

RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

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Parenting adopted children through adolescence

What you need to know:

In BC, many adoptees are adopted prior to adolescence and experience pre-adoption issues that may manifest differently or resurge during adolescence. These issues intersect with common adolescent issues such as identity formation, peer relationships, dating and negotiating more independence. Adoptive parents may be unprepared for the possible exacerbation of issues that emerge for adoptees during adolescence.

What is this research about?

The Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) delegated adoption social workers place children under permanent care of the Ministry with suitable lifelong families and homes so that children may develop to their full potential. Currently, MCFD requires prospective adoptive parents to take a course on adoption called the Adoption Education Program (AEP), but this mandatory course does not address parenting adolescent adoptees who are adopted as infants or children.

The MCFD seeks to understand the ways in which adoptive parents can support their adopted children as they transition into and through adolescence in order to inform current policies on

the mandatory training requirements and develop resources for preparing prospective and current adoptive parents for their future adolescent adoptees.

What did the researcher do?

The researcher performed a literature review exploring parenting adolescent adoptees. The researcher used the PsychInfo database to search for academic articles and book chapters published between January 2009 and March 2019. The researcher reviewed the abstracts and methods section of the literature, and if they met the inclusion criteria of a focus on parenting adolescent adoptees adopted prior to the age of 12, they were included in the review. The researcher summarized the main focus and findings of each source, then analyzed for key themes and recommendations for practice and research.



UVic researchers reviewed literature to inform policies and resources to prepare prospective and current adoptive parents for parenting adolescent adoptees (Photo credit: DDC from Pixabay).



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What did the researcher find?

This review included 23 sources published in English. Four themes and sub-themes emerged in the review:

1. Common adoptee issues in adolescence
 - Adolescent attachment
 - Communication about adoption including how and when adolescents find out they are adopted
2. Understanding and coping with pre-adoption adversity
 - Parent-child dynamics, conflict and parenting styles
3. Parental context
 - Parent stress and mental health
4. Diverse/intersectional adoptive families
 - Intercultural adopted families
 - Same-sex parenting and adoptees with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Recommendations for practice:

1. Develop workshops or resources for adoptive parents
2. Develop parenting approaches for internalizing (e.g., Major Depressive Disorder, anxiety, etc.) and externalizing (e.g., alcohol and substance use) behaviours
3. Inform adoptive parents of any externalizing behaviours of the biological parents
4. Continuous post-adoption support for parents
5. Educate professionals working with adoptive families on adolescent-to-parent violence

Suggestions for future research:

- Experiences of adoptive parenting
- Adoptive fatherhood and motherhood
- Diverse adoptive families
- Evaluation of adoptive parent resources
- Which parental factors constitute a training competency versus a screening criteria

How can you use this research?

This research will help practitioners, policymakers and other stakeholders develop policies and resources for adopted parents, and for

professionals working directly with adoptive families. The research is also useful to adopted parents who adopted children prior to adolescence.

About the researchers

Drexler Ortiz is a University of Victoria (UVic) graduate student. This project was completed as part of the [Graduate Studies \(GS\) 505](#) course and supervised by instructors Dr. Sibylle Artz and Ms. Thais Amorim. Facilitated by UVic [Research Partnerships and Knowledge Mobilization](#), GS 505 is a partnership between MCFD and UVic. This project was prepared on behalf of MCFD.

Keywords

Parenting adopted adolescents; adolescent adoptees; parenting adopted children; preparing adopted parents; adoption

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