



# Reducing Aggression and Relational Frustration in Adoptive Families through Trauma-Informed Intervention

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## Abstract

Hope Connection 2.0 is a therapeutic camp developed by the Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development (KPICD) that utilizes Trust-Based Relational Intervention® (TBRI®), a trauma-informed and attachment-based intervention, to meet the needs of adoptive families. To examine its effectiveness in meeting these needs, data from child and parent measures are collected from participating families during a one-year time period. The current study specifically examines the effectiveness of this intervention in decreasing aggression in adopted children and decreasing relational frustration between the parent and adopted children from pre- to post-camp. The results of this study indicate that both aggression and relational frustration significantly decreased after families participated in the intervention. Additionally, results suggest a significant positive correlation between aggression and relational frustration, suggesting the more a child exhibits aggression, the more relational frustration the parent(s) feels. Results of this study indicate the effectiveness of Hope Connection 2.0 in reducing aggression and frustration in adoptive families, demonstrating the potential benefit of this post-adoption intervention in meeting the needs of adoptive families.

## Introduction

Adopted children often have histories of trauma that can impact long-term social-emotional and behavioral problems and contribute to children's difficulties adjusting to their adopted family (Purvis et al., 2013). Previous research has found that parents of children with developmental delays experience higher levels of parental stress which is linked to both relational frustration between the parent(s) and the child and aggression in the child (Dennis et al., 2018).

Hope Connection 2.0 is a two-weekend camp targeted towards adopted children with complex developmental trauma. The camp curriculum is based on Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI), a trauma-informed and attachment-based intervention. TBRI focuses on Connecting, Correcting, and Empowering Principles to promote felt-safety, connection, and self-regulation in adopted children from adverse backgrounds (Purvis et al., 2015). Adopted children and their families are given an opportunity at camp to learn and practice the three TBRI Principles through planned activities and Nurture Groups.

This study examined the effectiveness of Hope Connection 2.0 in decreasing aggression in adopted children and decreasing relational frustration between adoptive parents and adopted children from pre- to post-camp. It was hypothesized that both aggression levels and relational frustration would decrease from pre- to post-camp intervention.

## Methods

Participants of this study were adoptive parents whose families participated in camp. Eligibility criteria for families participating in the camp included having an adopted child between the ages of 5-12 during camp, having officially adopted the child for at least a year, and making sure all family members in the household could participate in both camp weekends. Participants were asked to complete several surveys pre- and post-camp that assessed aggression levels, relational frustration, and other aspects of family operations.

Participants:

- 32 adoptive parents
- Age: 41.5 (M)
- Gender: Female (53%) and Male (47%)

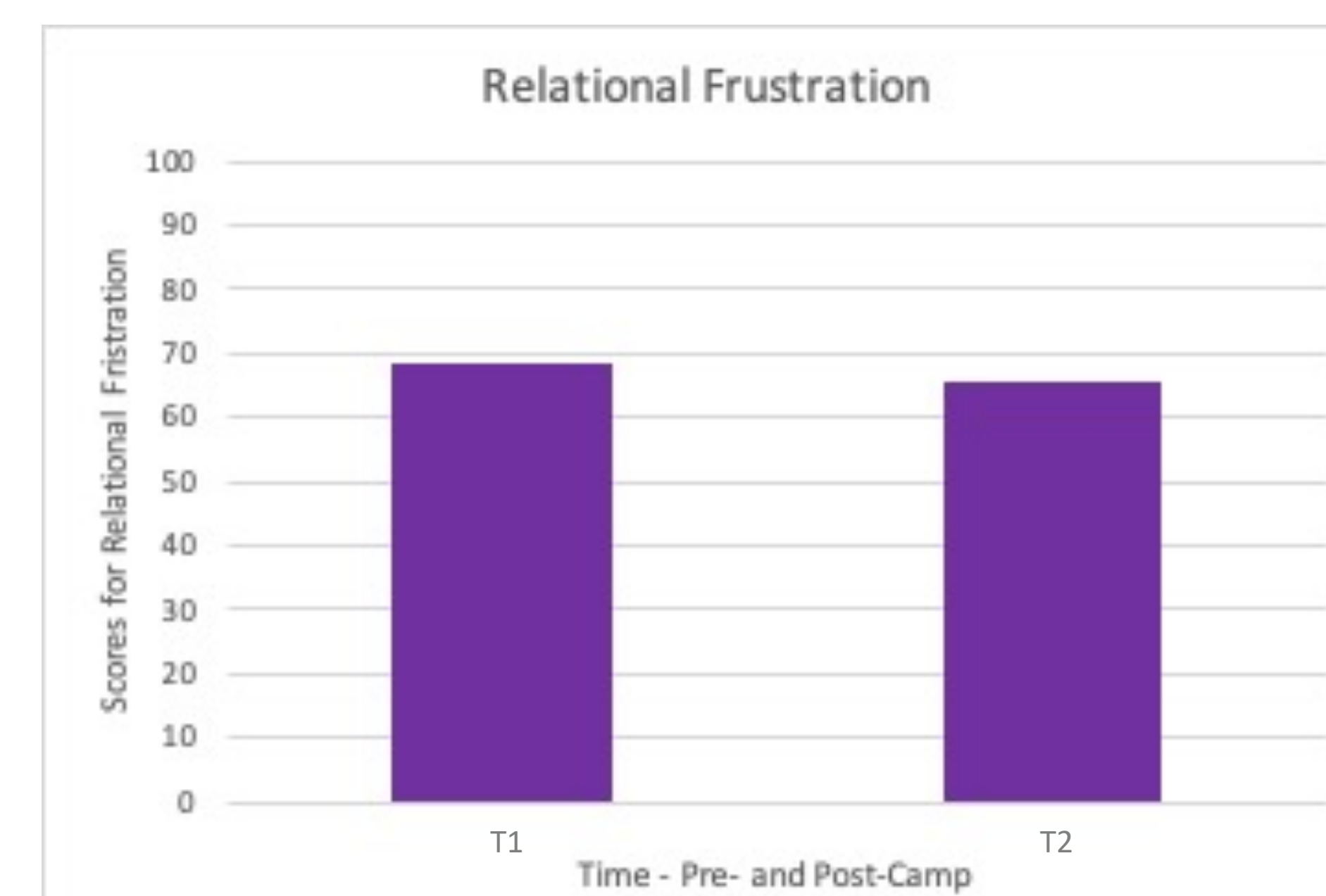
Measures:

- Parent Relationship Questionnaire (PRQ)
- Trauma Symptom Checklist for Young Children (TSCYC)

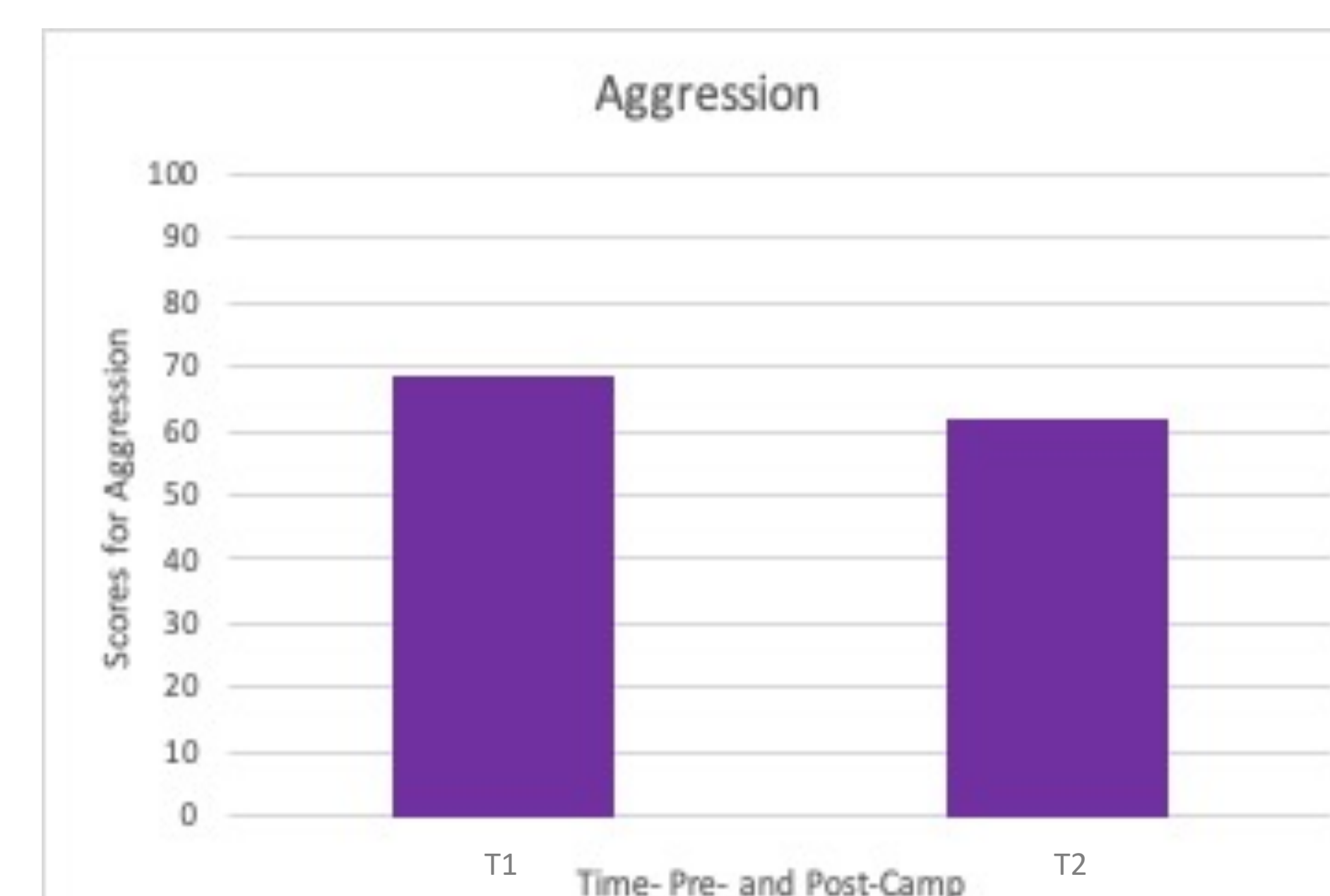
Procedure:

- Camp took place over two-weekends and was offered three times per year (i.e., spring, summer, fall)
- Participants were asked to complete online surveys 5 weeks before camp (T1) and again at the end of the second weekend of camp (T2)

## Results



Results from a paired sample t test indicate that scores were significantly lower at post-test ( $M = 65.53$ ,  $SD = 9.59$ ) than at pre-test ( $M = 68.66$ ,  $SD = 10.42$ ),  $t(31) = 2.35$ ,  $p < .025$ .



Results from a paired sample t test indicate that scores were significantly lower at post-test ( $M = 62.06$ ,  $SD = 18.74$ ) than at pre-test ( $M = 68.59$ ,  $SD = 15.21$ ),  $t(16) = 2.27$ ,  $p < .038$ . Only the mothers' data were included in this calculation.

## Discussion

The results of this study suggest the effectiveness of Hope Connection 2.0 at reducing aggression in adopted children and relational frustration between adopted children and parents pre- to post-camp. Additionally, the data indicates that there is a significant correlation between aggression and relational frustration.

The results of this study are consistent with previous findings indicating adopted children from adverse backgrounds exhibit decreased levels of aggression (Purvis et al., 2015) as well as decreased levels in relational frustration between adopted children and adoptive parent(s) (Hunsley, 2019) after being introduced to TBRI. Although the association between aggression and relational frustration in adoptive families requires further investigation, these findings are in line with those of other studies between children and their parents (Dennis et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2011; Siu et al., 2016).

Limitations of this study include the lack of a control group. With a control group, the results of this study could better demonstrate the effectiveness of Hope Connection 2.0 at reducing aggression and relational frustration in adoptive families. In addition to this, most adoptive families consist of two-parent units. With increased representation from single-parent adoptive families, the results could better indicate how effective Hope Connection 2.0 is at reducing aggression and relational frustration. Finally, the small sample size limits the results of the study. If conducted with more participants, there would be increased statistical power in the results of this study.

Future research could focus on the effectiveness of post-adoption interventions in meeting adoptive family needs. Also, exploring the relationship between relational frustration and aggression would be beneficial as it could aid in developing curriculum for post-adoption interventions.

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