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Between Vulnerability and Resilience: Study of Adult Adoptees' Parenthood

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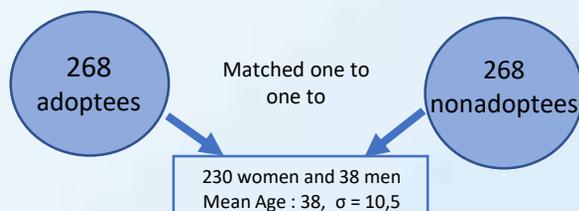
Introduction

- Studies carried out on a population of adopted adults are rare and present most of the time their **vulnerability**. They show that adoptees present a **poorer mental health (1)** and a **more insecure attachment (2)** than the general population. They would also be **less satisfied with their marital relationships (3)**.
- For any adult, parenthood is a **crisis** at the **individual** level but also at the **couple's** level. According to the **bio-psycho-social model of parental stress**, adjustment to parenthood would depend on the individual psychological variables and on the quality of the parents' relationship (4). Adoptees' features in terms of psychological and dyadic adjustments could therefore have a deleterious effect on their experience of parenthood.
- The rare studies carried out on adoptees' parenthood show that becoming a parent gets them back to their **early experiences** and **changes their relationships** with their parents (biological and adoptive.) A recent literature review details the **specific issues** faced by adoptees in the context of their parenthood (5). However, the existing works have important **methodological biases** (for instance: low number of participants, no control group, interest exclusively in the prenatal period).

Aims of the study

- 1 Compare adoptees' and nonadoptees' experience of parenthood.
- 2 Study the determinants of adoptees' experience of parenthood (psychological and relational variables)

Method



8 standardised scales:

Attachment
Mental Health
Resilience
Parental Stress
Parental Educative Skills
Motivations to Have Children
Dyadic Coping
Coparenting (integrity and conflicts)

Psychological
characteristics

Parental
experience

Relational
characteristics

Results

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Adoptees and nonadoptees present **similar scores** for:

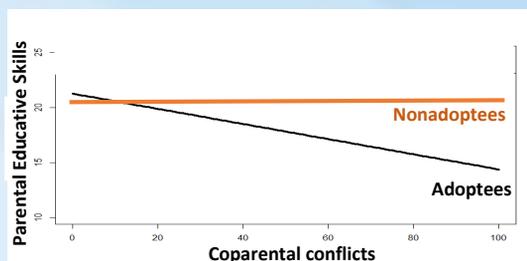
Parental Stress
Parental Educative Skills
Motivations to Have Children
Coparenting

≠

Nonadoptees present **better scores** than adoptees for:

Mental Health
Attachment
Resilience
Dyadic Coping

- Adoptees' **Parental Educative Skills** and **Parental Stress** are determined by their **relational and psychological characteristics**.
- The characteristics of the **marital relationship** play a particularly important role among adoptees:
 1. Adoptees' committed in a relationship present less Parental Stress than single adoptees (this difference was not found among nonadoptees);
 2. Dyadic Coping plays a mediating role between Psychological Characteristics and Parental Stress for adoptees;
 3. Coparental Conflicts better predict Parental Educative Skills for adoptees than for nonadoptees (see the Figure below) : an interaction effect was found.



Discussion

- Existing works present adoptees as more vulnerable as parents. Our results highlight adoptees' **resilience**. Despite significant differences in **psychological and dyadic adjustments** observed between the two groups, they have comparable scores regarding the parental experience.
- This can be explained by the fact that adoptees' adjustment scores remain **in the norm**. There would be **no consequences** on their parenthood. Moreover, other factors, such as their **adoptive parents' parenting style**, could act as protective factors (6).
- Our results regarding the importance of relational variables among adoptees are in line with those of Feeney, Passmore and Peterson (2007) (2) who show that adoptees were **more sensitive to relational stressors** than nonadoptees. This sensitivity might have a deleterious effect on parenthood.
- Future research will need to ensure a **better male / female distribution** in the samples; and focus on the long-term effects of the **adoption pathway** on the experience of parenthood.

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