

# **Cognitive Development and Educational Achievement in Internationally adoptees**

Presentation by  
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- **Cognitive functions in international adoptees have been highlighted in several studies during the last fifteen years**
- **These studies have had a focus on:**
  - *language development*
  - *school performance*
  - *educational attainment*

➤ **Several studies have documented developmental disparities in international adoptees performances**

(Dalen, 2001; Gindis, 2005; Howard et al., 2004; Judge, 2004, McGuinness et al., 2000, Rutter et al., 2000; Van IJzendoorn et al., 2005)

➤ **Few studies have focused on intelligence in international adoptees**

(Romania, ERA-study team, 2000, 2006)

# Pre-adoption factors influencing cognitive development

- Pre- and perinatal risk factors
- Postnatal risk (*Institutionalization*)

Rutter (2005):

*“Substantial cognitive impairment is largely a consequence of depriving conditions in the institutions rather than institutional upbringing as such”*

- **The variety of pre- adoption factors constitute a general problem of heterogeneity for adoption research**
- **One way to approach this issue would be to focus on:**
  - **Age at adoption**
  - **Country of origin**
- **These two variables may serve as proxies of aggregation of factors influencing cognitive development**

## ➤ ***Age of adoption***

- **Some studies have not documented age of adoption to be a strong indicator for children's overall development (Cederblad et al., 1999, Dalen, 2001, Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005)**
- **Other studies have shown that age of adoption do have an effect on cognitive development (Becket et al, 2006)**

## ➤ ***Country of origin***

- **Great variety in quality of pre-adoption conditions, adoption procedures and selection of children for adoption (Selman, 2000)**
  - **South Korea has a special position (Dalen, 2001; Kim & Staat, 2004; Lindblad et al., 2003; Verhulst, 1990, 1992)**
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- **Adoption means a positive change for most children**

# Educational Achievement

- **Internationally adoptees (IA) are lagging behind in educational achievement** (Dalen, 2001; Hoksbergen et al., 1987, van IJzendoorn et al., 2005; Verhulst et al., 1990, 1992)
- **IA has more learning problems** (Dalen, 2001; van IJzendoorn, 2005)
- **IA are more often receiving special needs education** (Dalen, 2001; McGuinness et al., 2000; van IJzendorrn et al., 2005)

➤ **Discrepancy between adoptees' intelligence scores and their school performance** (van IJzendoorn et al., 2005)

➤ **Adoption decalage**








➤ **“Adaptive grieving”**  
(Brodzinsky et al., 1992)

# Learning problems

- **Language development and language disorders** (Dalen, 2001; Gindis, 2005; van IJzendoorn et al., 2005)
- **Hyperactive behavior** (Dalen, 2001; McGuinness et al., 2000; Kvifte-Andrsen, 1992, Verhulst et al., 1990, 1992)
- **Executive functions** (Baddeley, 2003; Frederici, 2003; Gindis, 2003; Gioia, 2003)

# Language development

- Change of language
- Few adoptees become bilingual
- Interrupted language development
- Most adoptees make rapid progress
- One third develop some kind of language problems

<b>Norwegian born children</b> <b>children</b>	<b>Refugee</b>		<b>International adopted</b>
<b>Norwegian</b>	<b>L- X Norwegian</b>	<b>L- X Norwegian</b>	<b>L-X Norwegian</b>
	 	 	 
<b>Continually</b>	<b>Simultaneously</b>	<b>Successive</b>	<b>Interrupted Language development</b> <b>Change of language</b>
	<b>Bilingual development</b>		

➤ **Day-to-day Language or Basic Communication Skills** (BISC, Cummings, 1981)  
*"the contextualized language"*

➤ **Academic Language or Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency** (CALP, Cummings, 1981)  
*"the de-contextualized language"*

*"The adoptees seem to have problems with the academic language, which put them at risk for later literacy disorders"*

*(Dalen & Rygvold, 2004)*

# Hyperactive behavior

- **Hyperactivity is a common symptom among internationally adoptees** (Dalen, 2001; Hoksbergen et al., 2003; Kvifte-Andresen, 1992; Roy et al., 1999; Verhulst et al., 1990, 1992)
- **Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorders (ADHD) is more used as a diagnosis among adoptees** (Howard et al., 2004; McGuinness et al., 2000; Rutter o' Connor et al, 2000)

# Parental background

- **Adoptive parents represent higher socioeconomic layers and are more educated than other parental groups** (Hjern et al., 2002; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005; Lindbald et al., 2003; Verhulst, 1990,1992)
- **Adoptive parents educational level only has a marginal or modest effects on cognitive outcomes** (Becket et al., 2006; van Ijzendoorn, 2005)
- **Adoptive parents are far more supportive of their children's school situation** (Dalen, 2001)

- **Adoptive parents may have too high standards for their children's school performance** (Berry, 1992; Rosenthal, 1995; Lindblad et al., 2003)
- **Too high expectation may lead to low self esteem in adoptive children** (Harter, 1999; Skaalvik, 1996)
- **Higher risk for social maladjustment in adoptees belonging to white-collar families compared to blue-collar families** (Berry, 1992; Hjern et al., 2002; Rosenthal, 1995)

# Conclusion

- Negative pre-adoption condition may have persistent influence on cognitive development
- The difference in cognitive functioning among adoptees may reflect the conditions in the country of origin more than ethnic differences

- The prognosis from a cognitive perspective – may be quite good regardless of age at adoption if:
  - the quality of care before adoption has been “good enough”
  - The adoption procedure does not reflect an overrepresentation of environmental and/or genetic risk factors
- Although adoptive parents may encourage cognitive development, the adoptees’ capacity for intellectual performance may be limited because of genetic and adoption adversity factors