Strengths and competencies in adopted adolescents: links with attachment to parents and problem behavior

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Participants

- From Wave 2 of the Minnesota-Texas Adoption Research Project (MTARP), when adopted child was in adolescence.
- Data were analyzed from 161 families, with specific data from 135 adopted adolescents (45.1% male, mean age = 15.5 years), 144 adoptive fathers, and 158 adoptive mothers.

Method

The authors developed a coding system based on the work of the Search Institute and literature on positive youth development. The original 26 codes were subsequently grouped into five categories: relational competence, specific skills, positive disposition, moral behavior, and motivation. Total strength scores were then computed as well. Each participant’s responses were coded independently by two of the co-authors, with disagreements reconciled by discussion.

- Correlation was used to analyze the association between parental reports of relational competence and problem behaviors and adolescents’ self-reported attachment scores to their parents. Correlation was also used to analyze the association between adolescents’ self-reports of relational competence and problem behaviors and their self-reported attachment scores to their parents.

Results

Mothers Reports
- Total competence was positively correlated with attachment to both the mother (r(157) = .29, p = .001) and to the father (r(157) = .26, p = .004).

Fathers Reports
- Social competence was positively correlated with attachment to both the mother (r(136) = .19, p = .037) and to the father (r(136) = .28, p = .002).
- Total competence was positively correlated with attachment to both the mother (r(134) = .23, p = .013) and to the father (r(134) = .24, p = .010).

Moral competence was positively correlated with attachment to the father (r(135) = .18, p = .047).

Motivation was positively correlated with attachment to both the mother (r(135) = .20, p = .026) and to the father (r(135) = .27, p = .002).

Adolescent Reports
- Social competence was positively correlated with attachment to both the mother (r(129) = .18, p = .040) and to the father (r(129) = .19, p = .032).
- Total competence was positively correlated with attachment to both the mother (r(125) = .23, p = .009) and to the father (r(125) = .23, p = .011).
- Moral competence was positively correlated with attachment to the mother (r(135) = .17, p = .053).

Total positively correlated with attachment to the mother (r(135) = .17, p = .054).

Attachment to both parents was also significantly negatively correlated to problem behavior scores, total, internalizing, and externalizing.

Limitations

- No non-adopted control sample
- May not be applicable to foster care, international, or transracial adoptions
- Data is based off of self-report

References