Research with Children Adopted From Abroad

Participants

- 28 children were recruited to participate in a longitudinal study
- Children were initially seen between 1-6 months and then again at 12 months post-adoption.
  - 13 from Asia
  - 13 from Eastern Europe
  - 2 from Guatemala
- 9 of the children were males.
- 3 children were younger than 1 year.
- 5 of the children were older than 2 years.
- 6 of the children had experienced foster care prior to their adoption.
- 5 of the parents were single parents.
- 15 families had other children.

Measures

The children’s development was measured across several developmental domains:

- Hearing
- Comprehension of English language
- Expression of English language
- Articulation of English sounds
- Symbolic play behaviors and problem-solving behaviors
- Social interaction behaviors and the ability to master a challenging task

Results

Communication Development at 1-6 months post-adoption:

- 19 of 20 children (95%) who were younger than 2 years scored within typical range for English-speaking age-matched peers.
- These findings support previous studies measuring communication development of children adopted from Eastern Europe.
- **No differences in performance were found between children adopted from Asia and children from Eastern Europe during 1-6 months post-adoption.**
- 4/5 children (80%) who were older than 2 years scored at a standard score of 80 or above in comprehension of English. The average standard score for English-speaking peers is 100.
- This finding indicates that when children focus all their attention on learning a new language, English language development is fairly rapid.
This evidence documents the fact that English language acquisition development for internationally adopted children is different from children learning English as a second language.

Communication Development at 12-14 months post-adoption:

- 14 of the original 20 children returned for the 1 year follow-up.
- 100% of the children performed at 80 or above for comprehension and expression of English.
- These findings are similar to other studies reporting language development of children adopted from Eastern Europe and China.

- Regional group differences were found:
  - Children from China had higher comprehension scores. Children adopted from China are comparable to English-speaking peers in comprehension by 1 year post-adoption. Expressive development may take 2 or 3 years post-adoption.
  - Children from Eastern Europe had higher expression scores. Children adopted from Eastern Europe are comparable to English-speaking peers in receptive language (+ 2 standard deviations; standard score of 80+) by 1 year and expressive language by 2 years post-adoption.

Hearing:

- Five children (18%) failed the hearing screening. Most of the children failed immittance screenings which is helpful in detecting fluid behind the ear drum.
- By 1 year post-adoption, hearing problems had been resolved.
- This finding is significantly lower than previous studies that found over 50% of the children failing the hearing screening.
- Thus it is recommended that all children receive immittance screenings shortly after arriving in the U.S.

Social-emotional Development at 1-6 months post-adoption:

- 7 (25%) children showed an awareness of the separation and when the parents returned.
- 15 (54%) children exhibited concern when their parents left them alone with the examiner and clearly preferred their parent(s) presence.
- 79% of the children showed signs of bonding with their parent(s).
- Adopted children who have been adopted at younger ages (younger than 2 years), show early indications of attachment to caregivers and fear of strangers by 6 months post-adoption (Hwa-Froelich & Matsuo, 2008)

Social-emotional Development at 12-14 months post-adoption:

- Most adopted children have close relationships with their parents by 12 months post-adoption.
- Children placed in full-time childcare took longer to establish close relationships with their parents
- *It is recommended that parents keep their adopted children with them for the majority of the time during the first 6 months post-adoption.*

**Summary**

Internationally adopted children adopted between 0-5 years

- lose their birth language quickly
- English language comprehension develops first, expression develops later
- Children adopted from China may take more time to develop expressive language than children adopted from Eastern Europe
- Children begin to be wary of strangers and prefer their parents by 6-8 months post-adoption
- Close relationships between child and parent are formed by 1 year post-adoption
- Symbolic play, problem-solving, and mastery development is within 3-6 months of chronological age by 1 year post-adoption

This research project has provided valuable information for the Saint Louis University International Adoption Clinic to improve the quality of our services to families with adopted children. The IAC provides developmental assessments and communication and relationship development intervention for adopted children and their families. We would like to thank Regionwise for funding this grant proposal.
Publications:


Presentations:


Internationally Adopted Children. Presentation at the Missouri Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Osage Beach, MO.


Bibliography:


Development. *Communication Disorders Quarterly*, 29, 149-165.


