

# Additional to Submission to the Senate Mental Health provision of service

This is to expand upon the emotional and psychological effects of adoption upon all involved and to define the ongoing needs of all involved.

## Birth Parents:

- No mother can ever fully resolve the separation from their child; it goes against the very genetic makeup of a woman. A common practice from the 1920's through to the late 1970's is girls aged 15 years to 19 years naive and trusting have intermit relations in many cases with older men, They find out later that they are pregnant and turn to their parents for support or help. Their parents through their belief and or the laws and policies of the day have little or no option but to hand her over to the authorities. She is placed in a government or church administered unwed mother's institution till she is ready to give birth.

In most cases when she arrives at the unwed mother's home she is given a new name for her time there (*to aid in the stripping of her identity and the disassociation of the whole procedure*) and is only referred to by that new name. She is not allowed contact with anyone from their family or friends and is completely alone.

The girl is continually informed of how sinful, disgusting and wrong she is to have done this to her parents and herself. In many cases she is also give large amounts of sedatives and then forced to sign a consent form to give her soon to be born child up for adoption.

The girl is not informed of her rights under the law and constitution she is simply informed that there is no other way. Then comes the time to give birth, if she has resisted the process in any way she will be physically tied to the hospital bed with leather straps, her face will be covered with either a sheet or pillow and in some cases a sack is placed over the head. The instant she gives birth the baby is removed from the room. The now mother is not allowed to even see or hear the child she gave birth to, as this will increase her fight to keep the child and within days she is informed that she can now use her own name again and just to simply forget this ever happened and move on with her life.

The psychological impact this would have on the girl is almost inconceivable and the authorities at that time were fully aware of the impact this would have as many psychological studies have been done but they still felt justified to do this inhumane and criminal act to another human being. Many of the perpetrators today still hold positions of power in governments, churches and hospitals and need to be prosecuted for their crimes that are not only illegal but also are crimes against humanity. This process was routine for the day and in many cases was standard procedure authorized by the state and federal government.

Some of the emotional and psychological conditions these young women would suffer from are:

- (PTSD) Post traumatic stress syndrome
- Chronic depression
- Complete psychotic breakdown
- Continuous nightmares of this act causing sleep deprivation feeding into many other conditions
- Chronic anxiety
- Suicide
- Manic depression
- Delusional schizophrenia
- Histrionic syndrome
- Self-destructive behaviour
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Low self-worth
- Failed relationships and marriages
- Long term issues relating to being a parent again
- Dehumanisation by reinforcement of the feeling of this being their fault by insensitive government departments, courts, politicians, society, religious groups, churches and the media

These and other conditions will not resolve themselves and need to be addressed. The way they are addressed is critical to the wellbeing of the woman. Inexperienced counsellors and psychologist with no training in understanding these areas will only increase the damage done. Only trained trauma counsellors with an understanding of these inhuman acts will be able to advise and support these women through the healing process.

Other areas that need to be addressed are:

- Most birth fathers were and are completely unaware that they even have a child that has been placed up for or has been adopted out.
- Those birth fathers that are aware have little or no say and are powerless in what happens to their child
- Most birth mothers that were forced to give up their child to adoption had their own relationship with their parents destroyed by their lack of support or agreement with the procedures of the day.
- Most birth parents to survive emotionally either voluntarily or involuntarily block out or remove any possible reminder of that situation and refuse to address this in any form due to the fear that they will lose what little sanity they have left and will be cast out of the society and social group or family they have become part of.

It only takes common sense to realize the fact that a mother will suffer greatly emotionally and psychologically when forced to give up their child to adoption. But sadly this is not recognized by authorities today as evident by their actions and the inaction to change archaic policies to

prevent the same impact today. Governments and religious organisations would rather place financial liability above their humanitarian and just obligations.

Many choose to rather pretend that these acts never had taken place and ignore the ramifications of their actions by burying the truth or by giving meaningless apologies. The perpetrators of these acts of abuse are still alive and prospering today while the victims suffer.

They justify by their actions by *it was the policy of the day* and *it was for your own good* and many other excuses. The simple fact remains that their actions were and are illegal. No human being deserves to be treated in this way and there is an overwhelming need to address this.

To address the emotional and psychological effects of the illegal adoption practices of the past is simple; we need to learn and to listen to those who have been through it. Not dissect and analyse them as if they are subhuman as is the common practice of psychology today, trying to teach them to live in denial for society's convenience, medicating the emotions away. A society that refuses to learn from their past is doomed to fail. Many of the social problems today are a direct result of the policies of yesterday, if we wish to grow as a society we need to learn from them not hide them away and pretend they never happened.

The next to suffer in the process of adoption are the adoptees. We (as I am one) are born from this trauma and we do carry this with our emotional and psychological makeup, we are born traumatized. It has been proven that if a pregnant mother feels agitated the growing baby also feels this and moves around in the womb in an agitated way. Through imaging now we can clearly see this. Then if this is the case what impact would the trauma the young unwed mother to be, that is going through this emotionally confusing and terrifying time have on the unborn child?

Common sense says a lot. As the child develops in their mother's womb we not only receive the necessary nutrients to have our body form but we gain many other attributes. The genetic template for our body, brain and personality comes from the DNA that is passed on to us from our genetic parents. That template is not standardized it is formed from the genetic template of our ancestry, the ongoing evolution of our family dictated by our environmental, our social and physical surroundings.

The physical attributes of memory is that they are stored in every cell of our body. A new child is formed from the cellular material of the parents, if this is the case then the cellular memories of the parents is passed onto the child. As an adult we learn to deal with strong emotional experiences from the life experience we have gained. A new born has no life experience to draw upon.

Medical science is only now starting to realize the emotional and psychological impact short term and long term separation at birth has on the child. Children through medical necessity that are immediately placed in a humicrib show some of the same emotional and psychological difficulties that adopted children have.

It is essential for a child's emotional and social development to have that initial connection to their biological mother. Without this connection the child will have emotional and psychological issues to resolve.

Some of the more common emotional and psychological effects of adoption on Adoptees, inter-country adoptees and cross cultural adoptees are:

- Inability to create emotional connections to family or friends
- Lack of identity cultural or otherwise
- Low self-worth
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Suicide
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Anger, aggression and potential for violence
- Domestic abuse
- Failed relationships and marriages
- Long term issues relating to being a parent
- Self-destructive behaviour
- Intellectual difficulties due to lack of motivation to achieve
- Emotional rejection issues
- No sense of belonging or cognitive understanding of the value of family
- Failure to become a part of the adoptive society and inability to be accepted by the culture of their birth
- Growing up being more an object chosen rather than a child with their parents
- Inability to have family medical history available when needed for diagnosis and treatment
- Dehumanisation by reinforcement of the feeling of being an object by insensitive government departments, courts, politicians and media
- Inability to trace ancestry and records due to lack of information to be able to search

Many of the above mentioned emotional and psychological issues do not manifest themselves until the adopted child reaches adolescence. As we grow we become more aware of our environment and begin to ask questions of ourselves and those around us. Growing up without the genetic connection to our parents removes any sense of identity, security and self-worth. This is no reflection on the upbringing of the adoptive parents it is just a simple fact.

Even adopted children that were not told that they are adopted and fortunately look similar to their adoptive parents still show and feel similar emotional and psychological traits informed adoptees have. The long term influence of this evolves over time and will affect the adoptee in the relationships they form and the way they behave in social interactions throughout their life.

This emotional and psychological trauma also affects the educational development of the child as identity and self-worth are essential in a child intellectual capacity and development.

With the cases of adoption where the child is of a different cultural background as in inter-country adoption and cross-cultural adoption there are many other problems that can and will occur.

There is more to raising an adopted child than just simply loving them. Besides the obvious food, shelter and clothing it takes a great deal of research and understanding, as well as the acceptance that they will 100% have the trauma of being separated from their mother regardless of the circumstance. This will manifest itself somewhere in their psychological and emotional perspective of life.

Depending on the circumstance if the child is adopted from a culture that has been torn apart by conflict like in different parts of Africa then the child also will have been born with a level of trauma passed down from the parents additional to the removal from their mother. Studies have proven this as psychologists have been studying children born to Vietnam Veterans and have seen that the children have nightmares and trauma associated with post traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) as a result of their parents involvement in the Vietnam War.

I personally know this as true as I am a first generation son of a Vietnam veteran and throughout my childhood I vividly remember dreams of being in battles, being wounded and also taking life. For a child of two or three years of age, this is very hard to cope with and it does have emotional consequences that last a life time.

I have found through observation that the personality of any child, the dominate personality traits are usually dictated by what the parents are going through for about two years before conception and during the pregnancy. If there is a lot of conflict and fear then often the child is pre-prepared to cope with this when born, has the personality type to survive.

But with adoption the child is being raised in a completely different environment and can have difficulty understanding this as the environment they were genetically and mentally prepared for is different from the one they are being raised in. With foreign adoption often the child comes from a very poverty stricken background. As new parents want to give their new child everything this can create problems as the child can be pre-disposed to emotionally not coping with many possessions. This can manifest in a selfish attitude or simply being overwhelmed. This can also heavily impact upon the child's feelings of self-worth.

Now we come to the child's cultural background, if a child is from a cultural background different to the adoptive parents, even if they are from a westernized country the cultural background will have a high level of influence on the emotional and thought processes of that child.

I have found that the level of cultural influence depends upon the way the previous seven generations of the child's family have lived. The culture is not there to teach a person how to be but it is there to teach you how to understand the way you truly think and feel. Your culture is the dictionary to understanding your internal feelings and dialog. Without this understanding you can become emotionally separate from your surroundings and also yourself.

In the cases where the child is of a completely different physical appearance to the adoptive parents the questions of why this happens at a very young age. The difficulty with this is that the child does not have the life experience to put the explanation into the correct context and can often feel more isolated from the adoptive family as a result. All children have a unique ability to make every emotional and psychological trauma their own fault. The long term affects of this are soul destroying.

Many adoptive parents through their own trauma of not being able to have children place a lot of pressure upon the child they adopt. The adoptive child has to fill a void they were not born to fulfil. This can lead to a level of subtle resentment and separation on both sides of the relationship, the child's and the parent's.

Subconsciously the mother can see the adoptive child as a way to prove that they are a woman and can be a mother. They can finally fulfil the genetic need that all women have as well as being seen as a normal woman through becoming a mother. This places an emotional and psychological need on the child and sadly in many cases as the child is already traumatized rejects the initial advances of the adoptive mother and can lead to a high level of animosity on both sides of the relationship. This can grow to absolute resentment on both sides over many years.

The adoptive parents need to see that they are raising someone else's child not their own and treat their life together as a gift not a right. That way any aspect of the adoptive child's past and culture is not a threat to the relationship and can be openly explored throughout the relationship between the adoptive child and their adoptive parent's life together.

A very important aspect that needs to be addressed is the availability of documentation. When you adopt a child from the very beginning there needs to be procedures put in place so that the future informational needs of the adopted child can be easily and as trauma free be met. We need as much information as possible about our natural parents and the circumstances that surround the reasons for being placed up for adoption. This is far more achievable at the time of the adoption than it is after 18 years.

The birth parents need to take some level of responsibility for falling pregnant but in no way deserve the treatment they have received in the process of adoption and the adoptive parents need to accept that this is not a threat to their relationship with the adoptive child it will help in the future to answer all the question the adoptive child will raise within themselves and will make a very big difference in the feelings of self-worth and the ability to grow into an emotionally sound human being.

It is also very important to have access to as much information as possible about the medical history of the adoptive child as many times this can be crucial in diagnosing medical issues in later life. It can also help to prevent these issues from manifesting themselves at all. For me having the affects of Agent Orange being passed down to me from my father has led to many medical issues. But as I cannot prove this because I don't have any documental evidence I cannot get the help I need to alleviate the medical conditions I already have and to prevent future debilitation from the expansion of these affects, I.e. Parkinson's disease, liver failure etc.

This covers only briefly some of the areas that need to be addressed and resolved, the expansion of this information and the understanding of every aspect of adoption and its affects upon all involved, needs to urgently be addressed. It is not that adoption needs to be stopped, but further education and understanding of the affects both short and long term and the emotional and psychological trauma suffered by those that have endured the past atrocities associated with illegal and seriously flawed policies and practices of adoption, so that they are not repeated in the future. Serious resources need to be allocated to the support given to those that have suffered and in turn they with teach the lessons that need to be learned so that this is not repeated.

Adoptive parents and those that are considering adoption need to have the resources to understand all the traps and pitfalls of adoption so that their courageous choice to take on a child not born to them but raised by them, so that the child has the best chance at living as normal a life as possible, with all the necessary recourses to enable the adopted child to heal, understand and grow into a healthy productive adult member of society. The parents that now voluntarily make the informed choice to place their child up for adoption can if they choose participate in the raising of that child in a way that is beneficial for the child and the nurturing of their life. For those parents that do not wish to participate in the raising of their child or through circumstance are unable to will provide all the relevant information that the child will need to answer future questions.

This can be done simply and cost effectively by the birth parents or family relatives, a medical doctor and in some cases a social worker directly involved in the adoption process in the case of the mother clinically being unable to raise a child or in the event that the child is an orphan to fill out a questionnaire. This document can be either made available to the adoptive child at age 18 years or can be requested by the child or adoptive parents if it is need for the wellbeing of the child concerned.

The questions contained with this questionnaire are derived from interviews with adoptees and the answers we need so that we have access to the critical information needed to understand and to deal with the trauma associated with adoption.

Thank you

Tribal name: Standing Bear

Adoptive family name: Erik J Spinney