

Romania's abandoned children

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Romania's Abandoned Children, a new book from Harvard University Press, chronicles the Bucharest Early Intervention Project, a landmark study of the devastating effects of deprivation on the development of children.

"This study has important implications for the million or so children in the U.S. who experience neglect sufficient to involve child protective services every year," says Dr. Charles H. Zeanah, one of the principal investigators, a co-author of the book and Sellars-Polchow Chair of Psychiatry at Tulane University. Dr. Charles A. Nelson, Professor of Pediatrics and Neuroscience, Harvard Medical School; and Nathan A. Fox, Professor of Human Development and Quantitative Methodology, University of Maryland, also are co-principal investigators of the study and co-authors of the book.

The 12-year [study](#), begun in 2000, followed 136 infants and toddlers who had been abandoned and were in Romanian institutions. Half were randomly assigned to foster care while the others were assigned to "care as usual" or continued institutional care. A third group of children raised by their families also were studied. The researchers periodically assessed the children over the course of the study, measuring many aspects of development including physical, emotional, cognitive, social and language.

The study, as a randomized clinical trial, provides definitive proof of causal links between the interventions, including placing institutionalized children in foster care, and the outcomes. *Romania's Abandoned Children* shines new light on numerous [effects](#) of adversity on physical and brain development, with more attention to brain functioning related to institutional rearing than has ever been provided before.

"Our results suggest that institutional care is a particularly harmful way to care for children," says Zeanah. "For children being raised in any kind of adversity, the sooner you can get them into an adequate caregiving environment, the better their chances are for developing normally."