The adopted children from Eastern Europe grow up:
A pilot study of adjustment in early adulthood

Rhoda Scherman (and Wendy Hawke)
Inter-Country Adoption New Zealand
The adopted children from Eastern Europe grow up:

A pilot study of adjustment in early adulthood

Dr. Rhoda Scherman, Department of Psychology
Auckland University of Technology

NZPsS Conference, Queenstown
August, 2011
The adopted children from Eastern Europe grow up: A pilot study of adjustment in early adulthood

Dr. Rhoda Scherman, Department of Psychology
Auckland University of Technology

NZPsS Conference, Queenstown
August, 2011
The adopted children from Eastern Europe grow up: 
A pilot study of adjustment in early adulthood

21 August 2011

Dr. Rhoda Scherman, Department of Psychology
Auckland University of Technology

NZPsS Conference, Queenstown
August, 2011

Developmental Issues

- Bowlby was the first to describe the detrimental effects of early institutionalisation
- More recently, developmental neurologists estimate:
  - An institutionalised child loses one month of development for every three months in an institution (Federici, 1999)
  - A one-year-old toddler is developmentally on par with an 8-month-old

On arrival = Medical concerns

- Infectious diseases, including hepatitis B, and tuberculosis
- Intestinal parasites and urinary tract infections
- Visual and hearing impairments; oral health concerns
- Skin diseases, scabies and lice
- Rickets, anaemia and hip dysplasia
- Birth defects, low birth weight, malnourishment

(e.g. Hostetter et al., 1989; Jenista & Chapman, 1997; Johnson, 2000)
The adopted children from Eastern Europe grow up: A pilot study of adjustment in early adulthood

21 August 2011

Dr. Rhoda Scherman, Department of Psychology, Auckland University of Technology

Developmental Delays

- Some 1990 studies found as many as 85-90% of children were developmentally delayed
- Varying degrees of gross and fine motor delays, neurological problems, and decreased muscle tone
- Many of which associated with malnutrition, and/or an environment that restricts movement and does not encourage the children to sit or reach
- Tiered crashes
- They are smaller and shorter than their age-mates

(e.g. Hostetter et al., 1989; Judge, 1999; Rutter et al., 1998)

(Johnson, 2010)
The adopted children from Eastern Europe grow up:

A pilot study of adjustment in early adulthood

Social and Emotional Concerns

- temper tantrums
- anxiousness
- low attention span
- school avoidance
- clinging behaviour
- sleep disturbances
- bed wetting
- ambivalent parental attachment
- inappropriate friendly behaviour

(e.g. Hostetter et al., 1989; Judge, 1999; Rutter et al., 1998)

Sensory Adaptation and other Issues

- Due to under-stimulation experienced in the orphanages, many experience over-sensitivity to touch, sights or sounds
- Rocking or other forms of self-stimulation are common
- Some also suffer eating disorders, feeding difficulties (e.g. chewing), and a preoccupation with the availability of food
- ADHD, ADD, conduct disorder and autism are not uncommon

(e.g. Cermak & Daunhauer, 1997)
The adopted children from Eastern Europe grow up:
A pilot study of adjustment in early adulthood

Dr. Rhoda Scherman, Department of Psychology
Auckland University of Technology

The longer a child is in an institution, the poorer the outcomes.
However, most children experience developmental catch-up, making marked gains in growth and development in their first years with their adoptive families (e.g., Johnson, 2000)
And in adulthood ....?

Participant Characteristic (n = 26)

Country of Origin
- Russia = 68%
- Romania = 32%

Gender
- Males = 38%
- Females = 62%

Current Age = 20.6 yrs (mean)
- Range = 18 to 24 yrs

Age at Placement = 4.3 yrs (mean)
- Range = 0 – 8 yrs

Years with family = 16.4 yrs (mean)
- Range = 11.5 - 20 years

Parent Ethnicity
- New Zealand = 100%

Parent Current Ages
- 40-49 = 16%
- 50-59 = 57%
- 60+ = 27%

Family demographics
- Only child = 23%
- Related-adopted siblings = 31%
- Non-related-adopted sibs = 19%
- Siblings born to parents = 12%
- Mixed siblings = 15%
The adopted children from Eastern Europe grow up: A pilot study of adjustment in early adulthood

21 August 2011

Dr. Rhoda Scherman, Department of Psychology, Auckland University of Technology

NZPsS Conference, Queenstown August, 2011

**Brief COPE Inventory**

Range = 1 (low use) to 4 (high use)

Adaptive mean = 2.4 (SD = 0.45)

Maladaptive mean = 1.72 (SD = 0.4)

(Carver, 1997)

**Depression, Anxiety, Stress**

Range = 1 (high) to 4 (low)

Mean = 3.42

SD = 0.43

(Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)

Note: Here, a low score means the person experiences more depression, anxiety and stress, whereas a high score signals that they experience less of these.
The adopted children from Eastern Europe grow up:

A pilot study of adjustment in early adulthood

21 August 2011

Dr. Rhoda Scherman, Department of Psychology
Auckland University of Technology

NZPsS Conference, Queenstown
August, 2011

Rosenberg Self-Esteem

Range = 1 (low) to 4 (high)
Mean = 2.98
SD = 0.49

Adult Attachment

Range = 1 (low) to 5 (high)
Mean = 3.43
SD = 0.63

(Rosenberg, 1989)

(Collins & Read, 1990)
The adopted children from Eastern Europe grow up: A pilot study of adjustment in early adulthood

Ethnic Identity

Range = 1 (low) to 4 (high)
Mean = 2.67
SD = 0.54

Inferential analyses of measures

Spearman Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ATTACH</th>
<th>MEIM</th>
<th>ROSENBERG</th>
<th>DASS</th>
<th>COPE_MAL</th>
<th>COPE_AD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATTACH</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-0.131</td>
<td>0.525</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>-0.277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEIM</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td>0.497</td>
<td>0.264</td>
<td>0.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROSENBERG</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.624</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DASS</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-0.627</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPE_MAL</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.152</td>
<td>0.460</td>
<td>0.127</td>
<td>0.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPE_AD</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The adopted children from Eastern Europe grow up:

A pilot study of adjustment in early adulthood

21 August 2011

Dr. Rhoda Scherman, Department of Psychology, Auckland University of Technology

NZPsS Conference, Queenstown
August, 2011

Interpretation of scales and relationships

- The group rated their coping strategies as more adaptive than maladaptive.
- The maladaptive scores were negatively correlated with the DASS: if the adoptees had high DASS scores (low in depression, anxiety and stress) they had low maladaptive coping styles.
- No correlation was found between the two coping scores: to be high in adaptive coping does not mean one will be low in maladaptive coping and vice versa.

Interpretation of scales and relationships (cont.)

- Higher self-esteem was positively correlated with lower rates of depression, anxiety and stress: if the person had a high DASS score (low depression, anxiety and stress), s/he also had high self-esteem.
- Self-esteem was also positively correlated with the attachment scores: if a person had high rates of self-esteem, s/he also showed a high degree of attachment.
The adopted children from Eastern Europe grow up: A pilot study of adjustment in early adulthood

21 August 2011

Dr. Rhoda Scherman, Department of Psychology
Auckland University of Technology

NOTE: Values in (brackets) represents New Zealand norms on the same measures*. This data is provided as a point of comparison. However, not all measures had NZ values to compare with.

Interpretation of scales and relationships (cont.)

- The ethnicity scores suggest that collectively the group identify themselves as Russian or Romanian to a moderate degree.
- The index not indicate whether or not participants identified with the NZ culture. (It was not measuring bicultural attitudes.)
- The ethnic identity index remained independent of the others: how a person ethnically identified himself/herself seems to have no influence on (nor was it influenced by) any of the other measures used.

Adoptee's Relationships
- 72% Single
- 28% De Facto
- 0% Married / Divorced

Employment
- 58% Employed
- 23% Studying
- 19% Unemployed (NZ mean 17.2%)

Education
- 4% No High School Qualification (NZ 18%)
- 96% Basic High School Qualification (NZ 85%)
- 35% Final High School / UE (NZ 44%)
- 27% Currently Engaged In Tertiary Study (NZ 38%)
- 31% Completed Tertiary Cert / Dip
- 4% Completed Bachelor Degree or Above (NZ 21%)

*Survey questions and comparison data obtained from the Ministry of Health, 2006/07 New Zealand Health Survey. Adult Questionnaire. Date of publication (Online): May 2008
The adopted children from Eastern Europe grow up:

A pilot study of adjustment in early adulthood

**Height**
- 1.75m Males *(NZ mean 1.77m)*
- 1.55m Females *(NZ mean 1.65m)*

**General Health Perception**
(adoptive's own subjective rating)
- 38% Excellent
- 31% Very good
- 27% Good
- 4% Fair
- 0% Poor

"I seem to get ill easier than other people"
- 21% Definitely to mostly true
- 79% Definitely to mostly false

**Smoking Habits**
- 58% Never Smoked *(NZ 35%)*
- 23% Current Daily Smoker *(NZ 27%)*
- 4% Occasional Smoker
- 15% Used To But Quit

**Drinking Habits**
- 12% of Group
- 81% of Drinkers *Never (NZ 13% of Total Pop 18 - 24)*
- 14% of Drinkers *< Once / Week (NZ 26%)*
- 5% of Drinkers *1 - 3 / Week (NZ 40%)*
- 0% of Drinkers *4 - 5 Times / Week (NZ 18%)*
- 0% of Drinkers *Daily (NZ 15%)*
Preliminary Conclusions

- In light of research on the negative outcomes of early institutionalisation, the preliminary findings of this study are very positive, and bode well for our Russian and Romanian-born adoptees!

Overall Health

- Based on subjective ratings, the group considered themselves healthy, and not overly prone to illness—in contrast to what might be expected for this population given their early institutional care.
- Compared to same-aged NZers, they smoke and drink less.
- They are also somewhat shorter than the average New Zealand youth.
The adopted children from Eastern Europe grow up: A pilot study of adjustment in early adulthood

21 August 2011

Dr. Rhoda Scherman, Department of Psychology
Auckland University of Technology
NZPsS Conference, Queenstown August, 2011

Moderate to high adjustment

- For all five standardised scales, participants scored above the median of the ranges possible, suggesting moderate to high adjustment.
- No differences were found between males and females nor between Russian and Romanian adoptions.
- When analysed together, several significant relationships (correlations) were found. However, the direction of the influence is not known.

Limitations

- Larger sample
- Qualitative focus
- Experiential
- Resilience
- Other suggestions
- ??

Future directions

- Gatekeeping
- Parental Fear of Pigmalian Effect
- Response bias
Summary

- This study was the first of its kind.
- Despite limitations, the early data suggests these young adults have physical health, educational outcomes, relationships and lifestyles not too dissimilar to the norms within New Zealand.
- They also seem to be emotionally and psychologically healthy, and coping well with life's stresses.
- We will continue to collect data and run additional analyses to confirm these early findings. We are also seeking to add qualitative interviews to the design.
The adopted children from Eastern Europe grow up: A pilot study of adjustment in early adulthood

21 August 2011

Department of Psychology
Auckland University of Technology
NZPsS Conference, Queenstown
August, 2011

References


