

Summary of the British Chinese Adoption Study

The British Chinese Adoption Study explored the experiences and mid-life outcomes of a group of 72 out of 100 women who were brought from orphanages in Hong Kong to the UK in the 1960s and adopted by British families. The results are published in [*Adversity, Adoption and Afterwards: A midlife follow-up study of women adopted from Hong Kong*](#), (Feast, Grant Rushton and Simmonds). The study gathered both quantitative and qualitative data on a wide range of issues such as growing up in an adoptive family, health and well-being, adult partnerships, community relationships, parenting and experiences linked to being (in most cases) transracially adopted, lack of information about origins and access to information. In the Foreword for the book Professor Sir Michael Rutter commented:

“In many respects, the most important point to make is that the BCAS provides an outstandingly impressive example of the huge advantages that derive from the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The former has the strength of providing numerical findings on the extent to which groups differ on standardised scores or ratings of a range of variables but, particularly in unusual circumstances, it loses out on the personal meaning or individual feelings about personal experiences. That is just what qualitative interviewing provides. But what is really distinctive about the BCAS is the thoughtful integration of the two approaches. That has worked spectacularly well in a range of ways that are well described in the book.

The key findings:

- Seventy-two women participated in the study, out of a potential group of 100. The average age of participants was 48 years (ranging from 42 to 53 years).
- Comparison groups of UK-born adopted and non-adopted women of similar age were drawn from the 1958 UK National Child Development Study.
- The adoptive parents were all married couples, most with parenting experience. 90% of the couples were white British.
- At the time we interviewed the women, 90% of them were living in the UK, in a range of locations from the major cities to rural communities.
- Virtually all of the women reported some experience of racism or prejudice – this ranged from playground name-calling during childhood to racists taunts in adulthood.
- 77% of the women were married or cohabiting; 71% were parents (including a small number who had adopted children). 97% said they had a person in their life they could turn to for support when needed – this was very similar to both the comparison groups.
- On the study's main measures of psychological adjustment and life satisfaction, there were no statistically significant differences between the ex-orphanage women and the comparison groups. However, the interviews with the women made it clear that this did not mean problem-free lives but most had managed to cope well enough when challenges arose.

- The majority felt a sense of belonging in the UK and felt comfortable going out to public places . Most did not have close links with Chinese people in the UK.
- There was no evidence of increased risk for major physical health problems; using the same comparison groups as above.
- In comparison with other groups who had suffered more severe early deprivation or maltreatment, the following were almost entirely absent at the follow-up: contact with the criminal justice system, in-patient psychiatric care, removal of at risk children and serious drug/alcohol problems

Overall, the findings are positive with good levels of mental and physical health, educational achievement, family life and relationships with adoptive family members. Most of the women told us that, on balance, life has been good and when reflecting back on their lives and said that adoption has given them considerable opportunities and provided them with families who love and supported them. However, many of the women also stressed that being internationally and transracially adopted adds another specific dimension to the adoption experience which should not be ignored.

The majority of the women encountered racism not just in childhood and adolescence, but also as adults in current day Britain. Some said that they were able to seek support from their adoptive families, or others close to them, in coping and managing racist incidents, while others described feeling isolated and not able to share this with anyone. For some it was not easy living with the fact of being from a different ethnic background and visibly different from their adoptive families. This could result for some having a sense of not belonging or not feeling able to identify with either white British or Chinese communities. By mid-life most of the women who experienced this had found ways to adequately deal with such feelings, which is not to minimise how difficult this had been for some.

The strengths and limitations of the study and possible reasons for the largely positive outcomes despite a poor start in life are discussed in the book.