1961

A study of the attitudes and concerns of adoptive parents toward the behavior problems of adopted children presented at a family agency

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

A STUDY OF THE ATTITUDES AND CONCERNS OF ADOPTIVE PARENTS TOWARD THE BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS OF ADOPTED CHILDREN PRESENTED AT A FAMILY AGENCY

A thesis

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In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Science in Social Service

1961

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This is a study of the attitudes and concerns of adoptive parents toward the behavior problems of adopted children presented at a family agency. The attitudes of nine families with an adopted child were studied. In order to see whether these attitudes were unique to these parents, a control group of nine families with an own child were also studied.

A survey of the social work literature indicates that the phenomenon of adoption, by its very nature, implies that both adoptive parents and adopted children react to parenthood and childhood respectively in different ways from biological parents and own children.

This indicates that adoption is a factor that would influence the way parents feel, think, and act toward adopted children with behavior problems. Since patterns of behavior emerge in everyday living situations, and since the psychic and social factors are interrelated, the attitudes of the parents in this study were examined in relation to the child's natural habitat -- his home, his school, his playground.

This study examines the kinds of behavior problems about which adoptive parents bring their children to a family agency. It also studies parental attitudes and concerns regarding the cause, significance, and acceptability of the problem, as well as the parents' attitude toward involvement in working toward a solution to the problem. The study considers these parental attitudes and concerns in the areas of the child's family life, school, peer relationships, and discipline.

The data come from case records of a family agency, namely the Child and Family Services, Portland, Maine.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY AND LITERATURE

This is a study of adoptive parents. In working with parents the caseworker's major task is to alter attitudes that the parents hold toward their child and his actions. Since adoption is a factor that may influence parental attitudes toward children, a study of parents seeking help for an adopted child would make a contribution to casework management.

Adoption is the "act of accepting that of which one is not the begetter."[1] Adoption of children is a phenomenon of increasing importance in the United States. Factors affecting this increase are the large number of homes that continue to be broken by death, divorce, and desertion, the increase of illigitimate births, and the growing realization that adoption is appropriate for any child without family ties who is in need of a family and for whom a family can be found to meet his need.[2]

Because these are increasing concerns in our society, adoption becomes a major social work concern both from the standpoint of the child who is adopted and also of the parents who adopt.

Every child, whether adopted or not, has certain needs, which may be summarized as follows:[3]

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[1] Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, G. and C. Merriam Co., Springfield, Mass., 1958.

[2] Schapiro, Michael. A Study of Adoption Practice, vol. 1, New York: Child Welfare League of America, Inc., 1956, p. 9.

[3] English, O. S., and Pearson, G. H. J. Emotional Problems of Living, New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1945, p. 89.

1. He needs the security and backing of two present parents.
2. He needs their love and understanding.
3. He needs an optimum period of gratification for his infantile sensual desires. (The child has to learn how to tolerate anxiety but he has to learn this through minute doses.)
4. He needs to have opportunities to express his hostilities, antagonisms and aggressiveness in order that he learn what these feelings are like and how to deal with them efficiently. All children during the period of infancy develop three fears -- fear of being deserted, of not being loved, and of being punished by horrible mutilations.

English and Pearson state that:

> . . . anything that occurs that prevents the effective satisfaction of needs or that increases the fears mentioned above will have a deleterious effect on the development of the child's personality and is likely to produce an illness. Such occurrences are known technically as traumatic events, i. e. events that are injurious. They can be grouped into three classes: (1) acts of fate, (2) adverse parental attitudes, and (3) exposure to premature and excessive sexual stimulation.[4]

For purposes of this study we will be considering the effect of adverse parental attitudes.

English and Pearson classify parental attitudes into three groups:[5]

1. Rejection of the child.
2. Overprotection of the child.
3. Indulgence.

Parents who have adverse attitudes to their children are classified into three types (a) overstrict parents, (b) overstrict parents who feel guilty about their dislike for their child, and (c) weak parents.[6]

Because we know that biological parents may display attitudes of rejection, overprotection, and indulgence toward their own children, we

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[4]English, O. S., and Pearson, G. H. J. Emotional Problems of Living, New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1945, p. 90.

[5]Ibid, p. 108.

[6]Ibid, p. 108.

suspect that adoptive parents, who must accept "that of which one is not the begetter", may be doubly susceptible to these attitudes. These are the kinds of attitudes the Child Welfare League hoped to assess in 1956:[7]

> Agencies were asked to rank the following criteria in order of their importance in determining the applicants' capacity for adoptive parenthood: mutual desire to adopt a child, ability to love a child, employment stability, realistic expectations of children, adjustment to childlessness, social stability, attitude towards behavior problems of children and satisfactory previous experience with children.

Abraham Simon, in his "Evaluation of Adoptive Parents" raises many questions relative to parental attitudes as well as areas in which adoption may influence parental attitudes:[8]

> Are they reasonably clear, from experience, on the matter of punishing as well as rewarding; permitting as well as restricting; protecting from danger as well as encouraging to adventure? Is the idea of family a joy clearly more than an obligation? Do they spend their leisure time together in shared experiences, and enjoy taking a child along, too? Can they plan an active role in the community in accordance with the expected role, for variations in age, sex, physique and intellectual endowment?

Because we know that biological children are often judged in the home, school, and community on the basis of nature and nurture, we may suspect that adopted children are doubly susceptible to being judged by these criteria.

Perlman says:

> On the issue of whether nature or nurture is more potent in the formation of the human being, there is general agreement today that both what the person is equipped with at birth and what he experiences from that moment combine to create his individuality. Moreover, it is assumed that these two factors do not simply exist

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[7] Schapiro, Michael. A Study of Adoption Practice, vol. 1, New York: Child Welfare League of America, Inc., 1956, p. 79.

[8] Schapiro, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 160-162.

> together but that the person's biological being will affect strongly what he experiences and how he registers that experience and, conversely, that certain experiences will affect his biologically determined makeup. (How much weight may be ascribed to the influence of psychic, social, or physical factors in the molding of the personality no one yet knows.) At every age and in every phase of living the personality is being shaped and infused by social relationships and, in turn, is affecting them. The circles of our society widen about us, from the primary unit of baby and mother to the family group, to the neighborhood, to school with its teachers and children, to groups of peers, to groups of employers and fellow workers, to religious, civic, and recreational interest groups, to love relationships, and to the formation of a new primary unit in marriage and parenthood.[9]

Both nature and nurture were considered to be important for study by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck in their studies in unraveling juvenile delinquency.[10] Areas of family life, school, and community were studied in addition to physical, mental and emotional attributes. One of the concluding statements of the study is this:

> Without attempting a psychoanalytic discussion of interpersonal emotional dynamics, we may point out that the development of a mentally hygienic and properly oriented superego (conscience) must have been greatly hampered by the kind of parental ideals, attitudes, temperaments, and behavior found to play such a major role on the family stage of the delinquents.

We see, therefore, that attitudes are important, and also that adoption can influence attitudes in the following areas: toward the need for adoption itself, toward the child's presenting problem and its causes, significance, and acceptibility, as well as the degree of parental involvement; and in relation to the child's school, discipline, peer relationships and family life. These are the areas of this study and will be investigated

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[9] Perlman, Helen. Social Casework A Problem Solving Process, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1957, p. 18.

[10] Glueck, Sheldon and Eleanor. Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency, New York: The Commonwealth Fund, 1950, p. 281.

in relation to parental attitudes and concerns toward these areas with adopted children.

CHAPTER III

METHOD OF PROCEDURE

The cases studied were from the files of a family agency, specifically Child and Family Services, Portland, Maine. Child and Family Services represents a merger of the Children's Service Bureau (organized in 1934) and the Family Welfare Society (organized in 1879). It is a voluntary agency, supported by endowments, the United Fund, and fees for service, and having the following as its purposes:

1. To assist families in meeting personal and family relationship problems both within the family and between the family and the community.

2. To provide services for the welfare of children, primarily in Portland and vicinity, in accordance with current needs and changing conditions.

3. To promote and protect, through educational and legislative activities, adequate standards of child welfare.

4. To study social conditions in the community and to cooperate with other organizations in efforts for social betterment.

This purpose is accomplished through various casework services, including counseling, foster home and adoptive placements, and financial assistance. Child and Family Services is accredited by the Child Welfare League of America and the Family Services Association of America. The only family agency within a population area of roughly 150,000, Child and Family Services served a total of 272 families involving 455 children in the Family Department in 1960 and 299 children in the Children's Department during the same period of time.

An attempt was made to find, in the agency files, 10 cases in which both mother and father were involved with the agency in working on a behavior problem with an adopted child. Only those cases were considered in which the child was adopted by non-relatives. In a random but thorough search of the files only nine such cases could be found. Many more cases involving adoptions by relatives were to be found than those involving adoptions by non-relatives. The cases used were representative of both agency and non-agency adoptions; no attempt was made to isolate this factor in this study.

The children of adoptive parents were matched in age and sex with children of own parentage. This was done in order to get some notion of the similarity of the concerns of adoptive parents and own parents regarding their children's behavior problems.

Following is the sample of 9 children of 18 adoptive parents and 9 children of 18 biological parents:

2 boys 10 years of age

4 boys 11 years of age

2 boys 12 years of age

2 boys 13 years of age

4 girls 15 years of age

2 boys 16 years of age

2 girls 17 years of age

Data concerning the families were secured from the files according to the schedule found on page of the appendix. Data were compiled for each item of the schedule. Comparisons were made of attitudes and concerns of the parents of the adopted children and of the own children. Certain

attitudes and concerns were charted against age of both groups of parents. These findings are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter deals with the examination of the factors studied in relation to the adopted and the own children. There were 9 adopted children involving 18 parents, and 9 own children involving 18 parents. The adopted children were matched with 9 own children on the basis of age and sex. The background characteristics are presented in section A. The attitudes are presented in section B. The adopted families will be referred to as the adopted group; the own children and parents, as the control group. In the tables, A will stand for adoptive; C will stand for control.

A. Background Information

Number and Distribution of Siblings.

In three of the adoptive families the child in trouble was the only child. One other child was alone by virtue of the fact that the older children were married and away from home. In total, there were seven siblings involved in the adoptive families. Five of these siblings were born to the adoptive couples; one was adopted. Of these siblings, three were older than the child in trouble; four were younger.

In the control group there were a total of 16 siblings living at home. In no case was the child in trouble the only child. Three siblings were older and 13 were younger than the child under study.

Current Age of Parents.

Table 1 on the following page presenting the current age of parents shows that age of mothers in both the adopted group and the control group

TABLE 1

CURRENT AGE OF PARENTS

Age	Mothers		Fathers	
	Adoptive	Control	Adoptive	Control
30 - 40 years of age	4	4	2	4
41 - 50 " " "	5	5	4	3
51 - 60 " " "	-	-	3	2
Total	9	9	9	9

were identical. Fathers in the control group tended to be younger than the fathers in the adoptive group.

Age of Parents at Marriage.

In the following table the age of parents at marriage is shown.

TABLE 2

AGE OF PARENTS AT MARRIAGE

Age	Mothers		Fathers	
	Adoptive	Control	Adoptive	Control
Under 20 years of age	2	5	-	1
20 - 30 years of age	3	4	5	7
31 - 40 years of age	1	-	-	1
41 - 50 years of age	-	-	1	-
No record	3	-	3	-
Total	9	9	9	9

Records of marriage were not available for three adoptive couples. The data available show a tendency for the parents of own children to marry younger than do parents of adopted children.

Age of Parents at Appearance of Child into Family.

Table 3 below shows that fourteen of the eighteen control parents

TABLE 3

AGE OF PARENTS AT APPEARANCE OF CHILD INTO FAMILY

Age	Mothers		Fathers	
	Adoptive	Control	Adoptive	Control
Under 20 years of age	-	2	-	-
21 - 30 " " "	5	6	4	6
31 - 40 " " "	4	1	3	3
41 - 50 " " "	-	-	2	-
Total	9	9	9	9

had their child by the time they were 30 years old. Half (nine) of the adoptive parents received their child after they were 30 years of age. Only four of the control parents had the child under study born to them after this age.

Religion.

As shown in Table 4 the religion of both the adoptive families and the control families is predominantly Protestant. In a close examination of the individual cases it was found that there was one mixed marriage among the adoptive couples, and two mixed marriages in the control group.

TABLE 4

RELIGION

Religion	Mothers		Fathers	
	Adoptive	Control	Adoptive	Control
Catholic	1	3	-	1
Protestant	4	5	5	7
Jewish	2	1	2	1
No record	2	-	2	-
Total	9	9	9	9

Education.

There was not enough data concerning the education of either the adoptive parents or the control parents for a compilation of this information.

Health.

As there was not consistent information in the records regarding the health of the parents of either group, no comparison was made. In those cases where mention of a parent's health was made, those symptoms

usually mentioned were headache, ulcers, asthma, nervous conditions, tiredness, and obesity.

Occupation.

Among the adoptive couples, all mothers were at home except one who was a nurse's aide. The adoptive fathers showed a wide range in occupation: one janitor, one odd-jobs man, two taxi drivers, one Navy yard worker, one sales manager of a cleaning company, one electrical supply company worker, and two drug store owners and operators.

Among the control group three mothers worked part time. The fathers were found among the following occupations: workers at a copper and tanks company and at the terminal company, railroad trainman and office worker, salesman, radio station electrical technician, manager in a truck owners' association, and manager in an oil company.

The occupations held by the fathers in the control group were somewhat close in status,[1] whereas in the adoptive group both extremes were higher and lower than any of those occupations of the fathers in the control group.

B. Attitudes

Attitude of Parents Toward Adoption.

In searching the adoptive records for attitudes of the parents toward adoption, attitudes of the fathers were found to be conspicuously absent. Attitudes of the mothers reflected their reasons for adopting.

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[1] Status in this instance is considered as one's position on the economic scale.

Reason for Adoption.

No father was found to have given a reason for adoption, while six of the nine mothers voiced the following reasons: "difficult delivery of own child", "did not want to being up own child alone", "wanted a perfect child", "wanted a child so husband would assume grown-up responsibilities", "had lost four children", "hysterectomy".

Attitude of Parents toward Telling Child of Adoption.

Fathers' expressed attitudes toward the adoption itself and regarding telling the child about the adoption were scarce. The few attitudes expressed indicated some discomfort with the subject. A few other fathers expressed the attitude that the adoption was the wife's project--"she managed the whole thing". Six adoptive mothers expressed discomfort at discussing adoption with the child.

Presenting Problem as Seen by Parents.

The following table shows all adoptive mothers and all adoptive

TABLE 5

[a]
PRESENTING PROBLEM AS SEEN BY PARENTS

Problem	Mothers		Fathers	
	Adoptive	Control	Adoptive	Control
External acts[b]	9	3	6	5
Internal states[c]	-	2	-	2
Combination[d]	-	4	-	-
No comment	-	-	3	2
Total	9	9	9	9

[a] Presenting problem is the reason which the parent gives for coming to the agency for help.

[b] External acts are those involving some overt action on the part of the child, e.g. soiling, running away, defiant, disobedient, lying.

[c] Internal states are related to emotional patterns, e.g. fears, lack of incentive.

[d] Combination signifies the parent has given a combination of external acts and internal states as the presenting problem.

fathers who commented saw the child's presenting problem as an external act. More control mothers saw the problem as a combination of external acts and internal states rather than either exclusively external or internal. Control fathers tended to agree with adoptive parents in seeing the

problem as one of external acts.

Age of Parents and Presenting Problem.

In charting age of parents with presenting problems, it appears that age of parents plays no significant role in relation to how the parents see the child's presenting problem, as seen in the following table.

TABLE 6

AGE OF PARENTS AND PRESENTING PROBLEM

Current Age of Parents	Presenting Problem												
	External Acts				Internal States				Combination				No Comment
	Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers		
	A*	C	A	C	A	C	A	C	A	C	A	C	
30 - 40	3	1	2	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
41 - 50	6	2	1	2	-	2	-	1	-	3	-	-	3
51 - 60	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	1
Total	9	3	6	5	-	2	-	2	-	4	-	-	5

*Key to abbreviations:

A - Adoptive

C - Control

Attitude of Parents Regarding Cause of Child's Problem.

In Table 7, both the adoptive parents and the control parents saw

TABLE 7

ATTITUDE OF PARENTS REGARDING CAUSE[a] OF CHILD'S PROBLEM

Attitude Regarding Cause	Mothers		Fathers	
	Adoptive	Control	Adoptive	Control
External to family[b]	1	2	1	-
Internal to family[c]	4	6	4	8
Hereditary[d]	2	-	1	-
No comment	2	1	3	1
Total	9	9	9	9

[a] Cause is that reason which the parent gives for the child's having the presenting problem.

[b] External to family are those reasons which lie outside the immediate family, e.g. sister-in-law's remarks, parental grandmother, neighbor.

[c] Internal to family are those reasons which lie within the immediate family, e.g. the child, opposite spouse, the family's fault.

[d] Hereditary means those reasons that lie within the child's physical history, e.g. something in the child's background.

the cause of the child's problem as centering within the family. Three adoptive parents viewed the child's problem as hereditary. An equal number of adoptive and control parents, two, placed the cause of the child's problem outside the immediate family.

Concern of Parents Regarding Significance[a] of Child's Problem.

Tables 8 and 9 following present the concern of parents regarding significance of child's problem, and the age of parents and significance of child's problem respectively.

TABLE 8

CONCERN OF PARENTS REGARDING SIGNIFICANCE[a] OF CHILD'S PROBLEM

Significance	Mothers		Fathers	
	Adoptive	Control	Adoptive	Control
Child oriented[b]	3	8	3	8
Parent oriented[c]	3	1	5	1
No comment	3	-	1	-
Total	9	9	9	9

[a]Significance of child's problem conveys the meaning the presenting problem has for the parents.

[b]Child oriented means that the parents express either their concern or lack of concern about the child in regard to the problem as important or unimportant, e.g. afraid of what child might do later.

[c]Parent oriented means that the parents express their concern about themselves in regard to the problem, e.g. endangering parent's health, annoys parent.

Adoptive parents tended more to place the significance of the problem in relation to the welfare of the parents whereas nearly all parents of the control group regarded the significance of the child's problem in relation to the welfare of the child.

In charting age of parents with significance of the child's problem, it is apparent that there is no relationship between the age of the parents and their concern regarding the significance of the child's problem, as seen below.

TABLE 9

AGE OF PARENTS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF CHILD'S PROBLEM

Current Age of Parents	Child Oriented				Parent Oriented			
	Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers	
	A	C	A	C	A	C	A	C
30 - 40 years	1	3	-	3	2	1	2	1
41 - 50 "	2	5	2	3	1	-	1	-
51 - 60 "	-	-	1	2	-	-	2	-
Total	3	8	3	8	3	1	5	1

Attitude of Parents Toward Acceptability of Child's Problem.

It is significant in Table 10 below that all nine sets of the

TABLE 10

ATTITUDE OF PARENTS TOWARD ACCEPTABILITY OF CHILD'S PROBLEM

Attitude	Mothers		Fathers	
	Adoptive	Control	Adoptive	Control
Wants change	6	9	4	9
No need to change	1	-	3	-
No comment	2	-	2	-
Total	9	9	9	9

parents in the control group wanted change in relation to the child's behavior problem. More adoptive mothers than fathers wanted change. The number of adoptive fathers who saw no need for change or who made no comment regarding change was greater than the number of control fathers who wanted change.

Attitude of Parents Regarding Involvement in Child's Problem.

Table 11 on the following page will present the attitudes of parents regarding involvement in the child's problem.

TABLE 11

ATTITUDE OF PARENTS REGARDING INVOLVEMENT[a] IN CHILD'S PROBLEM

Attitude	Mothers		Fathers	
	Adoptive	Control	Adoptive	Control
Projective[b]	3	-	5	-
Introjective[c]	3	9	1	9
Ambivalent[d]	3	-	1	-
No comment	-	-	2	-
Total	9	9	9	9

[a]Involvement indicates the degree to which the parent sees himself participating in working toward the solution of the child's problem.

[b]Projective means those attitudes of those parents who do not see themselves participating in the solution of the problem, e.g. unwilling to involve themselves.

[c]Introjective means those attitudes of those parents who see themselves participating in the solution of the problem, e.g. willing to involve themselves.

[d]Ambivalent indicates the attitude of those parents who show both projective and introjective attitudes.

All parents of the control group expressed willingness to involve themselves in working on the solution to the child's problems. Eight of the adoptive parents wished to project this responsibility, and four showed some ambivalence around involving themselves.

In charting age of parents with their attitudes regarding their involvement in the child's problem, it will be seen in the following table

that no particular age bracket seems more responsible for either the projective or the introjective attitudes.

TABLE 12

AGE OF PARENTS AND DEGREE OF INVOLVEMENT IN CHILD'S PROBLEM

Current Age of Parents	Attitudes												
	Projective				Ambivalent				Introjective				No Comment
	Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers		
	A	C	A	C	A	C	A	C	A	C	A	C	
30-40	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	5	-	4	1
41-50	1	-	3	-	3	-	1	-	2	4	-	3	-
51-60	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	1
Total	3	0	5	0	3	0	1	0	3	9	1	9	2

Attitude of Parents Regarding Child's Discipline.

Table 13 shows the attitude of parents regarding the child's discipline. Table 14 includes parents' age in relation to their attitude.

TABLE 13

ATTITUDE OF PARENTS REGARDING CHILD'S DISCIPLINE[a]

Attitude	Mothers		Fathers	
	Adoptive	Control	Adoptive	Control
Harsh and severe[b]	5	5	2	5
Appropriate[c]	2	1	1	1
Lax[d]	1	2	5	2
No comment	1	1	1	1
Total	9	9	9	9

[a]Child's discipline refers to measures which parents take to set controls and limits on the child.

[b]Harsh and severe are measures judged to be strict and rigid, e.g. calls in police, gets angry, wants child sent away.

[c]Appropriate are measures judged to be both firm and kind, e.g. withholds privileges reasonably, restricts activities reasonably.

[d]Lax refers to the lack of control or indifference to limits, e.g. over-indulgent, bribes and pleads, gives in to child, does nothing.

Both adoptive mothers and control mothers tended to be harsh and severe in the exercise of discipline toward the child. Control fathers tended to use harsh measures of discipline, whereas adoptive fathers tended to be lax in relation to setting limits for the child.

In charting parents' age in relation to their attitude toward the child's discipline, it appears that age is not a factor which has any influence upon the parents' attitudes toward the child's discipline, as shown in the following table.

TABLE 14

AGE OF PARENTS AND ATTITUDE REGARDING CHILD'S DISCIPLINE

Current Age of Parents	Attitude												
	Harsh and Severe				Appropriate				Lax				
	Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers		No Comment
	A	C	A	C	A	C	A	C	A	C	A	C	
30-40	2	3	-	3	1	1	1	-	-	-	2	1	-
41-50	3	2	1	2	1	-	-	-	1	2	2	1	2
51-60	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	2
Total	5	5	2	5	2	1	1	1	1	2	5	2	4

Nature of Parents' Concern Regarding Child's Schooling.

In Table 15, below, eight fathers made no comments regarding their

TABLE 15

NATURE OF PARENTS' CONCERN REGARDING CHILD'S SCHOOLING[a]

Nature of Concern	Mothers		Fathers	
	Adoptive	Control	Adoptive	Control
External factors[b]	2	3	1	-
Internal factors[c]	5	5	2	4
Combination[d]	1	1	2	1
No comment	1	-	4	4
Total	9	9	9	9

[a]Child's schooling refers to all of the child's activities around the process of going to school--his attitude about going, relationships with youngsters and teachers, his physical activities, as well as his academic record.

[b]External factors are those demonstrating activity on the part of the child, e.g. destroys school property, does not conform.

[c]Internal factors are those referring to the child's mental and emotional capacities, e.g. fearful to going to school, quiet, doesn't like school, does well, does poorly.

[d]Combination means that parents have expressed a combination of external and internal factors as concerns regarding the child's schooling.

child's schooling. The majority of parents commenting showed their concerns about their child's schooling in internal factors. Adoptive and control parents showed similar concerns.

Concerns of Parents Regarding Child's Peer Relationships.

Table 16 shows that nearly half of the parents made no comment concerning their child's peer relationships. The majority of parents

TABLE 16

CONCERNS OF PARENTS REGARDING CHILD'S PEER RELATIONSHIPS[a]

Concerns	Mothers		Fathers	
	Adoptive	Control	Adoptive	Control
External factors[b]	6	3	2	2
Internal factors[c]	-	5	-	2
No comment	3	1	7	5
Total	9	9	9	9

[a] Peer relationships include all references to the child's contacts or lack of contacts with friends.

[b] External factors are those having to do with physical activities involving the child and his peers, e.g. teases other children, fights.

[c] Internal factors are those which denote emotional overtones, e.g. no contacts with peers, unable to keep friends, uncomfortable in group.

expressing an opinion expressed their concern regarding external factors in relation to their child's peer relationships. Adoptive mothers tended to list external factors while control mothers tended to list internal factors as their concerns regarding the child's peer relationships.

Concerns of Parents Regarding Child's Family Life.

The following table presents the concerns of parents regarding the child's family life.

TABLE 17

CONCERNS OF PARENTS REGARDING CHILD'S FAMILY LIFE[a]

Concerns	Mothers		Fathers	
	Adoptive	Control	Adoptive	Control
External factors[b]	6	5	4	7
Internal factors[c]	-	2	1	1
No comment	3	2	4	1
Total	9	9	9	9

[a] Family life refers to those aspects of the case which involve the child in relation to his family at home.

[b] External factors are those involving some undesirable physical activity on the part of the child, e.g. destructive, stirs up trouble, noisy.

[c] Internal factors refer to those which have emotional overtones, e.g. doesn't appreciate anything done for him, not a part of the family.

Ten parents expressed no concerns regarding their child's family life. Those who did express concern laid more stress on external factors than on internal factors. There was no appreciable difference between fathers and mothers, or between the adoptive parents or the control parents.

Parental Expectations for Solution of Problem.

It was conspicuously apparent in the records of the adopted children that some parents were expecting the child to be placed away from home as the solution to the problem. One couple saw foster home placement or commitment to state custody as the solution to the behavior problem of their adopted child. In another case, the father was pressing for placement of the youngster at the House of the Good Shepherd, while the mother pressed for commitment to the state school. In two other families the mothers were pressing for placement in a Catholic home and a children's treatment home. There was no suggestion for placement away from home as a solution to the behavior problems of the children in the control group.

Siblings and Child's Development.

There was not enough data in the cases in the area of the child's involvement with siblings to make this tabulation possible.

Dating and Child's Development.

There was not enough data in the cases in the area of the child's involvement with dating to make this tabulation possible.

Attitudes of Parents toward Child's Future.

There was not enough data in the cases to indicate how the parents saw their child's future to make this tabulation possible.

Recreation and Child's Development.

There was not enough data in the cases in the area of the child's recreation to make this tabulation possible.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This is a study of the attitudes and concerns of parents of adopted children coming to a family agency regarding a child behavior problem. These attitudes and concerns were compared with the attitudes and concerns of parents of own children regarding a child behavior problem. The study involves nine children of adoptive parents and nine children of own parentage. The case records of the eighteen families were analyzed and the data collected on a schedule outlining background information, child problem areas, and parental attitudes and concerns.

The adoptive parents were found to be different from the parents of own children in the following respects:

1. The adoptive parents tended to be older than the control group a) at the time of marriage, b) at the time the child under study made his appearance into the family, and c) at the time the parents sought help at the family agency for help with the child's behaviorproblem. This series of facts may be related to the adoptive couple's pattern of ego defenses, e.g. an early denial, then a recognition of a possible negative, followed by projection of blame. It is as though the adoptive parents were saying: "maybe there's no marriage partner for me, but that's not my fault; maybe we can't have children, but that's not my fault; maybe there is a problem with the child, but that's not my fault".

2. The adoptive parents displayed extremes in economic background as determined by the father's occupation, whereas the control group tended to fall mid-way of either extreme. This finding seems to reflect society's

diversity of agreement as to what constitutes a good adoptive home. Some would say, "he's a hard-working man and she stays t' home and minds her own business--they would make a good home for the boy". There are others who would say, "they've certainly got money and can give the child everything--any child placed in that home would indeed be fortunate". In a country that has always valued hard work, minding one's own business, and money, it is not far-fetched to assume that their importance would be considered paramount even when it came to the subject of adoption.

4. Adoptive parents tended to see the child's problem as an external act such as disobedience, rather than as an internal state, such as lack of incentive, or as a combination of both, a fact which was more often apparent in the control group. Age of parents was not seen as having any relationship with this factor.

5. Adoptive parents tended more to view the child's problem in relation to the harm the problem would do to the parents rather than as their concern for the child. The opposite was true of the control group. Age of parents was not seen as having any relationship to their concern regarding the significance of the child's problem.

6. Adoptive parents showed some uncertainty or ambivalence toward the child's change, whereas all parents of the control group definitely sought change.

7. Adoptive parents tended to project the responsibility for change or to show some ambivalence toward involving themselves in working toward a solution of the child's problem. All parents of the control group expressed a desire to involve themselves in working toward the solution of the child's problem. Age of parents was seen as having no relationship to

this attitude.

8. Four of the nine adoptive parents saw placement away from home for the child as a solution to the child's problem, whereas none of the control group saw this as a solution.

In one way or another the adoptive parents seemed to be saying to the child, "You were never a part of us in the beginning; we have never really accepted you as a part of us in the meantime; we are not now going to begin to accept you or the responsibility for you; we expect some agency or institution to take over this responsibility now". In short, the adoptive parents were different from the control group by virtue of the fact that they were adoptive parents. In these cases studied the general attitude of the adoptive parents seems to be similar to the current trend of thought regarding marriage: "if it doesn't work out we can always get a divorce". In fact the State of Maine law provides for annulment of adoption as follows:

> Section 43, Chapter 158
> Any judge of probate may, on petition of two or more persons, after notice and hearing and for good cause shown, reverse and annul any decree of the probate court in his county, whereby any child has been adopted under the provisions of this chapter.

Although the law was passed for the protection of children, it also holds implications for ambivalent adoptive parents.

Those adoptive parents who consistently project responsibility, both for the problem and for the solution to the problem would be considered to be difficult cases. It seems unlikely that they would become actively engaged in a treatment process until they were able to accept some of the responsibility for the problem and also some responsibility for change.

In conclusion we can say that the factor of adoption definitely affects the attitudes and concerns of adoptive parents toward the behavior problems of their children.

This implies that such cases should be given careful attention upon application at a family agency. Since casework's task is to alter attitudes we can speak a common language with the kind of clients studied here if we realize at the outset that the attitudes adoptive parents bring to a family agency are different from those brought by biological parents.

That there has been a tendency to lump adoptive parents and biological parents together in our thinking seems evident from the fact that there is a paucity of casework literature on the subject of work with adoptive parents regarding behavior problems of adopted children in a family agency setting.

That caseworkers should approach adoptive families with a diagnostic understanding of them that is different from that of biological parents is evident from this study.

Michaels points out that: "the problems, whatever their nature, are likely to be complicated and intensified by the special circumstances of adoption".[1] She also states that "the caseworker can assume that where parents are having difficulty with their child, they are in all probability suffering from an intensified doubt of their own ability to be parents".[2]

All of this tells us that the factor of adoption must be given

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[1] Michaels, Ruth. "Special Problems in Casework with Adoptive Parents," Adoption Principles and Services, Family Service Association of America, New York, 1947-1952, p. 37.

[2] ibid., p. 42.

considerable importance both in family diagnosis and in family treatment.

The conclusions of this study raise several questions for further consideration. The large number of cases in the agency files that reflected behavior problems of a child adopted by one or more relatives was striking. One wonders about the attitudes of these relatives in relation to the adopted child.

An interesting question arises in relation to the number and distribution of the siblings in relation to the child under study. In both the adoptive group of children and in the control group, only three siblings in each group were older. Of the adoptive group, four were younger; of the control group thirteen were younger. One wonders what the parental attitudes are toward the child with the behavior problem as compared to parental attitudes toward the younger children.

Although the factor of health was not one that could be compiled in this study because of lack of information in the case records, the kinds of symptoms that those parents struggling with a child behavior problem did report were those usually considered to be in the psychosomatic category. One wonders if there is some relationship between the kind of physical symptoms parents present and the kinds of attitudes they have toward a child behavior problem.

One also wonders about the incidence of adoptive parents' seeking to place their children away from home. What attitudes of adoptive parents toward their child's behavior problem is related to their desire to place the child away from home as a solution to the child's behavior problem?

A few questions present themselves in relation to adoptive home studies. In what ways can the conclusions drawn from this study be related

to the selection of couples for adoption? Also, how is the factor of economic status related to parental attitudes toward adopted children? Then, too, how is the adoptive parents' attitude toward adopted children related to their comfort or discomfort with the idea of telling the child of his adoption?

accepted 5/19/64

Maxwell Schlesinger

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SCHEDULE FOR STUDY OF CASES

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Identifying Characteristics of Parents

- Name
- Age
- Age at marriage
- Age at appearance of child
- Religion
- Education
- Occupation
- Health

Identifying Characteristics of Child

- Current age of child
- Sex of child
- Number and distribution of siblings

II. ATTITUDES

Parents' Attitude Toward Child's Problem

- Reason for adoption
- Attitude toward adoption
- Attitude toward telling child of adoption
- Presenting problem as seen by parents
- Significance of problem
- Acceptability of problem
- Cause of problem
- Involvement with solution of problem
- Parental expectations for solution of problem
- Child's future

Problem Areas in Child's Development

- Recreation
- School
- Dating
- Family life
- Limits of discipline
- Peer relationships
- Siblings

APPENDIX B

Control I

IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS OF PARENTS

Name:

Age: F.* 37
M. 30

Age at Marriage: F. 25
M. 18

Age at Appearance of Child: F. 26
M. 19

Religion: F. Protestant
M. Protestant

Education: F.
M. 8th grade

Occupation: F. copper and tanks workman
M. fish factory worker

Health: F.
M. obese, nervous, severe headaches

IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILD

Current Age of Child: 10

Sex of Child: Male

Number and Distribution of Siblings: 2 girls younger

PROBLEM AREAS IN CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT
as Seen by Both Parents

Recreation: F.
M.

School: F. Difficulty in getting along with other children. Slow learner.
M. Acts out

Dating: F.
M.

*Key to abbreviations: F Father; M Mother

Control I (continued)

Family Life: F. Destructive, quarreling, mischievous
M. Provokes her into punishing child

Limits or Discipline: F. Spanks
M. Slaps or spanks, hollers and threatens. Interferes with father if he is punishing too severely.

Peer Relationships: F. No contacts with friends
M. No contacts with friends

Siblings: F. Constantly quarreling
M. Constantly quarreling

PARENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARD CHILD'S PROBLEM

Reason for Adoption: F.
M.

Attitude toward Adoption: F.
M.

Attitude toward Telling Child of Adoption: F.
M.

Presenting Problem as Seen by Parents: F. Stealing, tantrums
M. Stealing, roams house at night, taking food, emotionally disturbed.

Significance of Problem: F. Important to him as he didn't have chance to learn to be a good father
M. Sees problem as reflection of her as a parent

Acceptability of Problem: F. Wants different kind of childhood for his child
M. Must be changed

Cause of Problem: F. He doesn't know how to handle children
M. Sister-in-law's remarks

Involvement with Solution of Problem: F. Willing to be involved
M. Willing to be involved

Parental Expectations for Solution of Problem: F. Wants to be a better father
M. Wants to improve as a parent

Child's Future: F.
M.

APPENDIX C

Adoptive I

IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS OF PARENTS

Name:

Age: F. 32
M. 30

Age at Marriage: F.
M.

Age at Appearance of Child: F. 29
M. 27

Religion: F.
M.

Education: F.
M.

Occupation: F. Taxi driver
M.

Health: F. Nervous stomach, asthma
M.

IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILD

Current Age of Child: 10

Sex of Child: Male

Number and Distribution of Siblings: girl 12, boy 6

PROBLEM AREAS IN CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT
as Seen by Both Parents

Recreation: F.
M.

School: F. Does good work in school on papers. Is destructive with property
M. Fearful of going to school. Makes life miserable for teacher

Dating: F.
M.

Adoptive I (continued)

Family Life: F. Child doesn't appreciate anything done for **him.** Seems to do wrong things
M. Destructive around the house

Limits or Discipline: F. Puts child to bed; keeps in house; rewards for good behavior.
M. Requires sitting in chair. Deprives of a toy

Peer Relationships: F. Teases other children
M. Picks on other children

Siblings: F. Tries to hurt younger child
M. Tries to hurt younger child

PARENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARD CHILD'S PROBLEM

Reason for Adoption: F.
M. Difficult delivery with first child. Did not want to bring first child up alone

Attitude toward Adoption: F.
M. Uncomfortable

Attitude toward Telling Child of Adoption: F.
M. Afraid of telling child

Presenting Problem as Seen by Parents: F. Soiling, smearing, untrustworthy, fire-setting
M. Steals, cruel and abusive to children and animals

Significance of Problem: F. Annoying. Behavior might break up their home
M. Endangering her health

Acceptability of Problem: F. Wants change
M. Wants change

Cause of Problem: F. Something in the child's background
M. Some heredity factor

Involvement with solution of problem: F.
M. Wants agency help with placement

Parental Expectations for Solution of Problem: F. Wants child out of home
M. Wants placement or commitment to state

Child's Future: F.
M. Afraid of reform school

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