

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

Sarah Elizabeth Neville & Ellen E. Pinderhughes
Education Development Center Tufts University

Background

- China's Waiting Child program lets foreign parents adopt children with special needs (SNs) more quickly than non-SN infants (Tan, Marfo, & 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 (Selman, 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, 2005),
 - higher adoption satisfaction (Paulsen & Merighi, 2009),
 - fewer post-adoption challenges (Paulsen & 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:

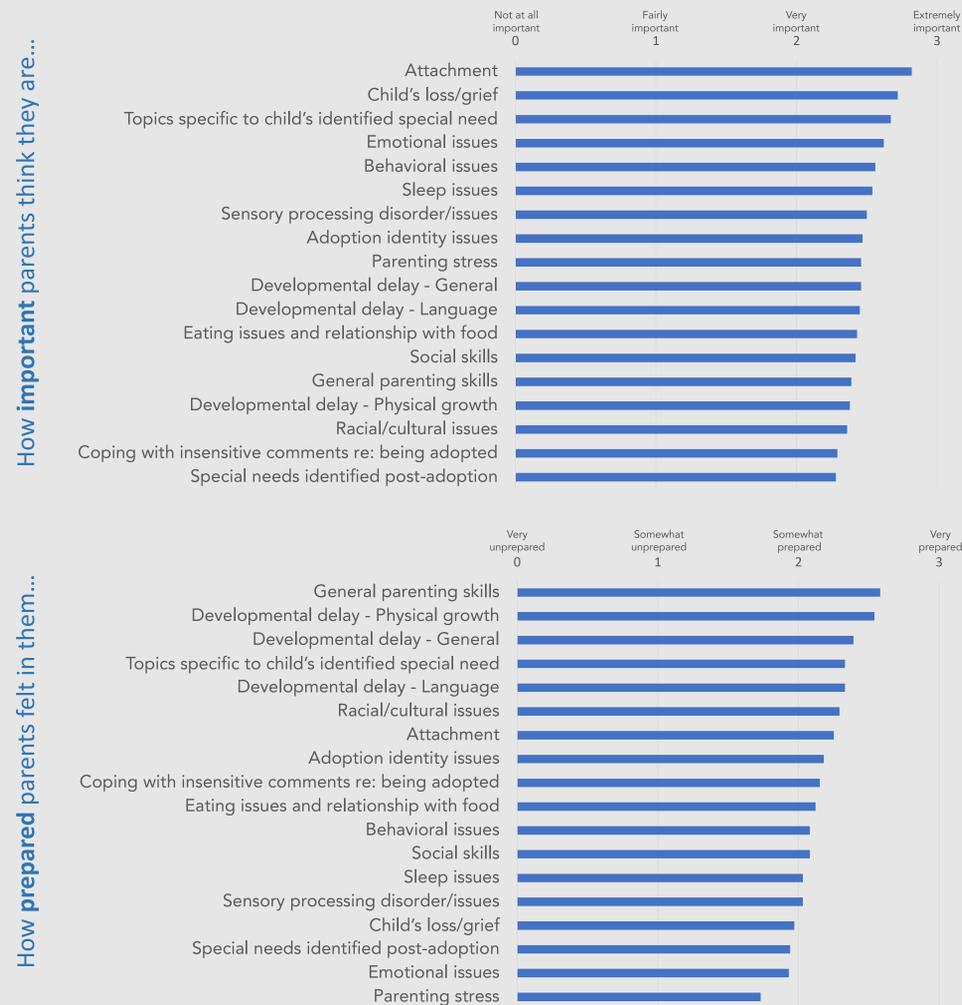
- 66% female
- Average time in institution: 22 mo
- Average age at survey: 6 yrs
- Most common SNs: cleft palate (22), cleft lip (19), heart defect (16), missing limb (7), club foot (6)

Results: Preparation & Outcomes

(Pearson's correlation)	Total number of preparation tasks parents used	Parents' average rating of their preparation tasks' helpfulness
Parents' adoption satisfaction	$r = -.047$	$r = .171$
Child's total difficulties score (parent report)	$r = -.022$	$r = .026$
Child's prosocial score (parent report)	$r = .192$	$r = .185$
Parents' rating of the overall smoothness of their adoption	$r = -.015$	$r = .151$
Parents' rating of how prepared they felt at the time of adoption	$r = -.057$	$r = -.030$
Parents' rating of how prepared they truly were in retrospect	$r = .312$ ★	$r = .413$ ★

Key: ★ Significant at the $p < .001$ level

Results: Preparation Content Areas



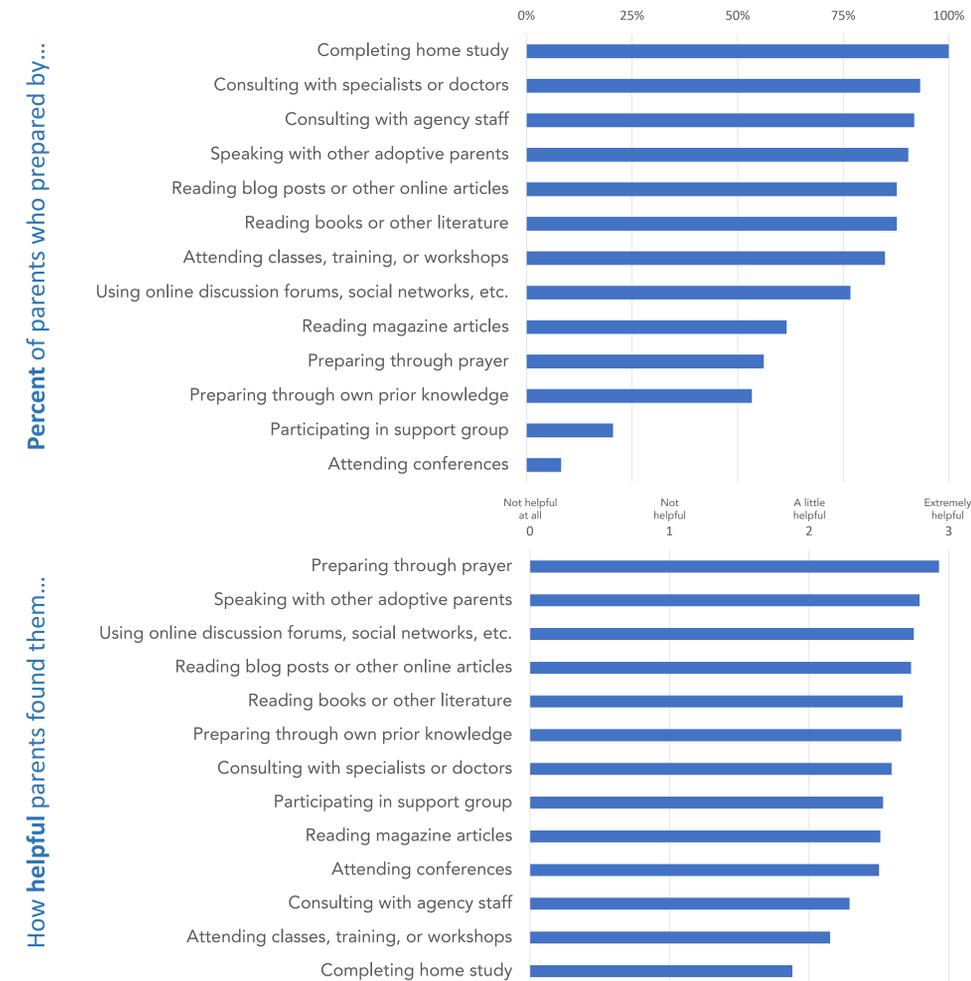
Importance of vs. Preparedness in Content Areas

Looking at each content area, there were *only* significant positive relationships between importance of and preparedness in... (Spearman's rank-order correlation)

- Racial/cultural issues ($r_s = .414, p < .000$) ★
- Adoption identity issues ($r_s = .290, p = .013$) ★
- Physical growth delays ($r_s = .315, p = .007$) ★

There were no significant negative relationships, so there was no area for which the more important parents thought it was, the less prepared they felt in it.

Results: Preparation Methods



Discussion

- 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 consider it very important; same for parenting stress. Online forums were found to be very helpful, but only some parents used them.

References

Berry, M., Barth, R. P., & Needell, B. (1996). Preparation, support, and satisfaction of adoptive families in agency and independent adoptions. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 13(2), 157-183.

Paulsen, C., & Merighi, J. R. (2009). Adoption preparedness, cultural engagement, and parental satisfaction in intercountry adoption. *Adoption Quarterly*, 12(1), 1-18.

Rushton, A., & Monck, E. (2009). Adopters' experiences of preparation to parent children with serious difficulties. *Adoption & Fostering*, 33(2), 4-12.

Sar, B. K. (2000). Preparation for adoptive parenthood with a special-needs child. *Adoption Quarterly*, 3(4), 63-80.

Selman, P. (2012). The global decline of intercountry adoption: What lies ahead? *Social Policy and Society*, 11(3), 381-397.

Tan, T. X., Marfo, K., & Dedrick, R. F. (2007). Special needs adoption from China: Exploring child-level indicators, adoptive family characteristics, and correlates of behavioral adjustment. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29(10), 1269-1285.

U.S. Department of State/Bureau of Consular Affairs. (n.d.). Statistics: Intercountry adoption. Retrieved from <https://travel.state.gov/content/adoptionsabroad/en/about-us/statistics.html>

Wind, L. H., Brooks, D., & Barth, R. P. (2005). Adoption preparation. *Adoption Quarterly*, 8(4), 45-74.