

Project: From care, to adoption, to parenting: a two generation study of identity, risk and resilience in adoptive families

Funder: Economic and Social Research Council

Dates: June 2018 – December 2020 (30 months)

Research team: Professor Beth Neil (Principle Investigator) and Dr Julia Rimmer

Context

For 20 years UK policy has encouraged the adoption of children from care, and tens of thousands are now of an age where they could become a parent. This compulsory form of adoption is controversial at home and abroad and it is vital to fully research the lifespan effects - including what happens when adoptees become parents to the next generation. This study will provide a new understanding of the lived experiences and needs of people adopted from care who are now parents, and of adoptive parents who are now grandparents. It will inform support to help adopted young people to prepare for parenthood, promote their resilience, and support them as parents.

There is no specific research about the experiences and support needs of people adopted from care who are parents, even though there is evidence that up to half of such individuals may have psychological vulnerabilities as they move into adult life. Neither have the experiences of adoptive parents as grandparents been studied. Important questions are unanswered e.g. how will adoptees manage parenting their own child given their past histories? How might being a parent affect how they feel about their birth family? How will adoptive parents react to the arrival of a grandchild with whom they have no biological connection, and how will they see the role of birth grandparents? This research will draw on narrative identity and risk and resilience frameworks in understanding the experiences of parents and grandparents.

Aims

The overarching aims of the project are:

- to provide a new understanding of the lived experiences and needs of people adopted from care who are now parents, and of adoptive parents who are now grandparents.
- to use these insights to inform the support of adopted children & young people, adopted adults, and the children of adopted adults.
- to inform future developments in adoption policy and practice.

Methodology and research design

This research will be a qualitative study of two generations in ‘from care’ adoptions: adoptive parents who are now grandparents, and adopted people who are now parents of a child. The key elements of the research design are:

- A review of the international literature relevant to adoptees as parents.

- 40 in-depth interviews with parents who were adopted as children from the care system (20 men, 20 women).
- 40 in-depth interviews with parents who adopted a child from care, and whose adopted child is now a parent.
- A programme of stakeholder engagement extending throughout the project and involving professionals, adoptees who are parents, and (grandparent) adopters.

Impact

The main impact we hope to achieve from this project is to develop and disseminate ideas about how to support adoptees who are parents and their children. We will achieve this impact by providing new insights into the needs and experiences of adoptive families when adoptees reach the age where they may become parents themselves. The ultimate beneficiaries will be people who were adopted from care and their children, and the adoptive parents of children adopted from care. Users who have the potential to support such children, parents and grandparents include: adoption agencies, adoption support agencies and other adoption support providers for example therapists; local authority children's services (who have responsibilities to support "children in need"); universal child and parenting support services (for example health visitors, nursery workers); adoptive/grandparent membership organisations.

Findings from the research will be disseminated and published in a range of formats addressing the key audiences (academic articles and policy/practitioner articles).

For more information about the project please contact the research team:

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