



Assessment of family strengths in a sample of adoptive and typical families

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Background

- The population sector of adoptive families has its unique characteristics and is considered a social risk population (Bruskas, 2008). In Puerto Rico, there are no recent data reports that state the statistics of children who have been adopted, and the current status of these families.
- Children under foster care are vulnerable, because many of them have had a traumatic experience, hence they are susceptible to the instable environments (Bruskas, 2008).
- There have been made different meta-analysis that state that the majority of adopted people have adapted. There is also evidence of an over representation of this population in mental health clinics (Feeney & Passamore, 2007).
- Investigations are consistent when confirming that families with children with disabilities confront bigger challenges and higher stress levels. (Dodd, Zabriskie, Widmer & Eggett, 2009; Olsson & Hwang, 2001; Warfield, Krauss, Hauser-Cram, Upshur & Shonkoff, 1999).
- The focus in family strength can help adoptive and typical families and support in the positive aspect of their life and to achieve family closeness.
- Therefore, the exercise of searching for these data create d a new way to work from a framework centered in the system; with the means of creating true functionality and at the same time providing a way to regard the difficulties and challenges new families can encounter when including an adopted child. Studies reveal that the development of an individual and the environmental protective factors can minimize the effects of adversity and build resilience in the child.

Goals & Objectives

The goal of this study was to explore the true functionality of adoptive families vs. typical families with the means to understand their strengths.

The specific objectives are:

- Identify the strengths of adoptive families vs. typical families.
- Determine whether there is a statistically significance relationship between family strengths and the socio-demographic characteristics of the family.

Methods

This was a transversal- exploratory descriptive study. The recompilation of data was through the Family Function Style Scale. It consists of 26 items with a Likert response scale of 4 levels. This scale adapted and translated in spanish has demonstrated an Alfa coefficient of .81 in previous studies (Alonso, 1996 & Zayas, 2003).

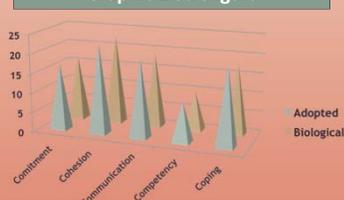
Participants/ Sample

Participants were parents of adopted children and typical families., selected by availability. The inclusion criteria: participants were older than 21 years of age, residents of Puerto Rico, able to read in Spanish and be a biological or adoptive parent or legal guardian of the child. Participants were recruited in different meetings held by the Puerto Rican Association of Adoptive Parents and the Center of Infante Development (CEDI).

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Demographics	f	Percent
<u>Child Age</u>		
1-9	22	78.5
11-16	6	21.5
<u>Child Nationality</u>		
American/ Latin- American	28	100
<u>Child Gender</u>		
Female	19	67.9
Male	9	32.1
<u>Family Composition</u>		
Father, mother and children	25	89.3
Mother and children	3	10.7
Total of children	36	100
Adopted child	19	52
Biological child	47	17
Child with Developmental Disabilities	47	17

Graphic 1 Strengths



Graphic 2 Total Score



Results

In this study 28 families completed the survey (see table 1). A 60% of the sample (f=17) is adoptive parents, while a 39.3% (f=11) are families with biological children. In the sample, a 53.6% (f=15) of the families do not have children with developmental disabilities. A 32.1% (f=9) have 1 child with developmental disabilities, where 6 of them are adoptive families. A 14.3% (f=4) of the families have 2 children with developmental disabilities, where 2 families are adoptive. 9 out of 10 children with developmental disabilities are from adoptive families. The most frequent diagnosis in the participant families is Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder.

Strengths (see Graphic 1 & 2)

Compromise: A mean score of 16.84 (75% of the participants) was obtained, where 20 is the maximum score. A 10.7% (f=3) of the families reported the top score. In the other hand, 14.3% (f=4) reported scores under the mean. However, non of the scores obtained can be classified as low.

Cohesion: In this scale, where the maximum score is 24, the participants represented a mean score of 22.78. A 17.9% (f=5) reported scores under the mean and a 42.9% reported the top score. Even though there are scores under the mean when compared among themselves, everyone reported a high level of the competence of cohesion.

Communication: In this scale the mean score was 19.25, where a 107% (f=3) reported the maximum score of 24. a 32.2% (f=9) reported scores under the mean.

Competency: The participants in this scale presented a mean score of 10.11, where the top score is 12. Everyone (N=27) presented scores that reflected the presence of this strength in the family.

Coping: In this scale 3 (10.7%) families reported a perfect score of 24. The mean score was 19.28. The range of scores was 12-24, and this is why every family (N=28) reported the presence of this strength in their members.

There were no significant correlations between the family composition and the scores obtained in the different family strengths. There was a negative correlation (r= -.40, α .05) between the adoptive parents and biological parents regarding the coping strength reported.

Conclusions

The families, adoptive and typical, reflect the presence of the strengths of compromise, cohesion, communication, competence and coping. This results are maintained even if children with developmental disabilities are present or not. The adoptive families presented higher scores in the coping strength when compared with the typical families. These results are congruent with the literature that state that the level of compromise in the adoptive families is higher because of the process involved on adoption, and also the search for positive strategies and external resources of help (Feeney & Passamore, 2007).

Limitations: One of the limitations of this study is that the sample was by availability, only the ones that wish to participate. This implies that the sample is not completely representative of the population of people with developmental disabilities.