

**THE EXTENT OF ADJUSTMENT OF CHILDREN IN FAMILIES WITH BIOLOGICAL
AND ADOPTED CHILDREN**

by

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Abstract

This study investigated the extent of adjustment of children in families with biological and adopted children. The purpose of the study is to ascertain the children's adjustment from the two families. The descriptive survey design was adopted in the study. One research question and one hypothesis guided the study. The population of the study comprised about 1,883,952 children in the area. The sample comprised 352 children selected through purposive sampling technique. A researcher developed questionnaire duly validated by experts was used in data collection. The reliability coefficient of 0.84 was found using Cronbach Alpha. The researcher administered the instrument. Mean ratings and t-test were used in data analysis. Findings indicate that both children in biological and adopted families perceived a low extent of adjustment in their families. It was therefore recommended that adoptive parents should make personal efforts to improve their family adjustments in order to help the children adjust well in their families.

Keywords: Extent, *adjustment, children, families, biological and adopted*

Introduction

A family is a household consisting of father, mother, sisters and brothers. It basically consists of married parents and their children and in some cases, uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces and nephews. The family as a social unit, is the foundation of the society. It provides a sense of security and identity for the child and is the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members particularly children. It is within the family unit that one generally learns to walk, talk and interact with others. Fields (2003) noted that families are often the first and frequently the last source of support for individuals.

Adoption is defined as the legal permanent placement of a child with a family that is not related to the child, which discontinues the relationship between the child and his biological parents. Sobol, Daily & Kelloway (2000). In adoptive family, kinship is based on a legal and not a biological relationship. Adegoke & Adedeji (2007). Families are considered the hub of wellbeing, and how they function depends on the family adjustment. The prevalence of adoptive families is on the increase in Nigeria, thus changing the family situations in which

children in the country are cared for and raised. The Society for Family Health (2006) noted that the number of adoptive families in Anambra State will continue to increase because more families are seeking to adopt children for a variety of reasons including infertility, late marriage and sex preferences.

Given the projected increase in adoption in Anambra State, an important question that arises is how families with adopted children function when compared with those with biological children in terms of family adjustment. Authors have stated that couples that adopt have fears about the functioning of their families when the adopted children grow from childhood to adolescence. The concern of many adoptive parents include non-acceptance of the child by either of the spouses, extended families or friends, fear of disloyalty by the child, and poor family adjustment. These fears have devastating psychological consequences on the affected families and deter several others from seeing adoption as a viable option, as well as provide a compelling rationale for the superiority of biological families.

Studies such as Brodzinsky, Smith & Brodzinsky (2008) and Farr & Patterson (2009) found that internationally adopted youths perceived their families as functioning poorly in several dimensions including internalizing and externalizing problems, attachment and academic achievement. These studies also found out that adopted children perceived their families as less adaptive and cohesive than their parents. These studies indicate that many adopted children tend to view their families as being emotional unsupportive and rigid than biological children.

Studies have also indicated a low level of family functioning in Anambra State. There are increasing cases of spousal abandonment of their families and many children carry with them the trauma of treatment, sadness, anger, and problems of unacceptance from their family members ó Ezeugwu, C., Obi, U. & Onah F. (2002). Given the above background, it becomes imperative to ascertain the extent of family adjustment in families with biological and adopted children in Anambra State.

Research Question and Hypothesis

One research question and one hypothesis guided the study.

Research Question

1. What is the extent of family adjustment in families with biological and adopted children in Anambra State?

Null Hypothesis

H₀: Biological and adopted children do not differ in their mean ratings on their family adjustment.

Method

The research design adopted for this study was a descriptive survey. The population for this study comprised children in Anambra State. This consisted of children about 1,883,952 households with children aged 11 to 18 years in Anambra State.

The sample consisted of 352 participants (176 biological children and 176 adopted children) selected through purposive sampling technique. One hundred and seventy six eligible biological families were randomly selected from 88 secondary schools where adopted children had been identified, selected and used for the study.

A research ó developed questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The questionnaire is titled Family Functioning Assessment Scale-Child (FFAS-C) which consisted of two parts. Part 1 is the introductory part and contains open-ended statements on biographic formation of the child. Part 2 of the instrument was structured on a 5 point response scale of very high extent, high extent, moderate extent, low extent, and very low extent. Two lecturers in the department of Educational Psychology, Nwafor Orizu College of Education validated the instrument. The Cronbach alpha method was used to test for reliability of the instrument in terms of internal consistency. To do this, copies of the instrument were distributed to 20 children (10 biological and 10 adoptive) in Njikoka Local Government area. These children were not included in the final study. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the instrument was found to be 0.84 and this was considered adequate for the study.

To answer the research questions, mean ratings were used in analyzing responses to the questionnaire items. The responses of the children to each item were analyzed separately for biological and adoptive children. The average mean scores for adopted and biological children on each cluster of items were presented and interpreted separately. To test the hypothesis, the t-test was applied to analyze the mean responses of biological and adopted children. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Mean ratings of biological and adopted children on the extent of their family adjustment

S/N	Items	Biological Children N = 176 X	Rmks	Adopted Children N = 176 X	Rmks
1	We have the feeling that friends and relatives are friendly and like us	1.27	LE	1.36	LE
2	Every member of our family is acceptable to one another.	3.55	H.E	3.63	H.E
3	We are proud of talking about our family with other families.	2.86	M.E	3.63	L.E
4	Parents in my family are capable of restraining, disciplining and controlling family members behaviour.	1.84	L.E	207	L.E
5	Family members express great hope that I will achieve great things in the future.	3.61	H.E	3.54	H.E
6	Family members look sad and worried for no good reasons.	2.13	L.E	2.00	L.E

7	Family members have been physically cruel or abusive to one another.	1.53	L.E	1.52	L.E
8	We have more problems in this family than I expected	2.07	L.E	3.23	M.E
9	We easily forgive any family member for wrongs done.				
	Cluster mean	2.44	L.E.	2.46	L.E

Note: Reverse scored items: RMKs ó Remarks

The data in table 1 shows that in the column for biological children, the mean score for items 1, 4, 6, 7 and 8 fell within the range of 1.27 and 2.13. Hence biological children perceived a low extent of their family adjustment in these items. Items 2 and 5 scored between 3.55 and 3.61 for the biological children thereby revealing that biological children perceived a high extent of their family adjustment as stated in the 2 items. Items 3 and 9 scored 2.86 and 3.13 indicating that the items were perceived as functioning to a moderate extent by biological children.

The table further shows that adopted children rated items 1, 3, 4, 6 and 7 within the range of 1.36 and

2.07, indicating their perception of low extent of family adjustment in those areas. Items 2 and 5 scores between 3.63 and 3.54 thereby revealing that adopted children perceived a high extent of their family adjustment as stated in the 2 items. With mean ratings of 3.23 and 3.27, there was a moderate extent of family adjustment in respect of items 8 and 9 as perceived by adopted children.

Generally, family adjustments obtained cluster mean scores of 2.44 and 2.46 for biological and adopted children respectively. Hence there was a low extent of adjustment in biological and adoptive families as perceived by the children.

Table 2: T-test on the mean ratings of biological and adopted children on their family adjustment

Children	N	X	Sd	df	Cal-t	Crit-t	P<005
Biological	176	2.44	0.80	350	0.22	1.96	Not Significant
Adoptive	176	2.46	0.72				

From table 2, the t-calculated value of 0.22 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and 350 degrees of freedom. Therefore the null hypothesis is accepted. Hence, biological and adopted children did not differ in their mean ratings on their family adjustment.

Summary of the findings

From the presentation and analysis of data, the following findings were observed:

1. There was a low extent of adjustment in biological and adoptive families.
2. Biological and adopted children did not differ in their mean ratings on their family adjustment.

Discussion

These findings have shown that family adjustment of children in adoptive and biological families show occurrences of sadness and worry, physical abuses, perception of unfriendliness from others and inability of their parents to control their behaviours among others. Thus, being adopted did not impose any more of these adjustment problems on adoptive families than those encountered by biological children.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide an insight into family adjustments in Anambra State. The conclusion here is that the biological and adopted children did not significantly differ in their perception of family adjustments. This study clearly shows that biological and adopted children experience similar aspects of family adjustment in Anambra State.

Recommendations

The findings of this study have formed the basis for the following recommendations:

1. Family planning specialists, religious bodies, community-based organizations and counselors should regularly organize seminars. For adolescents on the advantages enjoyed by adopted children to encourage victims of unwanted teenage pregnancy to put up their children for adoption.
2. Family life educators should challenge negative myths and attitudes expressed by many people on adoption outcomes.
3. Adoptive parents should make personal efforts to improve on their family adjustments in order to help the children adjust well in their families, attend support group meetings and

talk with other parents and even mentor one another.

4. The Ministry of Women Affairs and Social welfare and the UNICEF should organize

workshops for school guidance counselors to strengthen their counselling capacity and skills in counseling for improved family adjustment.

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