INTRODUCTION

Children raised in orphanages and other institutional settings face multiple risk factors for development, including: neglect, poor nutrition, and lack of consistent relationships with adults (Gunnar, Bruce, & Grotevant, 2000).

Internationally adopted (IA) children from institutions often arrive at their adoptive homes with growth, cognitive, and linguistic delays (Johnson, 2002; Rutter, 1998).

Despite initial language delays, English language acquisition in vocabulary and grammar typically progresses quickly after adoption, particularly in the area of auditory comprehension (Glenzen, 2007).

The goal of this investigation was to assess the language and communication skills of school-age orphanage-reared IA children.

HYPOTHESES

- IA children reared in institutions for longer periods of time would demonstrate deficits in language secondary to early adversity associated with institutional care.
- Length of institutionalization would relate to:
  1. Composite expressive of Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals-4 (CELF-4)
  2. Children’s Communication Checklist-2 (CCC-2)
  3. Children’s total utterances during a parent-child conversation task
- Time in adoptive home would account for gains in language development.
- Parent ratings of children’s language skills on the CCC-2 would relate to:
  1. Children’s expressive language scores
  2. Children’s total number of utterances during parent-child conversation task

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics: Group Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standardized Test Results</th>
<th>TONI-3</th>
<th>CELF-4</th>
<th>CCC-2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time Adopted</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>110.3</td>
<td>85.3</td>
<td>81.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- CELF-4 receptive language scores (M = 85.3; SD = 16.3) were low but within typical limits.
- CELF-4 expressive language scores were more than 1 SD below the mean.
- CELF-4 core language scores were more than 1 SD below the mean (M = 81.6; SD = 18.3).

- Children institutionalized for >24 months scored significantly lower on both expressive and receptive CELF-4 than did children who lived in an institution for ≤24 months, t(23) = 2.85, p < .01.

Correlational Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Adopted</th>
<th>TONI-3</th>
<th>CELF-4</th>
<th>CCC-2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time Adopted</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CELF-4</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC-2</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Partial correlations adjusted for age

- Children institutionalized for >24 months scored significantly lower on both expressive and receptive CELF-4 than did children who lived in an institution for ≤24 months, t(23) = 2.85, p < .01.

- However, duration of institutional care independently predicted expressive CELF-4 performance even after controlling for time in adoptive home, r = .36, p < .05.

- Marginal correlations found between CCC-2 and total utterances in parent-child conversation, r = .48, p = .07, as well as age of adoption and total utterances in the conversation, r = .39, p = .07.

CONCLUSIONS

- The findings of this study reveal an apparent discrepancy between the language performance of post-institutionalized IA children based on duration of institutional care.
- Low and below average language scores were in the presence of TONI scores within normal limits.
- Children who have lived in an institution for more than 24 months may be particularly vulnerable to school-age language difficulties, in part because they were exposed to English at a later age.
- Future directions include evaluating the range of social interaction styles in post-institutionalized children by analyzing children’s utterances during parent-child conversations and performance on a figurative language task.

REFERENCES


