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Children adopted from other countries have high self-esteem

Children from other countries adopted by Canadian families report higher self-esteem as adults than the general population, says a study of inter-country adoption conducted by researchers at the University of Toronto and Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo.

Fifty-six per cent of inter-country adoptees scored high on self-esteem measures compared to 45 per cent in the general population.

"It is possible that the people who choose to adopt from other countries and go to the effort involved make particularly good parents and nurture a strong sense of self-esteem in their children," said Anne Westhues, a professor of social work at Laurier, who led the study with Joyce Cohen of U of T's faculty of social work.

However, the researchers also found that 85 per cent of male adoptees and 82 per cent of female adoptees said that they had experienced "nasty or unpleasant behaviours" because of their ethnic or racial background.

The three-year study involved face-to-face interviews with 126 families living in British Columbia, Quebec, and Ontario who had adopted children from South Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Bangladesh, most during the 1970s. The objective was to assess how internationally adopted children and their families have fared now that adoptees have reached adolescence and young adulthood.

Other findings include:

- Most adoptees were comfortable or very comfortable with their racial background (76 per cent males, 74 per cent females). A small group (five per cent males, four per cent females) said they did not know how to think of themselves ethnically.
- In many areas, such as school performance, the responses of inter-county adoptees echo their Canadian family siblings. (71 per cent of adoptees felt that parents were satisfied with their school performance, compared to 77 per cent of siblings.)

(More)

- **About** half of inter-country adoptees considered themselves Canadian or Quebecois (52 per cent among males, 41 per cent among females).

"While more education is needed to help reduce racism, on the whole inter-country adoptees are functioning as well as their counterparts in the general population," Cohen said. "They appear to be well integrated into their families, have high self-esteem, have friends and positive peer relations."

Westhues and Cohen conclude that the practice of international adoption should be continued in Canada.

The study recommends that provinces continue their commitment to school programs aimed at preventing racism and, together with local boards of education, offer training to school personnel on how to handle racism.

It also recommends that:

- educational and support services be available for families before and after inter-country adoptions;
- specialized training be provided for social workers conducting home studies for inter-country adoptions and for physicians, on health care problems the adoptees may have when entering the country;
- regulations be developed to govern the cost of inter-country adoption;
- and a centralized information system be established to record the number of children admitted to Canada for adoption.

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