



# Romania Adoption Study

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Infants in a Romanian orphanage in Bucarest, circa 1995.

Nicolae Ceaușescu was the head of state of Romania from 1967 to 1989. By the end of his rule, he had become brutal and repressive. Not only was he a ruthless dictator who enforced his rule with the use of the secret police, but he also instituted strict policies requiring Romanians to have more children. He sought to increase the low birth rate in Romania by making divorce difficult and contraception and abortion illegal. He also dictated that women should have at least five children. To this end, Ceaușescu established the menstrual police. These were state gynecologists who conducted monthly checks of women of childbearing age who had not borne at least five children. To encourage additional children, families received a stipend for having more than two children but were also taxed for having fewer than five children. The number of new births did increase, although a number of these children were abandoned since the families could not afford to provide for them. The state encouraged placing these children in state orphanages.

After the fall of the Ceaușescu regime in 1989, it became clear that some 170,000 children had been placed in state institutions. The international media described these children as being “warehoused.” Initially, some of these children were adopted internationally, but this practice was later banned by Romania. Ministers in the government after Ceaușescu sought solutions to the problem of institutionalized infants and children and asked U.S. investigators to set up a study examining the efficacy of foster care as an alternative to institutionalization.

This set in motion a study in which the effects of foster care on attachment relationships and future cognitive, emotional, and physiological development could be assessed and better

understood. The Bucharest Early Intervention Project assessed infants and young children then living in institutions in Bucharest, selected families who were willing to foster these infants and children, and set up an intervention to gauge the effectiveness of foster care to remediate the effects of early deprivation. Some infants and children were randomly assigned to families, and others would continue to receive the usual care in orphanages. A control group of children from the Bucharest community, who were neither institutionalized nor raised in foster care, was also identified and provided an important point of comparison.

A team of researchers was able to follow a subset of these children over a number of years. Initially, measurements were taken (a baseline assessment) of the children who were assigned to a foster family as well as those who remained in the institution. These measurements allowed the researchers to know if the intervention was a success and if the age at which infants were removed from the institution and placed into foster homes was a determiner of that success. The baseline measurements were followed by a comprehensive follow-up at 30, 42, and 54 months and at 8 and 12 years. An initial study showed that those children in the institution displayed less attachment to a caregiver than those who had never been in the orphanages and lived in the community (see *Table 5.2*). When assessed at 42 months, more children in foster care showed secure attachment style, whereas those who received care as usual at the orphanage showed more of the other insecure styles (see *Figure 5.4*).

**TABLE 5.2** What Effects Does an Institution Have on Attachment?

| COMMUNITY           | INSTITUTION          |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| 76.7% secure        | 16.8% secure         |
| 3.6% avoidant       | 4.7% avoidant        |
| 0.0% resistant      | 0.0% resistant       |
| 19.7% disorganized  | 65.4% disorganized   |
| 0.0% unclassifiable | 13.1% unclassifiable |

Children raised in the community (the control group in this study) showed more secure attachment to a caregiver than those children raised in an orphanage

Source: Based on Zeanah et al., 2005.

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