Scoping Study: Historic Forced Adoption - Final Report

CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

social
research

Contents

Acknowledgements

The research team would like to acknowledge and thank the people affected by historic forced adoption who shared their experiences with us. Without your involvement, this research would not have been possible. Thanks also to the campaigners, support organisations, local authority representatives, and academics who took part in interviews, completed and publicised our online survey, and supported the recruitment of interviewees.

List of abbreviations

BACP - British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

COSCA - Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland

ECT – Electroconvulsive Therapy

EMDR – Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing

GAP – Group for Adopted People

MAA Scotland – Movement for an Adoption Apology in Scotland

NRS – National Records of Scotland

SAAM – Scottish Adult Adoptee Movement

Executive summary

Introduction

Historic forced adoption refers to practices in the 1950s-1970s "which resulted in newborn babies being unnecessarily taken away from unmarried mothers and placed for adoption, without regard for the mothers' and children's needs or wishes"[1].

In January 2023, as part of a range of work on this theme, the Scottish Government commissioned The Lines Between (TLB) to conduct a scoping study to explore support services for people affected by historic forced adoption.

This summary outlines the study findings, based on fieldwork with people affected by historic forced adoption including mothers, adoptees[2] and other family members, and stakeholders such as local authority representatives (the majority of whom were social work practitioners), post-adoption support services, academics and campaigners. A review of key literature was undertaken in the foundation stages of the research.

It is important to note that adoption policy and practice has changed since the 1950s-1970s, with more support and safeguards now in place for adoptees, parents whose children have been adopted, and adoptive parents.

Support needs among people affected by historic forced adoption

This executive summary focuses on the findings about the support needs of people affected by historic forced adoption; specifically search and reunion, accessing records and the emotional and psychological impact of historic forced adoption. The full report covers wider findings about the lived experience of historic forced adoption.

Search and reunion

People affected by historic forced adoption described the importance of searching for and reuniting with family members separated by forced adoption. This includes practical support to access the records required to trace family members, to make initial contact and support reunions; and emotional support throughout the process.

In addition to the positive feedback about existing public, private and third sector services that provide search and reunion support, some areas for improvement were identified. These included ensuring that there is clear guidance about searching for family members and the support services available, and that people can access emotional support throughout the process.

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[1] [Information about historic forced adoption](). Scottish Government website. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[2] Among the adoptees who took part in interviews, 14 described their adoption as forced and five did not know enough about their early years to be certain that their adoption was forced, but their adoption took place in the era of forced adoptions and they were keen to share their experiences.

Access to records

Some interviewees explained that another motivation for accessing documents, besides search and reunion activity, is to help them understand the circumstances and events that led to the adoption. These include written records about the adoption, such as social work, NHS and court documents containing case notes and descriptions of meetings from the time of the adoption.

Research participants identified gaps and improvements needed, including: practical help and guidance to find and understand records; enhanced emotional support to help individuals process any upsetting information they find, and to deal with disappointment when records are unavailable or lacking detail; more time to consult records; and ensuring people can photograph or photocopy records which contain information about them.

Emotional and psychological support

The severe emotional and psychological impact of historic forced adoption was emphasised by research participants. In some cases, individuals said their mental health had suffered with examples of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Participants emphasised the importance of emotional support, advice and guidance, talking therapies (including psychotherapy and counselling), peer support and creative and alternative therapies.

Some public, private and third sector services are available, but participants noted that the quality of support depends on the understanding of historic forced adoption among GPs, psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists and counsellors. The consensus was that, in general, these professionals would benefit from greater awareness of the impact of historic forced adoption. Crucially, we found no awareness among interviewees of any training or guidelines for these professionals related to supporting people affected by historic forced adoption.

Barriers and challenges

Barriers and challenges to supporting people affected by historic forced adoption include:

- Ensuring services have the capacity and funding to support people affected by historic forced adoption.
- Costs associated with certain activities and services, such as fees related to accessing some documents required to trace family members and charges for private counselling and therapy services, which can be prohibitive.
- Reservations among some people about accessing support delivered by post-adoption support services, some of whom were involved in historic forced adoption.

Next steps

The next steps for the Scottish Government are to consider how to ensure the support needs of people affected by historic forced adoption are met. Key issues include:

- Ensuring that people have adequate support during search and reunion activities, especially emotional support.

- Supporting people to access and understand their records, again including emotional support.

- Enhancing the services available to help people with the emotional, psychological and mental health impact of historic forced adoption.

- Developing training for key professionals such as GPs and mental health workers to raise their understanding of the impact of historic forced adoption so they can support and signpost people more effectively.

When considering next steps, the findings suggest it may be beneficial to engage with people who have lived experience of historic forced adoption to identify priorities and formulate action plans.

1.   Introduction and context

Historic forced adoption refers to practices across the UK, Ireland, Canada and Australia in the 1950s-1970s "which resulted in newborn babies being unnecessarily taken away from unmarried mothers and placed for adoption, without regard for the mothers' and children's needs or wishes"[3].

An unknown number of families in Scotland were affected by historic forced adoption. These traumatic experiences had enduring impacts on health and wellbeing. There is a growing movement of advocacy to gain further recognition of, and more support for, the many affected people and a focus by policymakers on how to respond to their needs.

In June 2021, the then First Minister committed to considering the issue of historic forced adoption in Scotland fully. In a significant development, the First Minister formally apologised to people affected by historic forced adoption on behalf of the Scottish Government on 22 March 2023.

The Scottish Government is undertaking a range of thematic work on historic forced adoption, including gathering evidence on experiences of historic forced adoption and a survey of people affected; assessing the services required to meet their needs; and investing in measures to support parents and families affected, such as counselling.

As part of this work, in January 2023 the Scottish Government commissioned The Lines Between (TLB) to conduct a scoping study to explore support services for people affected by historic forced adoption. The study aims to:

- Identify existing support services in Scotland.
- Understand the guidelines and training materials for GPs and mental health professionals related to supporting people affected by historic forced adoption practices.
- Engage with people who have lived experience of historic forced adoption in Scotland and gather their views on what new or additional support services are needed.

The research considers the following key questions:

- What services are available for post-adoption support in Scotland, and are these services available and suitable for those who have experienced historic forced adoption?
- What are the relative benefits and weakness of these services?
- What are the self-perceived therapeutic needs of those who have experienced historic forced adoption, and how do these needs vary between parents and adoptees?
- What are specific support services required for parents and adoptees?

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[3] Information about historic forced adoption. Scottish Government website. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

- What services are available in other countries/regions?

Adoptees' experiences

Most feedback from adoptees relates to the experience of being adopted in general and is not directly related to the forced or coercive nature of the adoption. Generally, the issues reported by adoptees stem from their experience of being adopted and are not specifically related to whether their adoption was forced. Indeed, five of the 19 adoptees who took part in interviews did not know enough about their early years to be certain that their adoption was forced, but their adoption took place in the era of forced adoptions and they were keen to take part to describe their experiences of being adopted.

Many adoptees involved in our study gave positive feedback about their experience of life with their adoptive families. Most, however, reported negative impacts of being an adoptee, even where they had a good relationship with their adoptive family. A sizeable minority recounted negative experiences with their adoptive families, including cruel, abusive or negligent treatment.

It is important to note, that research participants were self-selecting and these findings are not intended to be representative of all adoptees' experience. In addition, while many adoptees commented on adoption in general, this study is not intended as a review of adoption practices in general or of the wider impact of adoption on adopted people either now or historically. However, adoptees' feedback provides valuable insight into the experience and needs of adoptees born in the period (1950-1970s) and wider insights into the context in which parents and adoptees experienced historic forced adoption.

Methodology

Appendix 1 contains full details of the research methodology, which included:

- A review of key literature.
- Interviews with 32 stakeholders, including adoption agencies, campaigners, academics, and local authority representatives, the majority of whom were social work practitioners.
- Responses from 19 officers, mostly social workers, to an online survey of local authorities. Five of the 19 also took part in a follow-up interview.
- Interviews with 37 people affected by historic forced adoption, including 14 mothers, 19 adoptees, two siblings of adoptees whose mothers had a baby removed for adoption before they themselves were born, one sibling of a mother, and a husband of a mother.
- Survey responses from 11 adoptees, two parents and three wider family members of adopted babies.

Appendix 2 contains our research tools.

Research design

The methodology was predominantly qualitative, reflecting the complex, sensitive, wide-ranging and personal experiences explored in this research. Key data collection activities included in-depth interviews with people affected by historic forced adoption and other stakeholders (including professionals working in post-adoption support, campaigners and academics). This allowed the research team to explore individuals' experiences and views in depth and to ask probing follow-up questions as necessary.

Online surveys, including qualitative and quantitative questions, offered an alternative method for contributing to the study for people affected by historic forced adoption who felt uncomfortable speaking to an interviewer about their experience. While these surveys achieved a relatively low response, they were not intended as the main data collection method, as this would have detracted from the qualitative, exploratory nature of the research. However, the information gathered through the surveys provided useful additional evidence that was analysed alongside the interviews.

In addition, an online survey of local authority representatives allowed the team to maximise the reach of the study, alongside the stakeholder interviews. Fourteen respondents took part in the survey, spanning ten local authorities.

Research limitations

The findings are based on a thematic analysis of interview transcripts and survey responses from people affected by historic forced adoption and stakeholders. The number of people who experienced historic forced adoption is unknown, but this will likely be quite a small proportion of all those affected.

The research team tried to recruit participants affected by historic forced adoption including mothers, fathers, adoptees and wider family members. However, we did not interview any fathers of adopted babies or wider family members, except one sister of a mother whose baby was adopted and a husband of a mother.

This was a relatively small-scale qualitative study designed to gather in-depth information about the experiences of people affected by historic forced adoption and professionals working in the field. It is important to note that participants were self-selecting, and the findings are not intended to be representative of the whole population affected by historic forced adoption. A larger scale study would be required to achieve this.

However, the depth and detail provided in responses, and the wider awareness of other cases that campaigners and other stakeholders brought to the research, means we have collected a substantial evidence base of the impact of historic forced adoption and the support needs of people affected by it.

Experiences of historic forced adoption

The focus of the study is the support needs of people affected by historic forced adoption. However, interviewees shared their experiences of historic forced adoption with us. These provide important contextual information to help understand their support needs, and are summarised in detail in Chapter 2.

Many interviewees said they welcomed the opportunity to provide evidence to the Scottish Government, share their story and be listened to. Indeed, some of the interviews were lengthy, because people wanted to describe their experiences in detail. Given the sensitive nature of the conversations, the researchers took interviewees through an exit process in which information about support services was shared.

Literature review

Appendix 3 contains details of our literature review. Overall, our research findings are consistent with the evidence presented in the literature and add more Scottish-specific information and experiences to the evidence base about historic forced adoption. Our separate service delivery paper contains further references to the literature, particularly examples of good practice from other countries.

A note on terminology

When we refer to 'people affected by historic forced adoption' or 'people with experience of historic forced adoption', this includes parents whose children were removed, other members of families whose children were adopted, adoptees, and adoptive parents and families.

Terminology is a sensitive issue when discussing historic forced adoption. The language used can potentially be re-traumatising and impact people differently, depending on their experience[4,5].

We recognise many parents prefer to be described without prefixes such as '*birth'* mother[6]. These are felt to limit their role to reproduction and deny their status as a parent[7] and ongoing bond with their child[8]. Therefore, we followed Higgins and colleagues[9] and used the terms 'mother', 'father' and 'parent' wherever possible. However, where we have presented direct quotes from research participants that include the term 'birth mother', we have not altered their words.

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[4] Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[5] Department of Social Services Australian Government (No date, p.2). Fact Sheet: Forced Adoptions in Australia. Supporting People Affected by Forced Adoptions. Accessed on 7/6/2023.

[6] UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (2022). The Violation of the Right to Family Life. Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1949-1976. House of Commons and House of Lords. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[7] Department of Social Services Australian Government (No date). Fact Sheet: Forced Adoptions in Australia. Supporting People Affected by Forced Adoptions. Accessed on 7/6/2023.

[8] Origins Canada (No date). The Language of Adoption. Accessed on 7/6/2023.

[9] Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

As highlighted above, the definition of 'historic forced adoption' used in this study is practices across the UK, Ireland, Canada and Australia in the 1950s-1970s, 'which resulted in newborn babies being unnecessarily taken away from unmarried mothers and placed for adoption, without regard for the mothers' and children's needs or wishes'[10]. However, we recognise some may prefer the terms 'forced', 'closed', 'coerced' or 'contested' adoption.

Although this study considers the timeframe of the 1950s, 60s and 70s, cases like this occurred before and after this timescale[11].

Changes in adoption policy and practice

Current adoption practices differ from the period considered by this study (1950s, 60s and 70s). Now, adoption processes are more transparent, with the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 (the Act) placing a legal duty on local authorities to undertake adoption support assessments setting out what assistance, such as support with family contact, is required. The Act also stipulates that when a court is granting an adoption order, the welfare of the child must be the paramount consideration.

The Act places a legal duty on local authorities to provide for an adoption service and recruit, assess and provide training and support to prospective adopters to ensure that they can meet the needs and provide high-quality care to children. All adoption services in Scotland are regulated by the Care Inspectorate using the Health and Social Care Standards. These standards have been developed by the Scottish Government to describe what people should experience from a wide range of care and support services.

Post-adoption support services

Where we use the term 'post-adoption support services' in this report, we are referring to organisations that deliver support to people affected by adoption, including current or recent adoptions as well as historic cases. These organisations include adoption agencies such as Barnardo's, St Andrew's, St Margaret's, Scottish Adoption & Fostering. We are also referring to Adoption UK Scotland and Birthlink, organisations that are not registered adoption agencies but do support people affected by adoption, when we use this term.

Upsetting content

This report contains information about experiences of historic forced adoption that readers may find upsetting and distressing.

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[10] Information about historic forced adoption. Scottish Government website. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[11] Origins Scotland (2021). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights Inquiry: The Right to Family Life, Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women 1949-1976. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

Report structure

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 contains a brief overview of the experiences of people affected by historic forced adoption.

- Chapter 3 discusses the support needs of people affected by historic forced adoption related to searching for and reuniting with family members they have been separated from by adoption.

- Support needs around access to records are summarised in Chapter 4.

- Needs around the emotional and psychological impact of historic forced adoption are explored in Chapter 5.

- Chapter 6 summarises other support needs.

- Chapter 7 includes barriers and challenges to supporting people affected by historic forced adoption not covered in previous chapters.

- Chapter 8 presents our conclusions and recommendations.

- Appendix 1 contains full details of the research methodology.

- Our research tools are included in Appendix 2.

- The findings of our literature review are outlined in Appendix 3.

2. Overview of the experiences of people affected by historic forced adoption

Introduction

While this study focuses on the support needs of people affected by historic forced adoption, an awareness of people's experiences is necessary to understand their support needs. In this chapter, we discuss mothers' and adoptees' experiences, and mental health conditions and other adverse outcomes. The findings presented here are based on interviews with people affected by historic forced adoption and other stakeholders including professionals working in post-adoption support, academics and campaign groups.

This chapter draws on interview data to provide an overview of the experiences of those affected by historic forced adoption; some include harrowing individual examples. We do not know how typical these are, but research participants were clear about their impact on them.

The lifelong emotional and psychological impacts of historic forced adoption are discussed further in Chapter 5.

Mothers' experiences

Societal attitudes and norms

A few participants reflected on the difference between societal and religious attitudes and norms at the time compared to the present day. Adoptions of children born to unmarried mothers were described as standard practice, with women having fewer rights, choices, and support than today.

> "The young ones nowadays, they've got more rights… we were just told this is something that had to happen… It was just after the war… It's a different time, and it's a different age… You didn't get anybody to help you with your choices. You just went through the pregnancy, and you knew that baby was getting taken away from you." – Mother
>
> "There was no social care system to help women in that position to be able to parent their children." – Stakeholder

A common theme was the moral judgement and stigmatisation directed towards mothers who had a child outside of marriage. Participants explained this was seen as "sinful", "immoral", and "taboo".

"(The) stigma of being an unmarried mother. And the shame that was seen to be placed on the family… was a really, really big factor." – Stakeholder

"Mothers still feel the shame that was instilled in them." – Adoptee

Gender inequalities

One mother described societal views of unmarried mothers as reflective of gender inequalities. A few others identified power imbalances between mothers and fathers. There were reports of mothers becoming pregnant through sexual violence and abuse, or being led to believe they were engaged to the father, only for the father to disappear.

"You were the bad one if you had a baby out of marriage... The man wasn't even blamed for it - it was always the lassie that was blamed for it." – Mother

Family responses

Some participants recalled families reacting to the pregnancy with shame or judgement.

"My parents were Catholics. It was like the worst thing that ever happened in the world… They were absolutely ashamed that their daughter could do such a thing, and I think that's something that's lived with me ever since." – Mother

While a few mothers indicated they had been able to resist their parents' wishes to some extent, e.g. by refusing to have an abortion or their baby adopted outwith the family, these were unusual examples. Mothers often had little control, and their parents made the decisions. One adoptee also highlighted the lack of choice available to, and threats made towards, their father.

"Her parents shipped her through to a hospital… From being six weeks pregnant to six weeks after I was born. And she was only allowed back in the family house if I was never mentioned again. So, she had no say in the matter." – Adoptee

"My mother and father had wanted to get married. And my grandfather had said 'no way'… From what my cousin said, he probably went down to the house with a shotgun and told him to get down the road before he shot him." – Adoptee

In interviews, some mothers described being: hidden to conceal the pregnancy, sent away to live with relatives until after the birth, admitted to mother and baby homes or learning disability hospitals, or "rejected" longer-term.

> "I went to stay with this Auntie… who I had never seen since I was 5 - I didn't even know what she looked like. And then it was working… cleaning... She never had any kids. So she didn't really know what you were going through." – Mother
>
> "Her parents then surprised her with a one-way ticket to New Zealand and told her never to return to Scotland. Everyone reeled from the shame for decades… So many women were sent away overseas by their outraged families." – Sibling of adoptee

A few interviewees also gave examples of families refusing to believe mothers about the father's identity, denying the father's abusive behaviours, or pressuring mothers to marry fathers.

Treatment by professionals

Some participants recalled experiences at mother and baby homes, often run by religious organisations. A few described mothers being separated from their babies suddenly and unexpectedly, having cared for them for up to three years in some instances.

> "I was looking after him for six weeks, night and day. I do think that's why there is a bond because for six weeks, I never left him. I was just told to leave, and I was so young I just left, that was it." – Mother
>
> "We used to take them out in the pram and go for walks... Then, all of a sudden (it was) as if it was somebody else's bairn you were taking out for a walk… the Matron … came up to me and said, 'Oh, I've just sold your baby'." – Mother

While one mother recalled the kindness of a midwife in one of these homes, a few others recounted controlling and disingenuous practices of some other staff.

> "My mother's life was altered, and her mental health was ruined by her experiences in a Home for Mothers and Babies… My mother was pressured and tricked her into giving her baby up after six weeks of caring for her in the nursery." – Sibling of adoptee
>
> "It was obviously organised between the Mother and Baby Home (and hospital) because… after my son was taken by the social worker, another taxi arrived…Now I didn't order a taxi." – Mother

Similar themes were evident in participants' descriptions of social workers' behaviour. Examples included**:** excluding mothers from decision-making; acting against their wishes; failing to inform them of their legal rights or options; behaving coercively and threateningly; having personal relationships with the mother's parents or adoptive parents; and lying to the mothers about the family that was adopting their child. We should stress that we do not know how widespread examples like these were.

> "A social worker… didn't speak to me, actually. Spoke to my parents. And he kind of popped his head around the door and asked me if it was okay… I think back on it now - it was shocking."– Mother
>
> "There was a series of social workers... They were all asking me why I wouldn't sign the paper… And it was a year later, they kept threatening me and said, 'You need to sign these forms'. And I was like, 'I don't know what the forms are'… they kept saying, 'We're going to put you in front of the board'. And I don't know what that meant." – Mother

Some were told they would not be a good mother or made to feel guilty for wanting to keep their baby or trying to have them returned. A couple of mothers explained they received similar treatment and messages from their GP.

> "[The social worker said] the baby was in a well-to-do home and… what could I do for him? And I would break that lady's heart... to be coerced like that into a decision… it's not until you get older you realise she was putting me off taking my baby back…it's emotional blackmail." – Mother
>
> "I said, 'I'm going to be married now. And I really would like... to have my child back'. And (social worker) said, 'You're being extremely selfish... you will ruin the couple's lives who have her, and you will traumatise the child... and you know you can have (another) child with this man'." – Mother
>
> "I was set on the path to adoption from the first appointment with the GP… it was like a juggernaut. I wasn't given information about other options. I was led to understand that keeping my own child would be selfish, that my child would stand a much better chance in life with a married couple… I was told I wasn't good enough." – Mother

Experiences of labour and post-natal care

Interviewees shared examples of disempowering, coercive, cruel, punitive, and abusive treatment during and after birth. Some mothers described being verbally abused, sexually assaulted, denied pain relief, left with health issues after inadequate medical treatment, and prevented from having contact with their babies. We do not know how widespread these experiences were, but mothers highlighted their significant impact on them.

> "I never saw [my son]. I never held him. I never heard him. They took him right away… one even called me 'the scum of the earth'." – Mother
>
> "[A mother was having] a very difficult delivery and somebody was saying to her… 'You deserve it…you should be full of shame and you're a bad person'. And all that's going on at a time when you're very vulnerable and distressed." – Stakeholder

Silence, secrecy and unacknowledged pain

After the birth and removal of their child, some explained mothers were encouraged to "forget about it", see themselves as "lucky", or move on. Their experiences were "a taboo subject" not mentioned by others, and their grief and pain went unacknowledged.

> "I was really upset and cried quite a lot... I was told I was upsetting my parents, that my father had a heart condition, and that it was all over now… And I thought, but it's not all over. His life is just beginning, and he doesn't even know who I am." – Mother

> "In the home, you were lambasted all the time, 'you don't tell anybody! We took you in here and we're hiding you away from society to save you from the sin that you've caused, so you don't tell anybody about that sin and you take that secret to the grave.'" – Mother

In this context, some, but not all, mothers "locked" their experiences and feelings up and did not discuss them with their families, friends, partners, or subsequent children, sometimes for fear of the consequences for their family.

> "I put [my feelings] in a box, and I closed the lid and put it on the shelf in my mind. [It was] very rarely spoken about… [Name] [who was the mother's husband and the baby's father] wouldn't speak about it. I think I mentioned it twice in decades of marriage." – Mother

> "I've got three half-brothers. They didn't know anything about me at all." – Adoptee

> "The family situation is complex. The consequences of the full story coming out would be damaging to a number of family members." – Mother

> "You just knew that you couldn't go there. My mother would never talk about it. Even in the later years. And certainly, my father would never have spoken of it." – Sister of mother

Psychological impacts on mothers

A dominant theme in our study was the emotional and mental health impact of historic forced adoption on mothers. This includes grief, loss, trauma, depression, anxiety, agoraphobia, addictions and post-traumatic stress disorder. Participants also raised themes of regret, shame, guilt, self-criticism, and low self-worth.

> "You never get over the heartache; part of you is broke for life." – Mother

> "Her relationships with her subsequent children, her sisters, and with her parents were ruined. Fallout from the trauma included my mother becoming afraid to mix, to leave the house, she attempted suicide, she was emotionally unstable." – Sibling of adoptee

> "Enormous trauma, which leads to… post-traumatic stress… bereavement issues… they have shame, they have lack of self-worth, they have anxiety… because their experience was that life was not safe… their decisions were not valued... People were untrustworthy. So that leaves them with anxiety and depression." – Stakeholder

> "I find it quite hard to explain, it, I mean, it's in my head 24 hours, you know, and for a long time, I was really bad with alcohol." – Mother

One account concerned a mother who received electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) to treat her depression. She now struggles to remember events surrounding the adoption, acting as a barrier to tracing her child. Mothers also described ongoing thoughts about their children, worry about their wellbeing, or concern their child might think they were unwanted.

> "Always wondering everyday, feeling preoccupied."– Stakeholder
>
> "I was told this was the best thing for him... but what if he's not alright?" - Mother

Participants recounted several negative impacts on subsequent family life, such as mothers struggling with relationships and siblings' feelings of loss and grief.

> "[It] impacts on the wider family… I had a son and a daughter, and they didn't get to grow up with their older brother. And it affects your relationships with others because you have a lack of trust. It's so destructive." – Mother
>
> "The emotional fall-out from adoption created a dysfunctional environment for the family unit. It led to lack of bonding, lack of trust, insecurity, lack of self-worth etc and there was no emotional support either inside or outside of the family home to deal with this, both at the time of adoption and throughout the following years – still affected by it over 50 years later." – Sibling of adoptee
>
> "I think my mother was so traumatised by having to give up her first born son for adoption, that she could not bond properly with me and my other siblings – certainly it took until my youngest sibling for her to display any real sign of affection and joy in their relationship." – Sibling of adoptee

Adoptees' experiences

Many adoptees described a happy upbringing and loving relationships with their adoptive families

> "I've been extremely lucky, both in my experience with my adoptive parents who love me to bits, and I love them. And I had a really great childhood." - Adoptee
>
> "I was adopted into a great family, which was good." - Adoptee
>
> "I was adopted by a nice family and a nice home." - Adoptee

However, many also detailed grief, loss, and trauma linked to the separation from their parents. While it is important to remember that this study is not representative of all adoptees' experiences, either historically or now, these interviewees commented that bonds built up in the womb and the period immediately after birth are important, and separation from their mother can result in lifelong emotional and psychological impacts.

> "When people are adopted… They've been in their mother's womb for nine months. They know their mother. They know her voice, they know her, what she's like – although they've not been born, they still know." – Adoptee
>
> "It's quite a few traumas on top of each other. First, there's the trauma of separation with the primary carers, a lot of people think that this is not a trauma, but it is, you know, just imagine a baby separated from their mother and father and the family and their environment suddenly you know, so that's the first trauma." – Adoptee
>
> "This is my struggle that has been inflicted on me by a society which treats babies and children as if they're blank slates." – Adoptee

Again, some interviewees suggested this often went unacknowledged and there was little understanding about babies' and children's emotional and attachment needs. They also raised the inadequate consideration of adoptees' wellbeing within some adoptive placements.

> "There was no acknowledgement of any of the kind of trauma or loss attached to adoption… there was this kind of concept… it's a happy life, it's a new life." – Stakeholder
>
> "My birth mum left at five days. My adoptive parents came for me at day 14. I had nine days. Who was nurturing and caring for me? Who was swaddling and loving me? I think there's something in that time. And my gran always said, see when you came home, you just screamed! You were the most greety wean ever. And see now, I understand why." – Adoptee
>
> "Social work washed their hands of me. They were required to find a home and then dump you there. Matching the adoptee to the adopter wasn't a priority… It was more about making sure that you had three square meals a day, a bed to sleep on, a school, community of friends, a roof over your head and a family that portrayed financial stability... It was about my basic needs and practical goals being met, not my emotional development." - Adoptee

Experiences with adoptive families

Participants recounted positive and negative experiences with adoptive parents. As noted above, while some adoptees emphasised they felt loved and supported by their adoptive parents, some others shared experiences of cruel and abusive treatment.

> "I grew up being told I was an imbecile. I grew up being told that I was the biggest disappointment in [my adoptive mother's] life. My adopted dad died when I was six… my life was absolute hell from that day on – I got beaten every day." – Adoptee
>
> "I had to go to another family… It was really difficult between myself and my mother… I hated her, and she hated me… even in the second family... it was really difficult. So after three years, I left. I was 19 at that time… lived by myself." – Adoptee
>
> "I had a particularly drastic and dreadful adoption. There's abuse, mental and emotional abuse involved, not just at home, but also from grandparents, my grandmother and my cousins as well." – Adoptee
>
> "If I said anything it was like I was being ungrateful: 'Are you not grateful for all we've done for you over the years?' and so on. You just feel totally isolated, I always felt the odd one out. I felt really miserable throughout my teenage years." – Adoptee

Some highlighted that being an adoptee can have psychological impacts regardless of the relationship with their adoptive parents. Others, however, did not report this.

> "It's baggage in a certain way… although I was happy as a child… being adopted as an adult is very difficult." – Adoptee
>
> "I've missed my mother all my life… I had a mother – but I missed my blood mother." – Adoptee
>
> "I struggle to know where I fit in – in my adoptive family, in [the country where I was born], in Scotland, and even with other adopted people. I have low points when I think everyone else is happier and more solid than me… I think I can be hard work and push people away and self-sabotage. I know I'm hard on myself." – Adoptee

Sense of identity

Interviewees also described their experience of growing up as an adopted child. Some reported feelings of rejection and a sense of being different from their adoptive family, even if their adoptive families were loving. This affected their sense of identity and belonging.

> "It was a good adoption. I've not had any problems with my parents, but I did sometimes, strangely, even when I became aware of it, I did feel, I wouldn't call it a distance but I sometimes did feel almost like a slight remove from them to some degree. But that was just how it was." – Adoptee
>
> "People that we have supported have stated their need to find the 'missing piece of their jigsaw' and that they need to know who they are and where they come from. They have required support to make sense of their story and to navigate their way through the information that we are able to provide." – Stakeholder

Access to information

Adoptees' awareness of being adopted as they were growing up differed. For some, "it was never a secret". For others, their adoptive parents told them in childhood, teenage years, or not at all, as happened to the participant below.

> "I started to do some family research... and I thought, I'll do a DNA test. There's nothing in the way that I was treated... nothing that gave me any inkling that I was adopted. So, to discover this at the age of 67 was a shock." – Adoptee

Participants suggested the initial impact of finding out they were adopted could vary according to the relationship between adoptees and their adoptive parents, the intent behind being informed, and their age at the time.

> "I didn't find out until I was 18… and I don't know how many adoptive parents or even the general population know how damaging that can be. And luckily, I was told out of love, but… some people are told out of spite… It really messed me up. I kept my adoption a secret from everyone else in my life for another 12 years." – Adoptee
>
> "Those that find out later in life… either post death of their adoptive parent or well into adulthood... it's extremely traumatic and has a significant impact on understanding [their] own identity."– Stakeholder

A handful explained that their adoptive parents withheld further information about their adoption or, in one case, had deliberately destroyed the adoption documents so they could not trace their family.

> "I didn't know anything about it, why or anything. And they didn't tell me anything, even though I asked. So that was a negative point." – Adoptee
>
> "Some adoptees, because they don't know the circumstances of their adoption, feel that their mother perhaps abandoned them and didn't want them, which leaves them with particular issues." – Stakeholder

Discovering the forced nature of adoption

Some of the adoptees commented on the impact of discovering their adoption was forced, describing their sadness that their mother had gone through such an experience. In cases where adoptees had not met their mothers, uncertainty about the impact on their mothers caused concern.

> "The only thing I am sad about is my mum's difficulties. She didn't have a very happy marriage… Somebody told me she had some alcohol problems and I think that probably contributed to her early death as well... It must be a horrible thing to have to go through... There nothing I could have done about that but It still makes you sad that somebody had to have such pain... I just feel sorry for my mum." - Adoptee
>
> "It was a forced adoption. She was underage… The way that she was treated by parents, by social workers, by nurses in the hospital when she gave birth, she was denied pain relief, she was told she didn't deserve pain relief, and quite how anybody could do that to another human being is quite extraordinary. On a human to human basis, it's just unnecessarily cruel." - Adoptee
>
> "I was born in a nursing home for unmarried mothers… so I dare say it's been a traumatic event for my birth mother." - Adoptee

As noted in Chapter 1, it is important to acknowledge that much of adoptees' feedback is not related to whether their adoption was forced or not, but rather relates more to their experience of being adopted. We emphasise that this study's research sample was self-selecting and this feedback is not intended to be representative of all adoptees' experiences either historically or now.

International adoptions

The added complexity and grief surrounding international adoptions was highlighted by a small number of adoptees, who described the impact of being separated from their language and cultural identity.

> "I love Scotland, but I was taken away from my roots." – Adoptee
>
> "They had a very strange understanding that... it was best for [international adoptees] to forget about their native land to integrate… as an adult, I realise how traumatising it is for a ten-year-old child to just forget about their... past life, their culture, the food, everything." – Adoptee

Adoptive families

While this study did not involve adoptive families, a few stakeholders suggested that adoptive parents might feel guilty if they found out or suspected their adoption took place under forced or coercive circumstances.

> "Adoptive families may, as a result of the apology, have felt very uncomfortable and guilty that the children they reared and loved who are now adults had been stolen and that they were, not party to that, but part of that." – Stakeholder

Mental health conditions and other adverse outcomes

Some mothers and adoptees attributed mental health conditions to their adoption experience, including anxiety, depression, addictions and complex post-traumatic stress disorder and a small number mentioned suicide and experiences with criminal justice agencies.

"My story is not unique in terms of, you know, ending up with mental health issues and addiction issues." – Adoptee

"How society kind of impedes adult adoptees from achievement, that adult status, the amount of hurdles that are put in our way… hence we come back to the statistics on the amount of adoptees who take their own lives." – Adoptee

"[I was having panic attacks]… I felt I was going to die." – Adoptee

"I suffered a deep depression." – Mother

"The symptoms that people experience, the PTSD, the loss, the depression, anxiety." – Mother

Chapter summary

Many interviewees recounted traumatic experiences of historic forced adoption. We cannot comment on how widespread these experiences were, but this information provides an insight into the effect of historic forced adoption on people and the need to provide adequate support.

3. The needs of people affected by historic forced adoption: search and reunion

Introduction

Research participants highlighted that people affected by historic forced adoption need support to find and reunite with family members they were separated from by adoption. This chapter summarises the importance of, and barriers to, search and reunion, the support services available, and improvements required.

The importance of search and reunion

Mothers whose babies were adopted spoke of a need to find their child. This was a dominant theme in this study. Reunification and establishing a relationship with the adopted person are the ultimate aims. However, even when reunification or contact is impossible, mothers expressed a need to confirm that the adopted person is happy and healthy, which can provide some peace of mind after years of worry.

> "I can understand if he doesn't want to get in contact, but just to know that he's alright and everything's fine with him, and he's had a good life… I was just looking for peace of mind." – Mother

Finding and meeting their parents, siblings, and extended family members can improve adoptees' sense of identity and understanding of who they are and where they come from. Where a meeting is impossible, simply finding information about their family can provide a sense of belonging. This was another recurring theme in the study.

> "You'd like to have more of a sense of who you are… it's just natural. [Having made contact with family], it's like I've got two families. So it's all good. And that's something I didn't have before. I do feel a bit more complete now." – Adoptee
>
> "When I found out where my family came from, I had the feeling of, at long last, I belong somewhere. I felt like an alien… I didn't look like anybody. I didn't act like anybody… At long last, I knew where I came from." – Adoptee

However, looking for and reuniting with family members is not helpful for everyone affected by historic forced adoption. Some interviewees warned that reunions can be traumatic.

> "People don't really understand what it's about, how it affects you, if you have an opportunity to meet your lost child, how that brings back everything, and it is a very traumatic experience as well." – Mother
>
> "Some, some women didn't, didn't want to look for their child, because they just didn't think they could accept knowing that their child belonged in another family." – Mother

Barriers and challenges with search and reunion

Some research participants gave examples of positive experiences of finding and reconnecting with family members.

However, the practical and emotional challenges associated with this process include situations where:

- One party does not want to meet.

- The two parties do not get on.

- One party is ill or has passed away.

- The adoptive family is upset about the adoptee making contact with their family or where adoptees fear appearing disloyal to their adoptive family.

- Records are unavailable or the other person cannot be found.

> "I was just very, very upset and surprised when I was told the case is closed and I can't contact [my son]." – Mother
>
> "If their birth parents are maybe no longer here, and they've missed that opportunity. That's happened a few times, and that's really, really sad." – Stakeholder
>
> "Mum and Dad had always said, we don't mind at all if you want to look up your birth, and they didn't feel threatened by that. But there was an element of… and this isn't an uncommon thought, in terms of loyalty to your adopted family." – Adoptee
>
> "His father and I both went to North Lanarkshire Council, the social work department, and asked if we could get any information on [our son]. If they could tell us anything, and a few days and they came back and what she told me there was no record of him in their department." – Mother

Issues like this were raised repeatedly in interviews with people affected by historic forced adoption and stakeholders, and can arise whether or not the adoption was forced. However, there can be additional emotional challenges for adoptees who discover during search and reunion that their adoption was forced.

Search and reunion efforts can be further complicated when the adoptee or parents now live in a different country. Issues can include: the need to access records in a foreign country; language barriers; problems getting information from the authorities; and the ongoing stigma around unmarried mothers in some countries.

In addition, some mothers and adoptees believed they were not allowed to look for their family members and were not encouraged to do so.

> "From the get go, very often, the language was once things were signed off, if you will, and the adoption had been approved, then really that was effectively the end of it. And so many, many, many women will have gone through life, believing that that was the end of it and there was nothing we could do." – Stakeholder
>
> "I think you weren't really encouraged to even try to make contact. That was a sense I got. So it was a bit more like right you've down in that family so don't shake the applecart or anything." – Adoptee

What support is required?

Based on interview and survey responses, the following forms of support are important for mothers and adoptees when searching for and reuniting with the family members they have been separated from. For adoptees, these support needs are the same regardless of whether they know their adoption was forced or not.

Preparing to search → Searching for family members → Preparing to make contact → Mediation and supporting first contact → Supporting reunion → Building and maintaining relationships

Preparing to search

People affected by historic forced adoption must be informed about the potential outcomes of any search they carry out. As noted above, they could find upsetting news, for example, if the person they are looking for has passed away, or the records are lost or unavailable.

Individuals may also need support to consider their aim: for instance, do they want to contact their child or family or simply find out if they are safe and well?

Searching for family members

Accessing the records required to trace a family member can be a complicated process involving liaison with multiple agencies, including National Records of Scotland (NRS), local authorities and post-adoption support services. People often require specialist support to access and understand the information they need. We discuss this theme further in Chapter 4.

Preparing to make contact

Individuals need assistance at this stage to help manage their expectations and prepare for disappointing outcomes, for example, if the other person does not want to contact them or they have had an unhappy life.

Mediation and initial contact

Having an organisation act as an intermediary in making initial contact between the two parties can be helpful. This ensures no personal details need to be divulged to the other party, allows for gentle and sensitive first contact, and provides an opportunity for emotional support if the other person does not want to contact them.

"An intermediary would help because it would not be so shocking for them if I bowl up to their front door and knock and say hello, I'm your sister." – Adoptee

Reuniting, meeting and building relationships

Interviewees indicated that reunions can be therapeutic for those affected by historic forced adoption. Still, they can also trigger complex emotions of guilt and rejection, especially if establishing a relationship with the person is difficult.

Support is required after a person has been identified and has agreed to contact. Research participants appreciate advice from organisations with arranging a meeting, ensuring they have realistic expectations for the reunion, and accessing advice if they encounter any difficulties as the relationship develops.

"Support is required to track and trace birth family members and to initiate contact in a supportive and sensitive manner. Individuals should also be supported to understand the possibility that the outcome may not be what they imagined or wished for. They need to be prepared for further hurt and loss." – Stakeholder

"There wasn't any advice or support given for the meeting, I arranged that meeting, I went down on the train, I met my family by myself at the train station, in public. And thankfully, it all went really well. And we all really love each other and got on from the very first second, but it could have been a total disaster." – Adoptee

Emotional support during search and reunion

A prevalent theme was the emotional impact of searching for and reuniting with children and family members. Feelings include excitement at the prospect of reunification, joy at successful meetings, but also anxiety, regret and shame. People may feel rejected if the other party does not want to meet or the relationship does not develop as hoped. Those with experience of historic forced adoption may already have severe emotional and psychological impacts associated with the adoption (as noted in Chapters 2 and 5), so further emotional distress at this stage can have a particularly profound effect.

For this reason, stakeholders and people affected by historic forced adoption felt that emotional and psychological support should be available throughout the search and reunion process and beyond as individuals attempt to build relationships with their child or family members.

"It would have been nice to have had a counsellor or somebody that I could have gone to talk to you because the range of emotions you go through is terrible." – Mother

"How would you start building a relationship with somebody you don't know. They'll be a stranger, you know. So services that would help with that, I think would help." – Stakeholder

"You have all these hurt people. It's a minefield, it's a minefield, my sister-in-law of my birth brother, she couldn't cope with it at the time." – Adoptee

Support is also required when relationships deteriorate or breakdown after initial contact is made.

"I had that contact with my birth mum, and it just didn't work. You know, she just didn't want to talk about it. And I just felt so wounded by it all; I just felt rejected all over again. And it was really, really difficult, and I got absolutely hee-haw support at that point." – Adoptee

"There should be more things set in place for when things go wrong. So a social worker, I would say, should be allocated to every person who's doing a search and needs help. I think it's imperative." – Adoptee

What support is available?

Table 3.1 shows that support is available with search and reunion across Scotland from public, private and third sector services. However, more work is needed to ensure that people affected by historic forced adoption can access the help they need.

Table 3.1: Search and reunion support available

	Preparing to search	Search	Preparing to contact	Mediation & supporting initial contact	Reuniting, meeting & building relationships	Emotional support
Local authorities (services vary)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Post-adoption support services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Commercial websites		✓				
Social media		✓				
National Records of Scotland		✓				
Peer support groups						✓
Genealogists/ private investigators		✓				

We provide more detail about the services offered below before discussing the gaps and improvements required.

Local authorities

Local authorities have a statutory obligation to provide post-adoption support. We heard examples where they had supported adoptees and mothers throughout the searching and reunion process. Some authorities outsource this work to specialist agencies like Barnardo's Scotland Adoption Service.

However, interviewees highlighted inconsistent approaches across local authorities and among different officers within them.

Post-adoption support services

Various organisations provide post-adoption support. These include agencies that are involved in arranging adoptions (such as Barnardo's, Scottish Adoption & Fostering, St Margaret's and St Andrew's), as well as other organisations that support people affected by adoption including Adoption UK Scotland and Birthlink.

Birthlink's services include the Adoption Contact Register, funded by the Scottish Government, which allows adult adoptees, parents and other relatives the opportunity to register their willingness for contact with each other. If the person they are looking for is also registered, Birthlink acts as an intermediary between the two parties to determine if they want to share contact details.

Post-adoption support services can help people trace their relatives. The types of support they offer vary, but generally include sessions to help individuals consider the possible realities of searching and manage their expectations, outline the information that legislation allows people to access, and understand the potential outcomes of the search, including the risk of finding upsetting news. It also includes practical support to find and access the records that are required to find their relatives (for example, Birthlink has volunteer DNA analysts and genealogists and Barnardo's also has volunteers with specialised skills in searching and navigating historic records).

While searching for records, agencies can access documents held by them about adoptions they arranged, and they liaise with other agencies and NRS to access records where held elsewhere. There is also support available to understand the records, support for contacted parties, mediation during the first stages of contact with relatives and support at any reunion meetings and as the relationship develops beyond the initial reunion.

Agencies also often provide emotional support to help people deal with the myriad of emotions involved with searching for and contacting relatives.

Some of these organisations used to charge a fee for some of these services but no longer do so. However, there may be administration fees associated with accessing certain records during the search and reunion process. For example, as noted below, Scotland's People charges a small fee to access some records, and some agencies may ask for donations to support the work and cover administration costs.

Commercial websites

Several mothers and adoptees mentioned using online commercial family-finding services to search for relatives. These fee-paying websites include access to online records such as birth, marriage and death certificates, as well as DNA testing. Individuals can submit DNA samples to reveal information, such as the region or country their ancestors came from. It can also identify potential relatives where DNA matches other people who have used the service, and contact can be facilitated afterwards. Some also offer information about genetic health conditions based on DNA analysis.

Social media

Interviewees and survey respondents gave examples of individuals, including adoptees and families where babies were removed, searching for their relatives online on social media sites.

National Records of Scotland

Adoptees can access their original birth certificate through NRS. This includes their mother's name and address at the time of the birth, and this can help adoptees to find their family. Parents, however, rely on support from the organisations noted above to trace their children.

NRS also offers the [Scotland's People website](), which charges a small fee to access a range of records, including census data, birth, marriage and death certificates, church records and other information. Intended primarily for people undertaking family history research, a few interviewees found it was a useful tool when looking for information about relatives.

Peer support groups

Several mothers and adoptees described peer groups as important sources of emotional support during search and reunion activities. Mothers mentioned groups such as the Movement for Adoption Apology in Scotland (MAA Scotland), while adoptees talked about the Scottish Adult Adoptee Movement (SAAM) and the Group for Adopted People (GAP) Scotland.

Genealogists

A handful of interviewees said they had approached genealogists to help with their search.

Private investigators

One interviewee reported using a private investigator to search for a relative.

How can the support be improved?

Feedback from research participants indicates that various forms of support exist for people affected by historic forced adoption. Many individuals were positive about the support they had received in their search and reunion activities from local authorities and post-adoption support services. People mentioned benefitting from effective assistance to find and contact their relatives, delivered sensitively.

However, this was not the case for all, and other research participants identified several gaps and areas in which support for people with experience of historic forced adoption could be improved. Many issues focused on a lack of capacity and funding, a need for greater consistency across services, and improved awareness of available services. These are relevant to other types of help required and detailed in Chapter 7.

Some interviewees also called for assistance with the cost of search and reunion activities. This is explored further, along with other considerations around financial assistance, in Chapter 6.

Information and guidance on searching

Some interviewees, both mothers and adoptees, felt confused and uncertain about how to search for their relatives, and called for clear guidance on searching and which organisations to contact for support.

The Scottish Government, NRS, and some post-adoption support services' websites contain details about how to search, but some participants felt there is a need to review the information to ensure it meets the needs of people affected by historic forced adoption, and then raise awareness of it.

> "There should be some, a clear format that you can try, this is your first port of call, and this is what you do next. This is what you can then expect. And then if this doesn't work, then you could do this. And here are the voluntary organisations that can help you." – Adoptee
>
> "[I'd like an] option to talk about adoption and the process about accessing records." – Adoptee

People may need additional support where they or the family member they are searching for lives in or comes from a different country.

> "I cannot find [my sister's] details without the enormous cost and effort of coming to Scotland [from overseas]." – Sibling of adoptee

Enhanced emotional support during search and reunion

Many people affected by historic forced adoption who had accessed services to support search and reunion activity provided positive feedback about the services' sensitive and emotionally supportive approach.

However, others have not been able to access this support. There is recognition, among people affected and the services themselves, that more in-depth emotional support is needed to help people during search and reunion, especially after any reunion. We cover this issue in greater detail in Chapter 5.

> "The kind of counselling they do is at pre-reunion… but after reunion… what they don't have is they don't have anybody there on the premises, who's a qualified counsellor, [accredited by the] British Transpersonal Association or [Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland (COSCA)]." – Adoptee

Challenges around commercial services

A few participants felt people who use online commercial family-finding services need more support. Individuals can access information through these sites but often need help to understand and decide what to do with it. These services signpost people to support, but stakeholders highlighted the need to provide information about the Scottish context and services.

> "With these sites and home DNA testing kits, you can suddenly get so much information without any preparation, any support around it, and it's overwhelming to go from one day where you don't know anything about your biological makeup to finding out that you've got 33,000 relatives across the world… your brain just explodes at that point." – Adoptee

Using social media to search for relatives

A few stakeholders warned of the dangers of social media enabling people to contact relatives without third-party mediation, support or advice.

> "Another big challenge at the moment… is social media. People go trawling, Facebook and all the rest of it... We actually proactively tell people don't use social media… frequently, people phone me, and they're crying, they're upset, they can't take it in, you know, hyperventilating, all this kind of thing." – Stakeholder

Chapter summary

Searching for and reuniting with family members they have been separated from is an important process for people affected by historic forced adoption.

However, the process can be long, complicated and emotionally draining. Local authorities and post-adoption support services offer support with finding family members, contact and reunions, and provide emotional help throughout the process.

There is a need to ensure that people are informed about search tools and techniques and the organisations that can support the process. Interviewees emphasised the need to enhance emotional support available for people throughout the process.

Some interviewees expressed concerns about those who find their relatives via commercial websites and social media making contact without guidance. They call for more help and advice for people using these tools.

4. The needs of people affected by historic forced adoption: access to records

Introduction

This chapter explores experiences of accessing adoption papers, court records and other documents related to cases of historic forced adoption. The following themes are outlined: motivations for accessing records; barriers and challenges associated with accessing them; and gaps in support where improvements are needed.

Accessing records is a crucial part of the search and reunion process. Therefore, some findings about this topic (such as support available) are included in the previous chapter. The following sections focus on logistical matters related to accessing records, such as access rights, the language used in historical documents and missing or illegible files.

The importance of accessing records

Interviewees explained that people with experience of historic forced adoption often wish to access written records about the adoption, such as social work, NHS and court documents that contain case notes and descriptions of meetings from the time of the adoption.

While a common motivation for accessing records is search and reunion purposes, it is not the only reason. Some people affected by historic forced adoption explained they had previously accessed documents to help them recall or understand the circumstances and events which led to the adoption.

Barriers and challenges with accessing records

As noted in Chapter 3, accessing records related to adoptions that took place in the 1950s, 60s and 70s can be a complicated and emotional process. This is likely to be accentuated for those who experienced forced adoption due to the need for people, in many cases, to engage with agencies that were involved in arranging the forced adoption. Barriers and challenges faced by those accessing records are summarised in more detail below.

Restricted access rights

Adoptees and parents have different rights in terms of access to adoption records. For example, adoptees can access their original birth certificate, which includes their mother's name and address at the time of the birth. This can be vital information in any search and reunion process. Parents, however, have no right to access any information about their child, including their adopted name.

> "The biggest obstacle for birth mothers is that the rights are not the same as the adopted person. How can you search for somebody when you don't actually know what their name is?" – Stakeholder

"I feel the access to adoption records legislation needs to be updated to include mothers... Those records hold information about me and my son equally, so why am I excluded from viewing them?... There's a lot I don't remember about the time… Viewing these records would help me fill in the gaps and ultimately could help me towards closure about what happened." – Mother

Parents can ask local authorities (using Freedom of Information requests if necessary) and post-adoption support services to access records on their behalf. However, challenges with this approach include lengthy timescales and variations in access protocols across different areas. Stakeholders reported, where requests are made for court papers, individual sheriffs can interpret the relevant legislation differently and this leads to variations in the information that they will or will not release.

Interviewees also discussed difficulties in accessing information about their family's medical history. Adoptees highlighted being unable to gain access to their parents' medical records because of data protection restrictions, meaning they are unaware of any hereditary or genetic health conditions or risks. Some found this lack of knowledge distressing.

"I don't know any medical history. I've actually got a rare illness and it took until age 14 to find that out. And sometimes that can be very upsetting when anyone with a medical background can ask, what's your medical history? And if you don't know… that question can be upsetting." – Adoptee

Lost records

A common barrier to accessing records identified by participants was being unable to locate files related to the adoption. Again, this issue can affect people who experienced forced adoptions and those involved in consensual adoptions. It can be demoralising and frustrating, and a few said it felt like their search had 'reached a dead end' or 'hit a brick wall'.

Participants shared different reasons for the loss of their records, such as:

- Files going missing when adoption agencies or council buildings closed or moved premises.
- Paperwork destroyed in a fire or flood; a claim met with scepticism by a few interviewees.

A few said they had been given no explanation for the missing documents; they were simply told their files could not be found.

> "There were no records. That was it. That was what the chap said. And I said, 'How have you got no record when I had him?'… He said 'You know, we've moved offices that often that we've lost a lot of contact records'." – Mother

> "I was told all the records were apparently burnt in a fire. And I'm like, does nobody ever think to let us know?" – Adoptee

> "I have been told about adult adoptees who have gone to where they were born, and being told, we don't have any records, they were all burnt down in a fire. And you just think this has turned into a bit of a cliche, you know? So I think that in the past that has been an obstacle for adopted people looking for information." – Stakeholder

> "There's also the risk that people are going back to an agency where there's nobody there that remembers them, or anything to do with their particular experiences. And a number of times there's been fires or floods or things that have affected records. That was a surprise to me; how many people have not been able to access information." - Stakeholder

Illegible records

Archived adoption records can be difficult to read; most were handwritten on paper decades ago and have degraded over time, affecting the text's legibility. Digitally archived material can also be challenging; participants described some scanned or photographed documents as illegible.

> "[A post-adoption support service] provided me with my birth certificate and [another agency] got my adoption records for me, but a lot of the information isn't readable. I'm not sure if it's the way it's been photocopied or created. So I don't have 100% of my information." – Adoptee

> "Quality of records is very poor. A lot of the information can't be made out. The handwriting is very poor and details of the writing seem like it's erased." – Adoptee

Incomplete records and records with insufficient detail

Some participants said they gained access to their records but were disappointed or frustrated when the files did not reveal any new information, due to a lack of detail or incomplete fields.

> "In the early 90s, I was able to go to Edinburgh's Register House where I was given access to court records regarding my adoption, but learned nothing new." – Adoptee
>
> "All of the accounts of different meetings that I had with the social worker, there are items missing from it, significant items. For example, the social worker came to visit me on the first day after my son was born. There was no record in there of that conversation. And that was the conversation where I said, 'Well, you know, I was considering adoption, and now I don't want it'." – Mother
>
> "At times we cannot access information or there is very little information held." – Stakeholder
>
> "One of the challenges is the quality of information available. While records are kept for up to 100 years, the content may not be what is expected or hoped for. Some records will be excellent, while others may be quite limited with no photos etc. Managing expectations is challenging." – Stakeholder

A few interviewees attributed this to less rigorous record-keeping processes at the time.

> "There just weren't the same recording practices at that time. Very little recorded, and then even the retention? I mean, the responsibility was there to retain at that point, but there just is such little information when you go back into historical files… they're tiny compared to the huge files that people would have now where everything's recorded… But reading some of the really old ones, it's quite an eye-opener. Different practice, different time, different standards." – Stakeholder

Potentially inaccurate records

A handful of participants shared concerns that records about the adoption were inaccurate. For example, a few had seen records of meetings they believe did not happen and documents with incorrect dates, names and information and participants identified this as a barrier to finding information about their past.

Language used

The language used in historical records can pose challenges for two main reasons: there is often legal jargon that laypeople struggle to understand; and some files contain language or comments which can upset readers. A few interviewees recounted incidences of derogatory, stigmatising and judgemental language in their records.

> "Sometimes there are phrases that will be really judgemental. What they've written… it's a sign of the times back then, you know, she was 'an unmarried mother'… So that's quite hard to read and see that in black and white for people." – Stakeholder

> "I saw a snippet a GP had written, that… the adoptive parents, he was concerned about how they would cope if the 'teenager' [i.e. the mother] changed her mind. It was really upsetting to read that… it validated that I hadn't mattered." – Mother

Other challenges

A few stakeholders said that responding to requests and tracking down records can be difficult and time-consuming; some noted that a lack of staff and resources to support this process can be a barrier to helping people access records. A small number also encountered delays in sourcing documents due to restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What needs to be improved?

Interviewees identified gaps in services and areas for improvement around the provision of support available for accessing records related to historic forced adoption.

Support to access records

A common request from participants was for more practical help and guidance about accessing records, including information about what records people can access, which services can help, and what type of documents may be available.

> "Information about how to search national records offices made more available, in local library, care hubs, general media, etc would have sped up my search." – Adoptee

Enhanced emotional support

Accessing records related to historic forced adoption can be a distressing and emotional process. Files may contain shocking or upsetting information (for example news of a family member who has passed away). In other cases, people may be frustrated and disappointed by the limited information available. A recurring theme among some interviewees was a lack of emotional support available for those accessing records. They advocated for more help for individuals to process any distressing discoveries or come to terms with there being minimal information.

> "And then the records, sometimes there are some really horrible things. Sometimes people come across, you know, maybe they've been a product of rape… You don't want to just read that without anybody being there, you know?" – Stakeholder

> "Automatic counselling should be there for after they have seen the birth records because it's quite a big thing, it's quite traumatic to read." – Adoptee

Help to understand information

As noted above, records are often written in formal or legal language, which is difficult to understand, and therefore people may require support to interpret their contents.

> "I suppose it's not just information, it's about the ability or help interpreting that information. Because often there's initials, there's ways of putting things that the lawyers have, you know, guardian ad litem, and what have you. And all of those things need somebody to hold your hand, really." – Stakeholder

Time constraints

A few participants said they were given a limited time frame to consult their records and would have appreciated an extended period to review the files. Some inconsistencies were also noted in rules around photographing or copying the records; interviewees argued for greater consistency in such protocols, advising that those affected by historic forced adoption should be entitled to a copy of all paperwork about the adoption.

Chapter summary

People affected by historic forced adoption often wish to access written records, such as social work, NHS and court documents with case notes and descriptions of meetings that occurred during the adoption. While many access these records in the search and reunion process, others do so to help remember or understand the circumstances around the adoption.

Several challenges can make it difficult to access and understand records related to historic forced adoption, including: restrictions in place around who can access different documents; records which have been lost over time; and documents which are difficult to read because of their condition or the language used.

Interviewees suggested how this process could be improved, including: improved support to access and understand records; emotional support to help people process any upsetting information that emerges as part of their search; and removing any monetary costs associated with accessing records.

5. The needs of people affected by historic forced adoption: emotional and psychological support

Introduction

Research participants emphasised the severe emotional and psychological impact of historic forced adoption, some referring to mental health conditions that they developed and attribute to their experience. This chapter summarises their needs for emotional, psychological and mental health support, discusses available services, and highlights gaps and areas for improvement.

Emotional and psychological impacts

Chapter 2 summarises the emotional and psychological impact of historic forced adoptions. For mothers, feelings of loss, guilt and shame have stayed with them throughout their lives. In some cases, their mental health has suffered with examples of anxiety, depression and complex post-traumatic stress disorder.

Adoptees described difficulties with their sense of identity and belonging, and being separated from their mother early in life can have a profound emotional and psychological impact. Adoptees also reported mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression and complex post-traumatic stress disorder.

As noted in Chapter 3, an individual's attempts to find and reconnect with people they have been separated from by adoption can have profound emotional and psychological effects. These may be pronounced when the search process is long or complicated, the other person does not want to make contact, or establishing a relationship with the other person is difficult. Similarly, Chapter 4 discusses the emotional impact of accessing adoption records, another area where people may require emotional and psychological support.

Support needs

Research participants reported a pressing need to support people with experience of historic forced adoption with the mental health, emotional and psychological impacts of that lived experience. This was a dominant theme in the study and participants identified needs that focus on the following:

Emotional support, advice & guidance

Peer support

Creative & alternative therapies

Emotional support, advice and guidance

What support is needed?

Many mothers and adoptees identified a need for talking therapies such as counselling and psychotherapy to address the emotional and psychological impact of historic forced adoption. After years of secrecy, mothers want to talk about their experience, and adoptees would value professional support to deal with the emotional and psychological effect of adoption on them. Adoptees reported that adoption can have an emotional and psychological impact, regardless of whether it was forced. However, some adoptees felt sad about the impact of forced adoption on their mother.

> "It would be nice to have some more counselling, a counsellor I could talk to really just to help me really with things when I'm struggling with everything." – Mother
>
> "I think just having somebody to pour it out to… I think just might take an awful weight off their mind… I think there should be more help for them. And even if it is just talking therapy, whatever." – Stakeholder
>
> "The Government needs to pay more for psychological support for adoptees." – Adoptee
>
> "I'd asked for help when I was struggling with trauma which I now realise was trauma. PTSD type stuff, [but] there was no specific support… I needed a space where I could more talk about the negative effects of how it's affecting me now, and how to live a life with the scars." – Adoptee

Stakeholders identified a range of support that could help to address the emotional and psychological impact of historic forced adoption, including:

- advice and guidance on the emotional impact of historic forced adoption; and

- intensive mental health treatments (such as talking therapies like counselling and psychotherapy) that deliver specialist treatment to support individuals with psychological or mental health issues. These services are delivered by counsellors, psychotherapists, psychiatrists or psychologists registered with a professional counselling body, such as COSCA (Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland), the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) or the British Psychological Society.

People with lived experience and stakeholders felt that both advice and guidance, and counselling and other therapies delivered by registered counsellors or therapists are important for people affected by historic forced adoption. We explore this issue further in our separate service delivery paper.

> "There are no dedicated counselling organisations. There are non-statutory organisations and some of the local authorities that offer advice and support. They do not offer... I would say dedicated counselling, that is professional counselling with a capital C." – Stakeholder
>
> "There are no counsellors or mental health services locally who specialise in adoption and we feel it is a very specialist subject." – Stakeholder
>
> "I would love to be able to have somebody that I can talk to and just empty my head, of all these years' worth of pain… one to one, it wouldn't need to be, a psychologist, but somebody who is trained in some sort of listening, wellbeing type skills. I think it'd be really helpful." – Adoptee

What support is available?

NHS Scotland offers psychologist and psychiatrist support. However, interviewees reported mixed experiences with this service. A few described it as effective, but others felt their psychologist or psychiatrist did not understand or appreciate the impact of historic forced adoption. Some talked about their feelings with their GP, however, GPs are also not always fully aware of the potential impact of historic forced adoption on individuals, and this can be a barrier to accessing the help required.

Long waiting times and difficulties scheduling appointments with NHS staff are also challenges with NHS services.

Some interviewees have accessed private psychologists, psychiatrists, counsellors and therapists. Individuals generally found these helpful, but the cost of such services was prohibitive for others. Some post-adoption support services said they had supported individuals to access counsellors in the past, but the cost means it is not always possible.

> "Private therapy is expensive and not easy to access." – Adoptee
>
> "I did have a counsellor for a while but it was private and it cost a lot of money and I just couldn't keep up with it." – Adoptee

Advice and guidance is delivered by post-adoption support services and local authorities. This includes support, delivered by skilled practitioners such as social workers, to help individuals prepare for and deal with the emotional nature of search and reunion activities and to address the psychological impact of historic forced adoption more widely, where appropriate.

These services do not include mental health treatment delivered by psychotherapists, psychiatrists or psychologists, although Scottish Adoption & Fostering's Bluebird project includes a counsellor who is registered with BACP.

Interviewees who had accessed support from post-adoption support services and local authorities gave positive feedback, but some said they needed more intensive therapy or treatment.

How can the support be improved?

A common theme was the need for more counselling and therapy services for people affected by historic forced adoption. Nearly all (90%, 17) respondents to the local authority survey argued for more counselling services, and 74% (14) identified a need for more psychotherapy.

While some people affected by historic forced adoption reported positive experiences of counselling and therapy, the consensus was that psychiatrists, psychologists, counsellors and therapists need more awareness and understanding of the impact of historic forced adoption. Some of these professionals already have awareness and understanding, but it needs to be more widespread to ensure that people with experience of historic forced adoption receive appropriate counselling, therapy and treatment.

> "Your average counsellor is not going to have that understanding and be able to piece those bits together, and have that impact." – Stakeholder
>
> "I've had counselling, a couple of times over the years… neither of them were obviously trained in dealing with someone with the emotions that an adopted person has." – Adoptee
>
> "[The psychologist] didn't understand, not at all. I mean the girl was nice… But she definitely didn't understand what I had went through and what I was going through or whatever, I just left it." – Mother

Interviewees and survey respondents highlighted low awareness and understanding among many professional groups, not just counsellors and therapists. We discuss this issue in greater detail later in this chapter.

A few people favoured counselling and therapy services that specialise in supporting people affected by historic forced adoption, but the consensus was that further training and awareness-raising among services, in general, would improve the services available.

Another issue related to waiting times for NHS services, and some interviewees suggested more could be done to increase capacity. However, a few perceived that limited funding exists to support these services.

> "The main point will be more funding and because there is not much help out there due to lack of funding and everything always comes down to money." – Adoptee

Peer support

What support is needed?

Many mothers and adoptees described peer support as beneficial, saying it was helpful to discuss their emotions and experiences with other people affected by historic forced adoption. This was a recurring theme in the study. Peer support helps people to deal with the long-term impact of historic forced adoption and the emotional impact of search

and reunion attempts. It also provides a vital source of moral support, advice, validation and acceptance.

> "I need to talk to other women. That's going to be one of the best therapies for me is going to be talking to other women." – Mother
>
> "Peer support is very important as well, because you feel that other people who have been through the experience, really do understand it, and there's very few other people that will understand it." – Mother

However, peer support is not suitable for everyone, particularly those who feel uncomfortable speaking or mixing with a group and require one-to-one approaches.

> "For me, peer-to-peer support is definitely not helpful and I wouldn't use it. I need highly specialised, individual help." – Adoptee
>
> "We have recently started a group for adult adoptees but had no response... the difficulty is that by the nature of adoption, there is often a tricky attachment pattern and so groups don't always work for adopted people." – Stakeholder

What support is available?

We found no evidence of any formal peer support groups in Scotland for parents, and only a few formal groups for adoptees. However, the Scottish Government commissioned Health in Mind to develop a peer support service, launched in September 2023.

Two local authority survey respondents (11%) said their organisation provides peer support services, but no people affected by historic forced adoption we spoke to reported having accessed these.

A few interviewees mentioned a peer support service previously run by an agency for parents, but this no longer exists. Barnardo's and Adoption UK Scotland offer group work for adoptees but not currently parents with experience of historic forced adoption[12], while Scottish Adoption & Fostering's Bluebird project offers informal peer support and links to the organisation's group work.

Many people with experience of historic forced adoption found informal groups and networks crucial. Mothers who met other mothers through MAA Scotland indicated that it was invaluable. Similarly, adoptees mentioned groups including SAAM and GAP Scotland. Research participants spoke positively about these groups' value in providing emotional support and validating their experiences.

> "It makes a difference, you know, when you're speaking to [other mothers]. You know you're not the only one. You can talk about it. I mean, for years and years you were ashamed of it." – Mother

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[12] Adoption UK Scotland does offer group work for adoptive parents.

"I've met the adoptee group... There's quite an active adoptee Twitter group, and I was picking things up on there. And just got to know people and in many ways, they are the best support because, some of them are trained counsellors as it happens, but because they've been through it, because they know exactly what we're talking about." – Adoptee

Some research participants mentioned engaging with peer support groups in other countries, for example, Origins Australia for mothers, and several online groups for adoptees.

What needs to be improved?

Peer support is important for mothers and adoptees. While many research participants described the value of informal networks, there is a need to formalise this to ensure that peer support services can help more people. Nearly four-fifths (15, 79%) of local authority survey respondents called for more peer support services.

There is optimism that the service being developed by Health in Mind will improve peer support availability. More detail about Health in Mind's service is included in the service delivery paper that sits alongside this report.

Creative and alternative therapies

What support is needed?

A few research participants advocated for using creative and alternative therapies, including art therapy, music therapy, drama therapy and hypnotherapy, to help mothers and adoptees address the emotional and psychological impact of historic forced adoption. These interviewees explained that the impact of trauma can be hard to express in words, but creative and alternative therapies offer a different method for people to process their experiences and communicate their needs.

"I think [hypnotherapy] should be an option for mothers and their daughters and sons… I think, trauma like this, that hypnotherapy would work… for my mum especially, because it's easy to bring stuff up to the subconscious and talk about it." – Sibling of adoptee

What support is available?

Research participants were unaware of creative or alternative therapies specifically for people affected by historic forced adoption. However, a few described accessing effective support through private therapists.

Some people with experience of historic forced adoption were aware of creative therapies delivered by post-adoption support services as part of post-adoption support for children and young people, but none were aware of similar services for adoptees who are now adults.

What needs to be improved?

A few participants requested more availability of creative and alternative therapies.

> "It's that unconscious memory where stuff is stored. When there are triggers, something will happen and it triggers a dreadful emotional response… art therapy, music therapy and drama would actually help the likes of us as well as children but it's not available anywhere." – Adoptee

Other considerations and challenges

Professional awareness and training

Some participants reported receiving effective support from NHS and private counsellors and therapists who understood the impact of historic forced adoption.

However, a prevalent theme in study was that health professionals, particularly in the NHS, need more familiarity with and understanding of historic forced adoption and its impact. Some interviewees recalled that their health professionals did not ask about any adoption experience during discussions about their mental health.

All local authority survey respondents felt awareness of the impact of historic forced adoption needs to improve among those providing support (100%, 19). Nearly all (95%, 18) agreed that services must be more relevant and specific to people affected by historic forced adoption.

When health professionals were aware of the individual's experience of adoption, it was not always taken into account when diagnosing the person's condition, and we heard a few examples where individuals believed they were misdiagnosed due to their health professionals' lack of awareness of historic forced adoption. One, for instance, described years of difficulties, misdiagnoses and inappropriate medication until she chanced upon a GP who happened to know about adoption trauma, recognised the cause of her challenges, and arranged effective support for her.

> "[That GP] saved my life." – Adoptee

We found no awareness among interviewees of any training materials or guidelines for GPs or mental health professionals in our fieldwork. Interviewees identified this as a critical gap.

Health professionals have many demands on their time, but many interviewees urged more action to raise awareness among GPs and mental health professionals to help them effectively support people affected by historic forced adoption.

> "Adoptees and some people, they'll go to the doctor's diagnosed with depression or anxiety, they're handed pills. And when really there could be other routes, different to medication, [there's something] deeper lying within the mind, but understand the doctor's point of view, they're strained and when you get someone who's in a big distress, it's very difficult to navigate what service they need." – Adoptee
>
> "I do feel that awareness needs to be raised among GPs and mental health professionals about the impacts of historical adoption… to get an awareness that this person who's been suffering most of their life, what might have caused that and, and to get appropriate help." – Mother

Training is available for social workers and local authorities from Birthlink and Barnardo's, for example, with information about search and reunion processes, the needs of people with experience of historic forced adoption, and the support services available. Birthlink also operates a telephone support line for post-adoption practice queries. However, medical professionals will likely require more in-depth training covering the clinical impact of historic forced adoption.

Support for wider family

Many interviewees conveyed the need to support everyone affected by historic forced adoption. This includes mothers, adoptees and adoptive families, but also fathers and wider families, mothers' subsequent children, adoptees' siblings and adoptees' children.

Funding to access private support

The cost of private services was a common barrier for many. Suggestions to address this included providing financial assistance to people affected by historic forced adoption to help them access support privately. Again, however, participants acknowledged this could strain central and local government funding.

> "In-person specialised psychological therapy that is available as long as needed. This should be provided free." – Adoptee
>
> "I think the NHS should be doing it… like getting stuff paid for them to help them... We've had the apology but I just feel these women have suffered in silence for so long. They should be compensated in some way." – Sibling of adoptee

Support from family and friends

Support from family members and friends has been crucial for many mothers and adoptees. In many cases, where they have been unable to access effective professional assistance, this has been a person's only way to process the impact of historic forced adoption.

> "If I hadn't the family I've got, I don't think I would have survived, I don't think I would have got over it, but my family has helped me an awful lot." – Mother

Chapter summary

Experiences of historic forced adoption have had a severe emotional and psychological impact on the people involved, leading to mental health conditions for many. A prevalent request among research participants was for more counselling, psychotherapy, psychiatrist and psychologist support. While some have accessed adequate support from medical professionals, many reported a need to enhance GPs and mental health professionals' awareness of the impact of historic forced adoption, to ensure they can deliver effective support.

Peer support was also identified as crucial. Informal networks have been supportive, and Health in Mind has recently launched a more formal historic forced adoption peer support service commissioned by the Scottish Government.

A few others requested creative and alternative therapies such as music, art, drama or hypnotherapy.

6. Other support needs

Introduction

The findings in this report centre around three main overarching themes:

- Search and reunion
- Accessing records
- Emotional support

However, throughout the study, other support needs outwith these categories were detailed by participants and are summarised in this chapter.

Memorial and commitment to the future

Some mothers advocated for creating a permanent national memorial to recognise the experiences of those affected by historic forced adoption, acknowledge their loss and represent a commitment to ensure similar cases will never happen again.

Financial assistance

Only one research participant suggested there should be direct financial compensation for people affected by historic forced adoption, but some others called for funding to be available so individuals can access the support they need. As noted in Chapter 3, this may include funding to help pay for any fees associated with accessing records or tracing their family members, or a contribution towards the cost of travelling to attend reunions with their family members, especially if that involves travelling a long distance within Scotland, the UK or overseas.

> "Tracing my family is difficult and expensive online." – Adoptee
>
> "Where families live a distance away, financial support may be required to assist with the contact meetings." – Stakeholder

As noted in Chapter 5, some interviewees called for funding to cover the cost of private counsellors and therapists to help with the emotional, psychological and mental health impact of historic forced adoption.

Education

Access to information and education about the impact of adoption might help adoptees understand their feelings. A few adoptees suggested this, and one said they had adapted the NHS's Survive and Thrive course for people affected by trauma to focus on the impact of adoption. This person found it beneficial to learn about the explanations behind their emotional and psychological problems, and believed this could also be helpful for other adoptees. Another adoptee also spoke about the benefits of being educated about their mental health.

> "I think more education. If somebody was to say to me, right we are going to run a course on the effects of adoption on adult adoptees now, I'd totally be up for that,

learning more about how it can affect me… One of the things I've learnt was that I am hyper-vigilant all the time. And it was just like, oh right that's why I'm like that. I think that would be helpful." – Adoptee

Tick box

A few adoptees suggested incorporating a 'tick box,' which indicates if an individual is adopted, into systems and paperwork used by public services. This would alert professionals that the person they are working with may be affected by adoption trauma and help them support the person more effectively. It would also save the adoptee from repeating their story to multiple professionals and agencies.

"Every health appointment, every single health appointment. There must be a way of putting it onto their system. Do not ask these questions, it's just basic stuff." – Adoptee

Chapter summary

Participants in the study requested other types of support and action, including financial aid, public education about the impact of adoption, and recognition of those affected by historic forced adoption through a national memorial.

7. Recurring challenges and considerations

Introduction

We have described several challenges associated with meeting the support needs outlined in the previous chapters. Here, we summarise other broader challenges related to planning services for people affected by historic forced adoption.

Greater consistency

Research participants emphasised inconsistencies in the types and quality of support available across different organisations and professionals. We found no clear evidence of any area-based patterns of provision in this respect; instead the types and quality of services offered by different organisations varied depending on the individual officer involved, or as a result of fluctuations in resources available. This applies to local authorities, post-adoption support services, GPs, mental health professionals and other organisations supporting people with historic forced adoption experience.

To address these inconsistencies, some interviewees urged the Scottish Government to provide guidance about the types of support that should be available for people affected by historic forced adoption. Although local authorities have a statutory obligation to deliver post-adoption support for children living with adoptive families, there is less clarity over the help that should be available for people affected by historic forced adoption.

Service capacity and funding

Many organisations emphasised a lack of funding and capacity, which constrains the support they can offer people with experience of historic forced adoption. Lack of capacity and long waiting times in local authorities, NHS services, post-adoption support services and other organisations was a recurring theme in this research. Nearly four-fifths of local authority survey respondents (15, 79%) and many interviewees said more availability is needed.

> "One of the problems that we have as an agency… is we're a very small charity and our pockets are not as deep as we would like them to be." – Stakeholder
>
> "The capacity of different local authorities is definitely an issue particularly just now because local authorities are facing a massive staffing crisis... So there's a big unmet need, I think in terms of being able to just hold and ring-fence the capacity within services to give the time and the commitment that is needed to do this piece of work properly." – Stakeholder

As a result, many interviewees – stakeholders and people affected by historic forced adoption - made the case for increased funding for services to support people affected by historic forced adoption.

Reservations around adoption agencies' role

Some interviewees expressed strong reservations about engaging with agencies involved in historic forced adoption practices. Although some interviewees recounted positive experiences of these agencies' assistance, others felt traumatised and refused to engage or access support from them entirely.

"What they see is the local authority is the one that's caused these issues. So they don't want us to be the people that are supporting them long-term." – Stakeholder

"It is chilling to consider that a mother seeking information about her lost son or daughter, or seeking support for mental health services, currently has no option but to approach the adoption agency that took her child or an agent of that body." – Mother

Lack of awareness of available services

Low awareness of services available is a theme that arose in several interviews. Local authority survey respondents highlighted low awareness of the services (17, 90%) and how to access them (13, 68%) as major barriers in supporting people with experience of historic forced adoption. The need for enhanced awareness-raising activity was a common suggestion among research participants.

"I found it quite difficult to get any information on how to find him. It was all quite difficult to find him until somebody mentioned [a post-adoption support service] and then everything just sort of you know went from there." – Sibling of adoptee

Some interviewees reflected on difficulties in finding information about support services. A handful noted that skills in using the internet are required. This can create barriers in access: those without internet access or lacking digital skills may be unaware of services that could help them.

"People don't always have a phone or IT access and there's costs associated with many of those things which our most vulnerable in society won't always have the economic capacity to fulfil." – Stakeholder

Suggestions for raising awareness of services included advertising campaigns, flyers in GPs surgeries, and, crucially, enhancing awareness among professionals such as GPs and social workers to enable more effective signposting.

"I don't know if they do, they might but I think there probably should be an advertising campaign. It's probably better if it's a Scottish Government thing. But it would have to go national [UK] as opposed to just in Scotland." – Adoptee

However, a stakeholder warned that support services' capacity must be increased before any awareness-raising activities are undertaken. Otherwise, services may not be able to meet the increased demand that could be generated.

> "But what I would say is that I think what needs to be put in place first, before that kind of awareness-raising is… we need to have the resources there." – Stakeholder

Societal views of adoption

Several adoptees spoke of a perception that adoption is viewed positively among society in general. They feel adoptees are seen as children who were rescued from a difficult situation and should be grateful a family took them in. However, experiences of adoptees who took part in our in research were more mixed: many described positive experiences with their adoptive families but many also reported negative outcomes such as mental health issues that they attributed to being adopted, and a sizeable minority described cruel or negligent treatment by their adoptive families. Again, however, it is important to note that research participants were self-selecting, and feedback from adoptees in this study is not intended to be representative of all adoptees, either historically or now. As noted in Chapter 1, current adoption policy and practice differs from the 1950s-1970s period that is the focus of this study, and this must be borne in mind when considering these findings.

> "The portrayal that adopted children have been looked after and loved and that for those children everything is rosy." – Adoptee

Similarly, some mothers feel society blames them for the adoption.

> "I generally got the impression that everyone believed that wicked or negligent parents abandoned kids, and they got adopted into wonderful adoptive families, and everyone lived happily ever after. So, I learnt not to say much." – Mother

These views are compounded by portrayals of adoption in popular culture. Some interviewees referred to television programmes that showcase individuals' attempts to find their family. They felt programmes like this place a positive slant on adoption and do not show cases of unsuccessful or unhappy search and reunion attempts. Interviewees warned this can skew people's expectations of search and reunion activities.

> "There's so much that needs to be done education-wise to educate people and represent the views and the experiences of parents who have lost their children to adoption. Because it's not represented well at all on the media." – Mother
>
> "I would like, somehow, that the public perception of adoption to be changed, TV programmes do little to tell the truth that is experienced by most families, that happily ever after myth is rarely the whole truth." – Mother

Reluctance to talk about adoption

Some research participants reported that, due to the stigma and secrecy surrounding historic forced adoption, and wider societal views of adoption, people affected may be reluctant to talk about their experiences. One example involves a mother who had become pregnant because of rape. Her friends arranged support from an organisation that supports sexual abuse survivors, but the individual could not bring herself to talk about the experience.

> "It's a challenge to actually get people to access the services to stick their head above the parapet and say, I am one of those people. I am one of those women. I mean, I still find it difficult… it's partly linked still, with all the guilt and shame, that's all connected all around it. Because I mean, I couldn't say, I couldn't say the word adoption for years. I just I couldn't say it." – Mother
>
> "Openness I think, would be a great a big step forward. There was so much secrecy around it for us. And it's not healthy because you end up getting tangled in lies and pretending and it's not healthy." – Mother

Feeling they have no right to support

We noted in Chapter 3 that some mothers felt they were not allowed to search for their child given the paperwork they were forced to sign at the time of the adoption. Similarly, people affected by historic forced adoption may feel they are not entitled to any support with their experience. Over half (10, 53%) of local authority survey respondents identified a feeling of not being entitled to seek support as a barrier, and some interviewees reinforced this.

> "One of the barriers is that for these women… they don't think that they have a right or that they're worth anything, so they're not going to go seeking help." – Stakeholder

Lack of services for adult adoptees

Some interviewees reported that post-adoption support focuses on children, young people and adoptive families, and there is a shortage of help for adult adoptees. Some stakeholders agreed their services are focused on adopted children and young people. Adult adoptees felt they need more support, both for themselves and their children to address the inter-generational impact of historic forced adoption. Adoption UK Scotland reported it has recently established an advisory board of adult adoptee members that feeds into the organisation's policy and approach to working with adult adoptees.

"Adoption services usually stop, they usually cater for the kids, 18 or below, so adult adoptees, we struggle to find help, and the only way we find help is with each other." – Adoptee

"We are not set up to provide this support – we focus on families and their children. Once adoptees are adults we provide little. We don't have resources to do this sadly." – Stakeholder

8.   Conclusions and areas for consideration

In this study, mothers, wider family members, adoptees and other stakeholders shared detailed accounts of their historic forced adoption experience. These provided detailed insight into the lifelong impact of the practice on people affected and their support needs. Many said they welcomed the opportunity to talk about their experiences.

When considering the next steps, we suggest the Scottish Government continues engaging with people with lived experience of historic forced adoption to benefit from their insight and ensure that support services meet their needs. Models such as the Scottish Government's National Suicide Prevention Leadership Group Lived Experience Panel could be considered. This oversees the implementation of the Suicide Prevention Action Plan and includes people with lived experience of bereavement by suicide.

Research participants identified several support needs for the Scottish Government to address. We have summarised these below along with areas for the Scottish Government to consider when planning support for people affected by historic forced adoption. These are categorised into top, high, medium and lower priority.

The levels of prioritisation reflect the research team's judgement based on our interpretation of research participants' feedback from research participants. Considerations classed as 'lower priority' are still important points, but our interpretation is that these should be lower priorities based on the urgency with which action is required and the strength or volume of feedback from interviewees.

However, we recognise that individual participants or groups may disagree with this prioritisation. Consequently, we suggest it is critical to engage with people who have lived experience of historic forced adoption to agree next steps and priority action points.

As noted earlier in this report, some of these findings are likely to be relevant to people affected by adoption regardless of whether it was forced. This is in contrast to some of the literature, which states that people affected by historic forced adoption are likely to have unique needs[13]. However, as our study focused on historic forced adoption, and is not intended as a review of the policy or practice of adoption in general, either now or historically, we cannot comment on the experience of those involved in consensual adoptions or compare their needs with those people affected by historic forced adoption.

Search and reunion

Searching for and reuniting with family members they have been separated from by adoption is an important process for people affected by historic forced adoption. This is an emotional process, and can be distressing, but it can also provide peace of mind for mothers that their child is healthy and happy, and a sense of identity for adoptees.

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[13] Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

Research participants were clear that support is required throughout the search and reunion process. This includes preparatory work to help individuals manage their expectations, support to find and access relevant records, help from intermediaries to facilitate and advise on first contact and reunions, and on-going support after contact has been made and reunions taken place.

Search and reunion: areas for consideration

Top priority

1. People affected by historic forced adoption and stakeholders called for emotional and psychological support to be available for people throughout the search and reunion process. This is particularly important when people receive upsetting news, for example, if the other person does not want to meet or has died, or if an adoptee discovers that their adoption was forced.

Medium priority

2. Support is available throughout the search and reunion process, but some research participants needed guidance about searching for their family members. This indicates it is important there is clear and easily accessible information about how to search for family members and about the organisations that can provide support.

3. Some people need financial support with search and reunion activities. For example, there may be charges to access certain records, or expenses to attend reunions, particularly if travelling a significant distance. We suggest the Scottish Government considers whether and how to provide funding to support these costs.

Lower priority

4. Some research participants described the difficulties of searching for family members using commercial websites or social media without support. This shows that ensuring that people in this situation receive information about organisations in Scotland that can support them is important.

Access to records

Access to records is a key part of the search and reunion process, but another reason for accessing records is to help people affected by historic forced adoption to recall or understand what happened at the time of the adoption.

Access to records: areas for consideration

High priority

5. People often require emotional support, especially if records contain surprising or upsetting news or derogatory references to themselves. The findings indicate that providing guidelines for organisations to ensure emotional support is available for people accessing records could help with this.

6. Support to understand records, particularly if they contain professional jargon or outdated terminology, may be required. Approaches to supporting people when they access records varies between organisations, but we suggest the Scottish Government could consider providing guidelines for organisations which hold records to encourage them, if they do not already do so, to help individuals understand the information.

Lower priority

7. Access to medical records is a particular concern for adoptees, who called for support with this issue. Without this, adoptees do not know about their family medical history and risk of hereditary or genetic conditions. There are significant data protection barriers, but we suggest the Scottish Government considers any steps that could be taken to make it easier for adoptees to access information about their family's health background.

Emotional and psychological support

Research participants described the significant emotional and psychological impact of historic forced adoption. Some reported mental health conditions that they attribute to their experience. Emotional and psychological support is required to help people deal with the impact of the adoption, and throughout any attempts they make to access their records or search for their family members.

Emotional and psychological support: Areas for consideration

Top priority

8. People affected by historic forced adoption and stakeholders called for adequate therapies and treatments to be available for individuals with experience of historic forced adoption. Some suggested a tiered approach may be needed. Some people may require a safe, independent space to share their experience, while others may need more in-depth psychotherapy, psychologist or psychiatrist treatment to address mental health conditions. People may need different services at different times of their lives.

9. Stakeholders and people with experience of historic forced adoption criticised public services, especially mental health support, for professionals' lack of awareness of the impact of historic forced adoption and the needs of people affected by the practice. While some professionals are aware and understanding, there was broad consensus among research participants that professionals need to be more aware of the impact of historic forced adoption, so they can support and signpost people more effectively. We suggest the Scottish Government considers:

- Introducing a programme to raise awareness among key professionals, including GPs, mental health professionals and social workers, of the impact of historic forced adoption and the needs of people affected by it. Barnardo's and Birthlink carry out awareness-raising work with local authorities, and their experience could help develop a suitable programme.

- Engaging with professional bodies and educational providers responsible for training, education, continuing professional development (CPD) and standards in key professions. The engagement could focus on the inclusion of topics around historic forced adoption and its impact in professional training.

10. This research has identified the crucial role of peer support for many people affected by historic forced adoption. Informal networks are valuable for adoptees and mothers, and the Scottish Government has commissioned Health in Mind to deliver a more formal service. We suggest monitoring this service's impact carefully to ensure it provides effective support and the Scottish Government identifies lessons learned from delivery.

11. Participants highlighted that historic forced adoption can have an emotional and psychological impact on wider families, including fathers, siblings and extended family, as well as the adoptee and the mother. The consensus was that support must continue to be open to all family members.

Medium priority

12. Some people affected by historic forced adoption described the cost of private talking and creative therapies as prohibitive. Based on this, we suggest the Scottish Government could consider how far these services could be integrated into the NHS or if funding could be provided directly to individuals to spend on therapies that they would find helpful.

Lower priority

13. A few research participants described the importance of creative and alternative therapies such as art, music, drama, music and hypnotherapy. Participants reported these are not available on the NHS currently, but we suggest that the Scottish Government considers how these could be made more widely available.

Other support needs

Some participants suggested other support needs and actions. These include:

- A memorial to the experiences of those affected by historic forced adoption and a commitment to ensure such cases never happen again.

- Education for people affected by historic forced adoption to help them understand and deal with the trauma it has caused.

- Introducing a 'tick box' in public services' systems and paperwork so professionals know when an individual may be affected by adoption-related trauma.

14. Area for consideration (lower priority): We suggest that the Scottish Government considers the suggestions listed above.

Other recurring barriers and challenges

Participants reported challenges in accessing and delivering support for people affected by historic forced adoption. These include the following.

Inconsistencies in the services available across different organisations and different workers

Service availability varies across different organisations, but we found no clear evidence of any particular geographical locations where services were notably lacking or abundant, compared to other areas. Sometimes the services offered can vary depending on the awareness and skills of the individual worker involved or fluctuations in the organisation's capacity.

15. Area for consideration (high priority): Based on our findings, we suggest the Scottish Government prepares clear guidelines for organisations about the types of services that should be offered to people affected by historic forced adoption to ensure a consistent and standard approach. Local authorities have a statutory obligation to provide post-adoption support, but the findings indicate that requirements around historical cases need to be clarified.

Challenges around service capacity and funding

16. Area for consideration (high priority): Support organisations reported concerns around capacity, so we suggest the Scottish Government considers providing enhanced funding to services to help them build capacity and support people affected in greater numbers.

Reservations around adoption agencies' role

Some research participants expressed reluctance to access support via adoption agencies because of those agencies' involvement in historic forced adoption cases. Some others, however, praised these agencies for their support and expertise.

17. Area for consideration (high priority): We suggest the Scottish Government could consider holding discussions with key campaign groups such as MAA Scotland and SAAM along with the adoption agencies to discuss what, if anything, could be done to make people more willing to access support from these organisations given their extensive expertise in adoption and its impact. If these discussions are unsuccessful, the Scottish Government must ensure that support is available from agencies not linked to historic forced adoption so that people with these reservations can access assistance.

Lack of awareness of support services

18. Area for consideration (medium priority): We suggest the Scottish Government works with support organisations to raise awareness of their services, possibly through adverts and flyers in settings such as GP surgeries.

Feeling they have no right to support

Some participants felt they were not entitled to access support. This view was often held by mothers due to the paperwork they were given at the time of the adoption and, in some cases, threats of criminal action if they ever attempted to contact their child.

19. Area for consideration (medium priority): We suggest that any publicity materials or public awareness campaign must emphasise that anyone affected by historic forced adoption is entitled to support.

Lack of services for adult adoptees

Some adoptees reported that support is available for adopted children, but there is less assistance for adoptees who are now adults.

20. Area for consideration (high priority): We recommend that services ensure there is support for adoptees who are now adults, where this does not already exist, and the Scottish Government provides funding where possible, and required, to support this.

Meeting mothers' and adoptees' needs

Mothers and adoptees have different experiences of historic forced adoption, but the impacts for both groups is significant. Mothers can recall the trauma of their baby being taken away. Adoptees may not remember the experience, but some research participants reported that the impact of being removed from their mother has a life long resonance.

Both mothers and adoptees reported needing assistance with searching for, contacting and reuniting with family members they have been separated from by adoption, help with accessing records, and support with the emotional and psychological impact of historic forced adoption.

There were, however, a few areas of difference:

- Adoptees reported issues around accessing parents' medical records.

- A feeling of not being entitled to support was more common among mothers than adoptees due to the paperwork they had to sign when the adoption occurred.

- Mothers can have more difficulty accessing records and searching for their child than adoptees because adoptees have access to their original birth certificate, which contains their mother's name and address at the time of the birth.

Some interviewees felt that one group received more support than the other, and in some cases identified specific services they felt were focused more on one group than the other. However, there was no clear consensus – a few felt that mothers were 'better off' for support, while a few said the opposite.

Stakeholders expressed commitment to supporting both groups, and it is clear from this research that both groups need support. They have similar support requirements and need to feel equally entitled to support.

Further reading

This report has focused on the support needs among and improvements advocated by people affected by historic forced adoption who took part in our study. These align with many recommendations made by campaign groups such as MAA Scotland and SAAM, but these groups have also urged further action, as laid out in documents available on their websites[14].

Final thoughts

Overall, this research has found that support is available for people affected by historic forced adoption. However, provision is inconsistent and sometimes lacking in capacity. Challenges like these must be addressed to ensure that people affected by historic forced adoption can access the support they need to deal with the significant and lifelong impact of the practice on them and their families.

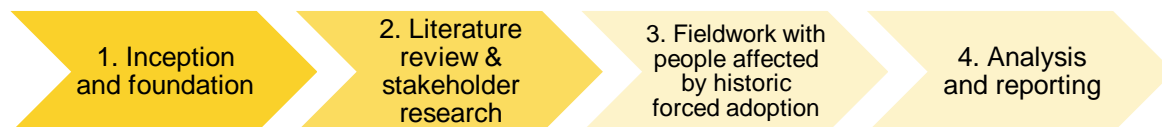[14] The Movement for an Adoption Apology (2022). Recommendations to the Joint Commission on Human Rights from the Movement for an Adoption Apology. Accessed on 22/5/2023.

Scottish Adult Adoptee Movement (2022). Adoptee Recommendations to: the Scottish Government, Historic Forced Adoption Practices, the Violation of Family Life: Rights of Adopted People. Accessed on 22/5/2023.

Appendix 1: Methodology

Methodology

The study had four main phases, as outlined below:

1. Inception and foundation	2. Literature review & stakeholder research	3. Fieldwork with people affected by historic forced adoption	4. Analysis and reporting

Phase 1: Inception and foundation

In initial stages, the Scottish Government and TLB study teams co-developed a research timetable and framework. This included development of a suite of research tools, including:

- Discussion guides for interviews and group discussions with stakeholders and people affected by historic forced adoption.
- Surveys for stakeholders and people affected by historic forced adoption.
- Information sheets and privacy notices for stakeholders and people with experience of historic forced adoption.

This phase also involved introductory meetings with key stakeholders including MAA Scotland, SAAM, GAP Scotland and post-adoption support services. These meetings provided an opportunity to a) explain the study, aims and methods to stakeholders and b) confirm stakeholders' willingness to participate in the research and support the recruitment of people who have experienced historic forced adoption in Phase 3.

The research team maintained regular contact with the Scottish Government study team throughout the remaining phases to keep the Scottish Government team informed of progress.

Phase 2: Literature review and research with stakeholders

Phase 2 comprised a literature review and stakeholder interviews and survey.

Literature review

We undertook a literature review to 1) enhance our understanding of the issues that affect people who have experienced historic forced adoption and 2) identify recommendations and examples of good practice in supporting people and services available in other countries. Over 30 documents were reviewed, including articles highlighted by Scottish Government and stakeholders, and other sources identified by the TLB team through online searches. Sources reviewed include academic reports, research papers, government documents and information from campaign bodies.

Stakeholder interviews and survey

Stakeholder interviews were a crucial component of Phase 2, and 32 stakeholders took part in interviews. Interviewees include staff from post-adoption support services or organisations supporting people with experience of historic forced adoption, campaigners, social workers and academics.

To maximise the reach of the research, an online survey was distributed to over 100 contacts across all 32 local authorities in Scotland. TLB sent three reminder emails over the course of the survey, which was open for 11 weeks and, in total, we received 19 responses. Five respondents took part in follow up interviews, and these are included in the number of stakeholder interviews given above.

The stakeholder interviews and survey focused on these research questions:

- Mapping the currently available services for post-adoption support in Scotland, including reviewing service, guidelines and training materials for GPs and mental health professionals.

- Identifying services available for post-adoption support in Scotland and whether these services are available and suitable for those who have experienced historic forced adoption.

- The relative weaknesses and benefits of these services.

Phase 3: Fieldwork with people affected by historic forced adoption

The third research phase involved fieldwork with people affected by historic forced adoption, including parents and families, adoptees, and adoptive families. We explored their lived experiences, support they have accessed, any help they need but cannot access, and their views of any improvements required to support services. This phase focused on these research questions:

- The views of those with lived experience of historic forced adoption in Scotland regarding what new or additional services are needed.

- What services are available for post-adoption support in Scotland, and are these services available and suitable for those who experienced historic forced adoption?

- What are the relative weakness and benefits of these services?

- What are the self-perceived therapeutic needs of those who have experienced historic forced adoption, and how do these needs vary between parents and adoptees?

- What specific support services are required for parents and adoptees?

Various stakeholders helped publicise the study and promote participation among people with experience of historic forced adoption. We also designed a social media post to share via Twitter and LinkedIn and directly with stakeholders who helped publicise the study. Stakeholders shared this information via their social media channels and directly with people they have worked with.

We offered various means to take part so people could participate in a way that suited their preferences. The options included:

- One-to-one interviews (either in person, by telephone or online).
- Group discussions.
- A survey accessible online or in paper form, for people who might not want to discuss their relationships with an interviewer and felt more comfortable contributing in a written form.

Everyone with experience of historic forced adoption who participated in a one-to-one or group interview was offered a £40 gift voucher to thank them for their time and help. Campaigners taking part in stakeholder interviews were also offered this because they shared their personal experience and insight gained through their broader knowledge of and activity in the field.

In total, our fieldwork with people affected by historic forced adoption involved:

- Interviews with 37 people, including 14 mothers, 19 adoptees, two siblings of adoptees whose mothers had a baby removed for adoption before they were born, one sibling of a mother, and a husband of a mother.
- Survey responses from 11 adoptees, two parents and three wider family members of adopted babies.

Interviewees and survey respondents cover 17 local authority areas in Scotland, while five lived in England and three overseas.

The focus of the study is the support needs of people affected by historic forced adoption. However, interviewees shared their experiences of historic forced adoption with us. These provide important contextual information to help understand their support needs, and are summarised in detail in Chapter 2.

Many interviewees said they welcomed the opportunity to share their story and felt listened to. Indeed, some of the interviews were lengthy because people were keen to share detailed accounts of their experience.

Figure A1.1 provides details of the decades in which the adoptions involving the research participants took place.

Figure A1.1: Decades when adoptions took place

Decade	Interviewees (37)	Survey respondents (16)
1940s	1	
1950s	5	2
1960s	17	10
1970s	6	2
1980s	4	
1990s	1	
Not stated	3	2
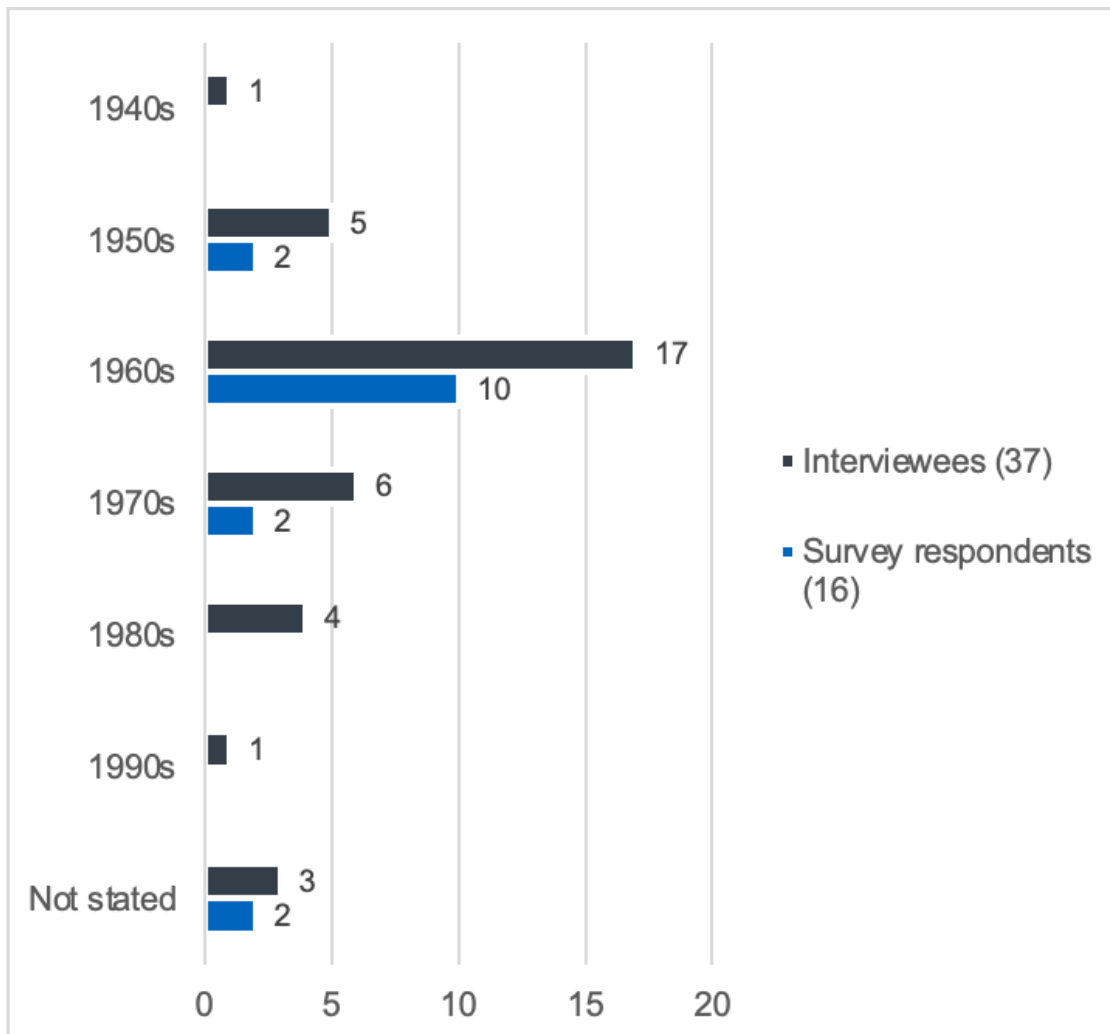
Phase 4: Analysis and reporting

Nearly all interviews were recorded with consent and transcribed in full. In the few instances where interviews were not recorded, the interviewer took handwritten notes which were typed up.

Underpinned by a codification framework, the data was thematically analysed to inform the findings in this report. We have not attributed findings to any individuals or stakeholder groups to maintain confidentiality. Some quotes have been lightly edited for readability, clarity and to reduce any risk of the interviewee being identifiable; but no meaning has been changed.

This report sets out the findings of our analysis.

Appendix 2: Research tools

We have included our interview topic guides here.

Discussion guide – stakeholders

Background

1. Can you tell me a bit about your role and organisation?

2. What is your understanding of historical adoption, and what involvement/interest do you have in relation to it?

The needs of people affected by historical adoption

3. What do you understand to be the support needs of those affected by historical adoption?
    a. How do they differ across parents, adoptees and other family members affected by historical adoption?
    b. Which of those represents the most significant area of unmet need currently?
        i. Why do you say that?

Services and support currently available

4. What support and services does your organisation provide?
    a. Which of these do you feel are suitable and relevant to the needs of people affected by historical adoption?
        i. Why do you say that?
    b. What experience do you/your organisation have in supporting people affected by historical adoption?
        i. What needs do they commonly present with?
        ii. What services and support do they tend to access/receive?
    c. What has been the key learning from working with people affected by historical adoption?

5. What post-adoption services and support are you aware of for people affected by historical adoption? (exploring)
    a. Who provides
    b. Where it is available
    c. Accessibility and availability
    d. Type of support
    e. Needs it meets
    f. Are there areas that are better served than others?
        i. Are you aware of any areas where there is no support available at all?

6. What are the challenges in meeting the needs of people affected by historical adoption?
    a. How can those challenges be overcome?

7. What are your perceptions of the suitability and effectiveness of available post-adoption support services in meeting the needs of people affected by historical adoption? (exploring weaknesses, strengths, limitations and benefits)

8. What wider services and support are available that can meet the needs of people affected by historical adoption?
    a. Who provides
    b. Where it is available
    c. Accessibility and availability
    d. Type of support
    e. Needs it meets
    f. Are there areas that are better served than others?
        i. Are you aware of any areas where there is no support available at all?

9. What are your perceptions of the suitability and effectiveness of wider services and support in meeting the needs of people affected by historical adoption? (exploring weaknesses, strengths, limitations and benefits)

10. What is your perception of the challenges and barriers that people affected by historical adoption face in finding and accessing the services and support they require to meet their needs?

GP and Mental Health services (if not covered in responses above)
11. What services can people affected by historical adoption access through their GP or mental health professionals?
    a. How suitable and appropriate are these in terms of the needs of those affected by historical adoption
    b. What is your perceptions of how effective they are in meeting the needs of those affected by historical adoption?
    c. Where are the most significant gaps in service?

12. What guidance, training and professional development materials and/or opportunities are available to GPs and Mental Health Professionals to equip them to meet the support needs of people affected by historical adoption?
    a. How effective are they in equipping GPs and mental health professionals?
        i. Why do you say that?
    b. What gaps or weaknesses exist in relation to guidance, training and professional development opportunities?
    c. How can those gaps best be addressed?

13. Are you aware of any best practice examples in relation to services and support provided by GPs or mental health professional in meeting the needs of people affected by historical adoption?

Future service provision

14. What could be done to enhance the current provision of services and support that are available to meet the needs of people affected by historical adoption?

15. What new or additional services and support is required to meet the needs of people affected by historical adoption? (exploring)
    a. How does this differ across parents and adoptees?
    b. Types of support
    c. Availability and accessibility
    d. Locations
    e. Providers

16. How can that best be provided? (what models – eg national service, local provision, hub and spoke, single point of access, virtual/in-person etc)

Other comments

17. Do you have any other comments you'd like to make?

Discussion guide – parents and families

Background

1. Can you tell me a bit a little bit about yourself and why you wanted to take part in the study?

Would you be happy to share some information about your circumstances in relation to historical adoption – it is to ensure that we understand if and how needs and experiences of support differ across different people. We would be asking you to confirm:

- Whether you: had a child who was adopted; or had another family member (eg a sibling) who was adopted
- The decade the adoption took place
- Whether contact has been established between parent and adoptee
- Local authority area where you live now

Confirm responses to the above if participant is happy to share.

Services and support currently available and experience of accessing and using
I'd now like to discuss your awareness and experience of services and support available to help people affected by historical adoption.

Help to find adopted child/family member

2. Have you accessed any services or support to help you find your child/family member?
    a. If yes, what has your experience of this been?
    b. If no, why is that?
    c. What services and support have you accessed and received?
        i. When?
        ii. Why did you want to access this service? How did you hope it would help?
        iii. What support did they provide?
        iv. What difference did it make?
        v. To what extent did it help with everything you wanted it to?

3. Have there been any other services that you've tried to access to help find your child/family member but have been unable to?
    a. Why was this?

4. What other services are you aware of that are currently available that could help parents/family members to find their adopted child/family member? (exploring)
    a. Who provides the service/support?
    b. Type of support offered
    c. Where and how is it accessed?
    d. Which of these do you feel are suitable and relevant to the needs of people affected by historical adoption?
        i. Why do you say that?

Help to make contact with adopted child/family member

5. Have you accessed any services or support to help you make contact with your child/family member?
    a. If yes, what has your experience of this been?
    b. If no, why is that?
    c. What services and support have you accessed and received?
        i. When?
        ii. Why did you want to access this service? How did you hope it would help?
        iii. What support did they provide?
        iv. What difference did it make?
        v. To what extent did it help with everything you wanted it to?

6. Have there been any other services that you've tried to access to help make contact with your child/family member but have been unable to?
    a. Why was this?

7. What other services are you aware of that are currently available that could help parents/family members to make contact with their adopted child/family member? (exploring)
    a. Who provides the service/support?
    b. Type of support offered
    c. Where and how is it accessed?
    d. Which of these do you feel are suitable and relevant to the needs of people affected by historical adoption?
        i. Why do you say that?

Help to access records related to the adoption

8. Have you accessed any services or support to help you access records related to the adoption?
    a. If yes, what has your experience of this been?
    b. If no, why is that?
    c. What services and support have you accessed and received?
        i. When?
        ii. Why did you want to access this service? How did you hope it would help?
        iii. What support did they provide?
        iv. What difference did it make?
        v. To what extent did it help with everything you wanted it to?

9. Have there been any other services that you've tried to access to help access records but have been unable to?
    a. Why was this?

10. What other services are you aware of that are currently available that could help parents/family members to access records about the adoption? (exploring)
    a. Who provides the service/support?
    b. Type of support offered

     c. Where and how is it accessed?
     d. Which of these do you feel are suitable and relevant to the needs of people affected by historical adoption?
        i. Why do you say that?

Counselling/mental health support to deal with the psychological or emotional impact of the adoption

11. Have you accessed any services or support to help you deal with the psychological or emotional impact of the adoption? This might include peer support and mental health services accessed through your GP or other organisations such as counselling, psychotherapy, and cognitive behavioural therapy.
     a. If yes, what has your experience of this been?
     b. If no, why is that?
     c. What services and support have you accessed and received?
        i. When?
        ii. Why did you want to access this service? How did you hope it would help?
        iii. What support did they provide?
        iv. What difference did it make?
        v. To what extent did it help with everything you wanted it to?

12. Have there been any other services that you've tried to access to help deal with the psychological or emotional impact of the adoption?
     a. Why was this?

13. What other services are you aware of that are currently available that could help parents/family members to deal with the psychological or emotional impact of the adoption? (exploring)
     a. Who provides the service/support?
     b. Type of support offered
     c. Where and how is it accessed?
     d. Which of these do you feel are suitable and relevant to the needs of people affected by historical adoption?
        i. Why do you say that?

[If not covered above] GP and Mental Health services

If we could now discuss any experiences you have of accessing your GP or local mental health team for support to meet your needs, and explore your perceptions of how suitable and effective the support they provide is.

14. Have you accessed your GP or local mental health team for support?
     a. If yes, what has been your experience of this been?
     b. If no, why is that?
     c. What support were you hoping they could provide?
        i. How did you hope this would help?
     d. What support was actually provided?
        i. How did it help? What difference did it make?

15. In your view, how effective and useful are the services and support provided by GPs and mental health professionals for people affected by historical adoption? (exploring weaknesses, strengths, limitations and benefits)

Thinking about the services we have discussed:
16. In your view, how effective and useful are the services and support available to help people affected by historical adoption? (exploring weaknesses, strengths, limitations and benefits)
    a. What works well?
    b. What works less well?
    c. What could be improved?

17. [If not covered above] What have been the main challenges and barriers you have faced in finding help with your experience of historical adoption?

Future support provision
We'd like to hear your views about any additional services or improvements that are needed to support people affected by historical adoption.

18. Are there any issues related to historical adoption that you would like support with but have not been able to access so far?
    a. If yes, what kind of things do you need support with?
    b. Why have you not been able to access this support so far?
    c. Which of those has the greatest impact on you and your overall quality of life?
    d. How would you like to access this support?
        i. Type of support required (eg counselling, coaching, cognitive behavioural therapy, peer support, befriending, financial, help to find a child/parent)
        ii. Availability, accessibility and format (eg virtual/in-person, one-to-one etc)
        iii. Locations (eg national service, local provision etc)
        iv. Providers
        v. Any specific skills, experience, knowledge, practice that support providers need to be equipped with

19. Do you have any other comments on how best to support people affected by historical adoption?

20. [If not covered above] What do you feel the challenges are in meeting the support needs of people affected by historical adoption?
    a. How can these challenges best be overcome?

Other comments
21. Do you have any other comments you'd like to make?

Discussion guide – adoptees

Background

1. Can you tell me a bit a little bit about yourself and why you wanted to take part in the study? (Gently probe re circumstances of adoption – can you tell me anything about the circumstances around the adoption?)

Would you be happy to share some information about your circumstances in relation to historical adoption – it is to ensure that we understand if and how needs and experiences of support differ across different people. We would be asking you to confirm:

- The decade the adoption took place
- Whether contact has been established between parent and adoptee
- Local authority area where you live now

Confirm responses to the above if participant is happy to share.

Services and support currently available and experience of accessing and using

I'd now like to discuss your awareness and experience of services and support available to help people affected by historical adoption.

Help to find parents/family

2. Have you accessed any services or support to help you find your parents/family?
   a. If yes, what has your experience of this been?
   b. If no, why is that?
   c. What services and support have you accessed and received?
      i. When?
      ii. Why did you want to access this service? How did you hope it would help?
      iii. What support did they provide?
      iv. What difference did it make?
      v. To what extent did it help with everything you wanted it to?

3. Have there been any other services that you've tried to access to help find your parents/family but have been unable to?
   a. Why was this?

4. What other services are you aware of that are currently available that could help adopted people to find their parents or family? (exploring)
   a. Who provides the service/support?
   b. Type of support offered
   c. Where and how is it accessed?
   d. Which of these do you feel are suitable and relevant to the needs of people affected by historical adoption?
      i. Why do you say that?

Help to make contact with parents or family

5. Have you accessed any services or support to help you make contact with your parents or family?
    a. If yes, what has your experience of this been?
    b. If no, why is that?
    c. What services and support have you accessed and received?
        i. When?
        ii. Why did you want to access this service? How did you hope it would help?
        iii. What support did they provide?
        iv. What difference did it make?
        v. To what extent did it help with everything you wanted it to?

6. Have there been any other services that you've tried to access to help make contact with your parents or family but have been unable to?
    a. Why was this?

7. What other services are you aware of that are currently available that could help adoptees to make contact with their parents or family? (exploring)
    a. Who provides the service/support?
    b. Type of support offered
    c. Where and how is it accessed?
    d. Which of these do you feel are suitable and relevant to the needs of people affected by historical adoption?
        i. Why do you say that?

Help to access records related to the adoption

8. Have you accessed any services or support to help you access records (eg court papers) related to the adoption?
    a. If yes, what has your experience of this been?
    b. If no, why is that?
    c. What services and support have you accessed and received?
        i. When?
        ii. Why did you want to access this service? How did you hope it would help?
        iii. What support did they provide?
        iv. What difference did it make?
        v. To what extent did it help with everything you wanted it to?

9. Have there been any other services that you've tried to access to help access records but have been unable to?
    a. Why was this?

10. What other services are you aware of that are currently available that could help people affected by historical adoption to access records about the adoption? (exploring)
    a. Who provides the service/support?
    b. Type of support offered

  c. Where and how is it accessed?

  d. Which of these do you feel are suitable and relevant to the needs of people affected by historical adoption?

    i. Why do you say that?

Counselling/mental health support to deal with the psychological or emotional impact of the adoption

11. Have you accessed any services or support to help you deal with the psychological or emotional impact of the adoption? This might include peer support and mental health services accessed through your GP or other organisations such as counselling, psychotherapy, and cognitive behavioural therapy.

  a. If yes, what has your experience of this been?

  b. If no, why is that?

  c. What services and support have you accessed and received?

    i. When?

    ii. Why did you want to access this service? How did you hope it would help?

    iii. What support did they provide?

    iv. What difference did it make?

    v. To what extent did it help with everything you wanted it to?

12. Have there been any other services that you've tried to access to help deal with the psychological or emotional impact of the adoption?

  a. Why was this?

13. What other services are you aware of that are currently available that could help people affected by historical adoption deal with the psychological or emotional impact of the adoption? (exploring)

  a. Who provides the service/support?

  b. Type of support offered

  c. Where and how is it accessed?

  d. Which of these do you feel are suitable and relevant to the needs of people affected by historical adoption?

    i. Why do you say that?

[If not covered above] GP and Mental Health services

If we could now discuss any experiences you have of accessing your GP or local mental health team for support to meet your needs, and explore your perceptions of how suitable and effective the support they provide is.

14. Have you accessed your GP or local mental health team for support?

  a. If yes, what has been your experience of this been?

  b. If no, why is that?

  c. What support were you hoping they could provide?

    i. How did you hope this would help?

  d. What support was actually provided?

    i. How did it help? What difference did it make?

15. In your view, how effective and useful are the services and support provided by GPs and mental health professionals for people affected by historical adoption? (exploring weaknesses, strengths, limitations and benefits)

Thinking about the services we have discussed:
16. In your view, how effective and useful are the services and support available to help people affected by historical adoption? (exploring weaknesses, strengths, limitations and benefits)
    a. What works well?
    b. What works less well?
    c. What could be improved?

17. [If not covered above] What have been the main challenges and barriers you have faced in finding help with your experience of historical adoption? (eg lack of availability, difficulties in accessing services)

Future support provision
We'd like to hear your views about any additional services or improvements that are needed to support people affected by historical adoption.

18. Are there any issues related to historical adoption that you would like support with but have not been able to access so far?
    a. If yes, what kind of things do you need support with?
    b. Why have you not been able to access this support so far?
    c. Which of those has the greatest impact on you and your overall quality of life?
    d. How would you like to access this support?
        i. Type of support required (eg counselling, coaching, cognitive behavioural therapy, peer support, befriending, financial, help to find a child/parent)
        ii. Availability, accessibility and format (eg virtual/in-person, one-to-one etc)
        iii. Locations (eg national service, local provision etc)
        iv. Providers
        v. Any specific skills, experience, knowledge, practice that support providers need to be equipped with

19. Do you have any other comments on how best to support people affected by historical adoption?

20. [If not covered above] What do you feel the challenges are in meeting the support needs of people affected by historical adoption?
    a. How can these challenges best be overcome?

Other comments
21. Do you have any other comments you'd like to make?

Appendix 3: Literature review

This literature review contains two sections. We begin with a context review exploring historic forced adoption including contexts, processes, influences, and practices. Section two presents a needs review outlining the support needs of those affected, recommendations for meeting them, and examples of good practice. These will be referred to further in a separate service delivery paper.

Given the wealth of information available, and finite study resources, this review is not exhaustive. Relevant information has been gathered from research publications, government documents, and campaign bodies.

It is beyond the scope of this review to consider the experiences and needs of adoptive parents and we acknowledge that they may have different views and experiences[15] which have not been explored here.

Section 1: Historic forced adoption: Contexts, processes, influences, and experiences

Policy contexts and prevalence

As outlined earlier in this report, we define historic forced adoption as practices across the UK, Ireland, Canada and Australia in the 1950s-1970s, "which resulted in newborn babies being unnecessarily taken away from unmarried mothers and placed for adoption, without regard for the mothers' and children's needs or wishes"[16].

Although occurring informally prior to this[17,18], in Scotland, adoption was not legally formalised until the 1930 Adoption of Children (Scotland) Act[19]. From this time until shortly after the 1968 Social Work (Scotland) Act, most adoptions were legally uncontested and took the form of babies being placed with childless couples[20]. Their

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[15] Higgins, D. (2010). Impact of Past Adoption Practices: Summary of Key Issues from Australian Research Final Report; A Report to the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Service and Indigenous Affairs. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[16] Information about historic forced adoption. Scottish Government website. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[17] Evan Donaldson Institute (2006). Safeguarding the Rights and Well-Being of Birthparents in the Adoption Process. New York: Evan Donaldson Institute. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[18] Greenlees. J. (2015). Unmarried Motherhood in Scotland during the Twentieth Century: Mother and Baby Homes. Centre for the Social History of Health and Healthcare, Department of Social Sciences Glasgow Caledonian University. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[19] Critchley, A., Grant, M., Cowan, P. & Hardy, M. (2018). Exploring the Changing Nature of Adoption Work: Reflections on the 1968 Act. Social Work Scotland. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[20] Ibid.

mothers were often young and unmarried[21]; this differs from today, when most adoptions occur following children being taken into care[22].

Evidence from across the UK suggests that the adoptions of children of unmarried mothers during much of the 20th century were 'closed'. This means children were given new names, identities, and birth certificates, were not informed they were an adoptee, and had no ongoing contact with their families[23].

According to National Records of Scotland statistics, from 1930 (when official figures began to be kept) until 1979 there were approximately 73,000 adoptions recorded in the Adopted Children Register in Scotland[24]. There is no data available for this period as to how many of these adoptions occurred without the mothers' informed consent. Therefore, in the absence of this data, it is not possible to establish an exact figure for the number of forced adoptions during this time.

Societal norms and values

Forced adoption practices existed across several Western nations, including Scotland and other nations in the UK, the Republic of Ireland, Canada, Australia, and the Netherlands[25]. Although realised differently in each country, the intertwined activities of church, state, and civil society often promoted these practices[26]. The literature suggests that across these countries during the 20th century, unmarried mothers were viewed as a social 'problem'. They were believed to have transgressed morally and spiritually[27] and their pregnancies outside of marriage were seen as 'illegitimate'. Such pregnancies were felt to threaten 'normal' family life - a post-World War 2 social reconstruction priority[28].

By the 1950s, psychological language had replaced this moral focus. For example, the literature explains that moral explanations for mothers' perceived 'transgressions'

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[21] Triseltiotis et al., (1997). Cited in Critchley, A., Grant, M., Cowan, P. & Hardy, M. (2018). Exploring the Changing Nature of Adoption Work: Reflections on the 1968 Act. Social Work Scotland. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[22] Castle et al, (2000). Cited in Critchley, A., Grant, M., Cowan, P. & Hardy, M. (2018). Exploring the Changing Nature of Adoption Work: Reflections on the 1968 Act. Social Work Scotland. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[23] Becker, S., Sellers, R. & Harold R. (2021). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights from members of the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme, University of Cambridge. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[24] Unpublished data provided to the Scottish Government by National Records of Scotland (2023).

[25] Lambert, M. (2021). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Sandhu, J. (2012). Cited in UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (2022). The Violation of the Right to Family Life. Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1949-1976. House of Commons and House of Lords. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[28] Lambert, M. (2021). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

reduced and were replaced by those focusing on their character and family backgrounds[29]. In Britain, the idea that mothers had transgressed, "was imposed from above by elites and authority figures through discourse and policies, but also realised from below in communities through social stigma and the marginalisation of unmarried mothers"[30]. There were class and gendered elements at play[31]. Women, in particular, had to conform to traditional gender roles and exercise sexual restraint[32]. Religious and class factors meant some families were against inter-class or faith couples keeping the baby together[33].

Women were often sent away to conceal the pregnancy and prevent shaming the family[34]. "The social and moral stigma... combined with multiple other factors… fuelled a dominant… attitude… that placing the babies of unmarried mothers for adoption… was in the best interests of society, parents, and children[35]."

Economic inequalities

In the UK, limited social or financial support and lack of access to housing or employment posed additional barriers to unmarried mothers raising their children[36]. "Raising a child as an unmarried mother without support was nearly impossible at this time"[37].

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[29] Sandhu, J. (2012). Cited in UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (2022). The Violation of the Right to Family Life. Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1949-1976. House of Commons and House of Lords. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[30] Lambert, M. (2021, p.3). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Sandhu, J. (2012). Cited in UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (2022). The Violation of the Right to Family Life. Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1949-1976. House of Commons and House of Lords. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[33] UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (2022). The Violation of the Right to Family Life. Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1949-1976. House of Commons and House of Lords. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[34] Sandhu, J. (2012). Cited in UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (2022). The Violation of the Right to Family Life. Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1949-1976. House of Commons and House of Lords. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[35] Becker, S., Sellers, R. & Harold G. (2021, no page number). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights from members of the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme, University of Cambridge. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[36] Critchley, A., Grant, M., Cowan, P. & Hardy, M. (2018). Exploring the Changing Nature of Adoption Work: Reflections on the 1968 Act. Social Work Scotland. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[37] UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (2022, p.18). The Violation of the Right to Family Life. Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1949-1976. House of Commons and House of Lords. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

During and after World War 2, many mothers who had moved away from family to find better paid work struggled to find childcare[38]. Domestic service - which many relied on to earn while raising their child - was declining in Scotland; at the same time married couples were being favoured for council housing[39]. Although unmarried mothers had increased access to healthcare, this was not matched in terms of welfare support[40].

There were differences between rural and urban parts of Scotland. "In some Scottish communities… children were absorbed into their immediate and extended family and the community without prejudice. This was more common in certain rural areas… Elsewhere in Scotland, illegitimacy was socially unacceptable because it broke historic and religious codes of moral behaviour"[41]. These differences have been linked, in part, to local economic differences throughout Scotland, for example, grandparents providing childcare so that mothers could continue agricultural work.

By the 1970s, the number of adoptions of babies of unmarried mothers in Scotland had fallen[42]. This was likely due to increased availability of welfare support and social housing, the legalisation of some abortions, and the introduction of the contraceptive pill[43]. There was also greater acceptance of cohabiting couples having babies[44]. However, it is important to note this was not universal with historic forced adoption practices continuing into the 1980s.

Adoption processes

In 2022, the UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) published a report[45] of their inquiry into the experiences of unmarried women and their children who were adopted in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Although not the main focus, due to separate legislation and practices in these countries, submissions from women in Scotland and Northern Ireland were considered.

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[38] Greenlees. J. (2015). Unmarried Motherhood in Scotland during the Twentieth Century: Mother and Baby Homes. Centre for the Social History of Health and Healthcare, Department of Social Sciences Glasgow Caledonian University. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid, p.4.

[42] Triseltiotis et al., (1997). Cited in Critchley, A., Grant, M., Cowan, P. & Hardy, M. (2018). Exploring the Changing Nature of Adoption Work: Reflections on the 1968 Act. Social Work Scotland. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Greenlees. J. (2015). Unmarried Motherhood in Scotland during the Twentieth Century: Mother and Baby Homes. Centre for the Social History of Health and Healthcare, Department of Social Sciences Glasgow Caledonian University. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[45] UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (2022). The Violation of the Right to Family Life. Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1949-1976. House of Commons and House of Lords. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

This inquiry found that mothers were disempowered within the adoption and consent process[46]. Despite their right to 'reclaim' their child for three months post adoption, in reality, it could be extremely difficult to stop the process once it had started; mental health difficulties, trauma, shame, stigma, guilt, lack of information about their rights, and coercive practices - such as mothers being threatened with arrest or having future children taken away - prevented them exploring alternative options[47].

Many mothers from across the UK who gave evidence to the inquiry felt they would have been able to keep their child with support and advice. However, they were not informed of any available support options, were led to think that adoption was the only possibility or felt coerced into this. There were reports of mothers being marginalised during discussions with professionals such as NHS staff, adoption agency social workers, and church personnel. For some, the presence of their mother during appointments was a barrier to them sharing their wish to keep their baby or asking questions.

These findings are echoed in a Scottish study[48], which highlighted that despite the legal clarity that existed in the 1950s and 60s, with mothers seemingly having consented to contact with agencies and to 'relinquishing' their child, the system was open to substantial abuse.

Becker and colleagues (2021), citing a BBC report, state that many women in the UK faced sustained pressure to place their children for adoption from professionals such as social workers, doctors, midwives, Mother and Baby Home staff, and adoption staff in religious and council-run homes[49].

The removal of children from unmarried mothers was a "structured approach embedded in central elite decision making, local organisation and the individual action of officials across a welfare state which encompassed both legislated statutory intervention by services and enabled voluntary action by private and charitable organisations"[50].

Marshall and McDonald (2010) explain that not all mothers felt coerced, with some experiencing sadness and regret but still believing adoption was right and others being content with their decision[51]. However, an Australian systematic study suggests very

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Lambert, M. (2022). Cited in UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (2022). The Violation of the Right to Family Life. Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1949-1976. House of Commons and House of Lords. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[48] Critchley, A., Grant, M., Cowan, P. & Hardy, M. (2018). Exploring the Changing Nature of Adoption Work: Reflections on the 1968 Act. Social Work Scotland. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[49] Becker, S., Sellers, R. & Harold, G. (2021, no page number). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights from members of the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme, University of Cambridge. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[50] Lambert, M. (2021, p.4). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[51] Marshall, A. & McDonald, M. (2001). Cited in Higgins, D. (2010). Impact of Past Adoption Practices: Summary of Key Issues from Australian Research Final Report; A Report to the Australian Government

few mothers felt they had any choice in the adoption; many felt systematically recruited as 'undeserving mothers' to meet the needs of 'deserving' married couples[52].

Echoing reports about historic forced adoption practices in other countries[53], fathers in Scotland similarly had limited legal rights, were side-lined within adoption proceedings[54] and tended not to be consulted or considered by the courts as potential carers for the baby[55].

The JCHR Inquiry[56] gives examples of a father's name being unwillingly omitted from the birth certificate and of them being threatened with arrest if they tried to support the mother. Fathers have also described feeling helpless when they were not permitted to visit Mother and Baby Homes[57].

Family pressure

Lack of support from families may have been an influencing factor in adoption decisions[58]. For instance, many families sent women to Mother and Baby homes, where they were denied access to their relatives; some report being shunned by their families,

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Department of Families, Housing, Community Service and Indigenous Affairs. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[52] Kenny, P., Higgins, D., Soloff, C. & Sweid, R. (2012). Past Adoption Experiences. National Research Study on the Service Response to Past Adoption Practices. Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[53] Becker, S., Sellers, R. & Harold, G. (2021). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights from members of the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme, University of Cambridge. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[54] Clapton (2003). Cited in Critchley, A., Grant, M., Cowan, P. & Hardy, M. (2018). Exploring the Changing Nature of Adoption Work: Reflections on the 1968 Act. Social Work Scotland. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[55] Critchley, A., Grant, M., Cowan, P. & Hardy, M. (2018). Exploring the Changing Nature of Adoption Work: Reflections on the 1968 Act. Social Work Scotland. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[56] UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (2022). The Violation of the Right to Family Life. Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1949-1976. House of Commons and House of Lords. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[57] Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science & Technology, (2018). Cited in Becker, S., Sellers, R. & Harold, G. (2021). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights from members of the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme, University of Cambridge. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[58] Clark, G. (2008). Cited in Becker, S., Sellers, R. & Harold, G. (2021). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights from members of the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme, University of Cambridge. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

sometimes longer term[59]. Family pressure may also have made it more difficult for Mother and Baby Homes to support mothers and babies to stay together post-birth[60].

One of the few studies from the time to have explored mothers' experiences in Scotland[61] found the likelihood of adoption to be linked to three factors: 1) the mother already having other children, 2) the mother's parents being unsupportive, and 3) the father being a married man. Many women who submitted evidence to the JCHR Inquiry[62] explained that their families were involved in the adoption, and that they were excluded from discussions about possible options. Most, but not all, described their parents responding with distress, anger, or shame.

In Scottish central belt industrial and mining communities in particular, "illegitimacy was socially unacceptable because it broke historic and religious codes of moral behaviour. Here, the mothers of illegitimate children were more likely to have been abandoned by their families, and she was left to try and support herself and her child"[63].

However, evidence submitted by Scottish mothers to the JCHR Inquiry emphasises that: "whether women stayed with their families or resided elsewhere, the vast majority of deliveries took place in NHS hospitals, and local authority social workers facilitated the removal of babies and handled legalities. Many practices within institutions… ensure[d] that mothers felt compelled to have their sons and daughters adopted. These abusive practices continued to operate even in the absence of family pressure or perceived risk to the baby"[64].

Cruel, punitive, and coercive treatment by professionals

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[59] Becker, S., Sellers, R. & Harold, G. (2021). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights from members of the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme, University of Cambridge. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[60] Greenlees. J. (2015). Unmarried Motherhood in Scotland during the Twentieth Century: Mother and Baby Homes. Centre for the Social History of Health and Healthcare, Department of Social Sciences Glasgow Caledonian University. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[61] Yelloly, M. A. (1965). Cited in Becker, S., Sellers R. & Harold, G. (2018). Exploring the Changing Nature of Adoption Work: Reflections on the 1968 Act. Social Work Scotland. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[62] UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (2022). The Violation of the Right to Family Life. Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1949-1976. House of Commons and House of Lords. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[63] Greenlees. J. (2015, p.4). Unmarried Motherhood in Scotland during the Twentieth Century: Mother and Baby Homes. Centre for the Social History of Health and Healthcare, Department of Social Sciences Glasgow Caledonian University. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[64] Origins Scotland (2021, p.2). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights Inquiry: The Right to Family Life, Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women 1949-1976. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

"There is evidence that some professionals at that time considered punishment as part of their adoption practice"[65].

Mothers who submitted evidence to the UK JCHR Inquiry[66] commonly described a sense of being punished by staff at Mother and Baby Homes run by the State, religious organisations, and charities. Many gave examples of being made to clean and scrub while heavily pregnant. There was little evidence that they were supported to prepare for birth, and many were afraid.

Greenlees' (2015) study into Mother and Baby Homes in Scotland suggests a complex picture[67]. She describes these as providing food, healthcare, and accommodation for pregnant mothers who lacked family support. A mainly non-punitive regime was supported by most providers, some of whom offered longer stays post-birth if needed. However, while some remembered their time fondly, others found the conditions punitive. And although the homes appeared to try keep mothers and babies together, some women still experienced pressure to adopt from the staff, adoption agencies or social services.

For those women who gave birth in hospital, cruel, degrading, bullying, and neglectful treatment was again reported[68]. Some women were told they deserved labour pain, were ignored by midwives, or received no ante-natal or follow-up medical care[69]. Testimony from Scottish mothers indicates that some were denied pain relief, left isolated during labour, or given drugs unnecessarily[70].

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[65] Becker, S., Sellers, R. & Harold, G. (2021, no page number). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights from members of the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme, University of Cambridge. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[66] UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (2022). The Violation of the Right to Family Life. Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1949-1976. House of Commons and House of Lords. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[67] Greenlees. J. (2015). Unmarried Motherhood in Scotland during the Twentieth Century: Mother and Baby Homes. Centre for the Social History of Health and Healthcare, Department of Social Sciences Glasgow Caledonian University. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[68] UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (2022). The Violation of the Right to Family Life. Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1949-1976. House of Commons and House of Lords. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Origins Scotland (2021). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights Inquiry: The Right to Family Life, Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women 1949-1976. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

Mothers' contact with their babies was limited post-birth, and some were stopped from seeing, holding, or breastfeeding their babies[71]. Testimony from mothers in Scotland[72] describes social workers removing babies without prior notice when, before attending hospital, they had expected to bring up their child[73].

Critchley and colleagues (2018), reflecting on evidence of cruel and punitive treatment of mothers by Scottish adoption agencies, state that "the legacy of cruelty and lasting shame and grief that some women experienced in the 1950s and 60s on future social work practice in adoption is difficult to estimate"[74].

Shame, secrecy, and silence

The pervasiveness of silence and shame is a common theme across international research into historic forced adoption[75]. In the UK, evidence from the JCHR Inquiry[76] shows that many pregnancies were cloaked in shame and secrecy. There were examples of mothers and families hiding the pregnancy from neighbours. Some women thought that adoption was best because they were shamed into believing they were a 'bad person'.

There were also reports of mothers keeping their experiences secret for decades and enduring stigma and shame. The Inquiry emphasised "the double-dose of shaming that the mothers suffered: first, the stigma of having been pregnant out of wedlock, and second the stigma of having 'given away' their baby"[77].

Section 2: Support needs review

This section presents a needs review outlining the support needs of those affected and recommendations for meeting them. We cover therapeutic support, support to grieve, trauma support, peer support groups, information and records, reunion and acknowledgement, redress, and learning from the past.

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[71] UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (2022). The Violation of the Right to Family Life. Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1949-1976. House of Commons and House of Lords. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[72] Origins Scotland (2021). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights Inquiry: The Right to Family Life, Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women 1949-1976. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Critchley, A., Grant, M., Cowan, P. & Hardy, M. (2018, p.15). Exploring the Changing Nature of Adoption Work: Reflections on the 1968 Act. Social Work Scotland. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[75] Higgins, D. (2010). Impact of Past Adoption Practices: Summary of Key Issues from Australian Research Final Report; A Report to the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Service and Indigenous Affairs. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[76] UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (2022). The Violation of the Right to Family Life. Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1949-1976. House of Commons and House of Lords. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[77] Ibid, p.11.

Evidence detailing the support needs of people affected by historic forced adoption is limited[78]. Adoption UK has also found inadequate service provision for adults affected by adoption in Scotland[79] - despite the life-long nature of adoption[80,81,82,83]. PAC-UK has found evidence of the ongoing impact of adoption on adult adoptees. For example, 77% of survey respondents reported accessing mental health support as an adult[84].

Recently, there have been attempts to understand such needs better. For instance: the Adoption Research initiative (Ari) explored UK first families' experiences of support services[85]; the Scottish Government's 'Supporting Roots' project examined the needs of parents separated from their child by care proceedings[86]; and Adoption UK's Adoption Barometer - a UK survey of the lived experience of adoption - has outlined the needs of adopted people, including those adopted in past decades.

However, none of these studies have focused explicitly on those with experiences of historic forced adoption[87]. As Higgins and colleagues (2014)[88] explain, the experiences, impacts, and therapeutic needs of this group are unique.

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[78] Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[79] Adoption UK (2023). The Adoption Barometer: A Stocktake of Adoption in the UK. Accessed on 6/6/2023.

[80] Featherstone, B., Gupta, A. & Mills, S. (2018). The Role of the Social Worker in Adoption – Ethics and Human Rights: an Enquiry. Birmingham: British Association of Social Workers. Accessed 26/4/2023.

[81] Merritt, M. (2022). Rediscovering Latent Trauma: an Adopted Adult's Perspective. Child Abuse and Neglect. 130 (2, August). Accessed 26/4/2023.

[82] Results from the Global Anon Adoptee 2022 Survey (2022). Accessed 8/5/2023.

[83] Scottish Adult Adoptee Movement (2022). Adoptee Recommendations to: the Scottish Government, Historic Forced Adoption Practices, the Violation of Family Life: Rights of Adopted People. Accessed on 22/5/2023.

[84] PAC-UK (2023). Big Consult of Adopted People. Accessed 8/5/2023.

[85] Information about the Adoption Research Initiative. Cited in Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[86] Critchley, A., Grant, M., Hardy, M. & Cleary, J. (2023). Final Report: Supporting Roots. Accessed on 1/5/2023.

[87] Adoption UK (2023). The Adoption Barometer: A Stocktake of Adoption in the UK. Accessed on 6/6/2023.

[88] Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

Again, much of the evidence is international. Becker and colleagues (2021)[89] summarise global reports and inquiries to identify common recommendations for support, including:

- Acknowledging past adoption practices and their impacts and providing an apology.

- Counselling or mental health services to support with the impacts of adoption and search and reunion processes.

- Search and contact supports, including financial assistance, and - as Kenny and colleagues (2012)[90] suggest - possibly taking the form of a national, centralised system.

- Improved access to records and information such as medical records and birth certificates.

- Awareness raising among the public and health professionals about people's experiences, their impacts and support needs[91].

The Australian National Research Study on the Service Response to Past Adoption Practices[92] sought the views of more than 1500 individuals including adopted persons, parents, wider family, adoptive parents, and service providers[93]. It recommended: training the workforce such as mental health and welfare professionals; creation or development of post-adoption support services; and incorporating lessons learned within current child welfare practices[94].

In the UK, JCHR recommendations echoed many of those outlined above and included: improved access to therapeutic support; more straightforward and timely access to paper records, with greater consistency across local authority areas; increased availability of information including transparency on birth certificates; establishing a system to allow parents to pass on medical information; improved intermediary services

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[89] Becker, S., Sellers, R. & Harold, G. (2021). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights from members of the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme, University of Cambridge. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[90] Kenny, P., Higgins, D., Soloff, C. & Sweid, R. (2012). Past Adoption Experiences. National Research Study on the Service Response to Past Adoption Experiences. Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[94] Ibid.

to support with tracing and contact; visa rules to enable easier travel overseas for reunions; and notifying mothers when their child has died[95].

Some of the recommendations from the Scottish Government's 'Supporting Roots' project[96] mentioned above may also be pertinent to those affected by historic forced adoption, including that services attend to the needs of fathers and the gendered elements of societal expectations of parents[97].

Some of these identified support needs are discussed below in more detail.

Therapeutic support

Higgins and colleagues (2014)[98] discuss the different types of therapeutic support called for by participants in the Australian National Research Study[99]. Mothers, for instance, wanted access to specialist physical and mental health supports to cope with trauma and other lasting impacts. Ongoing specialist counselling in identity, attachment, and abandonment was requested by adoptees and in trauma, grief, attachment, and guilt by mothers. Fathers, mothers and adopted persons felt supportive counselling while making contact and trying to build relationships with family members would also be helpful. Wider family members said they would benefit from support to assist them with traumatised family members.

However, specific interventions are lacking to support parents whose children are adopted[100]. Many struggle to find counsellors who understand the nature of their losses or mental health professionals adequately trained in the issues[101,102]. "Unless professionals have a deep understanding of the long-term impact of adoption

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[95] UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (2022). The Violation of the Right to Family Life. Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1949-1976. House of Commons and House of Lords. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[96] Critchley, A., Grant, M., Hardy, M. & Cleary, J. (2023). Final Report: Supporting Roots. Accessed on 1/5/2023.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[99] Kenny, P., Higgins, D., Soloff, C. & Sweid, R. (2012). Past Adoption Experiences. National Research Study on the Service Response to Past Adoption Practices. Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[100] Evan Donaldson Institute (2006). Safeguarding the Rights and Well-Being of Birthparents in the Adoption Process. New York: Evan Donaldson Institute. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[101] Ibid.

[102] UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (2022). The Violation of the Right to Family Life. Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1949-1976. House of Commons and House of Lords. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

separation, they may not recognise the consequences of shame in the lives of clients"[103].

Adult adoptees in the UK have also reported low confidence in the accessibility and appropriateness of therapeutic support; they do not feel statutory services understand their needs well[104]. Baden (2016) emphasises the importance of therapists understanding the impact of adoption[105], while McSherry and McAnee (2022) call for mental health support for adopted people[106].

Many have accessed therapy privately, but costs are a barrier to this for others[107]. SAAM recommends establishing government funding of free-to-access adoption- and trauma-aware counselling and therapy[108].

Offering choice and a range of support options has been identified as key[109]. As well as traditional talking therapies, alternative mental health supports, such as art therapies, body-focused therapies, and communal events and retreats, have been advocated for[110]. Higgins and colleagues (2014)[111] call for an integrated approach to meeting the, sometimes multiple, needs of those affected by historic forced adoption - such as mental health, substance use, attachment and parenting, and trauma support.

It has been suggested that ongoing support should also be available on a flexible basis - to acknowledge the enduring impacts of historic forced adoption and ensure

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[103] Robinson, E. (2014, p.1). Some Thoughts on Shame. Clova Publications. Accessed on 1/5/2023.

[104] Adoption UK (2023). The Adoption Barometer: A Stocktake of Adoption in the UK. Accessed on 6/6/2023.

[105] Baden, A. L. (2016). 'Do You Know Your Real Parents?' and Other Adoption Microaggressions. Adoption Quarterly (19), p1-25. Accessed 26/4/2023.

[106] McSherry, D. & McAnee, G. (2022). Exploring the Relationship Between Adoption and Psychological Trauma for Children who are Adopted from Care: a Longitudinal Case Study Perspective. Child Abuse and Neglect. 130 (2, August). Accessed 26/4/2023.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Scottish Adult Adoptee Movement (2022). Adoptee Recommendations to: the Scottish Government, Historic Forced Adoption Practices, the Violation of Family Life: Rights of Adopted People. Accessed on 22/5/2023.

[109] Parliament of Victoria Legal and Social Issues Committee (2021). Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoption in Victoria. Accessed on 3/5/2023.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

responsivity to people's changing needs[112]. For instance, people's need for support may increase due to life events such as birthdays, births, and deaths[113].

Finally, MAA Scotland has urged caution around who delivers therapeutic support: "There is a massive power imbalance between those who are trained/experienced in facilitating family separation (i.e. social workers) and those who have been victims of it… specialist counselling, and psychological services must be delivered by mental health professionals who have no connection with past and forced adoption practices"[114].

Support to grieve

Robinson (2001)[115] highlights a need for counselling and support groups which recognise the disenfranchised grief of mothers and adopted people alike: "the grief experienced... (should) be seen… as a healthy response... in the same way that grieving a bereavement is seen as a positive, productive response and one to be encouraged and supported rather than suppressed".

However, Robinson (2001)[116] sees 'grief resolution' as an unhelpful aim as it insinuates that those who do not achieve this have somehow failed; she argues instead that people be supported to manage their grief and assimilate this into their lives. She describes using a Post Adoption Grief counselling model while working in South Australia. Founded on a narrative approach, this works to empower mothers, support their sense of self and lessen feelings of guilt and shame, before assisting them to prepare for search and reunion.

Fathers similarly need support that understand their ongoing grief and emotional connection to their child[117].

Trauma support

Despite the diversity of needs and symptoms among people affected by historic forced adoption, there is a growing recognition that trauma-focused support is essential[118].

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[112] Parliament of Victoria Legal and Social Issues Committee (2021). Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoption in Victoria. Accessed on 3/5/2023.

[113] Australian Government Department of Social Services Leaflet. Forced Adoptions in Australia; Supporting People Affected by Forced Adoptions. Accessed on 2/5/2023.

[114] The Movement for an Adoption Apology in Scotland (2022). July, 2022 Newsletter.

[115] Robinson, E. (2001, p.2). Post Adoption Grief Counselling. Clova Publications. Accessed on 2/5/2023.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Clapton, G. (2008). Birth Fathers and their Adoption Experiences. London: Jessica Kingsley Publications.

[118] Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023

Higgins and colleagues (2014)[119] call for both trauma-informed support and trauma-specific services to be offered.

Rather than just being delivered by traditional therapeutic support providers, this should be offered by a wider range of stakeholders, including substance use services, mental health services, prisons, community health care, older adult services, and care homes[120].

Higgins and colleagues (2014)[121] discuss that services must understand trauma, grief and loss, and attachment disruption and be able to: offer appropriate assessment, develop a person-centred treatment plan and refer people to trauma-specific services if required. Such understandings are also necessary for services to provide a non-judgemental approach, with awareness of the needs of coping behaviours that may have developed due to trauma[122].

A non-judgemental approach may be essential for those with experiences of historic forced adoption, given that: 1) secrecy, shame, and social stigma can be a barrier to help-seeking[123] and 2) people who have experienced historic forced adoption may mistrust and be suspicious of doctors and nurses, or support services more broadly, due to their past treatment by professionals[124,125]. Training for staff in wider community services has therefore been called for to avoid re-traumatising people when they access services today[126].

Trauma-specific interventions are those delivered by highly trained specialists[127]. They may include psycho-education, individual therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy, exposure therapy, eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR), psychodynamic therapy, neurofeedback, mindfulness and acceptance-based therapy, supportive therapy, psychopharmacology, creative therapies, group therapy and peer support groups[128].

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[119] Ibid.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Robinson, E. (2001). Post Adoption Grief Counselling. Clova Publications. Accessed on 2/5/2023.

[124] Australian Government Department of Social Services Leaflet. Forced Adoptions in Australia; Supporting People Affected by Forced Adoptions. Accessed on 2/5/2023.

[125] Parliament of Victoria Legal and Social Issues Committee (2021). Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoption in Victoria. Accessed on 3/5/2023.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[128] Ibid.

Peer support groups

The Scottish Government recently announced funding for peer support for those affected by historic forced adoption[129]. This is pertinent, given the current national provision of peer support networks for people who have been adopted has been assessed as inadequate by Adoption UK[130].

Peer support is recognised as a key element in trauma recovery generally, and people affected by historic forced adoption similarly endorse this[131]. Australian mothers, fathers, and adopted persons identified a need to connect with others with similar experiences including peer support options[132]. Reasons for this included validating and normalising their experiences (adopted persons) and promoting engagement (fathers)[133].

While there are reports of peer support groups offering much comfort and guidance, some have expressed concern about their potential to re-traumatise [134].

In line with this, Robinson (2014)[135] identifies internalised shame as a possible risk, impacting the way people perceive themselves and interact with others: "while these groups can provide a safe and nurturing environment, there is also the danger of them suffering from the influence of those who have not confronted and managed their own shame and who exhibit blaming, bullying and controlling behaviour".

Peer support has therefore been recommended as one of a range of options, including one-to-one support[136]. The need for appropriately trained group leaders has also been

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[129] Health in Mind. Information about Historic Adoption Peer Support. Accessed 1/11/2023.

[130] Adoption UK (2023). The Adoption Barometer: A Stocktake of Adoption in the UK. Accessed on 6/6/2023.

[131] Parliament of Victoria Legal and Social Issues Committee (2021). Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoption in Victoria. Accessed on 3/5/2023.

[132] Kenny, P., Higgins, D., Soloff, C. & Sweid, R. (2012). Cited in Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[135] Robinson, E. (2014, p.1). Some Thoughts on Shame. Accessed on 1/5/2023.

[136] Parliament of Victoria Legal and Social Issues Committee (2021). Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoption in Victoria. Accessed on 3/5/2023.

highlighted[137,138]. MAA Scotland also emphasises the importance of peer support being facilitated by people with lived experience[139].

Information and records

MAA Scotland argues that "in order for most people to address the traumatic effects of forced adoption, they must first be able to access all of the information that is held about them and the process that was foisted upon them"[140].

SAAM recommends that "the NRS or other data-holding body will store documents securely, but give full access to adoptees… If adoptee identifying information is requested by first parents, safeguarding measures will be enacted and a period of protection and support provided for the adult adoptee and/or their descendants, as required"[141].

For many affected by historic forced adoption, there can be a powerful need to 'fill in the missing pieces'. They want to access information about their family heritage to help them make sense of their identities, understand their medical histories, and learn what happened to or reunite with family members[142,143].

For mothers, accessing information can help alleviate the distress of not knowing what has happened to their children"[144]. For adoptees, there may be a need to explore why they were adopted[145].

Historically, adopted people who were curious about, or searched for their first family, were depicted as unusual but, since the 1970s, there has been growing recognition of the importance of adopted people having access to information about their origins[146]. This is evidenced in findings from the UK Joint Committee on Human Rights, where

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[137] Ibid.

[138] Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[139] The Movement for an Adoption Apology in Scotland (2022). July, 2022 Newsletter.

[140] The Movement for an Adoption Apology in Scotland (2022). May, 2022 Newsletter.

[141] Scottish Adult Adoptee Movement (2022, p.11). Adoptee Recommendations to: the Scottish Government, Historic Forced Adoption Practices, the Violation of Family Life: Rights of Adopted People. Accessed on 22/5/2023.

[142] Ibid.

[143] Parliament of Victoria Legal and Social Issues Committee (2021). Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoption in Victoria. Accessed on 3/5/2023.

[144] Evan Donaldson Institute (2006, p.6). Safeguarding the Rights and Well-Being of Birthparents in the Adoption Process. New York: Evan Donaldson Institute. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[145] Neil, E. (2000). Cited in Clapton, G. (2018). Good Practice with Adults in Adoption. IRISS Insights 43.

[146] Critchley, A., Grant, M., Cowan, P. & Hardy, M. (2018). Exploring the Changing Nature of Adoption Work: Reflections on the 1968 Act. Social Work Scotland. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

children described a strong desire to understand their adoption circumstances and struggling emotionally when their adoptive families did not support this[147].

Unfortunately, accessing such information in Scotland is often emotionally and practically challenging[148]. Barriers include: a private register of adoptions, meaning that details of adoption certificates are not publicly available; lack of records relating to the adoption - especially if arranged privately via a doctor, priest or solicitor; adopted people having no legal right to access adoption agency records, with the amount and type of information shared being at the agency's discretion; lost or destroyed adoption agency records; and lack of knowledge about the type of information available or where to seek support[149]. The culture of secrecy about adoption can also act as an internal barrier to seeking information[150].

Clapton (2008)[151] explains that, for those adopted in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, the often long and arduous process of searching for information can raise feelings of powerlessness mirroring those linked to the adoption. He strongly argues against people being denied their own data: "good practice in adoption means dismantling secrecy… Adopted people may have been treated like children all their lives in relation to the 'secret' of their origins… (they) need the same access to their histories that everyone else enjoys".

In line with this, adoptees in Australia felt access to their own information should be available despite information vetoes[152]. Fathers also wanted the records to be accurate by including their names on the birth certificate[153].

The Victoria Inquiry into responses to forced adoption[154] advocated streamlining information access, ensuring appropriate family search support, and providing emotional and practical support by well trained staff during these processes.

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[147] UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (2022). The Violation of the Right to Family Life. Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1949-1976. House of Commons and House of Lords. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[148] Clapton, G. (2008). The Right to Information in Practice: Adoption Records, Confidentiality, and Secrecy. In Clark, C. & McGhee, J. (Eds). Private and Confidential? Handling Information in the Social and Health Services. Bristol University Press. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[149] Clapton, G. (2008). The Right to Information in Practice: Adoption Records, Confidentiality, and Secrecy. In Clark, C. & McGhee, J. (Eds). Private and Confidential? Handling Information in the Social and Health Services. Bristol University Press. Accessed 26/4/2023.

[150] Ibid.

[151] Ibid, p.140.

[152] Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[153] Ibid.

[154] Parliament of Victoria Legal and Social Issues Committee (2021). Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoption in Victoria. Accessed on 3/5/2023.

In Scotland, improved nationally agreed standards for access to records have been called for[155]. MAA Scotland has also suggested a secure national database of all historic forced adoption records run by an independent central body without ties to past adoption practices[156], while SAAM has called for a secure national database of all birth, foster and adoption records[157].

Reunion

Reunions can be hugely therapeutic for those affected by historic forced adoption[158,159]. For instance, these have been linked to better longer-term outcomes for some[160], with UK mothers reporting reduced guilt, sadness, and grief and increased self-esteem following contact with their child[161]. For adoptees, contact with first families can be similarly protective[162]. Reunion or information exchange can help communicate their mother's circumstances, countering the belief that they were unwanted[163]. Evidence from a small sample of UK fathers in contact with their children also suggests this can lead to improved self-esteem and outlook among fathers, some of whom described feeling happy to know their children were well[164].

Reunion can be a positive experience for many[165], but it can also be complex[166]. Struggles with self-worth, fears and experiences of re-abandonment, feelings of guilt

[155] Adoption UK (2023). The Adoption Barometer: A Stocktake of Adoption in the UK. Accessed on 6/6/2023.

[156] The Movement for an Adoption Apology in Scotland (2022). May, 2022 Newsletter.

[157] Scottish Adult Adoptee Movement (2022). Adoptee Recommendations to: the Scottish Government, Historic Forced Adoption Practices, the Violation of Family Life: Rights of Adopted People. Accessed on 22/5/2023.

[158] Evan Donaldson Institute (2006). Safeguarding the Rights and Well-Being of Birthparents in the Adoption Process. New York: Evan Donaldson Institute. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[159] Robinson, E. (2004). The Role of Ritual Following a Loss. Clova Publications. Accessed on 1/5/2023.

[160] Becker, S., Sellers, R. & Harold, G. (2021). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights from members of the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme, University of Cambridge. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[161] Triseliotis et. al. (2005). Cited in Becker, S., Sellers, R. & Harold, G. (2021). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights from members of the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme, University of Cambridge. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[162] Baden, A.L., Shadel, D., Morgan, R., White, E.E., Harrington, E.S., Christian, N. and Bates, T.A. (2019). Delaying Adoption Disclosure: a Survey of Late Discovery Adoptees. Journal of Family Issues, 40 (9), p.1154-1180. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[163] Higgins, D. (2011). Cited in Becker, S., Sellers, R. & Harold, G. (2021). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights from members of the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme, University of Cambridge. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[164] Triseliotis et. al. (2005). Cited in Becker, S., Sellers, R. & Harold, G. (2021). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights from members of the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme, University of Cambridge. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Parliament of Victoria Legal and Social Issues Committee (2021). Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoption in Victoria. Accessed on 3/5/2023.

and of letting others down, difficulties maintaining ongoing relationships, and rejection of contact attempts have been reported[167].

Trauma and grief can resurface when reunions do not go well or relationships subsequently break down, although, among mothers, some have still reported a sense of comfort from finding their child[168,169,170]. Adoptees may experience feelings of loss associated with not knowing siblings or extended family members, and even in cases of successful reunions with siblings, a fragility to relationships can remain[171,172].

"Some people find each other and maintain a relationship, while others are not able to do so. The pressure and stress on all parties can be immense and overwhelming… Both mothers and their now-adult children are often living with ongoing impacts created through forced separation... mothers have carried the trauma of their experience and adopted people have lived with questions about their identity and innate feelings of abandonment"[173].

Given these challenges, personal recovery work has been identified as an important precursor to reconnection, increasing the likelihood of acceptable outcomes for the involved parties[174]. There have also been calls for support to be available both during and beyond the initial search and contact phase to help people cope with the emotional impacts of this and in their developing relationships[175,176,177]. All groups who participated

[167] Ibid.

[168] March, K. (2014). Cited in Becker, S., Sellers, R. & Harold, G. (2021). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights from members of the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme, University of Cambridge. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[169] Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs (2013). Cited in Becker, S., Sellers, R. & Harold, G. (2021). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights from members of the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme, University of Cambridge. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[170] Evan Donaldson Institute (2006). Safeguarding the Rights and Well-Being of Birthparents in the Adoption Process. New York: Evan Donaldson Institute. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[171] Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs (2013). Cited in Becker, S., Sellers, R. & Harold, G. (2021). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights from members of the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme, University of Cambridge. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[172] O'Neill et. al. (2018) Cited in Becker, S., Sellers, R. & Harold, G. (2021). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights from members of the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme, University of Cambridge. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[173] Parliament of Victoria Legal and Social Issues Committee (2021, p.312). Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoption in Victoria. Accessed on 3/5/2023.

[174] Robinson, E. (2005). Use of Intermediaries in Adoption Contact. Clova Publications. Accessed on 1/5/2023.

[175] Clapton, G. (2018). Good Practice with Adults in Adoption. IRISS Insights 43.

[176] Parliament of Victoria Legal and Social Issues Committee (2021). Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoption in Victoria. Accessed on 3/5/2023.

[177] Adoption UK (2023). The Adoption Barometer: A Stocktake of Adoption in the UK. Accessed on 6/6/2023.

in the Australian National Research Study on the Service Response to Past Adoption Experiences highlighted support from trained professionals to reconnect with family as key[178].

Some have recommended increased access to professional intermediaries or mediation services[179,180,181,182]. It has been suggested these may increase the likelihood of families maintaining ongoing contact[183].

However, Robinson (2005)[184] believes intermediaries may dilute the positive impacts of reunions, such as empowerment and building self-confidence. Instead, she suggests the person seeking contact be appropriately supported and prepared by professionals. She argues that if a mediator is used, direct communication between family members be established as soon as possible[185].

Thoughtfulness around service models has also been emphasised. Some feel services should be separate from those assisting adoptive parents; others believe they also need support within reunion dynamics, for their own benefit as well as for that of adoptees[186]. Becker and colleagues (2021) refer to the Irish Government's Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes[187] and recommend: "that most families adopting the child believed it to be in the best interest of the child, and great care needs to be taken that such

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[178] Kenny, P., Higgins, D., Soloff, C. & Sweid, R. (2012). Cited in Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[179] Adoption UK (2023). The Adoption Barometer: A Stocktake of Adoption in the UK. Accessed on 6/6/2023.

[180] The Movement for an Adoption Apology in Scotland (2022). June, 2022 Newsletter.

[181] UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights (2022). The Violation of the Right to Family Life. Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1949-1976. House of Commons and House of Lords. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[182] Scottish Adult Adoptee Movement (2022). Adoptee Recommendations to: the Scottish Government, Historic Forced Adoption Practices, the Violation of Family Life: Rights of Adopted People. Accessed on 22/5/2023.

[183] Armstrong, S. and Ormerod, T. (2005). Cited in Clapton, G. (2018). Good Practice with Adults in Adoption. IRISS Insights 43.

[184] Robinson, E. (2005). Use of Intermediaries in Adoption Contact. Clova Publications. Accessed on 1/5/2023.

[185] Ibid.

[186] Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[187] Irish Government, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (2021). Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

families (or their adopted children) are not disrupted where positive relationship dynamics are present"[188].

Higgins and colleagues (2014)[189] also highlight that there may be a 'conflict of interest', where agencies involved in past adoptions now support those affected. They discuss the "deep feelings of mistrust" that individuals may feel towards these agencies and the potential for them to be associated with re-traumatisation, uptake barriers, or the re-enactment of past power dynamics[190]. They urge careful consideration about which providers are allocated funding to deliver support services, to prevent further distress or anxiety. MAA Scotland recommends that mediators should be offered through an independent central body[191], and SAAM recommends they "have no past or present connection to forced adoption practices"[192].

Acknowledgement, redress, and learning from the past.

On 22 March 2023, the First Minister, on behalf of the Scottish Government, formally apologised to people affected by historic forced adoption.

This is significant because validation and acknowledgement through processes such as apologies, awareness raising, retellings, and education is a further support need of those affected by historic forced adoption[193,194,195].

In the Australian National Research on the Service Response to Past Adoption Practices[196], mothers and adoptees called for opportunities to share their stories to

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[188] Becker, S., Sellers, R. & Harold, G. (2021, no page number). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights from members of the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme, University of Cambridge. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[189] Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014, p.45). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[190] Senate Community Affairs References Committee. (2012). Referenced by Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014, p.45). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[191] The Movement for an Adoption Apology in Scotland (2022). June, 2022 Newsletter.

[192] Scottish Adult Adoptee Movement (2022, p.12). Adoptee Recommendations to: the Scottish Government, Historic Forced Adoption Practices, the Violation of Family Life: Rights of Adopted People. Accessed on 22/5/2023.

[193] Kenny, P., Higgins, D., Soloff, C. & Sweid, R. (2012). Past Adoption Experiences. National Research Study on the Service Response to Past Adoption Practices. Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[194] Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced adoption support services scoping study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[195] The Movement for an Adoption Apology (2022). Recommendations to the Joint Commission on Human Rights from the Movement for an Adoption Apology. Accessed on 22/5/2023.

[196] Kenny, P., Higgins, D., Soloff, C. & Sweid, R. (2012). Cited in Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

increase awareness among the public and professionals. Wider family members similarly felt increased awareness among the public would be beneficial. Fathers, whose experiences and needs are often neglected, wanted their voices to be heard, and service providers advocated for increased understanding among the media and government agencies.

MAA Scotland has recommended an exhibition about historic forced adoption experiences as a means of commemoration[197]. "Physical spaces (such as a memorial/statue, or a museum) can support education and awareness, as well as providing opportunity for a therapeutic space for those affected"[198].

Stakeholders in Australia[199] and those with lived experience in Scotland[200] have also called for acknowledgement and apologies from agencies and institutions involved in past practices, such as social work and medical professional bodies.

Finally, redress has also been identified as part of acknowledgement and healing for those affected by historic forced adoption[201,202]. It acts as a means for governments and institutions to enact their apologies[203]. "Redress schemes are about acknowledging wrongs that occurred in the past and often provide affected individuals with financial compensation, public recognition, acknowledgement, counselling and support"[204].

[197] The Movement for an Adoption Apology (2022). Recommendations to the Joint Commission on Human Rights from the Movement for an Adoption Apology. Accessed on 22/5/2023.

[198] Becker, S., Sellers, R. & Harold, G. (2021, no page number). Written Evidence Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights from members of the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme, University of Cambridge. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[199] Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Accessed on 26/4/2023.

[200] The Movement for an Adoption Apology (2022). Recommendations to the Joint Commission on Human Rights from the Movement for an Adoption Apology. Accessed on 22/5/2023.

[201] Parliament of Victoria Legal and Social Issues Committee (2021). Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoption in Victoria. Accessed on 3/5/2023.

[202] The Movement for an Adoption Apology (2022). Recommendations to the Joint Commission on Human Rights from the Movement for an Adoption Apology. Accessed on 22/5/2023.

[203] Parliament of Victoria Legal and Social Issues Committee (2021). Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoption in Victoria. Accessed on 3/5/2023.

[204] Ibid, p.197.

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