Waiting Child, Ready Parents: Parents’ Perceptions of Pre-Adoption Preparation for China’s Waiting Child Program and Child Well-being

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Background

- China’s Waiting Child program lets foreign parents adopt children with special needs (SNs) more quickly than non-SN infants (Tan, Mathis, & Dedrick, 2007).
- From 2000-2016, the population of Chinese children adopted to the US shifted from non-SN infant girls to older boys & girls with SNs (Smalkin, 2012; U.S. Department of State/Bureau of Consular Affairs, n.d.).
- Adoptive parents’ use of preparation services is correlated with feeling more prepared for adoption (Wind, Brooks, & Barth, 2000), higher adoption satisfaction (Pulsen & Merighi, 2009), fewer post-adoption challenges (Pulsen & Merighi, 2009).
- Child and family functioning is correlated with feelings of preparedness (Sar, 2000); not correlated with use of preparation services (Sar, 2000).
- Parents are relatively unsatisfied with adoption preparation (Berry, Barth, & Needell, 1996; Ruston & Monck, 2009).

Research questions: When adopting from China’s Waiting Child program, what preparation methods do parents use and which do they find helpful? For what content areas do they feel prepared and which do they think are important? How does adoption preparation relate to post-adoption outcomes?

Method

- Instrument: Online survey distributed via social media & mailing lists
- Sample size: 73
- Eligibility: American adoptive parents of children who had been adopted from China’s Waiting Child program between 2002-2012

Respondent demographics:
- 92% female
- 95% adopted as a married couple
- 88% white or part of an all-white couple
- Average no. of children: 3

Target child demographics:
- 66% female
- Average time in institution: 22 mo
- Average age at survey: 6 yrs
- Most common SNs: cleft palate (22), cleft lip (19), heart defect (16), missing limb (7), club foot (6)

Results: Preparation Content Areas

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Results: Preparation Methods

- Use of preparation services was correlated with feeling prepared (reinforcing Wind et al. [2000]), but not adoption satisfaction or child functioning (contradicting Paulsen & Merighi [2009]).
- We reinforced Sar’s finding that use of services is not correlated with child functioning, but contradicted the finding that feeling prepared is correlated.
- Parents’ perceptions can give insights on ways to improve relevance and effectiveness of preparation. E.g., parents felt unprepared for emotional issues, but considered it very important; same for parenting stress. Online forums were found to be very helpful, but only some parents used them.

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Discussion

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