

How are the adopted adolescents? A comparison with non-adopted peers in attachment, emotional-behavioral problems and verbal skills

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Introduction. Late-adopted adolescents (i.e. adopted after 12 months of age) may show more insecurity or disorganization in attachment, more emotional-behavioral problems and lower verbal skills than non-adopted peers, due to adverse and under-stimulated pre-adoption experiences. However, the extent of these differences is uncertain due to few and contrasting findings of international and national studies. This study **aims** to compare late-adopted adolescents with non-adopted peers in attachment, emotional-behavioral problems and verbal-skills during adolescence.

Method. Participants were 98 adolescents living in North-West Italy (aged 11-18 years, $M=14.58$, $SD=2.15$), 49 late-adoptees (45% girls) and 49 non-adopted peers raised by their own biological parents (43% girls), matched for age. We administered the *Friends and Family Interview* for attachment representations, the *Children Behaviour Checklist 6-18* for emotional-behavioral problems, the *Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-IV (CVI-WISC-IV)* for verbal skills.

Results. There were no differences between adopted and non-adopted adolescents in secure, dismissing and preoccupied attachment patterns, but adoptees showed higher disorganization than controls ($p = .04$). Regarding emotional-behavioral problems, adopted adolescents showed higher scores of withdrawal/depression ($p = .04$) and attention problems ($p = .02$) than non-adopted ones. No between-groups difference in verbal skills was found.

Discussion. Unlike in childhood, adopted adolescents show little or no differences with non-adopted peers, even if areas of vulnerability remain, such as attachment disorganization and emotional problems.

Implications. Practitioners should work on late-adoptees' vulnerabilities to promote their psychological adjustment, designing preventive and clinical interventions, and planning the follow up along all the long-life process of adoption.