

Adoptive and non adoptive families: same or different in attachment and parental stress

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ABSTRACT

This poster focuses on analyzing the characteristics of the adoptive parents. Specifically, we studied the history of adult attachment and parental stress in adoptive families, and their relation to security in attachment behaviors and behavioral adjustment of children adopted.

SAMPLE

- The participants in the study were 98 families: 40 adoptive and 58 non-adoptive families. The groups were matched for educational level (82.5% of the adoptive parents and 53.4% of the non-adoptive parents held university qualifications).
- Regarding adopted children (n = 40), all of them had been born in Russia and were three years old at adoption ($M = 35.78$ months, $SD = 15.96$). Their average ages were six years ($M = 75.68$ months, $SD = 14.26$); they had three years in the adoptive family ($M = 39.90$, $SD = 14.25$); 27.5% were girls and 72.5% boys.

METHOD

The adoptive families were contacted through two agencies that specialize in adoptions from Russia; the non-adoptive comparison group was contacted through schools in the same region. Data were collected through interviews and observations in the home families by researchers and specialists.

- Parental Bonding Instrument* (PBI; Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979).
- Parenting Stress Index* (PSI; Abidin, 1995).
- Interview Measure of Attachment Security* (IMAS; Chisholm, 1998; Chisholm, Carter, Ames, & Morison, 1995).
- Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire* (SDQ; Goodman, 1999).

OBJETIVES

- Analyze whether there are differences in adult attachment history and parental stress depending on the family (adoptive or non-adoptive).
- Analyze the relationships between history of adult attachment and parental stress with security attachment behaviors of adopted children.
- Analyze whether there are relationships between history of adult attachment and parental stress with the psychological problems of adopted children.

RESULTS

1. Comparative analysis on adult attachment history

The statistical analysis did not show significant differences in history of adult attachment with the mother and father in adoptive and non adoptive families (Table 1 & 2).

Table 1
T Student of affection and overprotection (PBI) with the mother and father according to the family group (adoptive and non-adoptive)

| Indicators | gl | t | Sig. |
|-------------------------|----|--------|------|
| Mother's affection | 91 | -.006 | .996 |
| Mother's overprotection | 90 | -1.127 | .263 |
| Father's affection | 86 | -.296 | .768 |
| Father's overprotection | 86 | -.160 | .874 |

Table 2
Pearson Chi-square type of attachment (PBI) with the mother and father according to the family group (adoptive and non-adoptive)

| Indicators | gl | X2 | Sig. |
|---------------------------|----|-------|------|
| Type attachment to mother | 3 | 1.899 | .594 |
| Type attachment to father | 3 | 1.447 | .695 |

3. Associations between adult attachment history and parental stress with security in attachment and behavioral adaptation of children

Overall, no significant relationships between adult attachment history and behavioral adaptation of adopted children were found (Table 3).

Table 3
Pearson correlation between the scales of affection and overprotection of adult attachment (PBI) and behavioral adaptation of children (SDQ), in adoptive and non-adoptive families

| Indicators | Adoptive | Non-adoptive |
|-------------------------|----------|--------------|
| Mother's affection | .148 | .108 |
| Mother's overprotection | -.040 | .003 |
| Father's affection | .023 | -.092 |
| Father's overprotection | .026 | .275* |

Note. * $p < .05$.

Significant associations were detected between the level of parental stress and security attachment behaviors of children and behavioral adjustment in children (Table 4 & 5).

Table 4
Pearson correlation between indicators of parental stress (PSI) and the attachment security for children (IMAS), in adoptive and non-adoptive families

| Indicators | Adoptive | Non-adoptive |
|------------------------------------|----------|--------------|
| PSI: Adaptability | -.565*** | -.317* |
| PSI: Demandingness | -.453** | -.276* |
| PSI: Mood | -.212 | -.406** |
| PSI: Distractibility/Hyperactivity | -.493** | -.181 |
| PSI: Acceptability | -.426** | -.247 |
| PSI: Depression | -.347* | .170 |
| PSI: Competence | -.528** | -.184 |
| PSI: Attachment | -.409* | -.396** |
| PSI: Spouse | -.020 | -.093 |
| PSI: Isolation | -.308 | -.126 |
| PSI: Health | -.280 | -.065 |
| PSI: Role Restriction | -.154 | -.044 |
| PSI: Child | -.504** | -.370** |
| PSI: Parent | -.440** | -.135 |
| PSI: Total | -.527** | -.294* |

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 5
Pearson correlation between the total score of parental stress (PSI) and indicators of behavioral adjustment in children (SDQ), in adoptive and non-adoptive families

| Indicators | Adoptive | Non-adoptive |
|-----------------------------|----------|--------------|
| SDQ: Total problems | .693*** | .401** |
| SDQ: Emotional problems | .429** | .338* |
| SDQ: Behavioral problems | .502** | .209 |
| SDQ: Hyperactivity problems | .643*** | .331* |
| SDQ: Problems with peers | .371* | .198 |
| SDQ: Pro-social behavior | -.227 | -.019 |

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

2. Comparative analysis on parental stress

In general, the statistical analysis of the comparison between the two samples reflected the absence of significant differences in the total score in PSI, as well as the two main domains (parent and child) ($p > .05$). Only significant differences in PSI scale were found on distraction/hyperactivity disorder ($t(94) = 1944$, $p = .055$) and the scale of spouse ($t(94) = 2.379$, $p = .019$) (Figure 1). In both cases the effect size was small ($d = 0.40$ and $d = 0.49$ respectively).

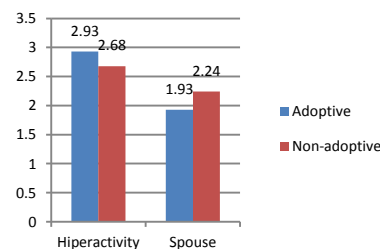


Figure 1. Mean scores on the PSI scale of distraction/hyperactivity and scale of spouse in adoptive and non-adoptive families

CONCLUSIONS

- Adoptive and non-adoptive families are similar with respect to the memory they have on their relationships with their parents in childhood and adolescence.
- In general terms, the stress level found in adoptive and non-adoptive families were similar.
- Adoptive families presented higher scores of stress due to the perception of inattention or hyperactivity of their children.
- The non-adoptive parents had higher scores on stress due to the lack of physical and emotional support of their partners in tasks related to parenthood.
- Adoptive parents with less stress may better address the emotional and behavioral needs of adopted children.
- These results highlight the need to study the interaction between parents and children, taking into account the relationship established between the characteristics of children and parents. This approach seems to be even more necessary in the case of adoptive parenthood.

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