

Written evidence from [anonymous] (ACU0046)

My birth mother met and fell in love with my birth father when she was 16 and they had a close and deep relationship up until she discovered she was pregnant. Her mother did not approve of my birth father and both families contrived to separate the couple. My birth father was told by her mother that the pregnancy had been a 'false alarm'. My birth mother was sent miles away to hide the pregnancy and was told she had no choice but to have her baby adopted. She told me this was the most miserable time of her life. Letters and any other attempts at contact between my birth parents were intercepted.

I was adopted into an unsafe abusive family. My adopters were cruel people and unfit to be parents. I was emotionally and sexually abused by three out of four members of my immediate adoptive family. From the outside it looked like the perfect family. The adoption agency would have been impressed by my adoptive father's status as a successful professional earning a 'good salary' and the fact that my adoptive mother had never needed to work. They had already adopted two sons and the wording in a letter on my file seems to imply that this fact (i.e., "*successful*" placement of two older children) meant that it was OK for them to adopt me without asking too many questions. I acknowledge that this is perhaps explained by the need at that time to find new homes for a huge number of babies and the workers within agencies probably truly believed they were doing the right thing. The approach feels like an attitude of "we're so busy we just have to go with 'good enough'". But is good enough acceptable when you are dealing with the life of vulnerable infant? I am also aware that less was known in 1960 about the emotional impact of separation and loss. However, these points only explain it, they do not *excuse* the attitudes, behaviours, and adoption practice at that time. They do not take away my pain or my birth mother's pain.

The way I survived my childhood was to learn to comply and do what I was told in order to be "loved". It was not safe to get close to anyone outside, though I searched and searched for a rescuer. I am grateful for the self-surviving automatic strategies that protected me then, and still do today, from explicit memories of most, but not all, of those horrors.

My adopters moved numerous times which disrupted my education. I now realise that this was a deliberate act to sabotage my development. Academic achievement was played down, and I was told that I was selfish and big headed. I grew up with no sense of my intelligence and potential. I now realise that living my whole childhood in forced incongruence was a form of 'brainwashing' and it had a huge impact on my mental health and wellbeing. I attempted to take my own life at age 14. I believed I was unworthy, selfish and a bad person. I have only challenged these beliefs in recent years. I experienced trauma when my own children were born and endured many years of post-natal depression.

How I have managed to survive and to go on to have close loving relationships, raise two children and have a successful career is through years of therapy and medication, both of which continue to this day. I have only once been offered free counselling. The specialist therapy I have needed over the years has been a huge financial outlay. It was money well spent of course, but my point is to highlight how little support has been available for me as an adopted child who was neglected and abused, and as an adopted adult.

The constant core issue/theme I've battled with throughout my life has been a cycle of fear of abandonment, low self-worth, and depression. This stems from being abused and neglected as a child. It has had a profound impact on my sense of self, my psychological development and mental wellbeing. There are several factors that have contributed to low self-worth, fear, and

depression. The most basic of these was at the very beginning. Having read a lot about adoption and the impact of severing the most primal bond, I believe that my trauma started even earlier, i.e., in the womb. Research supports what has been suspected for some time, i.e., that a mother's stress during pregnancy may imprint on the brain of her developing child (Cognitive Neuroscience Society, 2018). The research has focused on the connections between the amygdala and prefrontal cortex and has shown that the communication between these parts of the brain operates differently in childhood and adolescence than in adulthood. The most significant outcome of this research is that it has shown that the developing brain is not simply an immature version of the adult brain. Rather, it is designed to collaborate with the expected caregiving environment. My birth mother at 18 spent the last 6 months of her pregnancy totally alone living in a remote village with strangers. No one came to visit her. She received no letters. All the time knowing that there was no way she would be allowed to keep her baby despite being deeply in love with my birth father. She endured a long and traumatic labour which lasted for about three days. She does not recall being offered any intervention to help things along. She was not allowed to hold me.

So, in the womb I will have experienced my mother's pain and distress, and this will have become more marked as the months passed, and my birth was anticipated. I was born into the world with trauma, pain, and distress. And then separated immediately from the **only** source of comfort for a new-born baby, the smell and familiarity of its mother. That would have been damaging enough; the primal wound. What happened next added layers and layers of loss, pain, and trauma. To be abused by the very people whose job it was to protect me in the absence of my birth mother is the ultimate betrayal.

My late teens and 20s were troubled though I had no understanding of why. I rushed into marriage to escape my adopters and that saved me for a while. At the age of 24 I decided to access my adoption file. I had a sense at the time that information was being withheld. This was confirmed when I made a second application direct to the adoption agency that now holds my records five years ago. A document on my file indicates that the judge considering the adoption order was *"perturbed about the mother's circumstances and was doubtful about the validity of the J.P.'s signature on the consent form"*.

When I connected with my birth mother via an intermediary agency, she told me that over the years, various friends of hers who visited the UK had left letters from her to be passed on to me in case I ever contacted the adoption agency. When I accessed my records there was no mention of these on either occasion. I can only conclude that these either were not handed over by her friends or not kept on the file. I think the latter is more likely but cannot know.

We were reunited in person when I was 30. At first it was a joyous reunion and for the first 20 years I convinced myself that we had a great relationship. This was pure fantasy and another coping strategy. Through therapy I came to realise that my birth mother cannot give me what I long for. Her experience of forced adoption has impacted her ability to develop healthy intimate relationships through meaningful human connection. She carries even today, at the age of 80, so much shame and guilt because of the way she was treated when she became pregnant out of wedlock. She has struggled with low self-esteem and depression for the rest of her life.

I have come to realise that the impact of trauma of separation and loss as a result of adoption is life-long. Therapy and medication are still ongoing, and I believe likely to continue throughout the rest of my life. In fact, I have only had one brief period of 8-9 years during my 40s where I was free of medication and depression. One therapist reflected to me that in

modern social work terms when I was a child I would have been deemed 'failing to thrive'. She believed I had been depressed since around the age of 5. This I think says it all.

I am angry that adoption practices allowed me to be handed over to unfit adopters. I am angry that society, professionals, and adoption practices at that time caused my birth mother so much pain, trauma, and life-long shame. I feel an adoption apology to acknowledge the huge impact of forced adoption on birth mothers and their children who were adopted is long overdue.

References

Cognitive Neuroscience Society. *Prenatal stress changes brain connectivity in-utero: New findings from developmental cognitive neuroscience*. Science Daily. Science Daily, 26 March 2018. Available at: www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/03/180326110123.htm accessed 24 April 2021

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