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# **The educational aspirations and psychological well-being of adopted young people in the UK.**

Andrew Brown<sup>1</sup>, Cerith S. Waters<sup>1,2</sup> and Katherine H. Shelton<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Psychology, Cardiff University, Wales.

<sup>2</sup>Child and Family Psychology and Psychological Therapies Service, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, Newport, Wales

## **Abstract**

Much is hypothesized but little is known about the effects of early adversity on school experience, academic attainment and career aspiration for children and young people adopted from care. Drawing on data from Wave 1 of the Youth (10-15 years old) Questionnaire ( $n=4899$ ) from the United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Survey (UKHLS), also known as Understanding Society (US), this study explored differences between young people adopted ( $n=22$ ) and a matched comparison group ( $n=110$ ) on measures of educational and occupational aspirations and also psychological well-being. Adopted young people reported higher externalising and total difficulties scores (based on the SDQ, Goodman, 1997) than the general population comparison group, but equivalent internalising symptoms. Adopted children were more likely to show an intention to seek full-time work at the end of compulsory schooling. These findings align with previous research regarding the psychological well-being of adopted children, contribute new knowledge about the aspirations of young people adopted from care and highlight methodological issues when utilising large scale panel survey data for narrowly defined sub-groups.

## **Keywords**

Adoption, education, aspiration, academic attainment, school experience, Understanding Society

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## **Conflict of interests**

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

## **Corresponding author**

Andrew Brown, School of Psychology, (College of Biomedical and Life Sciences), Cardiff University, 70 Park Place, Cardiff CF10 3AT, Wales  
Email: [brownar3@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:brownar3@cardiff.ac.uk)

## **Introduction**

Ascertaining levels of psychological well-being and educational aspirations may be useful for understanding variation in academic outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Children whose developmental trajectory can be skewed by the persistent and enduring effects of early trauma (e.g. abuse, neglect, family stress, loss, inter-parental violence), including children adopted from care by unrelated adults, form such a group. Children for whom alternative care provision is sought are therefore prone to having a range of complex physical and psychological needs (Anda et al., 2006) which will potentially impact across many domains of development.

On the whole, adopted children benefit from placement into a stable and nurturing environment (Palacios and Brodzinsky, 2010). In the extreme, those experiencing severe pre-adoption deprivation in institutions make ‘astonishing’ (van Ijzendoorn and Juffer, 2006: p1233) catch-up in terms of physical growth and significant gains in terms of IQ, cognitive function, behaviour, language development

and school performance with adoption consequently viewed as a successful mode of intervention. Gains apply to children who are domestically or internationally adopted when compared to non-adopted peers or siblings (van Ijzendoorn et al., 2005).

In school, however, experiences of adversity or trauma may manifest into behaviours which are detrimental to academic progress and social development including hyper-vigilance, defiance, aggression, controlling behaviour, lack of organisation, attention and empathy, dissociation and inability to form and maintain friendships (Phillips, 2007). Further, these difficulties at school can lead to complications in adulthood, particularly in relation to mental health problems and low educational attainment (Van der Vegt et al., 2009); recent figures from the Department for Education show that 63.9% of all pupils achieve the expected threshold at GCSE compared to 34.7% for children adopted from care (DfE, 2018a; DfE, 2018b). Leaving care studies also indicate continuing difficulties for vulnerable children after compulsory education, with one third of young people aged 19, who were Looked After age 16, not in education, employment or training (DfE, 2011). Very few young people (6%) from a care background go on to higher education (DfE, 2015), compared to 43% for the general school population (Harrison, 2017).

Research that examines education outcomes and aspirations for Looked After Children (LAC) may be informative for considering education outcomes and aspirations for adopted children, given that adopted children experience similar levels of pre-care adversity as LAC. The concept of resilience serves as an explanatory mechanism for understanding the attainment gap between LAC and the general school population. Though resilience is a personal quality which enables individuals to successfully overcome significant adversity despite exposure to multiple high risk (and high stress)

situations, its quality is influenced by repeated interactions with positive features of the immediate context (Gilligan, 2004). These contextual factors include the utilisation of internal assets (e.g. coping skills, self-efficacy) and external resources embedded in social interventions. Similarly, recent research has identified mitigation of the impact of early adversity through protective factors including the formation of attachments and good family relationships in the adoptive placement, regardless of maltreatment type and quality of foster care placement (Cage, 2018).

Educational resilience, specifically, is the increased chance of school success despite adverse environmental conditions both at home and sometimes school (South et al., 2016). One key factor in developing educational resilience is the consistent presence of an adult in school (external resource) who regards the young person positively; re-frames perceptions of social situations and adversity so that beneficial and compromising effects are recognised, and facilitates opportunities to engage with the school and wider community (South et al., 2016). These factors develop a sense of belonging to the school which, in turn, provides the secure base essential to a strong sense of resilience. High levels of school connectedness not only lead to increased academic performance, motivation and emotional well-being, but can also serve as a protective factor against health risk factors (Gilligan, 2000). In addition, Stein (2008), suggests that children who are best equipped to overcome adversity have a sense of agency (internal asset) as they transition into adulthood and that positive interactions with family, community (including school) and culture, promote educational resilience.

### *Psychological well-being*

Research literature typically categorises childhood psychological problems into two broad groups to encompass behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

Internalising symptoms include lack of emotional control, anxiety, low self-esteem and depression, whereas externalising problems comprise aggression, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), conduct and oppositional disorders (Achenbach et al., 2016). Several studies have demonstrated that higher levels of externalising problems (even at a young age) predict lower educational achievement in adolescence; internalising symptoms appear to have a shorter term effect on early academic achievement, but may be exacerbated by early academic failure (Deighton et al., 2018).

Differences between adopted and non-adopted children in relation to internalising and externalising behaviours are well documented (e.g. Palacios et al., 2013), but with mixed results. Some earlier studies suggested adopted children showed more difficulties in total and externalising problems but not internalising symptoms (e.g. Brodzinsky et al., 1998). More recent studies, however, have demonstrated using meta-analysis that adopted children fare less well in terms of total, externalising *and* internalising problems when compared to non-adoptive comparison groups (Wiley, 2017). Variation of findings between studies may be attributable, for example, to sample design (i.e. clinical sample) or to the nature of comparisons made (between children adopted from domestic welfare systems or private adoption to those with extreme pre-adoption adversity).

In a systematic review of recent research examining adopted children's school performance and experience, Brown et al. (2017) found that, compared to non-adopted comparison groups, adoption was associated with higher levels of behaviour problems and lower academic attainment across childhood, adolescence and emerging adulthood. Most striking, however, was the paucity of studies examining education-related outcomes for UK adopted children, strengthening the call for future research to address

this major knowledge gap. Brown et al. (2017) suggested that the lack of attention in this area may be explained, in some part, by the difficulty in the UK in establishing a robust and comprehensive national picture of adopted children's academic outcomes to the same level as Looked After Children.

Local authorities in England and Wales have a legal duty to report annually to central government on Looked After Children's psychological well-being (through the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire: SDQ, Goodman, 1997) and academic attainment (through the annual school census); this requirement ceases when children are adopted and their academic progress subsumed into the general population but are not identifiable as a group for monitoring and analysis. Thus, there is a gap in knowledge about current school performance, psychological outcomes and awareness of how related issues manifest in the school setting for children and young people adopted from the public care system, both in the UK and internationally (Soares et al., 2017). Given that adopted children experience similar levels of pre-care adversity as LAC and that this adversity may have comparable implications for subsequent school performance (including behavioural adjustment and academic attainment), the lack of equivalent central monitoring is a serious concern.

### *Aspirations*

Increasing opportunities for social mobility is an important factor in addressing issues of inequality and social justice and continues to be a focus for policymakers, researchers and commentators (Goodman et al., 2011). The publication of the Milburn Review (Milburn, 2012) highlighted a stalling of social mobility in the UK and indicated that an advantaged social background provides access to higher professions. Raising educational aspirations to improve social mobility has therefore received

increased attention (Croll and Attwood, 2013). A recent YouGov survey of 4,723 adults in the UK (Gov.UK, 2017) confirmed that the decline of social mobility is a concern, particularly for young people (18-24 years old) as 70% believe it is not becoming easier to 'move up' in society.

Explanations for social mobility include structural and deterministic beliefs where social standing is passed down through generations and educational disadvantage persists across generations, acting as a barrier to social mobility (Croll and Attwood, 2013). Many solutions to this problem have focussed on raising educational attainment of disadvantaged families by fostering positive aspirations, as opposed to improving attainment through cognitive development (e.g. by improving reading skills), though there is scant evidence of their effectiveness to improve academic outcomes in this way (Taylor and Rampino, 2014).

Metsäpelto et al. (2017) link higher levels of externalising problem behaviours to lower levels of educational aspiration through the mediating role of reading skills. They suggest that disruptive behaviours exhibited in the classroom lead to poor development of basic academic skills (e.g. reading) and a steady process of disengagement from school, increasing the risk of school dropout. High levels of externalising problems at a young age may lead to 'adjustment erosion' (Moilanen et al., 2010: p636) where lower academic competence later in life persists despite a decrease in externalising behaviours with age. Positive educational aspiration may be conceptualised as a component of academic success. As children progress through school, beliefs about the importance of schooling and ideas regarding future education are developed, largely in response to their experiences of the school context but are also influenced by home factors. Therefore, pupils' views of their school and schoolwork are



important when considering how forming higher values of learning and school subjects facilitate more positive educational aspirations (Viljaranta et al., 2009).

In a large scale survey of nearly 4000 school children across the primary and secondary age range, Hay et al. (2015) identified five factors that influence the formation of educational aspirations: parent support, students' English ability, teacher support, students' level of confidence about school and students' mathematical ability. These factors were found to be compensatory, in that negative effects in one factor could be mitigated by positive effects in another. Quality of school experience, including teacher-pupil relationships and home-school connections, not only appears to be a key element in general wellbeing but also in forming aspirations that facilitate social mobility. Hay et al. (2015) recommended that interventions aimed at raising aspirations should not be seen as a 'quick fix', but be of a multi-dimensional nature and implemented over time. What is unclear, however, is how these factors contribute to pupil well-being and impact on the formation of educational and occupational aspirations for adopted children.

On the one hand, if adopted children have higher levels of externalising problems than general population peers, academic progress may be compromised, reducing educational resilience and lowering educational aspirations, with possible implications for social mobility. On the other hand, given that adoptive parents provide 'richer' home environments and are more likely to have higher SES, higher levels of education and exert greater influence over education and occupation aspirations than non-adoptive families (Hamilton et al., 2007), it might be expected that this positive environment enables adopted children to flourish generally, with additional gains seen in school settings through developing greater educational resilience. However, in the

absence of complete, centrally collated quantitative data and a paucity of recent and relevant UK empirical studies, resolution of this quandary is not forthcoming. Focus, therefore, turns to retrospective analysis of a large, nationally representative dataset, from an established longitudinal population study, to elucidate UK adopted children's educational and occupational aspirations and behavioural and emotional adjustment.

### **Research questions**

The present study addressed whether there are differences between adopted and general population groups of children in:

- i. Self-rated levels of psychological mental health and well-being, specifically internalising symptoms, externalising behaviours and general well-being;
- ii. Aspirations for continuing post-16 education;
- iii. Occupational aspiration.

### **Method**

#### *Sample*

Data were taken from wave one of the United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Survey (UKHLS), also known as Understanding Society (US) (University of Essex, 2016). Commencing in 2009, the US survey collects data from over 30,000 households over a period of 24 months for each wave. The design of the US survey has a complex weighting strategy<sup>1</sup> that extends its research potential over traditional longitudinal cohort designs and enables robust generalizations to the UK population (Buck and McFall, 2011).

Household members aged 10-15 were asked to participate in a youth questionnaire and 4899 were completed in wave 1. Three levels of filial relationship,

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<sup>1</sup> For naming conventions and details of weighting calculations see Knies (2015).

including adoption status, were initially ascertained: adopted, step-adoption and non-adopted. For the purposes of the present analysis, step-adoptions were subsumed into the non-adopted category leaving two levels of filial relationship: Adopted and non-adopted. A non-adopted comparison group was created through one-to-many matching (cases matched on age, sex, ethnicity and country of residence) with each case matched to five controls to maximise power and to counter the small sample size of the adopted group (Austin, 2008). Thus, the final sample for analysis consisted of an adopted group ( $n=22$ ) and a general population comparison group ( $n=110$ ), descriptive data for each group are shown in Table 1.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

### *Measures*

#### *Emotional and behavioural well-being*

The youth self-completion questionnaire included the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997), an established and validated screening tool for emotional and behavioural well-being in children and young people. The SDQ comprises responses to 25 attributes on a three – point Likert scale (‘Not true’, ‘Somewhat true’ and ‘Certainly true’). The 25 items are divided between five subscales: Emotional symptoms, Conduct problems, Hyperactivity/ inattention, Peer relationship problems and Pro-social behaviour. Each subscale has a possible range of scores from 0-10.

As there is mixed empirical support for the five-factor structure of the SDQ particularly when used in ‘low-risk’, community samples (Goodman et al., 2010), an alternative factor structure that combines the emotional and peer scales into an

*'internalising symptoms'* composite scale and an *'externalising problems'* scale from the conduct and hyperactivity scales was used (Goodman et al., 2010). Each composite scale is a summation of the two sub-scales yielding a range of possible scores from 0-20. It was decided to use these composite scales because the Understanding Society dataset could be considered a 'low-risk' community sample and the aims of the present study was to explore presence or absence of broader issues that have been shown to affect education experience and performance. The internal consistency estimates for the two scales was acceptable<sup>2</sup>. A Total Difficulties score was obtained by summing subscale scores on all but the Prosocial subscale, yielding scores that could range from 0 – 40. In the present study, 98.9% ( $n = 4844$ ) of 10-15 year olds who completed the youth survey also completed the SDQ.

### *General Well-being*

The Understanding Society survey ascertained feelings of a general sense of well-being using six questions. Respondents were asked to rate how they felt about their family, friends, school, schoolwork, appearance and life as a whole on a seven-point Likert scale. A lower total score indicates a more positive sense of well-being. These items have been shown to capture a general sense of well-being and be good predictors of educational aspirations (Hartas, 2016).

### *Aspirations – Educational and Occupational*

The perceived importance of performance in examinations at the end of compulsory education (Standard grades for Scotland and GCSE for the rest of the UK) was ascertained. Respondents were also asked questions relating to educational

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<sup>2</sup> Cronbach's  $\alpha$  internalising = 0.745; externalising 0.742

aspiration. For the purposes of this analysis, responses were coded to reflect either a desire to work full time or continue with education in some form (full time, part-time or part-time with working); aspiration to further or higher education was a dichotomous variable coded either 'yes' or 'no'.

A free-response item to ascertain occupational aspiration was also asked; 'What job would you like to do once you leave school or finish full-time education?' These responses were re-coded by the first author into one of the nine major SOC2010 groups (e.g. Professional occupations, Skilled trades occupations; ONS, 2017) on a hierarchical scale from one to nine; a lower number reflecting a higher status occupation (Flouri and Panourgia, 2012).

## **Results and Discussion**

Using data from a nationally representative, large cohort survey, this study sought to elucidate differences in psychological well-being and educational and occupational aspirations for adopted and non-adopted young people in the UK. Preliminary assumption checking was carried out for each variable and appropriate adjustments made. Any adjustment that affected the overall outcome of the analysis are recorded below; full details are available from the first author.

### *Psychological well-being*

Adopted children reported significantly higher levels, than the matched non-adopted comparison group, of externalising behaviour ( $8.67 \pm 3.39$  vs  $6.53 \pm 3.21$  respectively)<sup>3</sup> and total difficulties ( $13.81 \pm 5.03$  vs  $11.26 \pm 5.24$  respectively)<sup>4</sup>. Similar findings among previous studies exploring externalising behaviour in adopted children

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<sup>3</sup> Hotelling's Trace,  $p=0.012$

<sup>4</sup> Independent samples  $t$ -test,  $p=0.034$

and adolescents have been found (e.g. Zill and Bramlett, 2014). The skewed developmental journey of care experienced children may explain the raised levels of externalising behaviour seen in our analysis and align with previous reports of classroom behaviours commonly seen in children who have experienced adverse care at some point in their lives. Whilst adopted children may benefit from permanency, the persistent and enduring effects of early adverse experiences may be overwhelming in certain contexts (such as the classroom) or domains of functioning (such as concentration); these effects may be experienced simultaneously thus compounding the challenges faced by adopted children (and their teachers) in the classroom on a day-to-day basis.

Adopted and non-adopted children scored similarly on the internalising symptoms scale ( $5.13 \pm 2.85$  vs  $4.74 \pm 3.57$  respectively)<sup>5</sup>, this was unexpected because previous research has indicated higher levels of emotional problems in adopted children (Sanchez-Sandoval and Palacios, 2012). Whilst the SDQ is validated for use with both community and clinical samples (Goodman et al., 2000), it does not specifically address behaviours that are apparent in children that have experienced early trauma and severe adversity, including attachment-related difficulties, anxiety and dissociative responses to trauma, age-inappropriate sexual behaviour and self-harm (Tarren-Sweeney, 2013) and may partly explain this disparity. Similar scores between the two groups (adopted  $14.23 \pm 3.89$ ; non-adopted  $13.16 \pm 4.83$ )<sup>6</sup> on the General Well-being Scale (coupled with equivalent internalising symptom scores) might suggest that the challenges for adopted children in school may be primarily of an externalising nature, at least for this

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<sup>5</sup> Hotelling's Trace,  $p=0.631$

<sup>6</sup> Independent samples  $t$ -test,  $p=0.317$

age group, but internalising symptoms and externalising behaviour often co-occur (Sanchez-Sandoval and Palacios, 2012) and further investigation utilising purposeful research design is called for.

The timing of adoptive placements rarely coincides with the usual entry points for school; adoptive children's move to a new school may exacerbate children's feelings of being different as they try to fit in to new social groups (Peake and Golding, 2006). It may be that this inconsistency of educational provision has a detrimental effect on school performance manifested in elevated levels of externalising behaviour. However, this point may be moot as the average age for adoption at the time of survey was 3 years and 11 months (DfE, 2014), which is before the start of compulsory schooling in the UK; whether adoption affects children's socialisation in pre-school childcare settings (particularly if the pre-school setting is attached to a primary school) has yet to be explored in a systematic manner.

Effective interventions aimed at supporting adopted children in the classroom, and wider school environment, should therefore take into account the impact of early adversity, including trauma and loss, on psychological well-being. Psychological distress can manifest as behaviours that are familiar to practitioners and may lead to unsuccessful application of traditional methods of intervention (e.g. those grounded in behaviourist principles such as sticker charts). Taking into account the antecedents of such behaviour, and responding appropriately, will build trust in the teacher-pupil relationship and over time may improve chances of successful school experience, not least through facilitating educational resilience. Recent changes to the Children and Social Work Act (2017) confirm the importance of understanding the deleterious effects

of early trauma, particularly for adopted children, by widening the remit of Virtual School Heads to include this vulnerable group.

### *Educational aspiration*

The youth questionnaire was completed by young people aged 10-15 years and adolescence is a pivotal time for forming aspirations (Metsäpelto et al., 2017), which are affected by prior academic achievement (particularly performance in key examinations), ability of current peer group, parental SES, ethnicity, levels of home enrichment and unemployment (Sammons et al., 2016). These effects did not appear to manifest in the outcomes of the present analysis as both groups placed similar importance on performing well in end of compulsory school exams (adopted  $1.26 \pm 0.44$ ; non-adopted  $1.35 \pm 0.59$ )<sup>7</sup>; possibly suggesting a common sense of engagement and connectedness to education, or perhaps reproduction of a well-rehearsed message. Absence of a difference between groups may also be explained by the sample size of the adopted group; Wijedasa and Selwyn (2011) analysed responses from a similar sample (in terms of size and background characteristics) in the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) and found comparable positive attitudes toward school for adopted ( $n=34$ ), non-adopted ( $n=15,626$ ) and children in care ( $n=55$ ). Though these results are indicative, a more nuanced tool to establish levels of school connectedness or engagement may be needed to amplify differences between these two groups.

### *Post-compulsory education aspirations*

Adopted children were more likely than the non-adopted comparison group to show an intention to seek full-time work at the end of compulsory education (33%

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<sup>7</sup> Independent samples *t*-test,  $p=0.477$



adopted children compared to 7.4% non-adopted)<sup>8</sup> as opposed to a route that involved education in some form. Further, the vast majority of respondents across both groups intended to study in some form after 16; the proportion of respondents who intend to work full time at 16 was larger in the adopted group. Lower educational aspirations in the adopted group may contribute to this difference. Previous studies have demonstrated elevated levels of emotional and behavioural difficulties in adopted children (Sanchez-Sandoval and Palacios, 2012) and these, combined with a less favourable experience of school, may lead to a desire to leave education and pursue full-time employment post-16. Further exploration into the contributory factors for educational aspirations of adopted children is therefore warranted through more nuanced design to highlight key aspects for this vulnerable group.

For those that indicated a desire to continue education in some form the intended route involves college or university, although there is some ambiguity in how the item is constructed. It is unclear from the question wording how post-16 education was interpreted because ‘college’ could mean A-levels or other courses leading to Higher Education (HE); alternatively it could also represent vocational training.

### *Occupational aspiration*

The free response question regarding employment desirability was completed by 83.3% of all respondents ( $n=110$ ). Table 2 presents proportions for SOC2010 major groups according to filial relationship. There was no association between adopted and non-adopted adolescents and their stated desired occupation.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Fisher’s Exact test (2x2),  $p=0.006$

<sup>9</sup> Point-biserial correlation,  $r_{pb(110)}=0.095$ ,  $p=0.321$

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Our findings indicate that none of the adopted group aspired to management roles and fewer, compared with the non-adopted group, considered professional jobs. More of the adopted children were interested in the category that included caring roles relative to the comparison group. The notion that ‘richer’ home environments of adoptive families, including parental investment (Hamilton et al., 2007), contribute to aspirational values of occupational status appears inconsistent with these findings. However, a wide ranging examination of career choice amongst adopted children and its relationship with psychological well-being, educational aspiration and educational resilience is wholly under-explored. In our analysis, adopted children represented a more even distribution across the range of occupational status, but this is likely to be a further consequence of the small adopted sample size. Further investigation of the relationship between educational achievement, school experience and occupational aspiration for children adopted from care is called for to provide robust evidence as a basis for developing appropriate interventions at school level and for developing policies that allow children adopted from care opportunities for social mobility.

### **Further research**

Developmental progress can be severely affected by exposure to pre-natal parental substance misuse, particularly the effects of overexposure to alcohol (Phillips, 2004). Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) are the most common non-hereditary cause of learning disability (May and Gossage, 2001) and can result in physical and neuro-behavioural difficulties such as hyper-activity, tremor, executive dysfunction and sensory integration challenges (Autti-Rämö, 2002); some of which are often used when describing adopted children’s school-related behaviour (Sharma et al.,

1996). In 2016, the initial category of need for 70% of children adopted from care was abuse or neglect (DfE, 2016) and because substance misuse is a common element of many cases (Brandon et al., 2010) it is likely to form a contributory factor in the ability of some adopted children to function well in school. More focussed and empirically robust research is required to elucidate these relationships.

### **Limitations**

The present study confirms previous research for psychological well-being of adopted children but some limitations are noted. First, the Understanding Society dataset suffers similar problems as previous large cohort studies (e.g. Raleigh and Kao, 2013) where adoption is not the primary focus of participant recruitment or analysis. The resulting group sizes means that the loss of statistical power associated with small sample sizes should be considered when interpreting the results. Secondly, it is not possible, in this dataset, to determine an accurate or reliable age at adoption or establish the severity of early adversity; key factors in determining successful adjustment after adoption (Zill and Bramlett, 2014). However, the opportunity to examine specific outcomes for adopted children identified in a nationally representative dataset is rare.

A further limitation rests in the formulation of concepts explored in the Understanding Society questionnaire. For example, it is unclear from the question wording how 'adoption' may be understood by respondents in the main adult survey. Without differentiating between adoption type (e.g. from the public care system, Inter-country adoption, kinship adoption and step adoption) in the main survey, a nuanced analysis is impossible. In addition, Goodman et al. (2000) recommend a multi-informant approach in using the SDQ, due to the context-dependent nature of psychological problems and amelioration of inconsistent responses between informants

(Vaz et al., 2016), yet the Understanding Society survey uses the youth self-report version exclusively; it would seem that there is credible opportunity to include the parent/carer version in the main adult questionnaire.

## **Conclusion**

This study sought to explore differences between young people adopted from the public care system or living with birth/step- parents on measures of psychological well-being, educational aspiration and desired occupation. Our analysis contributes to emerging discussions about how school experience (including aspirational values) of children adopted from care in the UK may be affected by the legacy of early adversity. It is clear from existing evidence that an attainment gap between adopted and non-adopted children persists and it is likely that pre-adoption experiences make an enduring contribution to this gap. Pertinent analysis of its complexities may provide much needed insight for policy maker and practitioners to further develop opportunities that enable the attainment gap to be closed. Key to the quality of the future research base is purposeful design (including the primacy of adoptee voice) that allows specific analysis of factors directly relating to adopted children and their attainment, school experience and occupational aspirations.

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**Table 1**

Table 1: Demographics of Youth Questionnaire Responses

		Filial relationship	
		General population (weighted n=102)	Adopted (weighted n=24)
Age Mean (SD)		12.59 (1.5)	12.34 (1.67)
Sex n (%)	Male	42 (41.2)	11 (45.8)
	Female	60 (58.8)	13 (54.2)
Country n (%)	England	92 (90.2)	20 (83.3)
	Wales	1 (1.0)	1 (4.2)
	Scotland	9 (8.8)	3 (12.5)
	Northern Ireland	0	0
		General population (weighted n=102)	Adopted (weighted n=25)
Ethnicity n (%)	White	66 (64.7)	14 (56.0)
	Black Caribbean	4 (3.9)	1 (4.0)
	Mixed & Other	10 (9.8)	4 (16.0)
	Not Known	22 (21.6)	6 (24.0)

Note 1: Ethnicity is self-reported in the youth questionnaire from a choice of 22 categories. These were condensed into eight groups (White, Black Caribbean, Black African, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Mixed and Other) following Berrington et al. (2016).

**Table 2**

Table 2: Occupational Desirability (n (%))

SOC2010 Major Group	General population n=91	Adopted n=19
Managers, directors and senior officials	4 (4.4)	0
Professional occupations	32 (35.2)	6 (31.6)
Associate professional and technical occupations	33 (36.3)	6 (31.6)
Administrative and secretarial occupations	2 (2.2)	0
Skilled trades occupations	5 (5.5)	3 (15.8)
Caring, leisure and other service occupations	11 (12.1)	4 (21.1)
Sales and customer service occupations	4 (4.4)	0
Process, plant and machine operatives	0	0
Elementary occupations	0	0