



Universiteit Utrecht

*Faculteit Sociale Wetenschappen*

# Adoptive Children from Romania

## Longitudinal Research

*The Netherlands – Utrecht University – Faculty Social Sciences*

# Adoption in the Netherlands

- The Netherlands, population 16,3 million
- First law on adoption, 1956
- 1998 ratification of the Hague convention
- Since 1974 more foreign than domestic adopted children
- Since 2000 each year about:
  - 50 domestic adoptions
  - 1100 foreign adoptions
- Main countries in 2005:  
China (666) Colombia (98) Ethiopia (72) South Africa (58) Haiti (51) Taiwan (44)
- Important countries in former years:  
South Korea, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Brazil, and India



# Procedure

1. Letter of request to the Minister of Justice
2. Since 1990 preparation course for all adoptive parents obligatory, six sessions for eight couples, costs eur. 900,-
3. Home study for all aspirant adoptive parents by Child Welfare Council  
Yearly, only 0,5% to 1% refusals
4. Application to one of the seven adoption agencies recognized by the Ministry of Justice

In 2005: 35 adoptions organized by private persons only partly mediated by one of the recognized adoption agencies

Waiting time before placement of child: 3-5 years

Total costs: eur. 10.000 to 15.000

# Adoption from Romania

- Started in 1990
- Through 2 organisations  
(St. Kind en Toekomst and FLASH)
- Parents were idealistic, committed, and not fully aware of the severe deprivation these children had experienced.

# Study of Romanian adoptive children in the Netherlands

Parents contacted university because of the (severe) behavioral and developmental problems their children experienced.

Parents had questions about:

- Where can we find suitable help?
- Are other parents of Romanian adoptees experiencing similar difficulties?



# Longitudinal Study: Three Stages

1998 -----2006

**Stage 1:** 1998 – 1999

Semi structured questionnaire

74 families with 83 Romanian adoptive children  
(response 86%)

**Stage 2:** 2000 – 2002

Semi structured questionnaire and 6 other instruments

72 families with 80 Romanian adoptive children 44 boys  
(55%) and 36 girls (45%) (Response 83%)

**Stage 3:** 2003 – 2006

Child behavior Checklist for all children and extensive  
interview with two groups (15 & 18) selected based on  
earlier results.

# Instruments

- **Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL)**
- **Trauma Questionnaire**  
To determine Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- **The ADHD Questionnaire**  
To determine Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- **Auti-R scale**  
To determine the presence of Autistic Behavior
- **The Nijmegen Child Rearing Questionnaire**  
To determine the Burden of upbringing for parents
- **The Adoption Satisfaction Questionnaire**

(Internal consistency of all six instruments was high)

# Main Results CBCL

## Compared to norm group:

- Romanian adoptive children scored significantly higher on Externalizing and Total Problems, however, not on Internalizing.
- Individual syndromes:  
The Romanian children scored significantly higher on Attention Problems, Aggressive Behavior and Social and Cognitive problems.

## Comparison to a group of children adopted before the age of 6 months

Romanian boys and girls **higher** scores than adopted < 6 months, on:

- Attention Problems
- Social Problems
- Cognitive problems

However, **lower** scores on:

- Physical Complaints
- Internalizing

Externalizing problem behavior apparently increased the chance of survival.

While Internalizing behavior (Keeping problems inside of you, Anxious / Depressed behavior) did not.

## Comparison Romanian adoptees to Dutch norm group, on CBCL scores in clinical range

CBCL dimension	Romanian adoptees		Dutch Norm group
	Boys (44)	Girls (36)	Boys (579), Girls (593)
Total problems	17 (39%)*	12 (33%)*	10%
Internalization	8 (18%)*	5 (14%)*	10%
Externalization	14 (32%)*	13 (36%)*	10%

Chi-Square: \* $p < .001$  (two - tailed).

## Comparison to a group of adoptees at arrival two years and older

(from more than 10 countries, n=1085, average age at arrival 4;2)

Scores in clinical range of Total Problems: Boys 22%, Girls 15%

Romanian: Boys 39%, Girls 33%

Average age at arrival Romanian adoptees: 2;10 compared to 4;2 years in the group >2 years at arrival

## Behavioral problems

- **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**  
(16 children, 9 boys & 7 girls)
- **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder**  
(12 children, 11 boys & 1 girl)
- **Post Institutionalized Autism**  
(13 children, 8 boys & 5 girls)

Comorbidity was seen in several children.



## Burden of upbringing

- Adoptive parents of the 80 Romanian children perceive higher parental stress, than non-adoptive parents.
- Higher scores on “Child as a burden”, “Task difficulty” and “Expectation of help”.
- Adoptive mothers experience more child-rearing problems, need more assistance, want it more strongly, and expect to receive it from partner and third parties.
- Gender of the child not related to burden of upbringing.
- Adoptive parents experience less family stress and judge child-rearing situation as less problematic than non-adoptive parents who do call in professional assistance.
- Only on the scale “Child as a burden” adoptive parents are similar to non-adoptive parents.
- Adoptive parents cope more appropriate with raising problems.

# Adoptive Parents of the Non-clinical (29) and Clinical (51) group

Comparison with non-adoptive parents who did receive professional care (PC) and who did not (NPC)

- Scores of adoptive parents and non adoptive parents similar on scales: "Child as a burden" and "Task difficulty".
- Other scales show: adoptive parents more satisfied, and experience less stress in child rearing situation.

Conclusion: Adoptive parents: less stress and more satisfaction in upbringing situation than non adoptive parents.

Hoksbergen, R.A.C., Rijk, K., Ter Laak, J., Van Dijkum, C., Robbroeckx, L.M.H. & Stoutjesdijk, F. (in press) *Adoptive Parents, Parents with a heavy burden of upbringing?*

# Adoption Satisfaction

- Higher level of family stress coincides with less adoption satisfaction.
- High satisfaction with upbringing corresponds with high adoption satisfaction.
- Adoption satisfaction of parents is mainly explained by degree of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in the adopted child.
- Upbringing situation and adoption satisfaction determined by child's Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and externalizing problem behavior.

**Recommendation:** To prevent adoption failure it is essential to identify those adoptive families where the balance between resilience and perceived burden is gravely disturbed.

Hoksbergen, R.A.C. van Dijkum, C., ter Laak, J., Rijk, K. and Stoutjesdijk, F. (2004). Adoption of Romanian children in the Netherlands; Behavior problems and parenting burden of upbringing for adoptive parents. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, 25, 3, 175-180.

# CBCL development after five years

Comparison of two measurements of the CBCL (t-scores) for the 72 children for whom the CBCL was completed twice, with a period of about three years in between

	Stage 2	Stage 3
Internalizing	51.3	52.3
Externalizing	57.0	54.9
Total Problems	57.0	56.6

Differences between the two stages are small, there appears to be little change over time.

## Third stage: 2 groups

**Problematic group (n=18):**

- multiple behavioral problems at stage 2

**Non-problematic group (n=15):**

- little to no behavioral problems at stage 2
- No special education

# Results Parent Interviews

- Structure
- Warm and accepting approach
- Time-out
- Communication
- Relationship parent-child central focus of attention
- Let the child make up for missed experiences

# Parents' perspective Structure

Planning daily activities, and making visual and/or verbal reminders:

*"You have to be clear and predictable at all times, but we have become specialists in that. We've been doing it for years now... First with calendars, pictures etcetera. Now it is enough if we just tell him."*

# Parents' perspective Structure

Preparing the child for changes:

*"A sudden change, like a substitute teacher for example, can upset her deeply. We try to prepare her for any deviation from her daily routine by talking and explaining. It's important to start this preparation well in advance of the actual event."*

# Parents' perspective Structure

**Set clear rules and be consequent about them:**

*"You have to be very strict, which sometimes even makes me uncomfortable. With the other children, I can sometimes make an exception. Tell them, "hey, I've thought about it, and you can do it after all"... but with her, that is really not possible."*



# Parents' perspective Warm & Accepting Approach

Parents stress the importance of a warm approach, with an accepting attitude towards the problems of the child, and a focus on the positive aspects of the parent-child relation:

*"We treasure the nice and quiet moments. Despite the difficulties, he is an enrichment of our lives, and we have learned a lot over the last years"*

# Parents' perspective Time-out

Stress and anxiety can lead to severe anger-attacks. Parents named time-out as important for dealing with these or preventing them:

*"When we see an anger-attack approaching, we place him in his room, with as little stimuli as possible. Total quiet. Sometimes, this prevents things from getting out of hand"*

# Parents' perspective Communication

Both verbal and non-verbal communication were used to form a bond with the child and to explain things (e.g. rules)

*"we explained emotions. Not just look happy or sad, but mention it explicitly, so he can learn"*

# Parents' perspective Parent-child relationship focus of attention

Parents stressed the importance of being totally focussed on forming a relationship with the child.

*"the first few years, there was always at least one of us at home with him"*

# Parents' perspective Making up for missed experiences

Some children need to go through the early stages of development that they missed because of their deprived early childhood.

*"And then she starts crying... first like a baby. And then every few minutes, we see her age a year"*

# Results Teacher Interviews

- Structure
- Positive attention
- Keep contact with the child
- Time-out

# Teachers' perspective Structure

## Daily planning:

*"All activities for the day can be found on our calendar. With clearly marked times and a picture of the activity."*

# Teachers' perspective Structure

## Educational material:

*“Our system is designed so that the information is offered in small quantities, and in an orderly way”*

# Teachers' perspective Structure

## Rules and regulations:

*"The rules of the classroom can be checked by the children at all time, and are applied consequently"*

# Teachers' perspective Structure

More than other children?

*“And within the really strict structure of our classroom, he still needs his own structure”*

# Teachers' perspective

## Positive attention

Focus mainly on the positive behaviour, and reward this

*“Letting her know that you like having her around.  
Giving compliments, and letting her know it is OK to  
make mistakes. That you can learn from them.  
Accepting her the way she is.”*

## Teachers' perspective Contact with the child

Teachers try to keep contact with the child at all time. The children generally receive much attention in the classroom.

*"I try to always keep an eye on him, so that I can approach him immediately when things go wrong."*



# Teachers' perspective

## Time out

Time out mainly applied to bring calm and avoid over-stimulation.

*“When he is too strongly influenced by the other children in the classroom, and gets restless, I place him on a chair in the hallway. I explain that it is not a punishment, just a way to get some peace. I tell him to take some time to rest, look at the trees...”*

*Nowadays, he is able to ask for it himself: “Miss, it’s too busy in here, I’m going to sit on the quiet chair for a moment”. It has become a positive thing”*

# Conclusions

- Some children appear permanently damaged by the period of neglect
- Damaged:
  - externalizing and internalizing problem behavior
  - in cognitive development, 14 children (77%) in special education (in total group 34 of 72 children, 47%)
- Low parental expectations, and much concern about the future, probably a low degree of independence
- However, another group functions normally, despite neglect
- Not much difference in parenting style between problematic and non-problematic group
- Some children more vulnerable to neglect due to genetic factors?



# What parents of deprived children need

The need and desire to modify attitudes and behaviour of their deprived child

The conviction that this will be possible

The energy and wisdom to take efficient action:

- Pay special attention to the child daily
- Call upon help of professionals