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# Book Review: Coping with the Effects of Deprivation: Development and Upbringing of Romanian Adoptees in the Netherlands, by Catharina Rijk

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***Coping with the Effects of Deprivation: Development and Upbringing of Romanian Adoptees in the Netherlands.*** Catharina Rijk. Print Partners Ipskamp BV, Enschede: Netherlands. 2008.

International adoption is a popular way for couples and individuals to add a child or children to their families. This statement is true both nationally and globally. Focusing on the U. S., adoptions from (South) Korea became popular in the post World War II period and have continued as have adoptions from other countries. Beginning in the 1990s, Americans began to adopt orphans from newly-opened Eastern European countries. The first of these Eastern European adoptees came from Romania. According to statistics gathered by the International Social Science Resource Center for the Protection of Children in Adoption (ISS/IRC) for the years between 1990-1999, the U. S. was the receiving country for 87% of Polish adoptees, 83 percent of Russian adoptees, 77% of Ukrainian adoptees, 44% of Romanian adoptees and 33% of the Bulgarian children adopted internationally during that decade.

Children born in Eastern Europe comprise a sizeable number of international adoptees to the U. S. currently. Statistics compiled by the U. S. C. I. S. show that, between 1990 and 2008, **Americans adopted more than 83 thousand children from Eastern European countries.** The majority (66%) of them came from Russia. Regarding adoptions from Romania specifically, more than **five thousand Romanian orphans** joined American families between 1990 and 2004. Subsequently, Romania placed a moratorium on non-relative international adoptions of Romanian orphans.

Since 1990, international adoption has also become a visible global phenomenon with people in richer nations (receiving countries) adopting orphaned children from poorer nations (sending countries). The growing interest of researchers in Romanian adoptees and their adoptive families has resulted in a continuing stream of published work. This work includes the following: In the **United States**--Groze, 1996; Groze & Ileana, 1996; Groza, Ryan, & Cash, 2003; Ryan & Groza, 2004; Goldberg 1997, 2001; Wilson, 2004). In **Canada**—Aimes, 1997; Ames, Morison, Fisher, & Chisolm, 2000; Marcovitch, Cesaroni, Roberts, & Swanson, 1995; Mainemer, Gilman & Ames, 1998); LeMare & Audet, 2006; LeMare, Kurytnik, & Audet, 2006; LeMare, Audet, & Kurytnik, 2007. In **Britain**--Rutter, & the English and Romanian (ERA) Study Team, 1998; Rutter, Anderson-Wood, Beckett, Berdenkamp, Castle, Groothues, & others, 1999; Rutter, Kreppner, & O'Connor, 2001; Rutter, O'Connor, & the (ERA) Study Team, 2004.

***Coping with the Effects of Deprivation...*** is about Romanian adoptees to the Netherlands. Catharina Rijk's objective is to gain insight into the coping mechanisms developed by adoptive parents, teachers, and mental health providers in relating to, or working with, children born in Romania and adopted by Dutch families between 1990 and June of 1997. This time frame marks the beginning and end points of adoptions from Romania to the Netherlands. In her Introduction, Rijk identifies the principal variables and models considered in analyzing early deprivation of Romanian adoptees, the types of problems encountered by parents, teachers, and mental health providers, and the methodology of the study on which she reports in this book.

The study which forms the empirical basis for this book is longitudinal and includes three phases of data collection. Rijk also uses a qualitative approach, consisting of case descriptions, to gain greater depth into various issues. In her General Discussion and Conclusions, the author summarizes the results

she discussed in earlier chapters, restates the limitations of the study, and suggests some possibilities for further research.

Essentially, this book is an anthology of six self-contained, but related, chapters (articles) which comprise the author's dissertation. These articles, some of which have been published and others of which have been submitted for publication, are tied together by two other sections: an Introduction and a General Discussion and Conclusions. The author focuses her attention mainly on description—that is, on reporting the results of the three waves of data (i.e., the what). She pays much less attention to analysis (the why) and too little, in my opinion, to the implications of her research for ways to improve, or suggest, strategies aimed at helping adoptees from deprived early environments and their adoptive families.

*Coping with the Effects of Deprivation...* deals with an important series of related topics about the post-adoptive functioning of Romanian adoptees. The chapters on teachers and mental health professionals are particularly interesting and important. They show, for example, how generally unprepared these professionals were to work effectively with children experiencing the kinds of special needs and/or mental health issues these adoptees had.

There are many statements in this book with which I, and others who have done research on Eastern European adoptees, would agree. As an adoptive parent of a sibling group of three children born in Russia in the early 1990s, I can also relate to the experiences Rijk shares from the parents she interviewed.

This book has several methodological strengths. First, the study design is a longitudinal investigation of Dutch adoptive families of Romanian children at three points in time. This type of design is essential to observe change on the individual level. All families who adopted a Romanian child between 1990 and June, 1997 were invited to participate in Phase I. Most of the parents agreed to participate, although repeated participation lessened somewhat over the three phases of the research. Rijk states that 96 Romanian children (p. 13) were adopted by Dutch families during this time frame. Eighty six percent of the adoptive families agreed to participate in Phase I. The samples for each phase consisted of 74 families who had adopted 83 Romanian children (Phase I); 72 families of 80 adoptees (Phase II), and 64 families of 72 adoptees (Phase III). Longitudinal designs have the potential to re-investigate a sample of (many of) the same adoptees into adulthood. Follow ups of the same adoptees into adulthood could be very enlightening.

Second, standardized measures of behavior are used. Third, Rijk reports dividing the samples into three comparison groups: the co-morbidity, clinical, and non-clinical and comparing some of the results she obtains with results reported in other studies.

The book also has substantive strengths. For example, Rijk correctly identifies the importance and value of early intervention through specialized services and of psychological help for adoptees who need these services. She also points out that neurological damages/deficiencies experienced in early childhood may limit the ability of children to attach to caregivers. I like the five approaches and practices that Rijk identifies in Chapter 4. She pulls these helpful parenting strategies together from studies of clinical settings and therapeutic programs (pp. 75-76). Reading these strategies had me hoping to find a

concluding chapter, or major section of the last chapter, which focused on the practical implications of Rijk's work. I did not find it.

Therefore, the most important opportunity she misses is failing to give more attention to the implications of her research for recommending specific, viable changes in adoption practices, especially in regard to quality post-placement services and consistent opportunities for support for adoptees and their families—parents as well as siblings, biological and non-biological. Rijk talks about “practical/practice” implications briefly and in only a few places. Other mentions, for example, can be found on pages 88-89 and pages 124-125. Apparently, in the Netherlands, pre-adoption training is standardized for all pre-adoptive parents. Adoptive parents are also encouraged to be in contact with, and provide support for, other adopters. However, Rijk does not provide any details about either pre- and post adoption policies and practice in the Netherlands. A closing chapter, or major section of the last chapter, which discussed needed services (educational, psychological, and other) for adoptees and ways to support and improve family functioning in families where parents have an especially difficult task dealing effectively with their child's behavior and needs would have made a fitting conclusion to this book. Implications from the work of other researchers who have published in the field of international adoptions from Romania could also have been discussed in greater detail there.

This book has some other weaknesses and omissions. Its six chapters are replete with tables and statistics. Certainly, providing well-constructed tables and using statistics to draw conclusions can help to make results clearer. However, sometimes readers can get lost in so much information and wish that the author had focused only on the most important findings. From my perspective as an experienced statistician, the second important weakness is Rijk's use of parametric statistics like t-tests and ANOVA to analyze data from a non-random sample of respondents. Although not all social scientists agree, the conservative position is that statistical tests and techniques are **not** truly meaningful unless all of the requirements for their use are met. Random sampling is the most important of the standard requirements set forth for using every statistical test. A researcher can interpret data in meaningful ways *without* falling back on the use of statistics in reporting research results mainly because doing so is pro forma (required) if a researcher wants to get her/his work published in certain venues. A sports analogy is useful here. A team can play a baseball game by football rules and obtain a final score. However, interpreting what this score means is questionable.

Unfortunately, because it was **not** originally written as a book, but rather as a series of articles subsequently pulled together in book form, in moving from one chapter to another, readers encounter a lot of repetition of the details of the study. Each chapter has a set of references. However, the same references often appear in other chapters. The lack of a cumulative bibliography of all references makes it difficult for readers to 1) find the whole body of literature the author cites in a single location and 2) identify which references are present and which are not. Regarding the latter, I noticed that Goldberg's (1997, 2001) published work on Romanian adoptees is not cited. Providing a Name (Authors') Index and a Subject Index would also have been helpful to readers.

In terms of omissions, there is no analysis or discussion of the impact of adopting more than one child into the same family on both the parents' and children's functioning. The numbers of adoptees Rijk reports suggest that there are more adoptees than families in the sample. Therefore, at least some families appear to have adopted more than one child. She does not say anything about these families. The author

also does not discuss *variations* in the benefits of psychological help among the severely-deprived adoptees. It would have been helpful to know about the characteristics of the adoptees that did not benefit much or at all from psychological services and which psychological services were most helpful to families in distress.

Although this book is worth reading for what it does has to offer, *Coping with the Effects of Deprivation...* could have delivered much more than the results of a well-conducted study on Romanian adoptees to the Netherlands. With adoption of children from Eastern European orphanages such a prominent phenomenon in the U. S. and globally, after reading this book, thoughtful readers should be left wondering how Rijk would answer the following question: **Based on what you learned from your research, and from studies conducted by other researchers, what do you think governments, communities, social institutions (such as education and health), and adoption agencies can (or should) do, or do better, to improve the chances of deprived, neglected, and traumatized international adoptees making successful transitions to, and adjustments in, their new families?**

This is a question that experts on international adoptions of deprived children need to answer in feasible, pragmatic ways. Doing so requires going from data analysis to drawing practical applications of research results aimed at positive changes and interventions for previously institutionalized adoptees and their adoptive families.

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