

International Adoption: Lessons Learned From Romania

An Interview with [Victor Groza](#),
Author and Editor of "[A Peacock Or A Crow](#)"

Interview By Allison Martin

Dr. Victor Groza is an Associate Professor and the Interim Associate Dean for Research and Training at Case Western Reserve University in Ohio. "[A Peacock Or A Crow](#)" by Victor Groza, Daniela Ileana, and Ivor Irwin provides a informed look at adoption in Romania.

What major ideas would you like readers to learn from "A Peacock or a Crow"?

Dr. Victor Groza: The metaphor we try to use is the one of beauty and bland, good and bad -- a peacock and a crow. It is obvious that children adopted internationally are at high risk for developmental, health and behavior difficulties. About 20% of children (adopted from Romania) are resilient and show no obvious negative effects from early deprivation, 60% recover, and another 20% have many challenges. This information can be interpreted 2 ways -- 80% of children do well or 80% of children have problems -- the glass is half full or half empty. Given that these kids already have a rocky start, we want parents to have a balanced view of the risks and rewards and be optimistic rather than pessimistic about these children.

In A Peacock or a Crow you mentioned the Romania experience has broader implications for international adoption. What lessons can we apply to other countries and situations?

Dr. Victor Groza: Child welfare systems in most developing or war-torn countries are predominantly institutional or group care based system, unlike the United States that is predominantly a foster family based system. Thus, the overwhelming majority of children adopted internationally have spent time in institutional settings. Many of these children are placed at infancy or shortly afterwards. To have an accurate understanding of international adoption, practitioners must also have an understanding of the risk inherent to children who are institutionalized early in their life. The negative effects of early institutionalization have made headlines in America and England for the past 90 years. This book updates information with one wave of international adoptees.

How should prospective adoptive parents prepare for an international adoption?

Dr. Victor Groza: . At a minimum, parents should either receive training, or, in the event the agency facilitating the adoption does not provide training, attend seminars or read books in the following areas:

1. details on the legal and social process of adoption in both the United States and abroad;
2. issues of abandonment, separation, grief, loss and mourning for adoptees that are evident throughout the life cycle;

3. issues of separation, grief, loss and mourning for infertile couples that are evident throughout the life cycle;
4. the adoptive family's life cycle and unique issues in family formation;
5. individual and family identity development in adoption;
6. unique issues of attachment in adoption;
7. outcomes and risks in international adoptions; and
8. dealing with unresolved infertility issues.

Adoption preparation helps families to understand the unique issues in forming families or adding to families through adoption. A successful adoption depends less on the child and more on parental and family characteristics, which allow the child to be incorporated into the family without an intolerable level of family distress or chronic crises. The lack of preparation cannot be easily compensated for later and adequate preparation reduces the risk of negative adoption outcomes. As part of preparation, parents should go to support groups for international adoptive parents. They will get the most insight from these parents.

What are the main impacts in children institutionalized for long periods? Which ages are most at risk?

Children who are institutionalized at an early age often demonstrate delays in emotional, social, and physical development. Institutionalization places children at great risk for certain diseases. Institutional care may affect a child's ability to make smooth transitions from one developmental stage to another throughout his/her life. Children brought up in institutions may suffer from severe behavior and emotional problems, such as aggressive or antisocial behavior, have less knowledge and understanding of the world, and become adults with psychiatric impairments. Finally, children raised in institutions are at risk for learning problems-such as poor reading ability and have more difficulty with critical thinking, establishing cause-and-effect, and impulsivity.

However, the effects of institutionalization are not uniform and are dependent on other factors. The extent of suffering is not the same for every child who is institutionalized. The differential effects are due to child characteristics (genetic predisposition, basic personality, attractiveness, prenatal risk factors), caregiver characteristics (training, motivation & attitude), institutional characteristics (child-to-caregiver ratio, quality and degree of programming), and the child's history (the age of the child when he/she entered the institution and the length of time in the institution).

Not all children are treated equally in the same institution. Some children are prenatally exposed to risk factors. Prenatal medical care, nutrition, stress, exposure to toxic substances or environments, and genetics influence the developing neonate. Some children are born with a predisposition to be cranky, sickly, or colicky. Some children are immediately responsive to any stimulus or person, while others are more lethargic or less responsive. Some children are physically more attractive than other children. These factors influence how caregivers respond to these children.

Children who are cranky, sickly, or colicky are challenging; they are usually ignored by staff or

subjected to harsh treatment if they demand more time than caregivers can give. At the same time, if a child responds easily when spoken to or touched, and the caregiver gets some satisfaction from the response, the child receives more attention and responds even more positively. On the other hand, if the child does not respond easily to caregivers, he/she receives less attention. The cycle of stimulus-response-stimulus affects the child either positively or negatively. Finally, children who are physically attractive receive more attention than their less attractive counterparts. Also, children with obvious physical handicaps may receive less attention if they are placed with children who have no apparent handicaps.

The institution itself places children at-risk. The regimentation and ritualization of institutional life do not provide children with the quality of life, or the experiences they need to be healthy, happy, fully functioning adults. In group care, the child's needs are secondary to the requirements of the group's routine. Relationships between adults and children are usually superficial and brief, with little continuous warmth and affection. Institutional staff do not connect emotionally or physically with children in quite the same way that families connect with children. Finally, the age at placement and the length of institutionalization have an effect on children. The younger the child when placed and the longer he/she remains in the institution, the more negative the effects on cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development.

More by Dr. Victor Groza:

Book Review: "Clinical and Practice Issues in Adoption"

Book Review: "A Peacock or a Crow?"

Interview: "Clinical and Practice Issues in Adoption"

Interview: "A Peacock or a Crow?" and Romania Adoption

Article: Dickens, Boys Town or Purgatory: Are Institutions a Place to Call Home?

Dr. Victor Groza is an Associate Professor and the Interim Associate Dean for Research and Training at Case Western Reserve University in Ohio. He is a prolific author and editor in the field of adoption studies; four books and over 40 professional articles are in publication. "Clinical and Practice Issues in Adoption", edited by Victor Groza and Karen Rosenberg, presents seven professional articles on the theory and practice of infant-placed and older adoptions