

NEWS RELEASE

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New Foster Care Program in Romania Brings Mental Health Benefits to Preschool Children

ARLINGTON, Va. (June 1, 2009) – U.S. researchers who worked with Romanian colleagues to create a high-quality, child-centered foster care network in Bucharest report a reduction in anxiety disorders and other mental and emotional illnesses in children who were moved from institutions to foster homes, according to a study reported in *The American Journal of Psychiatry*.

Abandoned girls residing in institutions who were randomly assigned to foster care between the ages of 6 months and 2.5 years were only half as likely to have internalizing disorders, such as anxiety, at age 4.5 years as were girls who remained in the institutions, according to this follow-up from the Bucharest Early Intervention Project. The study appeared today in *AJP in Advance*, the online advance edition of *The American Journal of Psychiatry (AJP)*, the official journal of the American Psychiatric Association.

“Although foster care in the U.K. and the U.S. is the preferred intervention for abandoned and maltreated children, the database supporting foster care is actually limited to fewer than 10 mostly small studies, and those studies were confounded by selection bias—that is, more compromised children might be more likely to be institutionalized,” pointed out Dr. Charles Zeanah of Tulane University, lead author of the article.

Because foster care was not available in Bucharest at the outset, the study served as a demonstration project as well as a systematic evaluation of foster care. Romanian officials requested the research to help them in their decisions about the future of institutionalized care, which had been the preferred alternative for caring for orphaned or abandoned children in Romania. In addition, since there is considerable interest in the effects of early adverse experience as a risk for subsequent psychiatric disorders, this study represents the first randomized controlled trial of foster care as an alternative to institutional care in young children to examine the issue.

The foster care system was developed with research funds from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation through the Research Network on “Early Experience and Brain Development.”

The American Journal of Psychiatry is the oldest continuously published medical specialty journal in the United States and was recently named one of the “Most Influential Journals in Biology & Medicine of the Last 100 Years.” **The American Psychiatric Association** is a national medical specialty society whose more than 38,000 physician members specialize in diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. Visit the APA at www.psych.org and www.HealthyMinds.org. Statements in this press release or the articles in the *Journal* are not official policy statements of the American Psychiatric Association.

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