

**Brodzinsky, D.M., Schechter, D.E., Braff, A.M., & Singer, L.M. (1984). [Psychological and Academic Adjustment in Adopted Children](#). *Journal Of Consulting And Clinical Psychology*, 52,(4), 582-590.**

## OVERVIEW

The research addresses two questions concerning adopted children and compares results to non-adopted children of similar life surroundings. Are adopted children more vulnerable to emotional and academic problems? Are adjustment problems in adopted children related to sex and age?

### BACKGROUND

Theoretical literature suggests that the effects of adoption cause personality and identity problems. Psychoanalytic theory ([Psychoanalytic Theory](#), Peller, 1961; Sants, 1964; Schechter, 1967; Wider 1977a, 1977b) notes potential for emotional problems in late adopted children. Ethological theory ([Ethological Theory](#), Bowlby, 1969) highlights poor family communication and adjustment due to the rapid transition of adopted birth ([Social Role Theory](#), Kirk, 1964). Despite clear agreement theoretically, empirical study indicates assorted results. Adopted children are referred far more often than non-adopted children to mental health professionals. Representing only one percent of U.S. children, adopted children not reared by a relative account for four percent of children seen in mental health families. Additionally, adopted children are reported to be more aggressive.

Studies of non-clinic children yield mixed results. Some show no significant difference in behavior, academic, and personality adjustments. However, Nemovicher (1960) shows that adopted children are more hostile, dependent, tense, and fearful. Lindholm and Touliatos (1980) suggest that adopted elementary-age students exhibit greater conduct disorder, personality problems, and socialized delinquency. However, they are not found to suffer in areas of adequacy, maturity, or psychotic disorders. Bohman (1970) reveals that 10-11 year-old adopted boys have poorer adjustment and more emotional problems than non-adopted 10-11 year-old boys. Bohman offers no difference for girls and shows that the difference for boys is minimal by age 15 and some by ages 18-23. In other

words, the boys eventually adjusted to the norm.

Interestingly, these studies showed that adopted children did as well if not better academically.

## DESIGN

Included in the study were 130 adopted and 130 non-adopted children ranging from ages six to eleven. They were matched for relevant demographic and family variables. The sample was not out of a clinic population. The study compared adopted to non-adopted children by both age and gender. Ratings were obtained from mothers and teachers as adjustments for consistency in testing. The average age of adoption was 3.2 months but ranged from 3 days to 3-1/2 years. All children were told between age two and four that they were adopted.

## FINDINGS

According to the mothers of the kids, adopted kids rated lower social competence and higher in total behavior problems. Differences between genders are noted below:

**Females.** Non-adopted mothers rated their girls as more social and more successful in school. Mothers rated adopted girls significantly worse in comparison in terms of depression, social withdrawal, hyperactivity, delinquency, aggressiveness, and cruelty. There was no marked difference in somatic complaints, schizoid behavior, or sex problems.

**Males.** Adopted males were rated significantly poorer in school than non-adopted males. However, there was no significant difference found for social involvement. Adopted males were more hyperactive, aggressive, delinquent, and uncommunicative than non-adopted males. As the females studied, there was no difference for schizoid behavior, somatic problems or social withdrawal.

Teachers rated adopted children lower (poorer) in the area of adjustment on every aspect of the Hahnemann behavior scale. Characteristics tested included originality, independent learning, school involvement, productivity with peers, intellectual dependency, failure anxiety, unreflectiveness, irrelevant talk, social over-involvement, negative feelings, inattention,

school achievement.

## CONCLUSION

- Adopted children rate higher in psychological and school-related behavior problems, and lower in social competence and school achievement than non-adopted children.
- There are no significant differences due to age or sex.
- Although the study shows significant differences between adopted and non-adopted kids, adopted kids still typically exhibit acceptable behavior and performance.

## CRITIQUE AND EVALUATION

The evaluations of the kids were completed by mothers and teachers. It included no comments from kids. Additionally, the population of children studied was not ethnically reflective of the general population. Except for one Asian, three blacks and one Latino, all other children studied were Caucasian.

## IMPLICATIONS

1. Although adopted kids tend to have more behavioral adjustment and academic proficiency problems, adoption is often a successful substitute for child care. Youth professionals need to understand that the majority of adopted children adapt adequately in behavioral and academic areas. It is vital to know how to help the kids in the process.
2. Adopted kids are less socially and academically secure than non-adopted kids. It is essential to provide additional attention in order to build an adopted child's self-esteem. This is crucial for parents of adopted children and teachers, especially in elementary school.
3. Adopted kids need a sense of identity and belonging. Teachers, parents, and youth workers should include adopted children in groups as much as possible.
4. The effect of adoption on self-discovery and self-image occurs during the pre- to early adolescent years. Once kids are 15-18 years old, they appear more normal in behavior and social skills. Adopted children need special attention and help from ages 6-15.
5. Identity and personhood causes adopted kids to struggle in school. It

is important to help these kids through their insecurities so that they may perform normally in school.

6. Perseverance is needed by those working with youth. Be aware that adopted kids, even more than non-adopted kids, are searching for identity and self-worth.

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