

The International Adoption Project

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During the last year or two, you and your child(ren) helped us with one (or more) of the studies described in this newsletter. This letter is a way of thanking you and keeping you abreast of our results. This letter is being sent to all of the parents who have joined our international adoption registry. We would like to thank all 2,400 of you for your willingness to participate in research. Unfortunately, due to funding restrictions we may not be able to send a yearly newsletter next year. If you do not receive a similar letter next summer please visit our website at: <http://icd.coled.umn.edu/IAP> for future results. You may also access the preliminary results sent to parents in February 2002 from our website.



International Adoption Project 2001 Survey Results

In 1999 we received funding from the National Institutes of Health to conduct the first major survey of the health and well being of internationally adopted children in the U.S. Over 2500 parents who adopted using a Minnesota adoption agency between 1990 and 1998 returned this survey (approximately 62% return rate). The survey covered pre-adoption experiences, the children's health, behavioral development and behavior problems, education, and post-placement experiences. In addition to our research group, the survey reflects the work of the International Adoption Clinic, the School of Public Health, the Department of Family Social Science Department, and the Department of Psychology.

Pre-adoption Risk Factors: International adoption covers a lot of territory and a lot of children with very different pre-adoption experiences; therefore, when we discuss results from this survey we need to group children with similar experiences. Many studies have grouped children by country of origin; however, we know that countries tend to be volatile with many changes over time. Therefore in this study we have decided to group children based on their pre-adoption life experiences.

Results continued on page 3

Developing Communication Skills

Early in life, the human infant is dependent on adults in order to regulate stimulation. It has been suggested that appropriate social stimulation may play a critical role in the development of communication skills. Joint attention behaviors refer to a child's skill in using nonverbal behaviors to share an experience with others. Internationally adopted children may experience a conglomerate of adverse experiences prior to adoption including social deprivation. This study looked at a group of 78 internationally adopted children who came to the University's International Adoption Clinic. We assessed each child's communication skills within 3 months of adoption. Six months after adoption, children and their parents were invited back for a second visit. Sixty-two families returned for the second assessment.

Our preliminary analyses suggest that children who arrive in their families after about 14-16 months of age are delayed in the development of these preverbal skills and their scores predict how much English they have learned by 6 months after adoption. We are still analyzing whether these preverbal joint attention skills are related to cognitive development and emotional behavior. The joint attention tasks are easy to administer and fun for children to complete. Thus, health professionals could potentially use this technique to identify children who may need extra help learning to communicate with their families soon after placement. In our next newsletter we will be able share more of the results from this study with you.

If you would like more information about this study please contact Maria Kroupina at kroup003@tc.umn.edu or 612-624-6609.

Daytime Cortisol Rhythm: “the spit study”

As part of our continuing efforts to understand the development of children adopted internationally, a subset of families who completed our survey or registry card are participating in a study of cortisol levels at wakeup and bedtime.

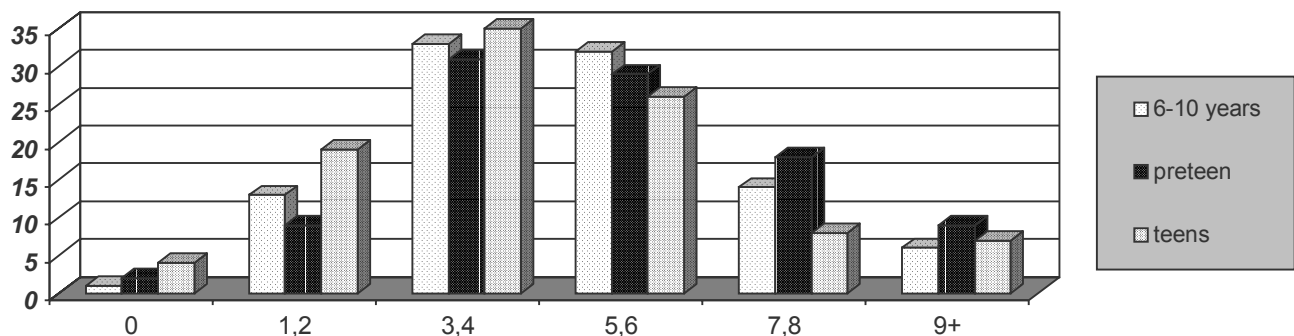
For this study we are interested in looking at the daily cycle of cortisol in children who come to their families through international adoption. Cortisol is produced every day on a daily, or circadian, rhythm. Its highest levels are around the time we wake up and its lowest levels are around the time we go to sleep at night. There is some information from research with other mammals that early experiences set the tone for this stress hormone system. When early experiences have been challenging or stressful, the system is “toned up” to produce higher levels of the hormone and to react more strongly to new challenges. We do not know whether this is true for human children. If it is true, we do not know whether this “toning up” relates to how children grow and develop, and this is what we are trying to find out.

Some internationally adopted children lived under challenging conditions before they were adopted, while others lived under less challenging conditions or were adopted very young and thus spent less time without the care of a loving family. By sampling cortisol in small amounts of saliva over several days, we hope to learn whether early experiences influence these everyday levels and whether the levels children have early in the morning and late in the evening are associated with their current emotional reactions and behavior.

Over the coming months, we plan to complete the collection phase and begin analyzing the cortisol and surveys. We hope to have our findings available to families by early 2003. If you would like more information about this study please contact Darlene Kertes at kert0006@tc.umn.edu or IAP at 612-624-9322.

Urban Legends of International Adoption

Periodically, around the world, bizarre stories surface about why Americans are adopting children. Indeed, there are rumors that the children are used as cheap labor, as servants, and, unbelievably, as organ donors!! In cultures where people do not adopt children who are not relatives, the behavior of foreigners who are willing and eager to adopt abandoned and some times ill children is confusing. Concern for what Americans are doing with the children plays into the politics of adoption. We know that parents who adopt internationally go out of their way to provide their children with rich and rewarding experiences. As an example, in the 2001 IAP survey, we collected information about the extra-curricular (outside of school) lessons, classes, sports, and clubs the children participated in over the course of the last year. The graph below shows the number per year separately for children of different ages.



As you can see in the graph, most children were signed up for at least one out-of-school activity in the last year, with many signed up for 4 to 6 out-of-school lessons, classes, sports, or clubs. In addition to getting the children to school, getting them special education help if they need it, and providing additional remedial help outside of school, parents are also seeking out enriching experiences for their children. If anyone becomes a servant in international adoption, it is not the children! Families who adopt internationally are very invested in providing the best for their children.

*Come join Professors Megan Gunnar & Richard Lee for a discussion of
the **International Adoption Project Survey Results***

Monday, September 23rd Southdale Library, 7001 York Ave. S. 7pm to 9pm

Please contact Meg Bale at 612-624-9322 or balex002@tc.umn.edu with questions.

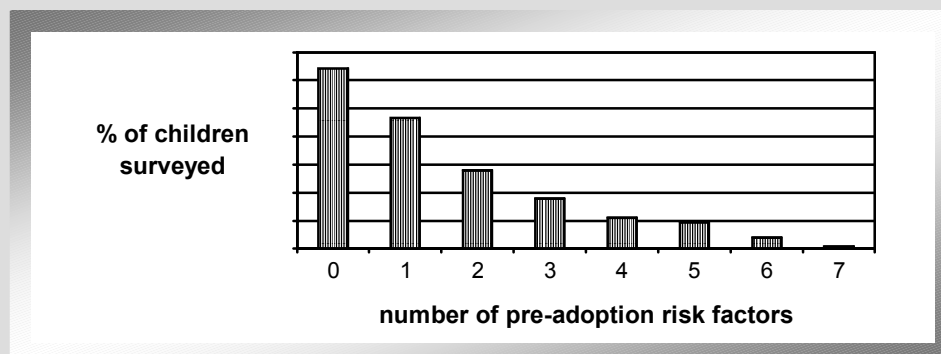
Survey Results continued from page 2

In the survey we asked parents “Do you believe your child experienced:” any of the following pre-adoption risk factors. The risk factors we listed were as follows:

1. Pre-birth exposure to alcohol or other drugs of abuse
 Yes No I suspect
2. A birth mother who was malnourished during pregnancy
 Yes No I suspect
3. A premature birth
 Yes No I suspect
4. Was your child in an orphanage, baby home, or hospital for more than 6 months?
 Yes No I suspect
5. Neglect of basic social needs such as lack of love, affection, attention, or cuddling.
 None Mild Moderate Severe
6. Neglect of basic physical needs such as food, clothing, and medical care.
 None Mild Moderate Severe
7. Physical Abuse.
 None Mild Moderate Severe

Each child in our survey was given a score ranging from 0 to 7 risk factors. For questions 1-4, a child was given a score of “1” if their parent(s) reported, “Yes” or “I suspect” and “0” if they reported “No.” For questions 5-7, a child was given a score of “1” if their parent(s) answered, “Moderate” or “Severe” and a “0” if their parent(s) reported “None” or “Mild.” Thus, for each question a child was given a score of “0” or “1.” We then totaled up all 7 questions giving the child an overall score ranging from 0 (no risk factors) to 7 (all risk factors). Please feel free to answer the questions above to calculate your child’s score. This may help in understanding the rest of the results (Note: if you have difficulty with this calculation please call Nikki at 612-624-9322).

The following graph shows the number of risk factors reported for the children in our survey.



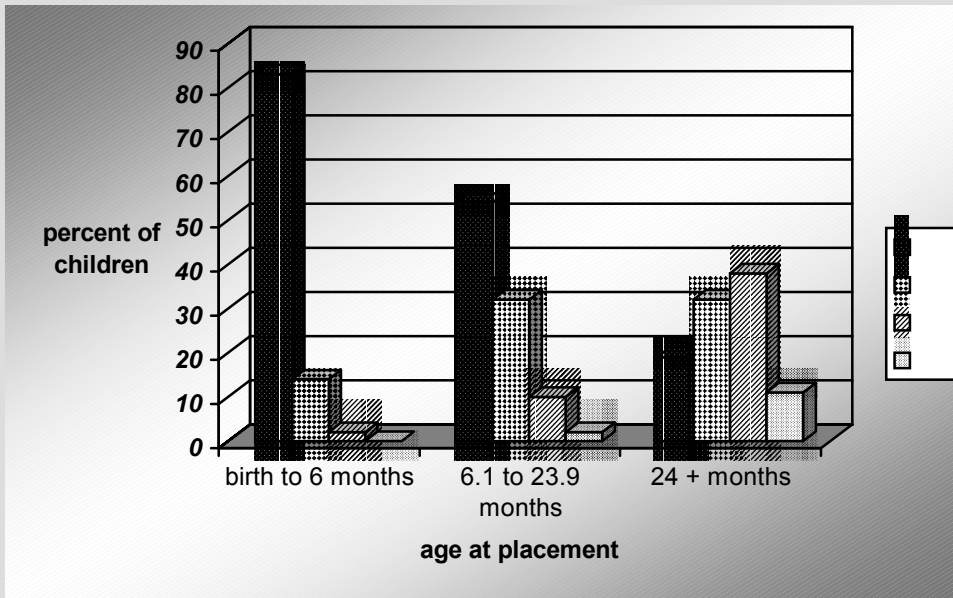
Survey Results continued from page 3

The table below shows which pre-adoption risk factors parents believed their children experienced by area of the world.

	<u>Europe</u>	<u>Latin America</u>	<u>Asia</u>
Prenatal Alcohol/Drug Exposure	44%	15%	9%
Prenatal Malnutrition	50%	41%	24%
Premature Birth	30%	14%	28%
Physically Neglected	45%	26%	12%
Socially Neglected	57%	22%	13%
Physically Abused	13%	6%	3%
6 months or more in an Orphanage, Baby home or Hospital	79%	17%	13%

When reading the table above we can see that parental report of believed pre-adoption risk factors vary by area of the world. So, is there a particular risk factor that has the greatest post-adoption effect on children? Oddly, the type of risk is sometimes less indicative of post-adoption adjustment than the number of risks that accumulated prior to adoption. Past research in child development has shown that quality of development is related to the number of risks factors in children's backgrounds. This finding is consistent with the results of our survey as well. 78% of children in our survey reported 3 or fewer risk factors, and overall they are all doing very well. The picture looks distinctly different, however, for those children that experienced numerous risk factors prior to adoption.

The following graph shows that the likelihood for numerous pre-adoption risk factors increases with age at placement.



In the graphs above you can see that almost all of the children that came into their families prior to 6 months of age have few (0 or 1) pre-adoption risk factors. As the age at placement increases, the numbers of risk factors increase. Nearly 50% of the children placed over 24 months have 4 or more risk factors. This information is important as it clearly shows that we can reduce pre-adoption risk by getting children to their families as early as possible. *Early placement should be a priority for improving outcomes for children.*

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Survey Results...

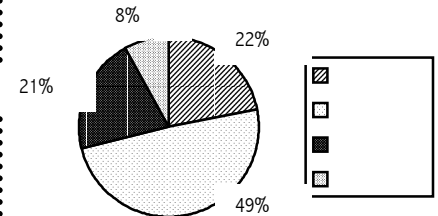
What percentage of children came from each country of origin?

- S. Korea 31% (806 surveys)
- China 10% (257 surveys)
- Colombia 10% (256 surveys)
- India 9% (225 surveys)
- Russia 8% (212 surveys)
- Guatemala 6% (140 surveys)
- Romania 5% (126 surveys)

Where did the kids come from based on area of the world?

- Asia 55% (1402 surveys)
- Latin America 28% (711 surveys)
- Europe 16% (417 surveys)
- Other 1% (21 surveys)

How old were the children who participated in the survey?



You talk about pre-adoption risk factors but what about post-adoption risk factors?

Post-adoption risk factors for children who come to their families through international adoption are very low:

- Less than 2% of the children in our survey experienced a divorce of their parents.
- The medium income for families was approximately twice the average for Minnesota families (census 2000), at \$75,000 to \$100,000. This is important because poverty is one of the largest predictors for post-adoption risk factors.
- 70% of parents, both dads and moms, had a college education. 30% of all parents had advanced degrees such as a master's or doctorate degrees.

All survey results reflect children adopted with the assistance of a MN adoption agency between 1990-1998

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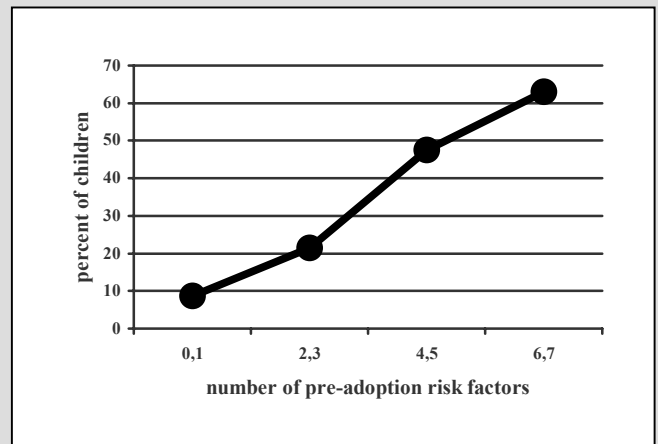
Education: The following results describe how children are doing academically.

In the survey we asked parents who had kids in grades K-12 “In general, how is your child doing academically?” Six options were giving which ranged from “excels in most or all subjects” to “falling behind in most or all subjects.” The following graph looks at how the children are doing based on what year they are in school.

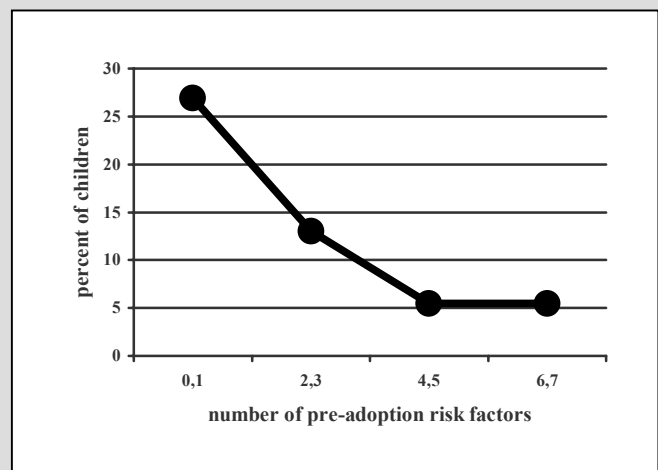


As you can see from the graphs above many children are doing extremely well. Parents report that 69% of elementary school students, 60% of junior high students, and 64% of high school students are excelling in at least one subject. However as children transition into junior high we see a significant increase in the number of whom are falling behind in some or all subjects (from 15% to 28%).

The graph to the right shows the percent of children in grades k-12 falling behind in most or all classes by the number of pre-adoption risk factors. Children with very few pre-adoption risk factors seem to be doing very well. Only about 10% are falling behind in some or all school subjects. However, as risk factors increase, the percentage of children having difficulties at school dramatically increases. Approximately 50% of children with 4 or 5 risk factors and 65% of children with 6 or 7 risk factors are falling behind in most or all subjects.



The next graph shows the percent of children in 4th–12th grade who participate in a gifted and talented class by the number of pre-adoption risk factors. Similar to the graph above, children with very few pre-adoption risk factors seem to be doing very well in school. Approximately 27% of children with 0 or 1 risk factor are participating in these classes. However, you can see the number drops off very quickly, as only about 5% of children with 4 or more risk factors are participating in gifted and talented classes. On a positive note, 18.5 % of all children in grades 4th– 12th are participating in gifted and talented classes!



The Cultural Experience of Children Adopted from Korea

Professor Richard Lee presented some preliminary findings on the cultural experiences of children adopted from South Korea at the 4th Annual Korean American/Adoptee/Adoptive Family Network (KAAN) Conference held on July 27th in Bloomington, MN. The findings are based on 746 surveys from parents of children adopted from Korea who participated in the 2001 IAP survey. The average age of these children was 7.8 years. Most parents (84%) reported that children participated in at least one Korean cultural activity with an average of 3 ½ activities per year. Social-oriented activities (e.g., meals, Korean friends) were the most popular and activities requiring more resources and commitment (e.g., culture camp, learning language) were the least popular. Most parents (85%) also reported talking with their child about racism in school and nearly all parents (92%) reported that schools were sensitive to the needs of racial minorities. About 20% of parents reported that their children sometimes/often experienced intrusive racial comments by peers. About one-third (36%) of parents were involved in a post-adoption parenting group/listserv. Parents involved in a post-adoption group/listserv had their children participate in more Korean cultural activities (1 more activity/year) and were slightly more likely to talk about racism in school with their child (89% vs. 78%). In summary, parents, particularly those involved in a post-adoption group/listserv, reported making concerted efforts to provide positive cultural experiences for their children. Future newsletters will describe the cultural experiences provided to children from other birth countries.

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Education continued: In the International Adoption Project survey we asked numerous questions about learning and behavioral needs. When we asked parents “Has your child ever received or do you think she/he needs special services for learning and/or behavioral problems,” parents of 32.5% (820 children) of all children in the survey and 40% of children in k-12th grade reported yes. **The following information will look only at these 820 children.**

What services did parents report their children were receiving? The following list reports the most common services parents reported children are currently receiving. Parents could check all services their child was receiving.

- Almost 50% of parents in this group reported that their child was receiving academic services. 24% reported they were receiving services for Math and 24.5% reported receiving services for reading.
- 41% of children are receiving Speech/Language services in addition to those receiving help with reading. 21% are receiving help with articulation and 20% for language.
- Almost 18% of these 820 children are in occupational therapy. 7.7% are receiving occupational therapy specific to sensory skills and 9.9% specific to motor skills.

So what services are parents reporting their children are not receiving?

- 50% of parents report that their children are receiving all the services they need.
- 16.2% report their children need additional academic services
- 7.1% report their children need additional speech/language services
- 6.3% report their children need additional mental health services.

What services are parents providing for their children outside of the school system?

- 32.8% of children are receiving help from a tutor.
- 31.6% of children are receiving private mental health services.
- 17.6% of children are receiving private speech/language services.
- 12.1% of children are seeing an audiologist.
- 9.9% of children are receiving private occupational therapy services.
- 6.6% of children are receiving private physical therapy services.

As we can see, speech/language services are the ones that children who come to their families through international adoption are using the most often.

Join Your Friends

The IAP registry was established last year to encourage researchers to write more grants and work on more issues of concern to families who had adopted internationally. As of right now, approximately 2400 parents have registered their families to participate in future adoption research. It is important that we continue to gather families who have recently come together through adoption so that our registry continues to represent the current adoption community.

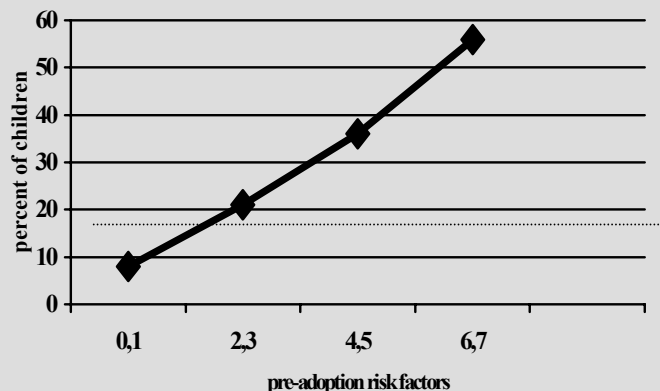
If you know any family whose child has just come home, or has yet to join our registry we would appreciate your making them aware of this registry. The families do not have to live in Minnesota, nor do they have to have adopted in Minnesota in order to be included in this registry. Any family with a child up to the age of 18 is welcome.

To learn more about this registry please contact us at 612-624-9322 or email us at iap@tc.umn.edu.

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Behavioral and Emotional Problems: Studies of the children adopted from Romania in 1990-1991 describe a number of emotional and behavioral problems for many of these children. Are these problems typical of children adopted internationally? To find out, in the survey we included a questionnaire called the Child Behavior Checklist or CBCL. This questionnaire has norms for the general population. We examined whether internationally adopted children were more or less likely to have behavior problems compared to children in general. Again we used the pre-adoption risk scores to group the children. The dotted line across the graph gives the percentage of children in the general population who have significant behavioral problems.

As you look at this graph, it is important to remember that parents of 59% of the children in the survey said their children had 0 or 1 risk factor. These children are less likely to have behavior problems than children in the general population. Children with 2 to 3 pre-adoption risk factors were just a little more likely to have behavior problems than the general population. However, behavior problems become more likely among the children with 4 or more pre-adoption risk factors. These children account for a small number of all of the children in the survey, but they and their families do have to manage significant behavioral problems that may be the result of their early life experiences.



IAP Survey Conclusions: We have learned many things from parents who participated in the survey that will help to foster the lives of children who come to their families through adoption.

First, age at adoption is one of the largest predictors of a child's outcome. Risk factors and age at placement are *highly* correlated; meaning the longer it takes a child to be placed into a family the more likely that child is to have many risk factors. Parents report that children placed before 6 months have few pre-adoption risk factors, while those placed over 24 months often have many.

Second, the number of pre-adoption risk factors a child has is related to post-adoption adjustment. Most children with few risk factors are doing extremely well in every area covered by the survey. Very few are failing at school, and many are doing exceptionally well academically. If anything, they are over-represented in programs for the gifted and talented. The picture is different for children with many pre-adoption risk factors, especially if they were adopted after 24 months of age. Many have significant behavioral and emotional problems, a significant number are falling behind in school, and a high percentage have received special education services.

Third, families of internationally-adopted children are providing stable, stimulating homes. Extremely few children are in lower-income families; indeed, most are in middle- to upper-income homes. Extremely few had experienced instability due to divorce or parental death. Beyond schooling, parents were providing many enrichment experiences that require additional fees and parent effort.

The overwhelming message from this study is that international adoption is a powerful intervention in the lives of children. Nonetheless, it can't eliminate the effects of their pre-adoption experiences. Reducing pre-adoption risk, in part by getting children to their families as early as possible, should be a priority for improving outcomes for these children. Beyond this, for children with significant pre-adoption risk factors, we need to know more about how to intervene to support their development.

In the coming months and years we will be writing for federal funding to conduct the studies that may help all of us understand how to intervene to support optimal development of children adopted from more difficult pre-adoption circumstances. We will also be conducting studies of how internationally adopted children who are minorities in the US culture come to understand their unique identities as they transition into adolescence.

We want to thank you for your support for our work thus far and look forward to continued collaboration



International Adoption Project

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Upcoming Research Opportunities:

Social-Emotional Development: Jackie Bruce, a graduate student working with Dr. Gunnar on her dissertation, will begin a new research project with 6 and 7-year-old children who came to their families through international adoption. The project will study the children's social-emotional development, such as the ability to interact with unfamiliar adults, understand emotion, and regulate behavior. It is expected that Jackie will begin to recruit families for her study in October. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact her by e-mail: bruce009@umn.edu.

Stress, Growth, and Adjustment: Currently, we are planning a study that will look at internationally adopted children who have recently come into their families. We are interested in looking at if there are differences in the daily cycle of cortisol, a stress hormone, in children during their transition into their families. We are also interested in the child's growth trajectories, since many children have such huge growth spurts immediately after entering their families. This project is a collaborative effort between the Gunnar lab and International Adoption Clinic at the University of Minnesota. There is no anticipated start date at this time; however, we hope to begin sometime in 2003.

International Adoption Project 2001 Survey Results

When: **Monday Sept. 23rd**
Where: **Southdale Library**
Time: **7pm to 9pm**

Come join Dr. Gunnar and Dr. Lee as they present results included in this newsletter as well as other results from the University of Minnesota's 2001 International Adoption Project Survey. There will time allotted for a question and answer session at the end of the talk.

Please contact Meg Bale at 612-624-9322 or balex002@tc.umn.edu with your questions.