoption. Moreover, most of them have resided in welfare centres before the adoption. Therefore, their adjustment as domestic adoptees contrasts to a great extent with other domestic adoptees, such as the American domestic adoptees sample reported by Grotevant and McDermott (2014), where domestic adoptees were adopted through private agencies, not from the welfare system.

Despite the differences between intercountry and domestic adoptees in the present study, we still found abundant similarities between them. For instance, family support was the most influential variable for both groups disregarding whether adoptees are studied as an entire group or divided according to their adoption type. These results support the above-mentioned hypothesis: family support may be more relevant to adoptees than non-adoptees.

It is necessary to reflect upon the family structure of the adolescents in this study. First, the HBSC study data-set is highly representative of the Spanish adolescent population. Therefore, the results regarding family structure presented in this work can adequately generalise to the entire Spanish adolescent population. According these results, the traditional nuclear family was the most frequent family type in adoptees and non-adoptees, followed by single parents and, eventually, reconstituted family. Second, it is also necessary to meditate on the influence of family type on the adjustment and development of (adopted or not) adolescents. There has been a long-standing tradition within the history of developmental psychology that studied the influence of family structure on the adjustment and development of children that considered the traditional nuclear family the best type (e.g. McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). However, this point of view is widely considered as outdated nowadays. Currently, it is well known in the literature that the most relevant aspect for the adjustment and development of adoptees is the function the family provides and the satisfaction of the children's needs, instead of family structure. In this line, good adjustment and development have been reported in different family structure types (Golombok, 2006; Kesner and McKenry, 2001).

Lastly, it is important to note that this study has certain limitations, such as the impossibility of realising a longitudinal design of the sample due to the transversal nature of the HBSC study. Similarly, despite being large compared to other studies, the sample of adoptees used here is clearly considerably smaller than the sample of non-adopted adolescents that serve as a comparative group. However, due to the analysis used and the inclusion of effect size, this



size difference cannot affect the results. Finally, the lack of information about some factors related to our sample, such as identity formation, has limited the scope of our discussion as well as the conclusions we were able to draw from the present results. Hence, further research items regarding identity formation have been included in the next data collection, which is going to start next year.

Nevertheless, this study reported interesting results in the area of adoption psychology. Specifically, the present research shows that, when the focus shifts from the traditional issues in adoption research to more normalised questions, the similarities between adopted and non-adopted adolescents are greater than the differences. In fact, evidence shows that both types of adolescents have the same level of communication, affection and family support, although the adoptees' family satisfaction is lower. This research provides interesting information on the differentiation between both groups of adolescents regarding the ways in which family support, communication with parents and parental affection are hierarchically structured in explaining family satisfaction. Thus, the information is transferable from research to intervention with adoptive families. Future studies should consider paying closer attention to family diversity. One possibility may be to incorporate same-sex families. Another interesting opportunity would be to examine differences not only between intercountry and domestic adoption, but also within domestic adoption variability, as well as the diversity among intercountry adoptees due to country of birth. Ultimately, we hope that this research focus, based on normality and a positive vision, finds a similarly relevant place in adoption psychology with the study of differences and pathologies.

## **Conclusion**

Studying the adoptees from a view focused in their reality, not in the classic clinical issues that have been the focus of the majority of adoption studies, revealed that there are more similarities to non-adoptees than differences. The perceptions of family relationships (communication, affection and support) are the same in adopted and non-adopted adolescents. In fact, more differences within the adoptees group (domestic versus intercountry) have been detected than between non-adoptees and adoptees. This finding emphasises the profound diversity existent within the adoption population. Family satisfaction was the only significant difference among non-adoptees and adoptees, and this may be because it is affected by the integration and acceptance process of adoption during adolescence as part of their identity.

## **Funding**

The HBSC study is supported by the Spanish Ministry of Health, Social Policy and Equality. This work was also supported by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness through the project PSI2015-67757-R. Carmen Paniagua's and Antonia Jiménez-Iglesias's work was supported by the V Plan Propio de Investigación de la Universidad de Sevilla (Spain) 2014, under the actions 'II.2. Contrato Predoctorales o de Personal Investigador en Formación (PIF) para el Desarrollo del Programa Propio de I+D+i de la US' and 'II.5B Contrato de acceso al Sistema Español de Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación para el Desarrollo del Programa Propio de I+D+i de la Universidad de Sevilla', respectively. Conflict of interest statement. None declared.

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