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THE WELL-BEING OF

RUSSIAN AND ROMANIAN

INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTEES

IN NEW ZEALAND

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Masters in Social Work at Massey University.

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the well-being of 54 Romanian and 62 Russian children in New Zealand who were adopted between 1990 and 1995. The samples represented 50 per cent of the Russian children and 44.6 per cent of the Romanian children adopted during these years and resident in New Zealand. Well-being was defined in terms of competence, happiness, health and problem behaviours. The primary source of information for the assessment of well-being was Achenbach's parent reported Child Behaviour Checklist upon which the survey questionnaire was based. The Child Behaviour Checklist was also used by Rosenwald (1994) in a study of intercountry adoptees (ICAs) in Western Australia and the Western Australian Child Health Survey (WACHS) (Silburn, Zubrick, Garton, Burton, and Dalby, 1994) which studied children in the general population of Western Australia. These two surveys provided a comparison for the well-being of Russian and Romanian children in New Zealand.

Intercountry Adoption New Zealand (a non-government organisation aiding and supporting intercountry adoption) facilitated access to the participants in the survey which was carried out anonymously. Adoptive parents completed a four part Intercountry Adopted Child Questionnaire for each adopted Russian and/or Romanian child.

Attachment theory provided the theoretical framework for the prediction that adoption after the age of six months, experience of adversity prior to adoption and institutionalisation affected attachment and later well-being. Adversity was based on parental reports of knowledge about the Russian and Romanian children's pre-adoption experiences of neglect, abuse and changes of care. Length of institutionalisation prior to adoption was also based upon parental knowledge.

The survey results indicated that the majority of Russian and Romanian children were considered to be happy (87.6 per cent), and healthy (94 per cent). On the basis of information provided by adoptive parents, about two-thirds were found to be competent in activities, social and school functioning (65.5 per cent) and 68 per cent had Problem Behaviour Scores within the normal range. However, it was found that the Russian, but particularly the Romanian children, had experienced very high levels of adversity prior to adoption. This seemed to have negatively impacted upon their later competence socially.
and at school and their level of problematic behaviour when compared with ICAs in Western Australia and children in the general population of Western Australia.

The length of institutionalisation prior to adoption also appeared to negatively impact upon levels of problematic behaviour for the Romanian but not the Russian children. Health on arrival in New Zealand was negatively affected by length of institutionalisation for both Russian and Romanian children. Adoption after the age of 6 months was found to negatively impact upon the later well-being of Romanian but not Russian children and was related to levels of problem behaviour, length of institutionalisation and experience of adversity prior to adoption. For Romanian children, the duration of their institutionalisation appeared to be related to the degree of satisfaction experienced by all parties to the adoption. It was also found that adverse pre-adoption experiences did have long-term effects on the extent to which the children were able to recover once adopted.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. II

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................. IV

TABLE OF CONTENTS ............................................................................................... VI

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................ XII

LIST OF FIGURES ....................................................................................................... XIV

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .............................................................................. 1

Reasons for Conducting this Research ...................................................................... 1
Objectives of the Research .......................................................................................... 3
Intercountry Adoption in New Zealand: History, Legislative Changes and Current Debates .......................................................................................................................... 5

History of Intercountry Adoption in New Zealand ...................................................... 5
Adoption (Intercountry) Act 1997 ............................................................................. 11
Current Debates Surrounding the Practice of Intercountry Adoption ....................... 13

Overview of Thesis Chapters ..................................................................................... 15

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................................. 17

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 17

Research on the Experience and Adjustment of Intercountry Adoptees and Their Families ......................................................................................................................... 17

Research in New Zealand ......................................................................................... 17
Research Overseas .................................................................................................... 21

Experience of Abuse and Neglect by Adoptees Prior to Adoption ......................... 21
Health and Developmental Problems ......................................................................... 22

Behavioural Problems ............................................................................................... 25

Post-Adoption Recovery ........................................................................................... 26
Age at Time of Placement for Adoption ................................................................... 27

Recovery of Health and Development ...................................................................... 28
Attachment and Socialisation ..................................................................................... 30

Education .................................................................................................................... 32
Adolescence and Identity Formation .............................................. 32
Issues Relating to Adoptive Parents .............................................. 34
Characteristics of Intercountry Adoptive Parents ......................... 34
Satisfaction with the Adoption Experience .................................. 35
Stresses of Parenting Adopted Children with Special Needs .......... 35
Support for Adoptive Parents ..................................................... 37

CHAPTER THREE: ATTACHMENT THEORY AND ASSOCIATED CONCEPTS .......... 41
Introduction .................................................................................... 41
Bowlby's Attachment Theory .......................................................... 411
Stages in the Development of Attachment ..................................... 433
The Separated Child ....................................................................... 444
The Affects of Institutionalisation .................................................. 455
Michael Rutter's Reassessment of Attachment Theory ...................... 466
Clarifying Basic Concepts of Attachment ....................................... 477
Construction of an Inner Working Model of Self and Attachment Figures .... 499
Caregiving Patterns and Patterns of Attachment ......................... 50
Secure Attachment ........................................................................ 50
Insecure Ambivalent Attachment .................................................. 50
Insecure Avoidant Attachment ...................................................... 50
Implications of Patterns of Attachment for Later Development ......... 51
Intercountry Adoption and the Behaviour of Adoptees .................... 53
Attachment in Adoptees ............................................................... 53
Patterns in Adoption ...................................................................... 55
Secure Children ............................................................................ 56
Anxious to Please Children .......................................................... 56
Angry Children ............................................................................. 56
Uninvolved and Wary Children ...................................................... 57
Resilience and Reversibility .......................................................... 58
Reversibility of Cognitive Ill-Effects ............................................. 58
Reversibility of Growth Defects .................................................... 59
Reversal of 'Affectionless Psychopathy' (Emotional Detachment) ..... 59
Key Points on Attachment ............................................................. 60

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY ..................................................... 63
Design of the Investigation ............................................................ 63
CHAPTER SIX: THE AFFECTS OF AGE AT ADOPTION, PRE-ADOPTION ADVERSITY AND INSTITUTIONALISATION ON WELL-BEING

Introduction ........................................................................................................................ 123
The Affects of Age of Adoption Upon Current Well-Being ........................................... 123
  Age at Adoption ............................................................................................................. 124
  Gender ............................................................................................................................. 126
The Affects of Adversity Prior to Adoption Upon Current Well-Being ...................... 127
  Experience of Neglect Prior to Adoption ................................................................... 128
  Experience of Abuse Prior to Adoption ...................................................................... 129
  Changes of Caregiver Prior to Adoption .................................................................... 130
  Total Adversity and Well-Being .................................................................................. 131
  Well-Being Despite Adversity? ................................................................................... 136
  Recovery from Adversity ............................................................................................ 138
The Affects of the Duration of Institutionalisation Upon Current Well-Being ...... 139
Conclusions ....................................................................................................................... 146

CHAPTER SEVEN: SATISFACTION AND THE USE OF OUTSIDE HELP

Introduction ........................................................................................................................ 151
Satisfaction with Intercountry Adopted Child’s Progress ............................................. 151
Satisfaction with the Overall Adoption Experience ..................................................... 153
The Use of Outside Help .................................................................................................. 160
Conclusions ....................................................................................................................... 162

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS

Introduction ........................................................................................................................ 165
Key Findings ...................................................................................................................... 165
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Levels of Well-Being of Russian and Romanian Adoptees</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Competence</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of School Activities</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Functioning</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Functioning</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Health</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Behaviours</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at Adoption</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Adoption Adversity</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Affects of Institutionalisation</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with the Progress of Intercountry Adoptees and the Intercountry Adoption Experience</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Use of Outside Help</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Adoption Recovery</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications of the Findings for Policy and Practice</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses of this Information in the Practice of Intercountry Adoption</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impending Legislative Changes</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Research</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions for Future Research</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX A.................................................................... 189

  Intercountry Adopted Child Questionnaire

APPENDIX B.................................................................... 207

  Permission Letter from Trudy Rosenwald

APPENDIX C.................................................................... 211

  ...... Letter Distributed by ICANZ to Adoptive Parents of Russian and Romanian Adoptees.

APPENDIX D.................................................................... 215

  ...... Information Sheet Distributed by ICANZ to Adoptive Parents of Russian and Romanian Adoptees.
APPENDIX E .............................................................................................................. 221
Letter to the New Zealand Immigration Service

APPENDIX F .............................................................................................................. 225
Letter of Reply from the New Zealand Immigration Service

APPENDIX G .............................................................................................................. 229
Letter from the Department of Internal Affairs

APPENDIX H .............................................................................................................. 233
....Letter Sent to Adoptive Parents of Russian and Romanian Adoptees with the
Second Mail Out of the Intercountry Adopted Child Questionnaire.

REFERENCES .................................................................................................................. 237
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Summary of Figures Relevant to the Size of the Target Populations of Russian and Romanian Children and Response Rate Calculation .............................................. 72
Table 2: Age at Arrival in New Zealand Classified by Country and Gender (Percentages) .................................................................................................................. 74
Table 3: Size of Groups within the Total New Zealand Sample .......................................................................................................................... 86
Table 4: Mean Scores for Well-Being Measures by Total Sample, Country, Gender and Age at Time of Research (2000) ................................................................. 87
Table 5: Mean Scores for Competence Variables by Age at Time of Research and Gender ........................................................................................................... 89
Table 6: Percentage of Children Participating in Number of Out of School Activities .......... 92
Table 7: Parental Rating of Child's Quality of Participation (Percentages) ......................... 93
Table 8: Participation in Out of School Activities by Country (Percentage) ......................... 95
Table 9: Parental Rating of Child's Relationship with Others (Percentages) and Classified by Country ................................................................................................. 97
Table 10: Parental Rating of Child's School Performance by Subject (Percentages) and Classified by Country ...................................................................................... 100
Table 11: Attendance at Special Education Programmes (Percentages) Classified by Country ................................................................................................................. 101
Table 12: Parental Reporting of Child Behaviour Checklist Items on Happiness (Percentages) Classified by Country .............................................................................. 106
Table 13: Mean Total Problem Behaviour Raw Scores by Gender, Age and Country ......... 113
Table 14: Most Frequently Reported Problem Behaviours Among Russian and Romanian Intercountry Adoptees Combined .............................................................. 116
Table 15: Mean Scores for Well-Being Variables by Age at Adoption, Gender and Country ..................................................................................................................... 125
Table 16: Experience of Neglect Prior to Adoption by Gender and Country (Percentages) ................................................................................................................. 128
Table 17: Experience of Abuse Prior to Adoption by Gender and Country (Percentages) ............................................................................................................... 129
Table 18: Number of Caregivers against Gender for Russian and Romanian Children Combined (Percentages) ................................................................................... 131
Table 19: Mean Scores for Well-Being Variables of New Zealand Intercountry Adoptees by Adversity ................................................................................................. 132
Table 20: Statistics Relating to Russian and Romanian Intercountry Adoptees in New Zealand who were Known to have Experienced Neglect and/or Abuse (Percentages) ............................................................................................... 137

Table 21: Parental Satisfaction with Child's Progress (Percentages) Classified by Country ........................................................................................................ 152

Table 22: Perceived Satisfaction with Intercountry Adoption Experience for Family Members (Percentages) Classified by Country ............................................. 154
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Percentage of All Babies Adopted in New Zealand, 1950 - 1990................. 8
Figure 2: Age at Arrival in New Zealand by Country and Gender ................................... 73
Figure 3: Age of Adoptees at Time of Research (2000) by Country .............................. 74
Figure 4: Participation in Out of School Activities ......................................................... 91
Figure 5: Parental Rating of Overall School Performance of Russian and Romanian Children (Percentages) .................................................................................................................. 102
Figure 6: Parental Rating of Child's Overall School Performance by Country (Percentages) .......................................................... 104
Figure 7: Health on Arrival of Romanian Children (Percentages) .................................. 108
Figure 8: Current Health of Romanian Children (Percentages) ........................................ 108
Figure 9: Health on Arrival of Russian Children (Percentages) ....................................... 109
Figure 10: Current Health of Russian Children (Percentages) .......................................... 109
Figure 11: Parental Ratings of Allergies ............................................................................. 111
Figure 12: Parental Ratings of Asthma .............................................................................. 111
Figure 13: Severity of Problem Behaviour Scores (Percentages) by Country and Gender .......................................................... 114
Figure 14: Number of Changes of Caregiver Prior to Adoption by Country (Percentages) .............................................................................................................................................. 130
Figure 15: Total Adversity Score by Problem Behaviour Score (Percentages) for Romanian Children .......................................................... 133
Figure 16: Total Adversity Score by Problem Behaviour Score (Percentages) for Russian Children .......................................................................................... 133
Figure 17: Total Adversity Score of New Zealand Intercountry Adoptees by Gender (Percentages) .................................................................................................................. 134
Figure 18: Total Adversity Score of Romanian Children Against Age at Adoption (Percentages) .................................................................................................................. 135
Figure 19: Problem Behaviour Scores Against Duration of Institutionalisation for Romanian Adoptees (Percentages) ......................................................................... 141
Figure 20: Problem Behaviour Scores Against Duration of Institutionalisation for Russian Adoptees (Percentages) .................................................................................. 142
Figure 21: Health on Arrival of Romanian Females Against Institutionalisation .......... 144
Figure 22: Health on Arrival of Romanian Males Against Institutionalisation ............... 144
Figure 23: Health on Arrival of Russian Females Against Institutionalisation ............... 145
Figure 24: Health on Arrival of Russian Males Against Institutionalisation

Figure 25: Parental Reports of Their Romanian Child's Satisfaction with Adoption Against Duration of Institutionalisation (Percentages)

Figure 26: Mother's Satisfaction with Romanian Adoption Against Duration of Institutionalisation (Percentages)

Figure 27: Father's Satisfaction with Romanian Adoption Against Duration of Institutionalisation (Percentages)

Figure 28: Family Satisfaction with Romanian Adoption Against Duration of Institutionalisation (Percentages)