



Tangle Adoptive Families: Experiences and Psychological Interventions

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Abstract

Through adoption children without permanent parents can grow up in a family and experience family relationships. Adoption experiences are emotionally embedded and take on an individual meaning which influences the unique emotionality of the adoptee's adoption history. Even when the adoption experiences are positive and adoptees show a good psychological adjustment, the establishment of parent-child emotional bonds, communication about adoption, beliefs and the search for origins are a trigger for additional concerns and problems in these families. In this work, we will focus on these specificities of the adoptive context, presenting practices and forms of intervention in post-adoption period, with the purpose of (un)tangle adoptive experience.

Keywords: Adoptive Families; Family Therapy; Family Psychology; Familiar Relationships; Family Studies

Introduction

Adoption is not a recent phenomenon [1-4], being once destined to respond to different needs of adults [5,6] and societies [6,7]. Presently, it emerges as a child protection measure [3] and a response to children deprived of their biological family to have a permanent family and caregiver, sustained in affective and legal bonds, which satisfies their specific developmental needs [5] assuring them "protection, affection and stimulation" [8].

Adoption is a natural successful intervention since it gives to adoptees the opportunity to recover on a physical, cognitive and socio-emotional level [9]. However, taking into account that the life prior to the adoption of these children was filled with negligence, abuses, institutionalization and foster families, separations and loss of the biological family,

friends and colleagues and that the age of adoption varies significantly [4,10], recovery is not uniform for all of them nor in all areas [11]. These different paths taken by children up to the time of adoption [4] translate into a baggage that particularizes and makes adoptive parenting more challenging when compared to the rest. Adoptive families differentiate themselves from non-adoptives since they are based on affection and not on preexisting blood bonds, translating into a "non-traditional way of creating a family" that originates particular "challenges and joys" [12]. These challenges relate to the unique tasks of adoptive parenthood that arise throughout their life cycle [6,7].

These tasks include the transition to adoptive parenting, facilitate attachment, communicate about adoption, help children understand their origins, support the child's curiosity about the biological family, help to overcome the

inherent losses of adoption, to foster a self-image and positive identity regarding adoptive status, help to cope with social stigma and beliefs about adoption, and ultimately support and assist the decision to search for origins [6,7,13,14].

This chapter will focus on some of these tasks, namely the establishment of bonds, the communication about adoption, stigma and beliefs and the search for origins, seeking to reflect and demonstrate the state of art concerning them and to present practical implications for the intervention with the adoptive families.

Specificities of the Adoptive Families

Establishment of Parent-Child Emotional Bonds: Beginning with one of the most important tasks for the adoptive families, the attachment theory affirms the universal human need to develop affective bonds that promote security that allows to explore the surrounding world, determinant in building the concept of self and the relationship with others [15-18]. Therefore, attachment is conceptualized as the emotional bond experienced with others, that can be perceived as a safe place and secure base. Attachment is also characterized by the tendency to seek and maintain proximity to a specific figure, particularly under stress generating situations [15-18].

Emotional experiences with parents in childhood contribute to the building of internal working models of representation of the self and others that will guide the behavior of the subject in future close relationships [19,20]. When there is sensitivity and responsiveness in the interaction between the primary caregiver and the child, this setting provides the tools for the development of a secure attachment. This type of attachment offers conditions for an optimal development of the relationship with others, allowing a better integration in the environment. Secure children tend to seek contact with their attachment figure when they are upset and are easily comforted [21]. On the contrary, when these conditions are not satisfied, the child may develop an insecure attachment, presenting difficulties in emotional development, emotional regulation and interpersonal integration [16,19]. Insecure children show signs of avoidance or resistance to the attachment figure when facing emotional distress [21].

Thus, children who grow in a stable and predictable family environment have a higher probability of developing a secure attachment. On the other hand, the more discontinuous and unpredictable the home environment, the greater probability of developing an insecure attachment.

From the moment the child is integrated in a new family, one of the most important adoptive family tasks

will be to develop emotional bonds that until that moment were nonexistent. Since these children went through early adversity and discontinuity in their development trajectories, they can be at a disadvantage when it comes to the establishment of relationships that promote emotional security and positive internal working models [16,19,22].

Adoptees who experienced maltreatment in their biological families often develop multiple control strategies that are effective in keeping them disconnected from a hostile or neglectful caregiver [23]. Even when a safe and protector caregiver is available, these children are often unable to trust or accept their care and protection, and these behaviors by the adoptive parents are experienced by adoptees with feelings of confusion and distress [22,23].

In fact, research has shown some problems concerning the attachment to parents at the arrival of these children in the adoptive family. These problems include reactive attachment disorders [24,25] and indiscriminate friendly behavior [22,26], that can even persist over time.

Moreover, several studies have reported that adoptive children present lower quality attachment (less attachment security and more insecure attachment patterns) when compared to peers who never separated from their birth families [9,27-30]. These results were also reinforced in a meta-analysis performed by van den Dries, et al. [31], with adopted children showing more insecure attachment patterns than non-adopted peers.

There are several reasons to expect less attachment security in adopted children, since adoption implies risks such as separation and loss of the biological family and other significant figures, deprivation and maltreatment before placement and discontinuity of care [22,32-34].

More specifically, some aspects of the experiences prior to adoption and the pre-adoption history have shown to have some influence in the attachment relationships to adoptive parents: age of adoption [31,35], type and length of stay in previous placement [36,37], experiences with the biological family [23], and being adopted with a sibling [38-41].

However, research also suggest that some characteristics of the adoptive family and adoptive parents can also have influence in the establishment of secure relationships between adoptive parents/adopted adolescents, such as: parental sensitivity [42], parental reflexive functioning [43], and parents' internal working models [44].

Thus, adoption can also function as a protective measure. Bowlby [19] theorized that attachment relationships and internal working models can change as a consequence of

changing experiences, suggesting that positive attachment experiences within the adoptive family may compensate for early adversity [39].

In fact, the entry of the adoptee in a family allows to compensate for the adversity of life prior to adoption, since the adoptive parents provide a greater amount of stimulation, attention toys” and better feeding [45] to their children. Many authors have stated that the adoption and particularly the characteristics and positive functioning of adoptive families positively influence adoptees at different levels, namely at the level of attachment [46], adjustment [47] and future emotional and social functioning [27].

Practical Implications: Given the influence of previous experiences on adoption in the lives of adoptees, namely in establishing new relationships with other significant figures, it becomes imperative that these issues be addressed in the period of preparation for adoption, both among adopters and with children/adolescents that will be adopted later. It is necessary to adjust expectations and prepare all stakeholders for the difficulties that may arise in establishing new relationships. The children and/or adolescents that will be adopted will be extremely relevant contextualizing them, according to their developmental and cognitive level, regarding the changes that will exist in their lives, preparing them to make a cut with past relationships and predisposing them so that they are available to establish new relationships that are expected to be the most secure possible.

With the adopters, in addition to contextualizing them about possible relational problems and adjusting their expectations, showing them that the adoptee’s past will continue to be present and influence the present and future of the adoptees and, consequently, the new family that will form; also contextualizing them about the backpacks that the adoptees bring with them, in order to provide the adopters with tools to deal with these backpacks.

In the post-adoption period, in order to help the various actors/stakeholders to deal with the challenges of establishing new relationships, it is necessary to have the support of specialized technicians in these issues, who can outline strategies based on empirical evidence that are adjusted to fit the real needs of the interveners. The constitution and attendance in support groups, both for families and for adoptive parents and/or adopted children/adolescents, tends to be an intervention that proves to be advantageous for these families, as it allows families to identify with other families that tend to experience similar challenges, sharing, but also often lessening the weight that these problems cause within the family. The identification among families also favors the establishment of groups that function as social support.

In both individual intervention and group intervention and in the various actors (parents and children) it is also extremely advantageous to focus attention on the process, and not only on the outcome (behavior in itself). It is necessary that all the actors realize the achievements that the rest are acquiring more by the process than by the result itself. This strategy will make variables that are less visible (e.g. effort, motivation) appreciated, valued, and increase the motivation of all stakeholders. Consequently, it is considered the added value of using positive reinforcement of appropriate behaviors, focusing attention on positive behaviors, rather than inappropriate behaviors that are intended to extinguish.

Communication about Adoption Process

Considering the functioning of the adoptive families, one of the most important challenges faced by adoptive families is the exchange of information about adoption and the communication about all that it implies. Adoptive parents can struggle to share adoption information with their children, and to help adoptees to understand in a healthy and integrative way the implications of being adopted. In this concern, professionals and scholars have long advocated full disclosure to children of their adoptive status [48], encouraging an open communication within the adoptive family.

To better understand the body of work that has been developed by scholars along the years in the field of open communication in adoption, one must firstly clarify the concept of openness in adoption. Brodzinsky [49] refers to two different but related ways of openness in adoption. One focuses on a structural agreement that involves both the adoptive and birth families. This type of arrangement includes sharing identifying information and some degree of contact between both families, which may or may not include the involvement of the child. The focus of this work will be the second type of openness in adoption – open communication. Open communication is defined by the communication and exploration of adoption issues within the adoptive family, regarding not only the content of the information that is exchanged, but all the involving process and emotional interaction [49].

Several researchers have shown the importance of studying the communication process about adoption within adoptive families, revealing that communication about adoption is a major contributing factor to adoption success and adoptees psychological adjustment and self-esteem [8,10,13,40,50-52].

For years, adoption researchers and professionals have encouraged and promoted full disclosure when it comes to

revealing to adoptees their adoptive status [48]. MacIntyre [53] has defined disclosure as parents taking the initiative to tell their children about their adoption rather than waiting for adoptees to discover their status on their own or told by a third part. Despite this encouragement from professionals, one of the main difficulties worrying adoptive parents is choosing how, when and what to tell their children about their adoptive status, and how to best answer their questions about adoption and previous history across their different stages of development.

Most adoption theorists reiterate the need to begin the communication process early in the child's life — usually in the preschool years [6]. Although researches advocate this policy of “early telling”, Brodzinsky, et al. [54] have shown that children at this early age are not capable of understanding the true nature of the adoptive status, the concept of adoption or what it means, even if parents are able to break down the relevant information into simple facts. However, more often than not, parents of preschool aged adoptees over-estimate the extent of their children's understanding about the meaning of being adopted [55].

As adoptive parents listen to their children talk about adoption and emulate their parents' speech about them being adopted, they can form the misconception that the child has a clear understanding of the meaning of adoption and what it entails. This misunderstanding can lead adoptive parents to restrain or end discussions about adoption prematurely [13]. However, children's knowledge at this early age is rather global and diffuse, and the capability to integrate different adoption aspects and experience matures along with the child development [56]. Thus, talking about adoption and all it entails should be a continuous process that must be flexible and adapt to the specific needs that arise throughout the development and life span of adoptees [57-60].

The idea of continuity and challenge of communication about adoption throughout the life cycle of the adoptive family is greatly supported by the conceptual model theorized by Wrobel, et al. [61] - the Family Adoption Communication (FAC) Model. The model identifies three central phases in the adoption communication process: (1) initial information is provided by the adoptive parents who control the quantity and content of the information that is given; (2) children's curiosity at each developmental stage leads adoptive parents to address their questions and fill some information gaps; and (3) adoptees take control of finding their own information to fill their needs [61]. Since the FAC model considers a developmental perspective, phase I is mainly associated with childhood, phase II occurs in adolescence and phase III in emerging adulthood. While this model can be very helpful in decoding some of the aspects of adoption communication

process, it is important to acknowledge that these phases are not static nor universal, as not all families go through all phases described. The child's age at adoption exerts a big influence in the communication interaction, and adoptees responsiveness, reactions and questions majorly impact on the content and emotional tone of this communication.

Family communication about adoption is a reciprocal influence process [62-64]. Different studies [10,64,65] found that children whose parents displayed a closed attitude when communicating about adoption showed greater difficulty in talking about it. These researchers also found that the less parents talked about adoption, the more the adoptees believed that it was unspeakable issue and tended to limit communication. On the contrarily, parents who provide information about their children's' background and are able to openly communicate convey the message that adopted children can ask questions and take action in fulfilling their curiosity [66].

Nevertheless, there may be differences in perceptions between children and their parents in the importance and ease of discussion about adoption issues. In fact, studies have revealed that adoptive parents can be unaware of the degree of their children's difficulties when discussing adoption [67]. Hawkins, et al. and colleagues [68], conducted a detailed study on communication that included both the perspective of the child and parents. The results of the study showed that the perceptions diverged between adopted adolescents and their adoptive parents in two important areas: how easy it was to talk about their background and how curious adoptees were.

Regarding the perception that adoptees have of their parents' communication about adoption, Miiller, et al. [69] found that one-third of the participants of their study reported that in their adolescence they felt their adoptive mother was not comfortable when talking about adoption, and half felt their father was uncomfortable when talking about these issues. However, Le Mare, et al. [63] found that most of the participants of their study reported that they perceived their parents to be completely comfortable talking about their adoptions, birth mothers, and birth fathers. However, the researchers also found that, in their sample, none of the adolescents reported to feel completely comfortable when talking about their adoption, showing that the easiness that adolescents perceive in their parents when communicating about adoption is not enough to make themselves comfortable with the subject.

These results diverge with research developed by other authors Hawkins A, et al. [69], in which few adoptees reported discussing adoption with their parents. Most

participants reported that they would have liked to talk more about adoption with their parents, and the majority also mentioned knowing less about their adoption than their parents thought they knew. In fact, research has shown that some parents - although not the majority - believe that it is enough to talk about adoption only once with their children, advocating that it is better for children to forget their past, and that it should be the child to take initiative and ask if some doubt arises [70,71].

Practical Implications: Considering the impact of adoption communication in the adjustment of families by adoption, promoting and supporting an open communication style should be the priority of preparation services for adoption and post-adoption. In working with families by adoption, professionals in the area should pay attention to this specific task of families by adoption, since this is a complex and delicate task, so it cannot be approached in a simplistic and inflexible way, of the type One-size-fits-all [72], nor in the context of a conversation in which several other topics are discussed. In fact, despite the efforts that have been made in recent years by adoption professionals to train parents about the specific dynamics of this type of parenting, many are those who continue to have difficulty recognizing and discussing differences associated with the life of family by adoption, as well as the meaning that adoption has for their children. Thus, frequently, children's curiosity about their past is not sustained by parents, and their feelings about adoption remain suppressed because of the discomfort of parents in addressing these issues. By supporting the exploration of adoption-related issues and by facilitating more open, direct and empathic communication between adoptive parents and adoptees, adoption professionals are simultaneously promoting a greater long-term adjustment of all members of the family by adoption [61,72].

Consequently, there is a need to promote and optimize training experiences within the communication process, focused on parental capacities and desires to know and explore issues related to adoption both at the personal level and with others [10,49]. In particular, the importance of a preparation that addresses the field of cognitive development, namely, the aspects that allow the child to understand the concept of adoption, should be emphasized, since they should serve as a guide to the communication process. It is also important to work on how parents tell the history of adoption and describe the biological family, particularly in cases where there are more emotionally complicated issues, such as situations in which the child's history includes traumatic experiences, or in cases where information about the biological family is scarce.

Attention should also be drawn to the need for interventions with those adopted by specialized technicians,

which should be initiated prior to adoption, in order to prepare the child/adolescent for this process. The needs of adoptees in terms of communication should still be seen as a dynamic and evolving process and, as such, adoption services must be prepared to support the different needs of the child and his/her family, which will emerge throughout the life cycle. In this way, it is also important to note the importance of post-adoption services with specialized technicians who can make this follow up. Also, in this context, it is important to consider the perspective of the adoptee, not only with regard to the communication process, but to the experience of adoption in general, to the way it experiences and means its entire process. Effectively, it is through the validation of the "voice of the adoptee" that it will be possible to access their true needs, which, in turn, will serve as a guide for adoption services and for the definition of post-adoption interventions.

Beliefs/Social Stigma

The need to communicate also about the beliefs associated with adoption evidence the social stigma associated with adoptive status. Although the community's view of adoption has evolved becoming mostly positive [73], adoption continues to be shrouded in controversy [74] and adoptive ties continue to be negatively perceived.

According to Miall [75], society differentiates between adoptive and biological parenting. This difference, based on the primacy of biological ties, leads to adoptive bonds being perceived as the "second best" [75,35]. For the author, adoption is submerged in a negative stigma, since the bond between parents and children is perceived as "less permanent and authentic" [75] and adoptees are considered inferior due to their "unknown genetic past" [75]. In subsequent research with the Canadian population, Miall [76] found scarce evidence of derogatory attitudes towards adoption, yet he attributed them to the possible effects of social desirability and to the existence of a greater diversity of family configurations.

More recently, Creedy [77] and Lee [78] studies have reinforced the conclusions advanced by Miall [75], reiterating that adoptive families continue to be seen as the "second best". [77] For Creedy [77], this is due to the fact that the adoption is still shrouded in "shame and secrecy" [77].

Moreover, the view conveyed by the media is also negative, which influences the way the phenomenon is seen and subdue/subject adoptive parents and children to a variety of stigmatizing beliefs, as stated by Kirk [51]. The media often support the emphasis on biological ties to the detriment of adoptive one [79] and describe adopted children as poorly adjusted [80], stating that these are

children once abandoned for lack of love, unhealthy and unwanted [81]. Particularly, in Kline, et al. and colleagues [80] research, it was possible to perceive that in 162 of the 292 stories conveyed by the analyzed media, the adoptees were characterized as problematic (e.g.: identity conflicts, emotional problems, health problems or perpetuating antisocial behaviors), reinforcing the social stigma regarding adoptive status and adoptive parents.

This social stigma and particularly the existing beliefs related to adoptive parenting influence the way parents and children experience adoption and their specific tasks. The infertile couples who adopt are still seen as “unfortunate” due to their inability to have biological affiliation [82]. Such supremacy is given to biological bonds [75,76] that even after adoption, these are not recognized as “real” parents [75], regardless of parental capacities or the type of relationship they establish with the adoptee [75,76]. Adoptive status therefore appears in a social framework that considers it “inauthentic and inferior” [83] and incomplete [84], in which the adoptive mother in particular appears less able to provide care [79]. Adoptive motherhood is still perceived as inferior [75] and inadequate, capable of causing and maintaining mental illness in the adopted child [83], since it is a less intense affective connection due to the inexistence of biological ties [76].

Likewise, March [85] and Wegar [82] stated that consanguinity is often considered as a precondition for taking care of a child and establishing an affective bond, reinforcing the stigma that the adoptive bonds are weaker compared to biological ones. In his study involving members of adoptive families, March [85] concluded that they socially experienced the stigmatization of their status and 67% of the adoptees said that society assumes the existence of differences between the two forms of family.

Practical Implications: Effectively, the ecology of the adoptive family is extremely complex, since it includes several systems that influence the family’s experience and the better or worse welfare of the adoptive families. Considering this complexity, it is believed that these families benefit from in-depth reflections and a deep knowledge about the subject of adoption. At each stage of their life cycle, adoptive families are confronted with preconceived ideas and beliefs that need to be demystified, and the intervention to be carried out should encompass all systems and levels of influence [86].

First, it is important for these families to reflect on the specificities of adoption and adoptees, reflecting on the beliefs that others manifest and even about their own beliefs. A deeper reflection will enable families to demystify misconceptions and adapt their own expectations.

Preferably the intervention should be performed at the micro and macrosystemic levels. Thus, it is important to raise awareness within adoptees about the beliefs and stigma that they may be targeted and provide them strategies to help overcome the discomfort arising from the situation, such as helping them establish the gains and losses of being adopted or allow them to reflect on their similarities and/or differences in relation to others. As for adoptive parents, the importance of making them aware of the issue remains. It is important that they attend training programs not only during the beginning of their adoption process but, more importantly, throughout the life cycle of their family. The intervention should focus on the implications that stigma and beliefs may have on family life, the well-being of family members, and adoptee’s acceptance of their adoptive status. It is important that these parents understand that, despite the particularity of their family, they are not the only ones and that all adoption families face the same challenges. In this case, strategies such as real-life case analysis and brainstorming can help them in this understanding and, therefore, enable them to minimize the influence of stigma and beliefs on their daily lives. Moreover, regarding intervention in issues such as stigma, it is essential to include other professionals and contexts in which families by adoption are inserted. One of the closest and most relevant is the school, where one can find either uninformed teachers or pairs poorly sensitized to this reality. It is extremely important to address the theme in these contexts and with these stakeholders in order to normalize the theme as much as possible. Intervention with educational agents should refer them to the choice of more inclusive strategies, such as, for example, when working on themes such as the family, include not only new family configurations (e.g. single parents, homosexuals) but also families by adoption.

It is also worth mentioning the need to intervene at this level with the community and society in general, for example through informational lectures and workshops about real cases. Particularly, an intervention with the Media would also be beneficial in helping them to best report on adoption events and their stakeholders [80].

Once again, macrosystemic intervention is about normalizing adoption and informing about the subject, aiming for changes in attitudes and consequently minimizing the social stigma that affects adoptive families.

Finally, it is relevant to intervene in the sense that both adoptive families and the rest of the community understand the importance of non-labeling and the use of neutral language, particularly when the subject is adoption and the adoptees.

Search for Origins

This difference assumed by society relates to another particularity of the adoptees, i.e, regardless of the characteristics of the adoption process and life prior to adoption, all adoptees need to integrate the attachment to two families: adoptive and biological [60], which constitute the adoption triangle [87]. However, it is often found that the information that the adoptee has in relation to the past is scarce or ambiguous for the development of a stable sense of the self [88], existing pieces of the puzzle missing or a feeling of emptiness [89-91].

Consequently, the search for origins is understood as a process in which the adoptee engages with the goal of creating an articulated narrative about himself, based on questions such as "Where did I come from? Who are my biological parents? Why was I adopted?" [92].

Initially the search for origins was conceived as an indicator of adoption failure [93] but, is currently considered a normative developmental task for adoptees [49,94] and a universal phenomenon [89], since it is necessary for the construction of the identity of the adoptee [95].

Kohler, et al. [96] affirm that all adoptees, at a given moment in their life cycle, will develop some kind of thinking about adoption and their past. However, despite being present in all the adopted ones, Wrobel and collaborators [94], found that it can be experienced differently.

Irhammar, et al. [97] defend the existence of two types of search: internal search and external search. The first concerns questioning and reflection on the past. This intensifies in the beginning of adolescence [4], because it is in this developmental phase that the construction of identity assumes more marked contours. Adolescents engage in active exploration of issues related to themselves and their history, conceiving the losses they have experienced through adoption. The maturation of reflective thinking [13], as an ability to understand mental states, leads adolescents to be able to construct a more realistic and empathic view of their history [49]. However, at this stage the ability of adolescents to perceive the discomfort of adoptive parents in the communication on adoption and the past also increases [49], provoking feelings of guilt [85,98], fear of hurting them [60,98] and awareness of the implications of the search for origins [99].

External search contemplates the desire to get more information about their past and personal history. According to Berger [100], the external search can still be classified as: active, when there is no intention to establish contact with

members of the biological family, occurring only a search for information; and interactive, which focuses on establishing contact. Interactive search tends to occur in late adolescence [92] and may culminate in a meeting with the biological family elements [101]. According to Wrobel, et al. and colleagues [94], adolescents who do not intend to start the external search have lower levels of curiosity compared to adolescents who intend to continue their search for origins.

According to Wrobel, et al. [102], curiosity arises from the association between the unknown information and the current knowledge that the adoptee has about its adoption. However, this curiosity may vary in intensity [98]. Adolescents who express curiosity often refer that they would like to know the reasons for adoption and also question the existence of biological siblings and the biological parents' appearance, personality and current life [102]. In addition to the desire to satisfy curiosity, other motives are presented to begin the process of searching for origins, namely, to recover lost time, obtain medical information or even the death of adoptive parents [90,103].

Contact with the biological family may also be facilitated or inhibited depending on some factors, such as the opening of existing adoption and the existence of facilitators or barriers that influence adolescents' curiosity.

With regard to the opening of adoption, it can be seen that: (1) it is confidential, when there is no communication between the adoptive and biological family; (2) open when there is direct contact between the two families; and (3) mediated, when there is a third identity/entity that is responsible for the sharing of information between families [101]. Open adoption has raised a number of issues since, on the one hand, it seems to be seen as a way of reducing feelings of loss and rejection, but on the other hand, it may continue a relationship which has already been considered harmful to the child [104].

It is also verified that there are people, policies and resources that allow or deny access to information [98], constituting themselves as barriers or facilitators. Wrobel, et al. [98] reported that these barriers can originate in the adoptee feelings of frustration, decreasing curiosity or serving as motivation to overcome the present obstacle. In the study conducted by Wright, et al. [105], adopted adolescents identified as contact facilitators the existence of someone (e.g. foster parents or the adolescent himself) who is active in the search. As contact inhibitors, adolescents pointed to factors such as drug use, domestic violence, and mental health problems. Other facilitators and inhibitors are pointed out in the study by Passmore, et al. [106] as the support behaviors of others or not, in relation to the search

for origins.

The search for origins seems, therefore, to be facilitated by a supportive family context [94], being reported by the adoptive parents and children a feeling of proximity when the adolescent shows intent to initiate the search process. However, search behavior seems not to be related to the family functioning or satisfaction with the relationship with adoptive parents [94,107]. Thus, it is possible to understand that, although adolescents feel happy in the adoptive family, they have questions about the past that incite feelings of uncertainty and loss [103], involving themselves in the search process.

During this process, adolescents also face decisions, such as telling their adoptive parents about the desire to initiate this process. The majority of the adopted who decides not to count makes this decision in fear of provoking anguish in the adoptive parents, showing fear that the search disturbs the family functioning [68,90,103,107]. Moreover, some adolescents end up suppressing curiosity because the adoptive parents express disapproval or depreciation regarding the issue of adoption. However, other reasons are pointed out as the fear of disturbing the current life of the biological parents or the uncertainty of their reaction to the search [103].

Despite these fears, adoptive parents seem to anticipate the need to contact of adoptive children with their origins [14]. In fact, in families where there is no contact with the biological family, adoptive parents acknowledge that adolescents may try to contact these family members in the future [105]. However, they show some fears, namely the fear of seeing their children disillusioned or the fear of losing their children to their biological parents [87,90]. Therefore, some adoptive parents consider it important to teach strategies that can help children identify signs of risk in order to ensure their safety [105].

In sum, the search for origins must be interpreted as a necessity of adoptees, being a more pressing process in adolescence that may help to fill some gaps relative to the history prior to adoption. It is a process that starts internally and that may or may not culminate in the external search. The search for contact with the members of the biological family is a process full of ambivalences [93], being fundamental for the adoptee to be able to verbalize the feelings and thoughts that this theme elicits to him with the adoptive parents and to follow the same ones in a possible active search for information, in order to experience this process in a more positive, harmonious and cautious way possible and always without judgment and with the support with their reference figures and caregivers.

Practical Implications: With regard to this specific task of adoption, intervention should be systemic, taking into account all stakeholders, including parents and adopted children and biological parents. In the case of adoptive parents, it is important to help them to reflect and understand that the phenomenon of the search for origins does not presuppose that something wrong is going on their family or that their children feel less well within the family. It is fundamental to demystify that the search leads to the loss of the adoptive child, that is, to the return of the adoptee to his biological family. Demystifying these ideas by using, for example, real cases where this search for origins does not affect the success of adoption, may have positive consequences in family everyday life, since adoptive parents can make their vision more positive about this task, leading to, consequently, that their attitudes towards it also improve. It becomes relevant to intervene in the sense that adoptive parents construct a family atmosphere of openness, in which the adoptee feels comfortable to talk about any theme and to express their emotions, particularly on emotionally painful issues such as questions about their origins or their biological family. Role play situations can be a beneficial form of intervention, allowing adoptive parents to anticipate questions and doubts of adoptees and formulate hypothetical responses and action plans to reduce the anxiety and disorder that the theme of the search for origins triggers within the family. The intervention performed with these parents should encourage them to support the curiosity of their children, accompanying them in the search process, that is, in the visits to adoption services to request information and later, accompany them in the possible encounter between both parts.

As for the biological parents, preferably, the intervention should take a similar course to the intervention performed with the adoptive parents. An intervention focused on the adequacy of expectations and preparation for a possible reunion with their biological children and their adoptive family is essential.

The purpose of the intervention with the adoptees aims, once again, to make them understand the normativity inherent to curiosity in relation to the origins and the search process. This intervention may involve role-play strategies, analysis of real cases of origin search and/or other strategies such as the writing of a letter to the adoptive/ biological parents and the imagination of their response to it.

It is fundamental that the professionals of the adoption, acquire an increasingly specialized formation in the area and a greater sensitivity and openness in order to understand the complexity of the process. These professionals play a key role in matching parents 'and adoptive parents' expectations

of what they may or may not find (e.g. incomplete processes, unknown and/or deceased parents).

The positive attitude of all those involved in adopting about the search for origins is essential for the adoptees to carry out in a stable and supported way the construction of their identity and for the adoptive parents to live this period without any hiccups.

It is also extremely important to intervene in order to educate policy makers so that policies associated with adoption become increasingly facilitating the contact between the adoption triad (adoptee-adoptive family-biological family) so that this task is perceived in a normative way both by the elements of the triad and by the community in general.

Conclusion

In summary, adoption seems to be both a risk and a protective factor for children and young people who have experienced early adversity.

Even though generically the adopted, as a group, demonstrate a normative functioning, there is a great variability and heterogeneity within this group, may be due to the heterogeneity of individual life pathways and early adversity experiences among adoptees, which draws attention to the need to pursue studies with this specific population, in order to perceive the processes that determine this variability, increasing support for families by adoption and intentionalizing interventions with this population.

Although families by adoption have more similarities than differences compared to other families, they face a series of specific tasks that we analyze throughout this chapter and which constitute as additional challenges to the family system and its different subsystems. The profound family adaptation that adoption entails is undeniable. This family adaptation presupposes a profound change, a structural and relational reorganization, setting up a new family system that integrates the new member. In this process of transformation, the collaboration and commitment of all members in the necessary changes to establish healthy relationships is essential. These processes of adaptation of families by adoption, as we were able to verify, are private, procedural, multidimensional, multilevel, and undoubtedly complex that imply multiple connections and interactions, as well as the availability of all involved. In order to potentiate a more favorable family adaptation, this chapter intended to contribute to the design of intervention strategies, providing technicians and families by adoption knowledge based on empirical evidence.

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