



Adoption Integration and Internalizing Behaviors

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Background

- Infants that spend a significant amount of time in orphanages or similar institutions around the world lack stable, consistent caregivers, which increases the risk of mental health problems.
- Even when these children are adopted into stable homes as young children, research indicates that they are more likely to show heightened symptoms of behavior and emotional problems, including internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Wiik, et al., 2011).
- Not all children adopted from orphanages develop emotional problems. Why some do and others do not is not completely understood. Some of the difference relates to the severity and duration of deprivation prior to adoption. However, part of the effect may have to do with how the child conceptualizes the adoption process and how well integrated they feel in the family.
- Adoption integration is defined as how the adoptee views themselves, their adopted family, past and current self.
- **Internalizing behaviors** include depressive behaviors, anxious behavior and withdrawal from social contact. These are important because if these behaviors become severe enough and relatively frequent they can interfere with their mental health and daily functioning.
- **Externalizing behaviors** include observable behaviors of lashing out toward others with in violent and aggressive ways.

Aims

- Determine the relationships between adoption integration status and the development of internalizing behaviors in children that have been adopted.
- Determine if these relationships are distinct from externalizing behaviors.

Method

Participants

- Internationally Adopted Children
- Adopted between 16-59 months of age (mean=29 months)
- N=100 (Male n=36, Female n=64)
- Age (Range=7-15 years old; Mean=11.63; SD= 2.38)
- Children were adopted from 14 countries with the majority being from Russia, China, India, and Guatemala.

Measures

Adoption Integration

- Youth participated in a modified Youth Life Stress Interview including a section on adoption as part of an ongoing study.
- A coding scheme was created to measure adoption integration.
- Measures Included
 - Language showing ties to biological family
 - Birth Mom vs. Real Mom
 - Reaction to being questioned about adoption
 - Enjoy vs. Offended
 - Overall feelings about adoption
 - Happy, mad, scared, sad, worried, frustrated, confused
 - Reasons giving for being happy
 - Emotional vs. Physical Needs
 - Social behaviors related to their adoption or history
 - Participate vs. Avoid
 - Curiosity regarding birth origin
 - Resolved vs. Unresolved
- Mean scores were only included for analysis if scores could be given for at least two of the six measures.
- This brought our N from 125 to 101; it should be noted that the interview was not designed to measure adoption integration so not all interviews covered the six measure topics.
- 35% of cases were scored by two coders and reliability was established, ICC (42)= .89, $p < .001$

Internalizing and Externalizing Behaviors

- The parent and the child each completed the Human Behavior Questionnaire (HBQ) to date n=94.
- Internalizing behavior scores were the mean of depression, separation anxiety, and anxiety subscales.
- For comparison purposes we also collected Externalizing Behavior scores, which were the mean of opposition/defiance, conduct problems, overt hostility and aggression, and relational aggression subscales.
- These measures were not used as diagnostic, but describe a range of behavior problems.

Results

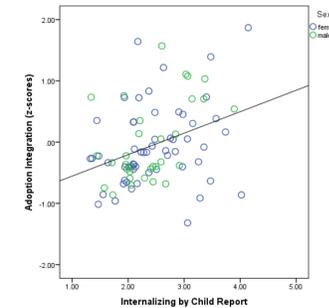
Sex as Covariate

- Males and Females differ on Externalizing by parent report $t(92)=-2.96, p < .05$
- They were not different on Integration, Externalizing by child report, or Internalizing by either report.
- Therefore sex will be used as a covariate only when examining Externalizing by parent report.

Internalizing

Child Report

- Internalizing and Integration were correlated, $r(89)=.35, p < .01$



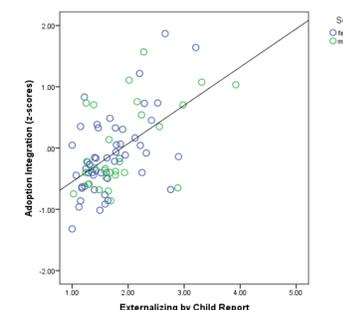
Parent Report

- Internalizing and Integration were only correlated at the trend level, $r(93)=.17, p=.10$

Externalizing

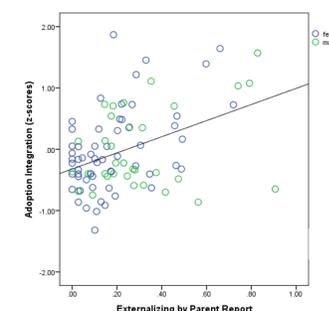
Child Report

- Externalizing and Integration were correlated, $r(81)=.56, p < .001$



Parent Report

- Controlling for Sex Externalizing and Integration were correlated, $r(77)=.32, p < .01$



Discussion

- Determining whether or not there is a relationship between adoption integration and internalizing or externalizing behaviors is important because it could lead to future interventions for adopted children.
- Something to consider about this study is the HBQ data was collected at the same time as a public speaking task, which could have influenced the child report. This could also explain the difference in the child and parent reports.
- The interview from which the data was collected was designed to measure sources of chronic stress, not adoption integration. Collecting original data through an interview designed to measure adoption integration would enhance these results.
- Initially internalizing behaviors were the focus of the research but after analysis it was determined there was a stronger correlation with externalizing behaviors.
- It is possible that children that have a more difficult time with adoption integration have difficulties in multiple domains.
- Directionality has also not been determined.

References

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