

Adopted Children

Michael Galobardi, Lisa K. Lashley, Charles J. Golden

Nova Southeastern University, College of Psychology

Adoption is the legal transfer of parental rights and responsibilities over the care of a child from the birth parents to other adult(s), who will then raise the child. The adoption of children by non-biologically-related adults has a long and complicated history in both the United States and around the world. Over time awareness of adopted individuals, adoptive families, and birth parents and families has increased; all three groups known as the adoption triad, or adoption kinship network.

Two types of adoption are domestic adoption and international (intercountry) adoption. As the name implies domestic adoption is when all members of the adoption triad are from the same country; and international adoption is when children are placed in families outside of their country of origin. Some domestic adoptions occur through the child welfare system, which can mean that the state has removed the child (or children) from their biological parents/families. Other domestic adoptions are private, in which the biological parents legally relinquished their rights over the child and have handed them in for adoption.

The research in this population has found that adopted children are more prone to certain difficulties than other children. These adopted children tend to exhibit more externalizing symptoms like attentional difficulties, oppositional tendencies, learning problems, and conduct and defiant problems than children who grew up with their birth parents. It seems that children adopted domestically are more vulnerable to these types of issues than those adopted internationally. Children that live in institutions, in other words before they are adopted, are stunted in certain areas such as physical growth. However, being adopted seems to have a catch-

up effect in the areas of physical growth, attachment security, behavior problems, self-esteem, and cognitive development and scholastic achievement.

Children who integrate into their adopted families the easiest are children who were adopted at a very young age and have had very few prior pre-placement adversities, such as children who were removed from their birth parents because of issues of abuse and neglect, or children who experienced poor institutional care. There are new set of difficulties for children who were adopted at an older age. Both the child and the adopted family have to make an effort to get to know each other and get comfortable with living with each other. Children who are adopted later may still have feelings for the birth family, and will find it difficult to feel a sense of belonging in the new home. However, some who adopted late may have a sense of relief at just being in a secure environment. Children who are older and have special needs are particularly at risk of feeling insecure in their new environment.

When older children are adopted they are not only changing homes, but also changing schools. These school-aged children find it difficult to not only form attachments to their new family, but also coping with the stressors of transitioning to a new school. It is difficult to cope with this new change, including difficulties in regulating emotions and peer relations.

Another finding is that adopted individuals, across all ages and contact arrangements (i.e., contact with birth parents vs. no contact), expressed an interest in their birth parents. The particulars of their interest changed depending on the age of the individual. Adolescents who were adopted showed an interest in wanting to know why they were put up for adoption. Emerging adults who were adopted were more interested in learning their birth parent's health histories. Particularly in adopted individuals who have no communication with their birth parents, they seem to be more interested in learning what their birth parents looked like and

where they were living. Knowledge in these areas helps adopted individuals in constructing their adoptive identity.

Research has also been done on children adopted by gay and lesbian couples, as this trend has become more and more common in the last decade and children adopted by same-sex parents fare very well on a variety of areas and outcome measures. These children demonstrated typical and healthy development, and did not differ significantly in the areas of health and adjustment from children of heterosexual parent families. Adopted children into a transracial family is an area of growing research. These children will have to navigate through racial issues for the rest of their lives. Some issue can include the awareness that the child is not the same race as the parents, the inability for the parents to understand the experiences of the child in terms of race and racism, and managing the perception in society of transracial adoptions. Adopted individuals of transracial families will report that in new relationships they will often disclose both their multiracial status and their adopted status early on so as not to cause uncomfortable moments.

References:

- Neil, E. (2012). Making sense of adoption: Integration and differentiation from the perspective of adopted children in middle childhood. *Children and Youth Services Review, 34*(2), 409-416. doi: 10.1016/j.chilyouth.2011.11.011
- Syne, J., Green, R., & Dyer, J. (2012). Adoption: The lucky ones or the cinderellas of children in care. *Educational and Child Psychology, 29*(3), 93-103.
- Wiley, M. O. (2017). Adoption research, practice, and societal trends: Ten years of progress. *American Psychologist, 72*(9), 985-995. doi: 10.1037/amp0000218