



Treatment Outcome Research

Clinical Research Shows Corrective Attachment Therapy™ Works By Terry Levy and Michael Orlans

A retrospective longitudinal research study was recently conducted at the Evergreen Psychotherapy Center. This study was designed to determine the effectiveness of Corrective Attachment Therapy, a combination of emotional, cognitive and family systems therapy as well as parenting-skills training.

The study contained two parts. The first part examined the demographic and clinical characteristics of 50 children and families who participated in the two-week Corrective Attachment Therapy treatment program. The second part examined changes in the behavior and attitudes of children who completed therapy. Symptom reduction was determined by comparing scores on the 50-item parent-reported Symptom Checklist pre- and post-therapy. Following is a summary of some of the findings.

Descriptive Analysis

Adoption Background	%of Studied Group
Adopted	84%
Different race/ethnicity than adoptive parents	46%
Adopted as part of sibling unit	45%

Serious disruption and damage in the children's attachment histories was found.

Placement History	%of Studied Group
One or more foster care placements prior to adoption (average of three placements)	72%
Experienced severe and chronic physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse prior to adoption, with a mean of 48 months	90%
Were forcefully removed against biological parents' wishes	56%
Spent considerable time in foreign orphanages.	34%

Parents reported more severe symptoms in their children prior to treatment due to:

- parents and child of a different citizenship (cultural and ethnic differences)
- length of time abuse and neglect occurred prior to adoption
- number of years child spent with biological parents
- prior diagnosis of PTSD and/or several diagnoses in addition to RAD.

Parents with secure attachment histories reported lowest symptom severity (34% of mothers and 38% of fathers).

Treatment Effectiveness

An analysis was conducted on the pre- and post-Symptom Checklist scores, measuring the child's improvement on six symptom categories (behavior, emotion, cognition, relationships, physical, and moral/ spiritual).

Statistically significant positive changes were found on all six symptom categories up to three years after therapy. Improvements held over time.

Children improved more when they had the following characteristics:

- fewer moves in the foster care systems
- fewer pre-therapy diagnoses
- were not adopted as a sibling unit
- were not taking psychotropic medications during therapy
- had an adoptive mother with a secure attachment history

These research findings have important implications for children and families. First, the research proves that Corrective Attachment Therapy does help children with histories of maltreatment and compromised attachment. It also confirms that multiple placements in foster homes are damaging to children and make treatment more difficult.

Interestingly, although there are times when adopting sibling groups is appropriate, the findings show that certain sibling group adoptions can result in severe problems for children and parents, and inhibit the development of secure attachment (for example, when the siblings have pathological patterns of relating, such as physical and sexual abuse).

The research also illustrates that the pros and cons of medication must be weighed, as it can interfere with treatment results.

Finally, the findings show that the parents' attachment history and current level of emotional maturity play an important role in the success of treatment and the child's long-term improvement.