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# The Family Journal

## Community attitudes towards adoption in Italy: The role of stereotypes and emotional reactions

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**Community attitudes towards adoption in Italy: The role of stereotypes and emotional reactions**  
*The extent to which emotional and cognitive factors can shape the attitudes of the Italian population towards adoption*

**Sample:**  
 - REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ITALIAN POPULATION  
 - PARTICIPANTS: 1003 subjects  
 - GEOGRAPHICAL AREA: n. 298 NW, n. 193 NE, n. 201 C, n. 341 S and Islands.  
 - GENDER: n. 480 M, n. 523 F  
 - AGE: n. 215 18-34 years, n. 171 35-44 years, n. 352 45-64 years, n. 265 more than 64.  
 - EMPLOYMENT STATUS: n. 508 Employed, n. 495 Not employed

**Methods:**  
 Computer Assisted Web Interview questionnaire  
 Variables:  
 - Stereotypical representations for adoptees, adoptive parents, and adoptive families  
 - Emotional reactions to a possible adoptive project  
 - Attitudes toward adoption

**Data:**  
 Analysis based on a Hierarchical logistic regression to measure the effects on attitude to adopt a child of following variables:  
 1) the socio-demographic variables  
 2) stereotypical representations  
 3) emotional reactions to a possible adoptive project

**Results:**  
 - People's stereotypes may significantly contribute to explaining their attitudes toward choice of adoption.  
 - Stereotypical representations for adoptees and adoptive families are more likely associated with a negative attitude towards adoption.  
 - Negative reactions toward the choice of adoption are less like to endorse this choice when made by a friend and vice versa for positive emotions.

440x174mm (72 x 72 DPI)

## Community attitudes towards adoption in Italy: The role of stereotypes and emotional reactions

### Abstract

*The paper explores the attitudes toward adoption of a representative sample of the Italian population. Focusing on the sociodemographic factors, stereotypes, and feelings about adoption, this study investigates whether and to what extent they can shape attitudes towards adoption. A large sample of 1,003, Italian adults was used in the study. The participants were asked to complete a self-report questionnaire. A series of hierarchical regression models were conducted to examine the relative contributions of factors to explain the Italian's perception of the adoptive family. Results suggest that cognitive and affective processes may significantly contribute to explaining the community's attitudes toward adoption.*

**Keywords: Adoption, Attitudes, Hierarchical Logistic Regression, Italy, Perception of Differences, Stereotypes**

### Introduction

According to the theory of planned behaviour, attitude can be considered one of the crucial precursors of intention and, consequently, of behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000).

Literature regarding the choices relating to family form have also been studied in relation to attitudes. Globally, studies on attitudes towards procreative options, especially on non-clinical populations, is highly limited, and particularly focused on assess parenting attitudes towards adoption in the event of infertility (e.g. Canzi et al., 2020). However, an increasing number of international studies has returned to study the society's attitudes towards adoption, highlighting that adoption-related emotions and beliefs, are crucial for couple considering adoption (e.g., Mohanty,

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2  
3 2014). In particular, such factors are likely to affect how prospective adoptive parents perceive  
4 themselves (e.g., Weistra & Luke, 2017). Unsurprisingly, the choice to adopt a child is more likely  
5 among people who endorse adoption as a family form (e.g., Mohanty, 2014). Self-perception is  
6 profoundly shaped by how individuals believe others think of them (Cooley, 1972). Prospective  
7 adoptive parents may be aware of the widespread stereotypes towards adoption within their social  
8 context, and they may acknowledge how such beliefs can bias the perception of themselves and of  
9 their family. This is relevant, e.g., for the willingness to adopt children with a different ethnic  
10 origin, which not only depends on the prospective parent's desires, but also on the comments and  
11 expectations of the surrounding social environment (Docan-Morgan, 2010). The literature argues  
12 that the motivations to adopt and the intrinsic nature of an adoptive family are often poorly  
13 understood by the general population. This might be exacerbated by the media unrealistically  
14 portraying's parents as either 'heroes' or 'desperate' (e.g., Weistra & Luke, 2017). In response to  
15 these misconceptions, adoptive parents may be less inclined to disclose their status and to share  
16 adoption-related experiences. Both adoptive parents and children often have to deal with  
17 discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion, and these experiences might lead to depressive  
18 symptoms, lower self-esteem, and poor quality of life among adoptive families (Arnold et al., 2016;  
19 Ferrari et al., 2017, 2022; Koskinen et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2015; Link et al., 2002; Seol et al., 2015;  
20 Wegar, 2000; Weistra & Luke, 2017; White et al., 2021). Fear of being judged and discriminated  
21 against, and therefore socially rejected as "different", can play a relevant role in whether and who  
22 prospective parents will adopt (Weistra & Luke, 2017).

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50 The seminal study conducted by Miall (1987) more than three decades ago, showed that  
51 adoptive parents are likely to perceive the community attitudes towards adoption status as a stigma  
52 because of the importance of blood ties. Have these attitudes changed? The answer is still uncertain,  
53 because relatively few studies explore community attitudes, stereotypes, and adoption-related  
54 feelings. Indeed, the adoption literature has mainly focused on the adoptees and on the adoptive  
55 parents, exploring the adoptive families' challenges and resources (e.g., Brodzinsky et al., 2022). In  
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3 contrast, empirical studies focusing on the social context in which adoption takes place are scarce  
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5 (e.g., Callea & Urbini, 2010; Marabelli et al., 2018; Novara et al., 2017). This paper contributes to  
6  
7 filling this gap, by focusing on the perceptions and attitudes about children's adoption.  
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10 Italy is an interesting context to study because, after the United States, it has been the second  
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12 receiving country for inter-country adoptions over the last twenty years (Selman, 2009). Over the  
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14 years, and following a global trend, also Italy has experienced a sharp decrease in the number of  
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16 adoptions. Exploring the factors that can influence positive attitudes towards adoption are the first  
17  
18 step to understand what might have driven this trend over time. In this direction, the present study  
19  
20 investigates Italian community attitudes toward adoption. To the best of our knowledge, this is the  
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22 first contribution in the literature that explicitly focuses on the role of sociodemographic factors,  
23  
24 stereotypes, and feelings about adoption. Our paper is structured as follows: the next sections  
25  
26 provide literature review on community attitudes towards adoption and stereotypes towards  
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28 adoption, outline the empirical methodology, and include the synthesis of the main characteristics  
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30 of participants and results, discussion, and implications.  
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### 36 **Community attitudes towards adoption**

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39 Based on the empirical fact that the intention to adopt is generally higher among childless  
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41 couples than among those with a child, the empirical research on adoption has been mainly focused  
42  
43 on infertile couples' willingness to adopt and their stated motivations for becoming parents (e.g.,  
44  
45 Canzi et al., 2020; Miall & March, 2003; Mohanty, 2014; Moos & Mwaba, 2007). The focus is  
46  
47 clearly on the role of infertility as a trigger for the choice of adopting a child (e.g., Bausch, 2006;  
48  
49 Jennings, 2010). The fact that there exist infertile couples who choose not to adopt a child, suggests  
50  
51 that this is a more multifaceted and complex decision, where several factors can play a role. For  
52  
53 example, the couple decision can be affected by the fear of social stigma, and the perception that the  
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55 society conveys a negative picture about adoptive families, adoptive parents, and adopted children  
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57 (Omosun et al., 2011; Joshi et al., 2015). Societal beliefs about accepting adoptive children may  
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3 create an enabling environment favouring adoption and, conversely, stigmatization is likely to  
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5 reduce the willingness to adoption among infertile couples (e.g., Mohanty, 2014).  
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8 To better understand the broad social context of adoption, it is interesting to explore the  
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10 attitudes towards adoption in the general population. An attitude is an evaluative judgment of a  
11  
12 person about a psychological object (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2008). Several studies have specifically  
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14 explored the community's approval of adoption as a family form. The results showed that in  
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16 different contexts around the world – such as the U.S., Canada, South Africa, and Singapore – there  
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18 is an overall favourable attitude towards adoption (Canzi et al., 2020; Fisher, 2003; Miall & March,  
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20 2003; Mohanty, 2014; Moos & Mwaba, 2007; Tyebjee, 2003). In Italy, a recent study carried out by  
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22 Canzi et al. (2020) on a sample of 1,891 young adults aged between 18 and 33, showed that in the  
23  
24 event of infertility, participants were more likely to advise a friend to adopt a child than to consider  
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26 the use of assisted medical reproduction technologies. This finding suggests the existence of a  
27  
28 positive attitude toward adoption. Attitudes depend on sociodemographic differences. For example,  
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30 women (Canzi et al., 2020; Gibbons, et al., 2006; Miall & March, 2003; Mohanty, 2014; Tyebjee,  
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32 2003), higher income households (Mohanty, 2014) and respondents with higher level of education  
33  
34 (Canzi et al., 2020) are positively associated to accepting the adoptive choice as a family form.  
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36 Familiarity and contact with adopted families are associated with more favourable and positive  
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38 attitudes toward adoption (Bausch, 2006; Mohanty, 2014; Tyebjee, 2003). However, further  
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40 evidence is needed, considering that there may exist country-specific differences which affect  
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42 attitudes and expectations. This paper contributes in this direction, considering Italy and responses  
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44 given by a representative sample of over one thousand individuals.  
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52 This paper investigates attitudes, as well as beliefs. Beliefs are often acquired and assimilated with  
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54 or without mindful control. They play a crucial role in guiding people's behaviour and in evaluating  
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56 and managing present and future actions. According to the expectancy-value model of attitude  
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58 (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2008), the beliefs and knowledge that people hold about adoption influence the  
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60 community attitudes toward adoption (Bausch, 2006; Gibbons & Brown, 2012; Mohanty, 2014;

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3 Tyebjee, 2003). According to the principle of internal coherence, beliefs guide people to  
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5 automatically select the entry/exit of new information, depending on whether such information is  
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7 consistent with the current beliefs (Jervis, 2006). Updating (explicit or implicit) beliefs can  
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9 therefore be a slow process, as it requires self-reflective thinking based on own personal  
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11 experiences, commitment to change, and understanding of the social life contexts.  
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### 15 16 **Stereotypes as antecedents of attitudes towards adoption**

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18 This paper also contributes to the literature on stereotypes (e.g., Esses et al., 1993). In  
19  
20 particular, it contributes to understanding the role of stereotypes towards adoptees, adoptive parents,  
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22 and adoptive families, and how they can impact on individual's more favourable or unfavourable  
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24 perception of adoption.  
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28 Stereotypes can be defined as a set of beliefs about the attributes of the members belonging  
29  
30 to a particular social group (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981). Stereotypes represent strong normative  
31  
32 cues that provide information and guide perceptions, judgments, and actions toward adoption; some  
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34 studies described the stereotyped views of adoptees in the general population. Accordingly, adopted  
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36 children were more likely than biological children to be perceived as at risk for medical,  
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38 behavioural, school problems, more prone to deviancy (Miall & March, 2003), and overall, at a  
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40 higher risk of mental health problems (Mohanty, 2014; Tyebjee, 2003). A recent study by  
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42 Keresztes-Takács & Nguyen (2018) on the Hungarian society's attitudes toward adoptive families,  
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44 finds that adoptees are expected to be more prone to deviancy, and have lower levels of emotional  
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46 and psychological stability, happiness, gratitude, and self-confidence than non-adopted children.  
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48 These results are consistent with some recent research showing that, in the Italian context, an  
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50 adoptive child is more likely to be an unstable and problematic person (e.g., Novara et al., 2017).  
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55 However, the contribution of community's stereotypes associated with adoptive parental  
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57 status to the attitude toward adoption is still under-investigated. For example, we can consider a  
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59 review of studies on parental status (Valiquette-Tessier et al., 2016) showing that married  
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3 heterosexual biological parents living in an intact family had the highest social appreciation score.  
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5 Among all parental statuses, the adoptive one was the most understudied. Adoptive parents are  
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7 perceived as warmer and friendlier than non-adoptive parents and respondents felt more admiration,  
8  
9 sympathy, and pity toward adoptive parents than non-adoptive ones (Keresztes-Takács & Nguyen,  
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11 2018). Besides, some studies showed a simplified adoptive family representation in Italy, in which  
12  
13 adoptive parents are depicted as heroic characters making a heroic choice that requires great  
14  
15 courage and ethical commitment (e.g., Callea & Urbini, 2010). Adoptive parents are often idealized  
16  
17 as "economically well-off," "very generous," and committed to social issues (Marabelli et al.,  
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19 2018). Although literature points out the existence of stereotypes toward adoptive parents, empirical  
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21 evidence on the corresponding association with the social approval of adoption in case of infertility  
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23 among the Italian population is still missing.  
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29 Some studies have suggested that, among the general population, there exists stereotypes  
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31 also towards adoptive families as a type of family. Despite a general greater social acceptance for  
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33 the existence of different types of families, the adoptive family appears to be "stigmatized" and  
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35 some disagree about the legitimacy of adoptive parent-child bonds (Wegar, 2000). In communities  
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37 where blood ties within the familial relational networks are important, adoptive families are  
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39 typically considered as "different" families. Greater concerns about the importance of blood ties in  
40  
41 family relations are negatively related to adoption approval among the general population in  
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43 Singapore (Mohanty, 2014). Beyond the importance of blood ties, the shared fate theory (Kirk,  
44  
45 1964), recently validated in modern adoption practices (Lo et al., 2021), has emphasized the  
46  
47 importance of whether the differences between adoptive and non-adoptive parenthood are  
48  
49 acknowledged. Based on this perspective, Brodzinsky (1987) draws a continuum about how  
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51 adoptive families can cope with the difference. The acknowledgment of differences is defined as the  
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53 propensity to think that adoptive and non-adoptive families are different in many relevant ways. By  
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55 acknowledging differences between adoptive and non-adoptive parenthood, adoptive parents can  
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57 understand that their children may have unique experiences and challenges related to their adoptive  
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3 status, which typically has beneficial effects. In contrast, rejection of the existing differences  
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5 interferes with parents' ability to attune to the child's adoption-related needs (Cigoli & Scabini,  
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7 2007; Lo & Grotevant, 2020). According to this perspective, it is important to assess  
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9 acknowledgment of the adoption-related differences within the population, because adoptive  
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11 parents confronting their own internalized beliefs about adoption with comments (and social  
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13 pressure) from the rest of the community, may perceive the legitimacy of their experience of  
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15 adoptive parenting as challenged, or reinforced.  
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19 Finally, it's noteworthy emphasizing that, despite several contributions to the joint effects of  
20  
21 cognitive and affective processes on attitudes (Esses et al., 1993; Haddock & Zanna, 1999),  
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23 previous studies have mainly focused on cognitive dimensions (i.e., beliefs/stereotypes) as  
24  
25 important determinants of attitudes. Research on affective and emotional perception of adoption is  
26  
27 instead limited. Considering the interplay of affect and cognition on attitude formation (Ajzen &  
28  
29 Fishbein, 2008; Haddock & Zanna, 1999), in this study, we propose to consider the relative  
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31 contributions of both cognitive (i.e., stereotypes towards adoptees, adoptive parents, and adoptive  
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33 families) and emotional (i.e., emotional reaction to friends' adoption choice) processes on  
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35 evaluations of adoption's attitudes among the Italian population.  
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### 39 40 **Aims of the research**

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42 In light of the theoretical framework outlined above, the present [MASKED FOR REVIEW]  
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44 research, promoted by [MASKED FOR REVIEW], investigated the attitudes toward adoption of a  
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46 representative sample of the Italian population explored in terms of individual's favourable (or  
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48 unfavourable) evaluation of adoption in the event of infertility.  
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51 Specifically, this paper explore the association between stereotypical representations of  
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53 adoptees, adoptive parents, and adoptive families, and adoption-related feelings with attitudes  
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55 toward adoption. Based on the evidence presented in the literature review, some sociodemographic  
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57 characteristics could be associated with the attitudes towards adoption. Accordingly, female  
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59 respondents were expected to have a more favourable attitude than male (Callea & Urbini, 2010;  
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3 Canzi et al., 2020), and higher income households (Mohanty, 2014) were expected to have more  
4 favourable attitudes toward adoption. Focusing on cognitive and emotional factors, the present  
5 study analyses whether and to what extent they can shape attitudes towards adoption. Concerning  
6 cognitive processes, we focused on stereotypes targeting adoptees, adoptive parents, and adoption  
7 as a form of family. With regard to the emotional dimensions, both positive and negative emotional  
8 reactions towards couples who have chosen to become parents by adopting a child were considered.  
9 Specifically, we hypothesized that the relative contributions of the stereotypical representations of  
10 (i) adoptees, (ii) adoptive parents, and (iii) adoptive families as similar or different to biological  
11 family, and the feelings towards adoption's choice (in terms of positive and negative emotional  
12 reactions towards those couples who have chosen to become a family through adoption) can  
13 contribute to explain attitudes toward adoption. For example, we expected a negative association  
14 between the endorsement of choosing to adopt and the existence of negative stereotypes towards  
15 adoptees. We also expected a negative association when the existence of differences between  
16 biological and adoptive families is denied, and when adverse emotional reactions towards those  
17 couples are mentioned. On the contrary, those respondents who described positive stereotypes  
18 towards adoptive families as being different from biological families, and with positive emotional  
19 reactions towards adoption choice, are expected to be more likely to approve adoption.  
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## 44 **Participants**

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46 This research project [MASKED FOR REVIEW], carried out in Italy with the Computer  
47 Based Assisted Interview technique, involved 1,003 respondents (men: 47.9%,  $N = 480$ ; women:  
48 52.1%,  $N = 523$ ). From a statistical point of view, the sample is representative of the adult Italian  
49 population; it has been balanced for the geographical area of residence, the size of the inhabited  
50 centres, sex, age, socio-economic status and employment status. Regarding the geographical areas,  
51 26.7% ( $N = 268$ ) live in North West of Italy, 19.2% ( $N = 193$ ) in the North East, 20% ( $N = 201$ ) in  
52 the Center, 34% ( $N = 341$ ) in the South and Islands. 51.8% ( $N = 520$ ) participants live in a town  
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3 with up to 30,000 inhabitants, 31.5% ( $N = 316$ ) with 30,000-250,000 inhabitants, and 16.7% ( $N =$   
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5 167) over 250,000 inhabitants while 51.5% ( $N = 517$ ) are employed, and 48.5% ( $N = 486$ ) are  
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7 unemployed or retired. In terms of age, 21.4% ( $N = 215$ ) of the sample belong to the 18-34 years  
8  
9 old group, 17% ( $N = 171$ ) are aged 35-44, 35.1% ( $N = 352$ ) are aged 45-64, and 26.4% ( $N = 265$ )  
10  
11 are 64 years old or older.  
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## 15 16 **Measures**

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18 All respondents gave informed consent before participating (e.g., Oldani, 2018). The survey  
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20 was anonymous and constructed to investigate attitudes toward adoption, the stereotypical  
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22 representations for adoptees, adoptive parents, and adoptive families, and the respondents'  
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24 emotional reactions to infertile couples' prospective plans of adopting a child. Measures are listed in  
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26 Table 1.  
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31 **Attitudes toward adoption.** Attitudes towards adoption in the event of infertility were  
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33 measured through one scenario (Canzi et al., 2020). Participants are requested to imagine having a  
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35 friend who is in a heterosexual relationship and is facing difficulties in conceiving; then they report  
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37 if they would recommend adoption as a solution to face as a single dichotomous item with “yes/no”  
38  
39 as response. The choice of referring to a scenario based on the attribution to a friend (instead of  
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41 asking for themselves), was aimed at eliciting responses less influenced by ideologies, or self-  
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43 representations. This allows to collect information on personal attitudes indirectly (thinking about a  
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45 friend), and it thus less likely to elicit emotionally connoted answers.  
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49 **Stereotype of the adoptive child.** Participants were asked to express their degree of  
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51 agreement on seven ad hoc items regarding the negative and positive beliefs toward adopted  
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53 children (see items and response options in Table 1). The exploratory factor analysis supports the  
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55 one-factor solution with 44.94% of variance explained; satisfactory commonalities are all above  
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57 0.5. The total score was obtained by averaging the scores across the seven items. Positive item  
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3 statements were reversed in value, so higher scores reflect more negative and problematic  
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5 perceptions of adoptees. Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency was 0.79.  
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8 **Stereotype of adoptive parents.** Participants were asked to express the degree of agreement  
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10 with six ad hoc items regarding their positive and negative beliefs about adoptive parents (see items  
11  
12 and response options in Table 1). The exploratory factor analysis supports the one-factor solution  
13  
14 with 36.58% of variance being accounted for and satisfactory communalities mostly above 0.5. The  
15  
16 total score was obtained by averaging the scores across the six items. Negative item statements  
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18 were reversed in value, so higher scores reflect more positive and idealized perceptions of adoptive  
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20 parents. Cronbach's Alpha, used to assess internal consistency, was satisfactory and equal to .65.  
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24 **Representations of the adoptive family as different.** Participants were asked to express  
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26 their degree of agreement with an ad hoc item aimed at measuring the perception of an adoptive  
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28 family as a different family compared with the biological one (Table 1).  
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31 **Emotional reactions.** The positive and negative adoption-related feeling was measured by  
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33 an ad hoc scenario developed for this current study. We asked participants to imagine that someone  
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35 you are familiar with told you that they intend to adopt a child; we then asked the probability to  
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37 which they would have positive and pleasant emotions (Admiration, Understanding, Joy) and  
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39 negative and unpleasant emotions (Worry, Embarrassment, Compassion). The exploratory factor  
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41 analysis supports the two-factor solution with 54.75% of variance being accounted for (for positive  
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43 emotions, the first factor explained 38.73% of the variance; for negative emotions, the second factor  
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45 added a further 16.02% of explained variance) and satisfactory communalities mainly were above  
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47 0.5. The total negative and positive emotions scores were obtained by averaging the scores for the  
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49 three items in each category. Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency was 0.78 and 0.75 for the  
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51 Positive and Negative Emotions subscales, respectively.  
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56 **Sociodemographic variables.** Sociodemographic variables were gender, age, and income.  
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## 60 **Results**

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3 Descriptive analyses were carried out to explore the attitudes toward adoption in our sample,  
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5 how much the adoptive family is perceived as different from the biological family, the existence of  
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7 a positive stereotype for adoptive parents, negative stereotype for the adoptive child, and the  
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9 existence of positive and negative emotional reactions. Most Italian people support adoption as a  
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11 family choice: there is a prevalence of a positive attitude towards adoption, as 89.2% of the  
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13 participants would recommend it in the event of infertility. Descriptive statistics show that  
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15 participants reported few stereotype towards the adoptive child ( $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = 0.36$ ) and parents  
16  
17 ( $M = 2.54$ ,  $SD = 0.38$ ), a representations of adoptive families as quite similar to the non-adoptive  
18  
19 ones ( $M = 1.68$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ), and more positive ( $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ) than negative ( $M = 1.66$ ,  $SD =$   
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21  $0.66$ ) emotional reactions towards a relative that intend to adopt a child ( $t(1002) = 79.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ).  
22  
23 No significant differences related to gender, age, and income were found.  
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28 To examine the relative contributions of the cognitive and emotional factors explaining  
29  
30 attitudes toward adoption, a hierarchical logistic regression analysis is conducted (Greene, 2003;  
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32 Wong & Meson, 1985). This econometric method fit the binary outcome we are considering. The  
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34 results are shown in Table 2.  
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37 In the first block, the control variables are sociodemographic ones (gender, age, and  
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39 income); attitudes towards adoption's variable are considered as the outcome. In the second block,  
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41 attitude towards adoption is regressed on the cognitive variables—stereotypes of the adoptive child,  
42  
43 stereotypes of adoptive parents, and stereotypes of the adoptive family. Finally, negative and  
44  
45 positive emotional reactions are added in the third block. The model chi-square and chi-square  
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47 change are also calculated to determine whether there is a significant increase in the model's  
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49 explanatory power at each stage.  
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53 In the first block of Table 2, the attitude towards adoption is regressed on the  
54  
55 sociodemographic variables (gender, age, and income). The explanatory power of the  
56  
57 sociodemographic variables in Model 1 is 0.1 % ( $\chi = 5.38$ ,  $p = .146$ ; see Table 3). Gender, age, and  
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59 income are not statistically significant. Cognitive variables in the second block (stereotypes towards  
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3 adoptees, parents and adoptive families) explain an additional 19% of the variance in Model 2 ( $\chi =$   
4 103.97,  $p < .001$ ). Stereotypes towards adoptees and stereotypes towards adoptive families are  
5 positively related to negative attitudes towards adoption. Stereotypes towards adoptive parents are  
6 negatively related to negative attitudes towards adoption. This implies that participants reporting  
7 negative adoptees' stereotypes are more than seven times as likely to have negative attitudes toward  
8 adoption. Those who perceived adoptive families as different are almost twice as likely to have  
9 negative attitudes towards the choice of adopting. Those who reported lower (positive) stereotypes  
10 towards adoptive parents are more likely to have a negative attitude toward adoption than those who  
11 reported a higher level of (positive) stereotypes towards adoptive parents, but the OR is very low.

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24 In the third block of Table 2, positive and negative emotional reactions are jointly  
25 considered. The explanatory power of Model 3 increased by 6% ( $\chi = 135.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Negative  
26 emotional reactions are positively related to negative adoption attitudes, and positive emotional  
27 reactions are negatively related to negative adoption attitudes. Participants reporting negative  
28 emotional reactions are almost twice as likely to have negative attitudes toward adoption. Those  
29 who report more positive emotional reactions are less likely to have a negative attitude toward  
30 adoption, than those who report few positive emotional reactions. In Model 3, negative adoptees'  
31 stereotypes and representations of adoptive families as different, but not the adoptive parents'  
32 stereotypes, remain significantly related to negative attitudes towards adoption.

## 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 **Discussion**

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48 This study is the first in the literature to focus on the Italian community's attitudes toward  
49 the choice of adopting of hypothetical couples that cannot generate. Results address the growing  
50 interest in examining the social context in which the adoption process occurs. The general  
51 population's perception of adoption is not only an important antecedent of the intention to adopt, but  
52 also a relevant precursor of adoptive families' perception of stigma and discrimination (e.g., Weistra  
53 & Luke, 2017). Knowing how the general population shapes their perceptions of the choice to  
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3 create an adoptive family, and examining the factors that more strongly drive these attitudes, can  
4 help the researchers and practitioners better understanding the choices and behaviour of adoptees  
5 and adoptive parents.  
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10 This study shows a large prevalence of positive attitudes towards adoption. Respondents  
11 would typically recommend adoption to friends that cannot generate children. With regard to the  
12 factors that could promote or, on the contrary, hinder positive or negative attitudes towards the  
13 adoption choice, our results suggested that negative attitudes towards adoption that can be in turn  
14 negatively associated to choosing to adopt, is not related to variables such as age, gender, and  
15 economic status. These results are not fully consistent with previous studies where females, older  
16 and higher income households are more prone to adoption (Callea & Urbini, 2010; Canzi et al.,  
17 2020; Mohanty, 2014). One possible reason for the discrepancy may be related to the Italian  
18 country-specific cultural scenario, or the timing in which the survey was carried out. Incidentally,  
19 note that the empirical method used in this paper is not directly comparable with literature (Canzi et  
20 al., 2020; Gibbons, et al., 2006; Miall & March, 2003; Tyebjee, 2003), which might partially  
21 explain the discrepancy between the results presented here and those available in the literature.  
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37 This paper explores how and to what extent the stereotypical representations of adoptees,  
38 adoptive parents, families, and adoption-related feelings, predict the attitudes toward adoption and  
39 endorsing the choice of adoption by childless adults. Results suggest that people's stereotypes may  
40 significantly contribute to explaining their attitudes toward adoption. While we could not detect a  
41 statistically significant effect of sociodemographic variables, we find that the stereotypical  
42 representations' variables do play a role in shaping attitudes toward adoption. Consistent with the  
43 literature, the general view is that an adopted child is in some ways different from the others. It is  
44 generally believed that adopted individuals are more likely to face various problems and deviancies,  
45 and to be less happy, self-confident, and stable than their non-adopted counterparts (Keresztes-  
46 Takács & Nguyen, 2018; Miall & March, 2003; Mohanty, 2014; Novara et al., 2017; Tyebjee,  
47 2003). In the present study, the representation of the adoptive children as more problematic, fragile,  
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3 and restless than biological peers is more likely associated with a negative attitude towards  
4 adoption. In other words, the adoptive child is perceived as at risk for emotional and behavioural  
5 problems, vulnerable, and in need of attention. This perception can be a deterrent towards the  
6 intention to adopt a child.  
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12 Moreover, results suggest that the perception of the difference between biological and  
13 adoptive families is more likely associated with a negative attitude towards adoption from the  
14 perspective of the general population. Previous studies suggested that adoptive parents'  
15 acknowledgment of differences within the family is a parenting cognition necessary to be attuned to  
16 a child's adoption-related experience, having positive implications for the parent-child bond (Lo et  
17 al., 2021). The current study is the first to examine the implications of the acknowledgment of  
18 different attitudes towards adoption in the Italian population, highlighting that this general  
19 population's cognition can be a barrier towards adoption choice. We can speculate that in this case,  
20 adoption is viewed as something pertaining to other people and not to themselves. Future research  
21 should try to better explore this construct and the role played by this variable in explaining the  
22 attitudes towards adoption.  
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37 In addition, the findings show that stereotypes towards adoptive parents conceived as more  
38 altruistic, socially engaged, and religious are associated with more favorable adoption attitudes only  
39 when we don't consider the emotional reactions, suggesting the crucial importance of emotional  
40 dimensions. Specifically, emotional reactions towards adoption choice contribute to defining  
41 community attitudes, both positive and negative emotions, with the latter playing a more relevant  
42 role. Those who experience negative reactions toward the choice of adoption, such as worry,  
43 embarrassment, or compassion, are less like to endorse this choice when made by a friend.  
44 However, those who experience positive reactions of joy, and empathy, are more likely to support  
45 the choice, but with lower predictive power. Whereas previous studies have mainly focused on  
46 cognitive dimensions, the present findings support the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen &  
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3 Fishbein, 2008), which suggests that both cognitive and affective processes jointly contribute to the  
4 attitudes related to approval of the choice to adopt.  
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8 Although our results are obtained from a sample of individuals, their external validity is  
9 particularly strong, given that the sample is representative of the Italian population. However, the  
10 present nationwide study into the attitudes towards adoption has some limitations. For example, it is  
11 important to consider the ways in which attitudes and variables of interest have been measured. The  
12 single item and ad hoc measures used in this study may underestimate or overestimate the  
13 constructs. Due to the self-report nature of the data recorded from a single source, it cannot be  
14 inferred causality or directionality of the associations observed between variables. Finally, the study  
15 focused on attitudes and did not directly measure the behavioural component, such as whether the  
16 respondents have intention to adopt a child.  
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28 Despite these limitations, this research provides valuable insight into the attitude toward  
29 adoption among a representative sample of Italian population and document how the adoption  
30 attitudes can differ depending on the actually adoptive children stereotypes, the perception of the  
31 difference between biological and adoptive families, and emotive reactions linked with choice of  
32 adoption. In our view, the present result may have important theoretical and practical consequences  
33 and implications for professionals working in the field of adoption. For example, our data may lead  
34 to the development of more effective interventions to support prospective adoptive parents.  
35 Programmes that are focused on aforementioned multiple factors will be most successful in  
36 promoting positive attitude change towards adoption choice.  
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For Peer Review

Table 1. *Survey's item description.*

| Variables                              | Items  | Response  |
|--|--|---|
| Attitudes toward adoption              | In the event of infertility of a friend, would you suggest him/her the adoption of a child?  | 0 = Yes<br>1 = No   |
| Stereotypes of the adoptive child      | Adopted children are more problematic than others<br>.... are more fragile than other children<br>... are more in need of attention than other children<br>... are more restless than other children<br>... know how to deal with difficulties better than other children<br>... are braver than other children<br>... are more sociable than other children | 4-points Likert scale<br>1 = "Not at all" and 4 = "Completely"  |
| Stereotype of adoptive parents         | adoptive parents are more altruistic than others<br>... are more socially engaged compared to others<br>... are more religious than others<br>... are wealthy<br>... are more selfish than other parents<br>... need to fill a void  | 4-points Likert scale<br>1 = "Not at all" and 4 = "Completely"  |
| Representations of the adoptive family | Are adoptive families different from biological?   | 4-points Likert scale<br>1 = "Not at all" and 4 = "Completely"  |
| Emotional reactions                    | If someone you are familiar with told you that they intend to adopt a child, with what probability would you have the following reactions?"  | 4-points Likert scale<br>1 = "Not at all" and 4 = "Completely"  |
| Positive emotions                      | Admiration<br>Understanding<br>Joy   |   |
| Negative emotions                      | Worry<br>Embarassment<br>Compassion  |   |
| Sociodemographic variables             | Gender<br>Age<br>Income level  | 0 = men<br>1 = women<br>0 = 18-44 years<br>1 = 45-over 64 years<br>0 = low-middle<br>1 = upper-middle |

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For Peer Review

Table 2. Summary of Hierarchical Logistic Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Negative Attitudes Towards Adoption (N=1,003).

|  | Model 1  |           |     | Model 2  |           |      | Model 3  |           |      |
|--|----------|-----------|-----|----------|-----------|------|----------|-----------|------|
|  | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | OR  | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | OR   | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | OR   |
| Gender (Male)  | -.24     | .21       | .78 | -.118    | .22       | .84  | -.09     | .23       | 1.13 |
| Current age<br>(reference 18-44<br>years)                    | -.26     | .21       | .77 | -.21     | .23       | .81  | -.06     | .24       | 1.02 |
| Income (reference<br>low)                                    | -.27     | .21       | .76 | -.12     | .22       | .89  | .02      | .23       | 1.59 |
| Stereotype of the<br>adoptive child                          |          |           |     | 1.93***  | .33       | 6.90 | 1.79***  | .35       | 6.02 |
| Stereotype of<br>adoptive parents                            |          |           |     | -.67*    | .30       | .51  | -.47     | .33       | .62  |
| Representations<br>of the adoptive<br>family as<br>different |          |           |     | .65***   | .12       | 1.92 | .29*     | .14       | 1.34 |
| Negative<br>emotional<br>reactions                           |          |           |     |          |           |      | .68***   | .17       | 1.97 |
| Positive<br>emotional<br>reactions                           |          |           |     |          |           |      | -.68***  | .19       | .50  |
| R <sup>2</sup>   |          |           | .01 |          |           | .20  |          |           | .26  |

Note. Dependent Variable is Attitudes Towards Adoption

OR = odds ratio.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .