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Adoptions of children in Romania: applying attachment theory

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Abstract

Problem Statement: Attachment theory is the framework of understanding the child's adoption. **Purpose of Study:** This study is focused on the supportive factors for successful adoption. **Research Methods:** Clinical interviews with children (Friend and Family's Interview - FFI) and parents (Parent development Interview- PDI). **Findings:** Half of the 40 adopted children assessed have a secure attachment. **Conclusions:** When parents are aware about their role in promoting the child attachment, children develop secure attachment (B). This conclusion has a good potential for practical application in the training offered by child protection structures to the parents who are candidates for adoption.

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1. Introduction

During the years '70s, the attachment theory brought into attention of professionals, all over the world, the importance of the family for child's healthy development. Until attachment theory has been launched, the services for abandoned or orphan children were aimed to provide biological cares to children: adequate food, proper hygiene, heating, medical supplies. John Bowlby who is the father of attachment theory, had the experience of working with delinquent children in his professional background. John Bowlby found the common aspect within the life of these children: maternal deprivation, lack of protective adult in their life. Further explorations, including on animal offspring, brought John Bowlby to the structure of attachment theory. Now days "In the field of social and emotional development,

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attachment theory is the most visible and empirically grounded conceptual framework. “and “.on the effects of early parent-child relationships, including troubled and abusive relationships, attachment theory is prominent.”(Cassidy, Shaver, 1999, p.x). Following the researchers in the field and the clinical work with children and parents, the attachment theory has expanded its framework to the entire life of human being. What is happening in the early childhood between the child and the attachment figure and how efficient the attachment figure is in the role of secure base for child’s explorations, will structure the internal working model of the child. The child builds his internal working model “of his mother and her ways of communicating and behaving towards him, and a comparable model of his father, together with the complementary models of himself in interaction with each...” (Bowlby, 1988, p.129). The working model is already in function the first years of child’s life and “soon become established as influential cognitive structures” (Bowlby, 1989, p.129). The attachment quality is staying as a main support for child’s mental health and resilience. The resilience will empower the child in facing the difficulties and to continuing the healthy development and functioning (Ionescu, 2008). The parents and especially the attachment figure will not be able to protect the child against all and every risk in life but are able to give to child a secure base from which he can explore and enjoy the world and where to come for comfort when life’s events are too harsh for him or her. As Bowlby (1989) pointed out even if the child receives from his attachment figure only threats of abandonment, these “are as pathogenic as actual separations and probably more so” (Bowlby, 1973, p.85). Due to the long lasting effects of the attachment quality the parents but especially the professionals and practitioners within child’s welfare services should be equipped for providing the child opportunities for secure attachment. The adoptive parents who are suppose to value even more the child, should benefit of attachment theory’s knowledge in order to avoid the failures in interaction with the adoptive child. The adoptive child is coming into adoption and adoptive family after losing his reasons to exist within the abandonment of his biological parents. “..No child enters adoption without having experienced a traumatic event.”(Johnson, 2002, p.49). Being traumatized by his first experience with adults, the adoptive child is in need of adoptive parents who are not just “good enough parents” (Winnicott, 1964) but also who are able to take the responsibility for being therapeutically adequate towards their adoptive child. The attachment theory is for these parents the sine qua non framework of the interactions with their adoptive child. In Romania the domestic adoption remarkably increased the last 10 years. Unfortunately in some cases the adoption was not sustainable and the adoptive parents asked after some years for giving up the adoption. This is dramatic waist of life for all individuals involved, starting with the child and parents and ending with practitioners within child welfare system.

2. Methodology

Data was collected during 2010-2011, on 40 adolescents (11-16 years old) adopted at an young age (under 4). The research is done within national research project in domestic adoption, aimed to highlight the factors which contribute to successful domestic adoption.

The basic assumption of the research here considers the secure attachment of adoptive adolescents as being the attest of successful adoption.

Measures: The assessment of the adopted child’s attachment used the Friends and Family Interview (Steele&Steele, 2009). A strong internal reliability of .83 is found in the process of using this instrument. The parent’s assessment is done through the Parent Development Interview (Aber, Slade, Berger, Bresgi, & Kaplan, 1985), using the coding scheme developed by Steele, Henderson, and Hillman (2000). PDI is a method for measuring how a parent thinks and feels about their relationship with their child (Groza, Muntean, Ungureanu, 2011). The interviews with children and adoptive parents lasted about 3 hours. The adolescent and parent were interviewed in parallel by two researchers. The quotation of answers in

interviews is done on a Likert scale, with four degrees, between 1 and 4, where 4 is the best and 1 is the minimum or the absence. For simplifying the presentation here we only keep two classes of answers, where the quotas 1 and 2 is one category, and 3 and 4, is the other category. In addition other standardized instruments were used such as Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2009) and School Success Profile (SSP) (Bowen, Rose, Bowen, 2005). All the assessment's tools used here are either created within the attachment theory framework or congruent with attachment theory.

3. Demographic description of the sample (families and children)

Most adoptive parents are two parents families (67, 5%, n=27), but 32,5% (n=13) are single parent families, including one adoptive father. In the study, mostly mothers (57, 5%, n=23) participated; otherwise, both parents participated (40%, n=16). In one adoptive family, the mother died and the adopted child was living with the father who participated in the interview (2, 5%, n=1). At the time of the study, the age of the mothers ranged from 39 to 65 (mean=47.9, σ =8.5) and the age of fathers ranged from 39 to 65 (mean=49.96, σ =7.8). At the time of adoption, the age of the mothers ranged from 21 to 56 (mean=37.0, σ =8.9) and the age of fathers ranged from 25 to 54 (mean=38.2, σ =7.6). The highest level of education achieved by the mother was as follows: 10 % secondary school (n=4), 59% high school diploma (n=23), and 31% college education or above (n=12). The highest level of education achieved by the father was as follows: 18% secondary school (n=5), 39% high school diploma (n=11), and 43% college education or above (n=12). Family income ranged from working class (14%) to middle class (48%) and to high SES (38%) according to Romanian standards. The majority (72, 5%, n=29) were of the Romanian Orthodox faith.

Regarding the adopted children, 37, 5 % of the participants in the study were male (n=15) and 62,5% were female (n=25). At the time of the study, the age of the adoptees ranged from 11 to 16 years (mean=13.1, σ =1.7). Median age at the time of the study was 12 years. The age of the adoptee at the time of adoption ranged from 1 to 48 months (mean=22.6, σ =16.9) and the median age was 16 months. Before adoption, 47, 5% of children had been in a hospital (n=19), 32, 5% had been in an orphanage (n=13) and the remainder had been in foster care (20%, n=8). The majority (85%, n=34) reports the child's health as good to excellent and 15% of the child's health was reported as fair (n=6). Most adoptees (60%, n=24) had siblings, either biological children or foster children.

4. Results

The assessment aimed to identify the children attachment to their adoptive parents is showing an equal distribution of children securely and insecurely attached. The table below is giving the picture on the quality of children's attachment and their age at the evaluation.

Table 1. The quality of attachment among the 40 adopted adolescents

Ages of children at evaluation	Number of children	%	Number of children <u>securely</u> attached	%	Number of children <u>insecurely</u> attached	%
11 years old	8	20%	5	25%	3	15%
12 years old	11	27.5%	7	35%	4	20%
13 years old	7	17.5%	2	10%	5	25%
14 years old	5	12.5%	3	15%	2	10%
15 years old	4	10%	1	5%	3	15%
16 years old	5	12.5%	2	10%	3	15%
Total	40	100%	20	100%	20	100%

Out of 40 adopted children evaluated with FFI, half (50%, n=20) were securely attached or moving towards secure attachment (quoted with 4 and 3), and half (50%; n=20) were found with insecure attachment (quoted 1 and 2). Regarding the parental style, investigated and quoted through PDI, the adoptive parents in our sample displayed the following aspects (see the table below).

Table 2. The parental style and quality of attachment found to their adopted children

Parenting style	Parents	%	Promoting child's attachment				Secure attachment		Insecure attachment	
			Yes		No		no.	%	no.	%
			No.	%	no.	%				
Punitive	3	7.5%	0	0%	3	7.5%	0	0%	3	15%
Limits setting	10	25%	6	15%	4	10%	6	30%	4	20%
Ineffectual	8	20%	3	7.5%	5	12.5%	1	5%	7	35%
Negotiated	14	35%	12	30%	2	5%	10	50%	4	20%
Permissive	5	12.5%	5	12.5%	0	0%	3	15%	2	10%
Total	40	100%	26	65%	14	35%	20	100%	20	100%

None of the punitive parents has securely attached child; most of the negotiator parents have securely attached children (50%; n=10); most of the ineffectual parents have insecurely attached children (35%; n=7). When parents are aware about their role in promoting and sustaining the child's attachment, children are more like to develop secure attachment. None of the punitive parents are promoting child's attachment in their interaction with the child and most of the negotiated parental style (85%; n=12) are aware about their role in promoting child's attachment.

5. Limits of the study

There are limitations to our study which allow us only cautious conclusions. 1.The researchers gets in touch only with parents found available by professionals working within the child welfare system. The adoptive families are first found and selected by the practitioners in the child's welfare system. 2.We are looking for adopted adolescents. This means that they were adopted around 2000 years when the domestic adoption was not very much developed in Romania. 3.The adoptive family should disclose the adoption before being included within the research sample. The cultural context in Romania is not very supportive to adoptive families and consequently less adoptive families will disclose the adoption to their child and to the community around (Groza, 1999; Groza, Muntean, Ungureanu, 2011).

6. Conclusive remarks

Comparing with the international literature (van IJzendoorn, 2005) the data in our sample display smaller rate of securely attached children. However taking into account the cultural context in Romania (Muntean, 2011) and the currently little use of attachment theory within child welfare system we consider our results as motivating for further development of services for abandoned children and adoptive families. Attachment theory is providing understanding and clinical inspiration for healthy development of the child as well as for the trauma of abandonment or other child's maltreatments forms. We do not know what happened to the child before abandonment but the abandonment is such a frightening and disruptive life's event that abandoned children should be seen and honored as survivors and heroes. The child's resilience can bring unexpected evolution within abandoned child's life, as Killian (2004, p.33)

mentions: "...the child, who was orphaned at a young age, grew up in a children's home, became a juvenile delinquent and then settled into stable employment and is now a respected member of the community." But the responsibility of the society towards abandoned children cannot be abandoned once again these children and to leave them to manage by themselves. No doubts, the adoption is the best solution for them especially when they have the chance to find "caregiver who can alleviate the trauma by providing a sense of family support." (Sung Hong, Algood, Chiu, Ai-Ping Lee, 2011, p.34). The use of attachment theory and attachment evaluation tools for candidate parents for adoption as well as for training these parents on their everyday interaction with the child can significantly increase the successful adoption within the cultural context in Romania.

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