

## A FOLLOW-UP OF MEN AND WOMEN WHO GREW UP IN ROMANIAN ORPHANAGES

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**Abstract.** In 1997-98, 55 boys (born 1976) and 20 girls (born 1977) who grew up in Romania orphanages were followed up. 31% of the men and 24% of the women had good contact with their families, whereas 40% of the men and 58% of the women had no contact at all. Only 15% of the men and 29% of the women were in school or had a legal job, while 27% of the men and 35% of the women had never had a job at all. The majority had lived partly in places not intended for human habitation, and partly by foundations, friends, occasional employers and in hostels of schools and factories. Only 32% had rented accommodation, while 11% were exclusively street youths. Poor physical health was reported by 3% of the men and 24% of the women, whereas 45% of the men and 24% of the women had some minor medical problems. Serious mental disorder was present in 7%, and 16% had some mental problems. None admitted alcohol abuse, but 7% of the men reported some problems with drinking. Most had probably committed minor crimes without being arrested. Of 14 men with files in the criminal register, 12 (22%) had been sentenced to imprisonment. Only 26% of both sexes were satisfied with themselves, and only 35% of the men and 25% of the women were satisfied with their lives. Ten of 20 women had given birth to one each. Of 10 children, one died shortly after birth, and five are living in orphanages.

**Key words:** orphanages, ex-care, follow-up, jobs, accommodation, diseases, alcohol, drugs, criminality.

**Rezumat.** Între anii 1997-1998 au fost urmăriți 55 de băieți (născuți în 1976) și 20 de fete (născute în 1977) care au crescut în orfelinate. Investigația a evidențiat că 31% dintre bărbați și 24% dintre femei au avut contacte bune cu familia lor, în timp ce 40% dintre bărbați și 58% dintre femei nu au avut nici un contact cu familia lor. Doar 15% dintre bărbați și 29% dintre femei erau în școală sau erau încadrați legal în servicii, iar 27% dintre bărbați și 35% dintre femei care nu au avut niciodată un serviciu. Majoritatea trăiau în spații care nu erau destinate să fie locuite de oameni și, parțial, trăiau cu ajutorul fundațiilor, prietenilor, angajărilor ocazionale, în căminele școlilor sau fabricilor. Doar 32% aveau propria locuință, în timp ce 11% erau exclusiv tinerii străzii. Sănătatea fizică proastă a fost găsită la 3% dintre bărbați și 24% dintre femei, în timp ce 45% dintre bărbați și 24% dintre femei au avut unele probleme medicale minore. Dezordini mentale grave au fost prezente la 7% dintre subiecți și 16% au avut unele probleme mentale. Nici unul nu a admis abuzul de alcool, dar 7% dintre bărbați au declarat unele probleme cu băutura. Cei mai mulți dintre subiecți au comis infracțiuni minore fără a fi arestați. Dintre 14 bărbați cu dosare în registrul criminalității, 12 (22%) au fost sau sunt internați în pușcării. Doar 26% dintre subiecții de ambele sexe au fost mulțumiți cu ceea ce au realizat și numai 35% dintre bărbați și 25% dintre femei au fost mulțumiți de felul cum trăiesc. 10 din 20 de femei au născut câte un copil. Din 10 copii, unul a murit la scurt timp după naștere și 5 trăiesc în orfelinate.

**Cuvinte cheie: orfelinate, investigație, slujbe, adăpost și hrană, boli, alcool, droguri, criminalitate.**

#### INTRODUCTION

Boys and girls who spent their first 13-14 years of life in extremely inadequate Romanian orphanages “during Ceausescu”, and their teenage years under still miserable conditions in the years after the revolution in 1999, were followed up. They belong to the Romanian orphans who have suffered most during institutionalization.

The purpose of this part of the study has been to examine what happened to them after discharge from the orphanage. It has been possible to find more than 90 publications on in-care children, and there are certainly more. Numerous projects have demonstrated the deleterious short-term consequences of institutional child rearing. Less often has it been studied what happens to orphans when they leave the orphanage. There is a lack of epidemiological data upon which to base policy development and the planning of relevant services.

Hodges & Tizard (1-2) carried out a follow-up of former in-care women who had reached an average age of 16 years. Already at this age, it was very difficult to find the subjects. Wolkind (3), Wolkind & Rutter (4) and Wolkind & Kruk (5) examined a group of former in-care women during their first pregnancies. A group of former in-care females were followed to early adult life by Rutter & Quinton (6) and Quinton & Rutter (7). The projects mentioned in the foregoing were all carried out in London. The orphanages were excellently staffed, and provided high quality conditions for the children.

To our knowledge, there is only one study on male ex-orphans (8). Furthermore, there is no long-term follow-up of women who have grown up in orphanages of low quality, similar to the inadequate institutions described in many countries in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Findings from such studies may be of importance for several reasons. First, it is of general and theoretical interest to examine possible long-term effects of extremely inadequate institutional upbringing: how disastrous can such rearing be? Secondly, most residential institutions are probably still very inadequate. If the consequences are as deleterious as they are assumed to be, prevention will be important.

#### MATERIAL

The sample consists of 55 men born 1976, and 20 women born 1977 who spent the last years of the in-care time in House of Children in Budai. Instead of the 1976 cohort of women, which only covered three cases, the 1977 cohort was used. The cases had all fairly normal intelligence, and no severe physical handicaps. They left Budai between 1993 and 1997, at an age of 16-22 years (average age 18 years). Both cohorts were followed up 1997-98, at an average age of 22 years for men and 21 years for women.

Before 1989, the rule was that only boys to Budai, while the girls were placed in another orphanage. In 1989 this was changed, and girls came from other orphanages to Budai. This done

in order to improve the social relationship between boys and girls. The purpose was to reduce homosexual activities among the boys in Budai. This explains the dominance of boys in the cohorts.

When the orphans had to leave the orphanage, they received a small amount of money, corresponding to half the amount which the orphanage was paid for each orphan as long as they were in care, a blanket, a pillow and some clothes. From now on they had to take care of themselves. In fact, they were “thrown out”, without a job, without a place to stay, and without any means for living.

#### METHOD

The record of the House of Children Budai were used to find the cases. In addition, different official offices in the district, the files of the Romanian Police and the Romanian Military Service, and registers of maternities, mental hospitals as well as churches in the area provided information.

Family members (if known and available), friends, class mates and teachers helped to locate the cases. For instance, a case could tell that a mate had moved to another town or to another country, or that the person was living in places not intended for human habitation.

In order to get information about the place where a case might be found, each case was looked for in different rural and urban places in Iasi city as well as other places in Moldova. The directly contacted cases were found on the streets, in railway stations and bus terminals, in pubs, hospitals, prisons, and the army. Some were staying

illegally in hostels and factories. A few lived with humanitarian foundations, friends, or with their family.

#### **Different levels of information**

For most cases, it was possible to have some information from official registers. These data, which are incomplete and rather unreliable, include information from records of orphanages, schools, social and community service agencies, and police. It provided information on education, employment, military service, and criminality. This is called *general information* (GI).

If a case could not be contacted, e.g. because the residence was unknown or the person was dead, information was obtained from persons who knew the case. It could be a family member, a close mate, or staff from orphanages, schools, and colleges. This is called *indirect contact* (IC). By indirect contact, persons who knew the case very well could sometimes also provide sufficient information regarding some of the items in a questionnaire. IC includes general information (GI).

Whenever possible, the case was contacted personally and was asked to participate in the study. This is called *direct contact* (DC). DC also included information collected by indirect contact as well as general information mentioned above.

As showed in Table 1, 34 men and 12 women were contacted personally and participated in a semi-structured interview. When necessary (and practically possible), they had a medical examination.

**Table 1. Sources of information**

	Men		Women		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
General information only (GI)	11	20.0	3	15.0	14	18.7
Indirect contact (IC) + GI	10	18.2	5	25.0	15	20.0
Direct contact (DC) + IC + GI	34	61.8	12	60.0	46	61.3
Total	55	100.0	20	100.0	75	100.0

$\chi^2$  (2 df) = 0.045, N.S.

Of men known to live in Iasi, five could not be interviewed: three refused, one could not be found, and one was hiding from the police. Of cases living in other parts of Romania, it was possible to find out what had happened to six: one of whom was in prison. Nine of the men were interviewed in prison and two were in the army. One man had been found dead in the sewer drain in Iasi. He had been in orphanages from birth to age 13, when he returned to his maternal family. His mother was poor, unemployed and an alcoholic. He decided to leave the family and preferred to live in the sewer drains. In orphanages, he had been beaten by the other boys and by supervisors and teachers. In the sewer drains, he was beaten by others who lived there, and by the police.

Nobody knew what had happened to nine men who had left Moldova and

could not be found. However, there was some register information about them.

Twelve women have been interviewed, and it was possible to find somebody who could give information about five. Nobody could tell what happened to three.

#### RESULTS

Table 2 shows that follow-up, nobody had definitely left Romania. Most had remained in Iasi (62% of the men and 55% of the women), while 38% of the men and 45% of the women had moved to other parts of Romania. Nine men were in prison and two men in the army. In summer time, many go to the beach of the Black Sea, while some go for some months to Greece, Turkey, Germany and France. In winter time, some go to ski resorts in the mountains, or to Bucuresti, but most return to Iasi when the tourist season is over.

**Table 2. Residence**

	Men		Women		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Living in Iasi	34	61.8	11	55.0	45	60.0
Living outside Iasi	21	38.2	9	45.0	30	40.0
Total	55	100.0	20	100.0	75	100.0

$\chi^2$  (1 df) = 0.284, N.S.

The following table shows whether the cases have any contact with their

families. Sporadic contact means that the case has been together with family

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members once or twice. Good contact means that the case visits the family

regularly, stays with the family, and is sometimes helped by family members.

**Table 3. Contact with the family at follow-up**

	Men		Women		Total	
	n	%	N	%	n	%
No contact	22	40.0	10	58.0	32	44.4
Sporadic contact	16	29.1	3	17.5	19	26.4
Good contact	17	30.9	4	23.5	21	29.2
Total	55	100.0	17	100.0	72	100.0

$$\chi^2 (2 \text{ df}) = 1.92, \text{ N.S.}$$

As can be seen in Table 3, 44% had no contact with the family at follow-up. Sporadic contact was reported by 26%. One of the men with sporadic contact met his father when both were in prison. Only 29% had good contact with their family. It seems that women had less contact with the family than men had.

When the orphans left the orphanage, they usually tried to get in touch with their families. Often, family members could not be found. Sometimes ex-orphans succeeded in finding one or both parents. When they tried to get in touch, it often happened that they were not accepted, for instance by a mother

who married and who afraid of the reaction of her husband. Some of those who were accepted could live with the family, while many families were too poor to be able to care for another family member. Sometimes, the cases were accepted, but could not adapt to a normal family life after many years of institutionalization. Some could not stand the primitive life in houses with floors of earth and without water or electricity, and with days without food. Some were beaten by an alcoholic parent or by siblings and half-siblings, and decided to leave the family.

**Table 4. Civil status**

	Men		Women		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Single	45	81.8	11	55.0	56	74.7
Living with a partner	10	18.2	5	25.0	15	20.0
Married	0	0	4	20.0	4	5.3
Total	55	100.0	20	100.0	75	100.0

$$\chi^2 (2 \text{ df}) = 12.73, p < 0.01$$

It is shown in Table 4 that most of the men were single, few were living with a girl-friend, while none was married. The women's situation was different; 55% were single, 25% were living with a

boy-friend, and 20% were married. The difference between men and women is statistically significant.

Ten of the women had given birth to one child each. Of the 10 children, one

died shortly after birth, five were living by the families.  
 living in orphanages, and four were

**Table 5. Academic performance**

	Men		Women		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Not finished elementary school	10	18.2	1	5.0	11	14.7
Finished elementary school	14	25.4	4	20.0	18	24.0
Vocational schools, higher schools	31	56.4	15	75.0	46	61.3
Total	55	100.0	20	100.0	75	100.0

$\chi^2$  (2 df) = 2.75, N.S.

As can be seen in Table 5, 18% of the men and 5% of the women had not finished elementary school. Of 12 men sentenced to imprisonment, six had not finished elementary school. Furthermore, 25% of the men and 20% of the women

had graduated from elementary school, while 56% of the men and 75% of the women had been, or were still in vocational schools, high schools, colleges or universities.

**Table 6. Occupation**

	Men		Women		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Still studying	2	3.6	4	23.5	6	8.3
Permanent job	6	10.9	1	5.9	7	9.7
Sporadic/illegal jobs	32	58.2	6	35.3	38	52.8
Never employed	15	27.3	6	35.3	21	29.2
Total	55	100.0	17	100.0	72	100.0

$\chi^2$  (3 df) = 8.09, p < 0.05

Table 6 shows a statistically significant difference between men and women. More women than men were still studying. Very few (11% of the men and 6% of the women) had a legal job, while 58% of the men and 35% of the women had only sporadic or illegal jobs. The men worked illegally or sporadically on farms or in factories. Girls worked illegally in families, for instance looking after children. As many as 27% of the men and 35% of the women had never had any job.

This means that 82% had periodically or always been living by stealing.

The man who died and none of 12 men sentenced to imprisonment had never been employed.

One group of homeless people are those who sleep at the homes of friends and relatives, the stay being not continuous. According to the United Nations, "absolute homelessness" refers to people who sleep outdoors, in vehicles or in abandoned buildings (9).

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**Table 7. Residence**

	Men		Women		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Absolute homelessness	6	10.9	2	10.0	8	10.7
Occasional accommodation	30	54.6	7	35.0	37	49.3
School hostels	2	3.6	4	20.0	6	8.0
Rented accommodation	17	30.9	7	35.0	24	32.0
Total	55	100.0	20	100.0	75	100.0

$\chi^2$  (3 df) = 6.13, N.S.

Table 7 shows that 11% of the men were absolutely homeless. They lived in places not intended for human habitation, such as parks, streets, bus terminals, railway stations, unfinished buildings or dilapidated houses. With one exception (a prisoner who had inherited a flat), those who had been sentenced to imprisonment belonged to the absolute homelessness group or occasional accommodation. More than half lodged

temporarily by humanitarian foundations, friends, occasional employers and in hostels of factories. Those who were in the army belonged to this category. Only 32% had rented accommodations.

Homeless people, who have to sleep outside or in buildings without heating, usually have a high degree of physical diseases. The distribution of cases in this sample are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8. Physical health**

	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	n	%	n	%
Poor	1	2.3	4	23.5	5	8.2
Some problems	20	45.4	4	23.5	24	39.3
Good	23	52.3	9	53.0	32	52.5
Total	44	100.0	17	100.0	61	100.0

$\chi^2$  (2 df) = 8.26, p < 0.02

It is shown in Table 8 that more women than men reported poor physical health (24% versus 2%). Of these, all had a serious disease and had spent much time in hospitals. Those who slept outdoors and were received in mental hospitals on very cold days

(i.e. persons with "social illness") have not been included as "ill". Furthermore, 45% of the men and 24% of the women had some minor medical problems. Roughly half of the cases declared that their health was good.

**Table 9. Mental health**

	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	n	%	n	%
Poor	3	6.8	0	0	3	4.9
Some problems	7	15.9	0	0	17	11.5
Good	34	77.3	17	100.0	51	83.6
Total	44	100.0	17	100.0	61	100.0

$\chi^2$  (2 df) = 4.62, N.S.

Table 9 shows that 7% of the men had more serious mental disorders and 16% had some mental problems. Every woman and 77% of the men considered that they had a good mental health. According to self-report

none were problem drinkers, while 7% of the men admitted drinking too much (Table 10). Chi-2 could not be calculated because of too many small call numbers.

**Table 10. Alcohol**

	Men		Women		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Problem drinking	0	0	0	0	0	0
Some alcohol problems	3	6.8	0	0	3	4.9
No problem drinking	41	93.2	17	100.0	58	95.1
Total	44	100.0	17	100.0	61	100.0

**Table 11. Drugs**

	Men		Women		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Drug dependence	0	0	0	0	0	0
Some use	1	2.3	0	0	1	1.6
No problem	43	97.7	17	100.0	60	98.4
Total	44	100.0	17	100.0	61	100.0

None admitted drug dependence, and only one man reported some abuse of varnishes and dyes (Table 11). Chi-2 could not be calculated because of too many small call numbers.

The cases were searched in the central criminal register. This register covers only those who have been sentenced by court for major offences. Minor offenses are recorded by the local police in the villages, and by the police at railway station. Since a majority of the cases had no legal income, it is most likely that they lived by stealing and that minor offences occurred too frequently to be dealt with by the police. This information is

non-systematical and unreliable and has not been considered, nor has illegal employment. Some of the men and women migrated during the summer season to Greece, Turkey and Germany, and lived by stealing and prostitution. When they were arrested, they were usually returned to Romania without further interventions by the police.

As showed in Table 12, there was a statistically significant difference between men and women. No women, but 14 men had records in the central criminal register. Of these, 12 had been sentenced to imprisonment and nine were in prison at follow-up.

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**Table 12. Criminality**

	Men		Women		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Sentenced to imprisonment	14	25.5	0	0	14	18.7
No sentence to imprisonment	41	74.5	20	100.0	61	81.3
Total	55	100.0	20	100.0	75	100.0

$$\chi^2 (1 \text{ df}) = 6.26, p < 0.05$$

**Table 13. Social activities**

	Men		Women		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
No	32	72.8	11	64.7	43	70.5
Some	6	13.6	6	35.3	12	19.7
Active	6	13.6	0	0	6	9.8
Total	44	100.0	17	100.0	61	100.0

$$\chi^2 (2 \text{ df}) = 5.35, \text{ N.S.}$$

Table 13 shows that the majority did not participate in social activities. Of the cases who were interviewed, 17% were dissatisfied with their life, and only 35% of the men and 25% of the women were satisfied (Table 14).

Table 15 shows that only one quarter of both sexes was satisfied with themselves. The rest was more or less dissatisfied.

**Table 14. Satisfaction with life**

	Men		Women		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Dissatisfied	6	17.6	2	16.7	8	17.4
No quite satisfied	16	47.1	7	58.3	23	50.0
Satisfied	12	35.3	3	25.0	15	32.6
Total	34	100.0	12	100.0	46	100.0

$$\chi^2 (2 \text{ df}) = 0.52 \text{ N.S.}$$

**Table 15. Self-satisfaction**

	Men		Women		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Dissatisfied	12	35.3	3	25.0	15	32.6
Not quite satisfied	13	38.2	6	50.0	19	41.3
Satisfied	9	26.5	3	25.0	12	26.1
Total	34	100.0	12	100.0	46	100.0

$$\chi^2 (2 \text{ df}) = 0.59, \text{ N.S.}$$

## DISCUSSION

### **Sample**

The sample is not representative for children who were abandoned in the Iasi district 1976-77. There is no register (or at least no available) which makes it possible to follow a cohort of abandoned children from birth on.

The objective of the study has been to find out what happens to those who grow up in orphanages. For this purpose, the cohort appears to be representative for those who are discharged at an age of roughly 18 years.

### **Drop-outs at follow-up**

Since two thirds of the cases did not have a permanent address, and in addition many had moved to different parts of the country, it was extremely difficult to find them. It was particularly difficult to find those who were hiding from the police, and even more problematic to persuade those who were found to participate. Nevertheless, it was possible to get in personal contact with about 61% and, in addition, to have reliable information about 20%. Considering that this was a group of homeless people, followed up after several years, it is quite satisfying that was possible to have personal contact with, or reliable information about more than 80%.

As a rule, those who cannot be found in a follow-up tend to lack permanent accommodation and to have more mental and social problems than those who can be studied. However, cases who were willing to participate were often those without means of living, who hoped to get some help if they participated. In fact, some who did not

belong to the cohort tried to participate, hoping to benefit from it. Those who had grown up together had some contact with each other, and one former orphan could tell the investigator where mates from the orphanage could be found. Thus, it was possible to find most of the homeless people. In this study, it was perhaps more problematic to get in touch with those who had been restored with their families, or who were married. They had little contact with former mates, and might have wanted to forget the orphanage and to keep secret that they had grown up in institutions.

### **Lack of controls**

Since it has not been possible to study a control group, it is not possible to say whether the rates of those who have grown up in orphanages are different from those of young adults who have grown up in their families.

### **Social**

The social outcome is poor; 82% did not have a legal job and 68% did not have permanent accommodation. In a sample of British ex-care men and women, 44% of males and 45% of females showed poor social functioning. It is obvious that ex-care men and women represent a major social problem in Romania, as well as in the U.K. (8,9).

### **Criminality**

Since 29% never employed, and 53% had never had a permanent legal job, they can only have survived by stealing. The rates of minor offences are most likely underestimated. In the present sample, there has been rumour among mates that some of those missing were hiding from the police,

which may have reduced the rate of criminality. Compared to the frequencies reported in other European countries, 25% of the men sentenced to imprisonment is considerably more than expected, but almost the same as reported in follow-ups of children who have grown up in orphanages in Soviet (Julia Ivanova and Lorn Curry in CBS Newsworld, an Internfilm Production). It is considerably higher than for instance in Sweden. Lie (10) found that 9% of 19-year old men had committed serious offences and had been sentenced to imprisonment. The sex difference regarding crime was as expected; men have always higher crime rates than women.

In childhood, there had been a high rate of physical and sexual abuse (9) and 2 of 7 boys who had been sexually abused were in prison for sexual offences. This is in agreement with findings reported by Widom (11): being abused or neglected as a child increases the risk for delinquency, adult criminal behaviour, and violent criminal behaviour.

#### **Health**

Almost half of the men and women have some physical health problems, while 23% of the women report poor health. Considering that they are living in wet and cold cellars, or in similar places, with inadequate nutrition, this was as expected, and indicates need of humanitarian aid at different levels. Ex-care females have statistically significantly poorer physical health than ex-care males.

Self-report of mental disorders may be less reliable than on physical health. Studies of orphans in childhood show

that most have some mental problems (10,12,14). In the follow-up from Soviet (see above), 10% had committed suicide. In the present study, it is possible that the man who died may have committed suicide. It is also that this has happened to some of the cases who have totally disappeared.

#### **Alcohol and drug abuse**

Rates of 7% alcohol abuse and 2% drug abuse in men are based on self-reports and are probably considerably under-estimated. As comparison, the rate of alcohol abuse/dependence among homeless men in Munich is 61% and of drug abuse/dependence 5% (13).

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

A major problem seems to be those who grow up in orphanage lack job and accommodation when they have to leave at age 18. In many cases the continuing psychiatric risk derives not from any irreversible effect in infancy, but rather from a continuity in disadvantageous environmental circumstances that continue to impinge in ways that prolong and intensify the risks.

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