A STUDY OF ADOPTION DISRUPTIONS
IN MANITOBA
1990 - 1996

BY

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A THESIS

presented to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

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Sandra C. Mendell   1997 (c)

ABSTRACT

TITLE: A Study of Adoption Disruption in Manitoba from 1990 - 1996

Research indicates that older and/or special needs children are at increased risk for adoption disruption. This study examined the adoption placements of ten permanent wards of Winnipeg Child and Family Services in order to gain a better understanding of some of the issues involved in disruption. Seven social workers who had been involved in adoption disruption situations were interviewed. A qualitative research approach was used to both gather and evaluate the data for this study.

The characteristics of children, adoptive parents and organizations involved in adoption disruptions were examined. The findings from this research were compared with the themes in the literature on adoption disruption. The relationship between the adoptive parents and the adopted child had a significant role in the outcome of the adoption placement. Among important variables were the child's placement history and age at the time of adoption placement, the family loss of hope, the role of the adoptive mother and the impact of the disruption on the social workers involved in the situation. Implications for social work practice were also discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of adoption to provide for children who cannot be cared for by

their biological parents has a long history. Watson (1996) notes that

"societies have defined and redefined adoption in response to the

economic realities, political pressures, social expectations, community

mores, and visions of leaders of their times" (p. 523). In response to a

number of social factors, both adoption practices and the type of children

legally free for adoption have changed considerably over the past few

years. A few decades ago, agencies focused on the placement of healthy

Caucasian infants. Increasingly, the children available for adoption

through the child welfare system are older and/or have special needs.

Some of these children may have experienced abuse, neglect and/or

multiple placements. All of these issues affect adoption placement and

Cohen (1981) has raised the issue of whether adoption is really in the best

interests of some children.

The ultimate goal of adoption is to provide a permanent stable home

for a child. However some adoptions do not meet this goal and disruption

occurs. Many researchers agree that the rate of disruption has increased

in the past 15-20 years and there is some agreement that the placement

of those children who in the past would have been considered unadoptable, has contributed to this increase (Festinger, 1990; Steinhauer, 1991). Westhues and Cohen (1990) citing a number of studies, state that "disruption rates reported for special needs adoption range from 8% to 47.4% with the majority falling between 10%-15%" (p. 143). In order to make decisions in the best interest of children, it is important that child welfare agencies have an understanding of some of the factors that contribute to adoption disruption.

This study's main research goal was to develop a greater understanding of adoption disruption and to explore the implications for adoption practice. This study is relevant to current issues in child welfare practice because there is little national data on adoption (Daly and Sobol, 1993) and little data on special needs adoption disruption in particular (Cohen, 1981). Recent provincial government initiatives designed to enhance adoption programs and to help place older children with special needs, makes a greater understanding of adoption disruption important. It should be noted that disruptions represent the severe end of the adoption spectrum. Within adoption situations there may be a considerable range of problems, even if the end result is not disruption. This study will be helpful in providing insight into these issues as well.

The literature review contained in this chapter provides a brief history of adoption practices and presents various factors associated with adoption disruption. Chapter Two is a discussion of the research design and methodology used for this study. Chapter Three is a presentation of research findings. Chapter Four is discussion of the findings and compares the findings from this research with the themes identified in the literature on adoption disruption. Implications for further research and practice are also discussed. Chapter Five contains the conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW OF TOPIC AREAS

INTRODUCTION

This section will present a brief overview of the history of adoption

practices and adoption legislation as well as some current issues in

adoption practice. It will also examine some of the factors currently

identified as associated with disruption.

History of Adoption Practices and Adoption Legislation

The practice of adoption recognizes "that some children will not or

should not be raised by their biological parents" (Cole, 1984, p. 15).

Adoption provides a mechanism to allow for the legal transfer of parenting.

Steinhauer (1991) claims that the earliest recorded adoption dates

back to 28th century B. C. when Sargon I, the founder king of Babylon,

was placed in a reed vessel in a river and was raised as the son of the

water carrier who found him. Other early references to adoption include

the civil law of Spain and the Napoleonic code.

While recognizing that children needed to be cared for, historically

adoption practices primarily served the needs of the adoptive parents.

"Reasons for adoption included ensuring the continuation of the male line,

or the religion, guaranteeing the financial and political power of an

individual or family or even political assimilation" (Steinhauer, 1991, p. 3).

Adoption was not always used to deal with the issue of unwanted children. The advent of Christianity with its emphasis on the sanctity of human life, meant that the practice of infanticide and abortion and other methods used to deal with the problem of unwanted children were no longer condoned. "The humanitarian ideology of the enlightenment established a secular basis for protecting the rights of children" (Steinhauer, 1991, p. 3). However, these new attitudes did not mean that adoption became a common solution to deal with the issue of an increasing population of abandoned and orphaned children. Institutions to care for the population of homeless children came into existence.

In reviewing the history of adoption, Steinhauer notes that the first sign of an organized child welfare society in medieval Europe was an asylum for abandoned infants founded in Milan in AD 787. In 1160, Guy de Montpelier established the order of the Holy Spirit for the care of foundlings and orphans. While providing some measure of temporary care and an alternative to the previous practices of infanticide and abandonment, the foundling institutions frequently did not provide adequate care in parenting. Children suffered from the effects of extreme emotional deprivation and abandoned children died at rates varying from 50 percent to 80 percent.

Alphonso V of Castille's establishment of the Great Code in 1300 provided one of the earliest legal considerations of the adoptee's welfare. A definition of adoption was provided in the code and children under the age of seven could not be adopted because they were not considered sufficiently developed to give consent. The King could provide permission for the adoption of children seven to 15 years of age, if an investigation had been done to ensure that the adoption would be advantageous to the child.

The industrial revolution saw the increased use of children in the labour force. The condition of these children and the situations under which they laboured, led to legislative initiatives in the 19th century and laws were passed to aid these children. There were also some adoption laws designed at making a provision for the dependent child (Steinhauer, 1991).

Valdez and McNamara (1994) state that some of the earliest legislation for adoption practices in North America date back to the 1850s in the United States. While there were statutory differences, all of the legislation reflected concern regarding the child's welfare. MacDonald (1984) states that the origin of Canadian adoption statutes are to be found in the legislation passed in the United States, starting with the Massachusetts adoption law of 1851. The statute "provided for a judicial decree of

adoption based on a joint petition of the adoptive parents accompanied by the written consent of the child's natural parents" (Steinhauer, 1991, p. 5). If a judge was satisfied that the adoption was fit and proper, a decree would be issued. This legislation also called for the complete severance of relations between the child and the biological parents.

Concerns for the needs of the individual child also led to the establishment of supervised boarding homes as alternatives to asylums or unsupervised homes. Charles Britwell, of the Boston Children's Aid Society, was instrumental in this process.

Foster care developed as an attempt to "rescue good children from bad parents" (Steinhauer, 1991, p. 5). Foster homes continued to be regarded as the placement choice for a variety of children until the mid-1960s. The children placed in foster homes included homeless children, those still in contact with biological parents and children considered unadoptable due to factors such as age, physical disability, etc. The number of children in foster care increased in the 1960s and early 1970s and few children left the foster care system (Watson, 1996). Both citizen groups and professionals began to advocate for the reform of adoption and foster care. In the United States, by the end of the 1960s, a national adoption advocacy group had been formed and a new agency, focusing on the adoption of special needs children, was established in Michigan.

The first Canadian adoption statute was passed in New Brunswick in 1873. The legislation allowed an adult unmarried person or a husband and wife jointly to petition the Provincial Supreme Court in Equity for adoption of a child. The child had to provide written consent if he or she was over the age of 12 and written consent was also required from the biological parents or guardian. In order to grant the adoption, the judge had to be satisfied that the petitioners "could bring up and educate the child properly and be convinced of the fit and propriety of the proposed adoption" (MacDonald, 1984, p. 5). The statute made no reference to the secrecy of adoption records, an adoption probation period, or the requirement of a report from a public official on the suitability of the petitioners as adoptive parents.

The province of Nova Scotia passed a somewhat more elaborate adoption statute in 1896. This was followed by adoption legislation in British Columbia in 1920, Ontario in 1921, 1922 for Manitoba and Saskatchewan, 1924 in Quebec, 1927 in Alberta and 1930 in Prince Edward Island.

MacDonald (1984) contends that the Manitoba Child Welfare Act of 1922 was unique because of the powers granted to the provincial Director of Child Welfare. Prospective adoptive applicants had to apply to the Director, who had the authority to either issue or refuse a certificate of

adoption. After the granting of an adoption certificate, adoptive parents were required to report on a regular basis to an agent of the Director's and they were granted "every parental right pertaining to natural parents" (p. 46). The Director of Child Welfare had a responsibility to ensure that all of the adoption records were sealed and were not to be opened without permission.

The Ontario Adoption Act of 1921 and its successor in 1927, provided "the essential features that were to characterize Canadian adoption legislation for the next thirty years" (Macdonald, 1984, p. 46). The order of adoption legally terminated all rights and duties of the birth parents vis-a-vis the adoptee and created a new legal relationship between the adoptee and adoptive parents. The Ontario legislation also made provision for a report to be made to the court by a provincial officer regarding the suitability of the adoptive applicants. The legislation called for the provision of a two year adoption probation period, which could be extended or waived upon recommendation of the provincial officer. The 1927 legislation called for the sealing of all adoption papers which could only be opened for inspection with a judge's order or with the approval of the provincial officer. "The legislation also required that a judge, prior to making an adoption order, be satisfied that the parent signing the adoption consent understood that its effect included depriving her of parental rights

in relation of the child" (Macdonald, 1984, p. 46). Judges were required to make sure that no payment had been exchanged to facilitate the adoption.

Current Issues in Adoption Practice

Steinhauer (1991) notes that, since the end of the Second World War, there have been changes in the characteristics of children entering into the child welfare foster care system and available for adoption. Of particular note has been a dramatic decrease in infants, especially healthy caucasian infants, available for adoption. The availability of effective birth control, access to abortion, social policy changes which have made social assistance available to single parents under the age of 18, as well as changing societal norms which have de-stigmatized children born out of wedlock, have all contributed to this lack of healthy infants available for adoption. Cohen and Westhues (1990) state that child welfare staff are more committed to keeping families intact than in the past and "one of the results is that children who were once taken into care are now maintained in their homes with the use of support programs" (p. 3).

Steinhauer (1991) contends that the children who now come into care "usually do so as the result of abuse or chronic neglect" (p. 6). He also claims that many of these children have been exposed to violence in their families of origin on a repeated basis and the majority of them are older or children with special needs, "who at the point of entry into the foster

care system, already display a variety of mental, physical, emotional and behaviourial problems" (p. 6). As a result of all these factors, the number of extra familial adoptions involving child welfare agencies has fallen off dramatically (Daly and Sobol, 1993). Agency placements as a percentage of all adoption placements peaked at different times during the 1960s in all provinces (Lyman, 1984). In Manitoba there was a significant drop in agency adoption placements in the early 1980s as a result of a moratorium in the out-of-province placement of Aboriginal children.

In 1981, approximately 5376 children were placed for adoption through public child welfare agencies in Canada. By 1990, only 2836 children were placed (Daly and Sobol, 1993). The number of children younger than one year of age placed for adoption by public agencies has dropped from a high of 2736 in 1981 to a low of 698 in 1990. While public child welfare agencies facilitated fewer adoptions, hard to place children, defined as those "older than one year, physically, emotionally or cognitively challenged" remained primarily the responsibility of public agencies (Daly and Sobol, 1993).

While the number of infants available for adoption through the child welfare system was declining, the system began to look at the children who were in permanent care in foster homes. There were increasing concerns about what was termed "foster home drift" and children being left

in limbo. (Aitken, 1993). Steinhauer (1991) notes that long-term foster care came to be challenged on the grounds that it was inherently unstable. Efforts to change the situation gained momentum in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the advent of the permanency planning movement.

The ideology of the permanency planning movement helped challenge the idea that certain children were unadoptable. Paralleling this phenomena was a reassessment by prospective adoptive parents regarding the characteristics of children they were indeed prepared to parent. Faced with a waiting period of up to ten years for healthy caucasian infants, prospective adoptive parents began to look at children previously considered unadoptable. As a result, children who may have been considered unadoptable in the past now were potential candidates for adoption placement. There was a re-definition of older and/or special needs children as adoptable. At the same time, in the name of permanency planning, there was increased pressure to place children in adoptive homes. As economic conditions became more difficult, financial considerations may have been involved in permanent placements. Nelson wrote in 1985 that "controlling public expenditures for foster care became even more urgent as the social and economic climate became more conservative" (p. 2).

Adoption in the Manitoba Context

Within Manitoba, the provincial government has launched the Volume Management Initiative in response to an examination of both the number of children in care and the length of time spent in care. Funding was made available to create new positions in different areas of the child welfare system. Adoption was one of the identified areas. Children who were permanent wards and "sitting in care" were identified in an effort to transfer these cases to workers who would look at the possibility of making adoption or other permanent plans for these children. Funding for these positions was, in effect, borrowed from the anticipated savings of having children moved out of the child welfare system.

Funding for these programs was approved for a three year period, beginning in March 1995. Funding has been extended for the 1998/99 budget year. In a press release issued on July 25, 1996, Family Services Minister, Bonnie Mitchelson, announced that Manitoba's rate of children in care was still too high and the government was moving in a new direction to enhance the opportunity for children to be placed in permanent homes. New initiatives were to include ensuring integrated and co-ordinated support for the adoption of special needs children and the whole area of adoption was reviewed.

A community panel held public consultations throughout the fall of 1996 to review the Child and Family Services Act and submitted a report to the Minister in February 1997. Based on the recommendations in the community panel report and other recommendations which were made since the proclamation of the Child and Family Services Act in 1986, a new adoption act was introduced in the legislature.

The new act, which is expected to be proclaimed in June 1998, provides for the establishment of licensed non-profit adoption agencies to allow adoptive applicants the choice of service providers for those adoptions that do not involve the permanent wards of Child and Family Services. The act calls for child welfare agencies to continue providing adoption services for permanent wards as well as other adoption services requested by adoptive applicants.

According to the new act, an adoptive parent may enter into an openness agreement with a variety of designated people. The intention of this agreement is to facilitate communication or maintain relationships with those people who may have established a meaningful relationship with the adopted child. Section 34 of the act states that financial assistance may be provided if the care needs of a child constitute a greater than usual expense, and if a sibling group is adopted.

Adoption Disruption

While most people enter into adoption placements with the intention of having a child join their families on a permanent basis, some adoptions disrupt. Adoption disruption is defined as the removal of a child from the adoptive home after an adoption placement agreement has been signed but prior to legalization. This definition does not include children leaving the adoptive home on a permanent basis after the period of legalization. Groze (1996) uses the term dissolution to refer to the legal termination of adoption after finalization. He states there have been few studies dealing with dissolution and that many studies put dissolution and disruption in the same category. Groze estimates that less than 2% of adoptive placements dissolve after finalization. Both Groze and Barth and Berry (1988) state that some adoptions end in out of home placement for the child after legalization. These situations may or may not be permanent. Groze states that there are no accurate estimates of the number of out of home placements of adopted children.

In Manitoba, legalization typically occurs from six to twelve months after the adoption placement agreement is signed. This time period can be shortened or extended upon the approval of the Director of Child Welfare. The rate of adoption disruption in Manitoba during the 1990's has been relatively low, ranging from less than 1% in 1996 to 8% in 1994.

(see Appendix A). These figures represent all provincial child welfare agency adoptions and do not include private adoptions, extended family or intercountry adoptions.

Lack of information from other provinces makes it difficult to compare rates of disruption. British Columbia does not keep statistics on the number of adoption disruptions and Ontario is in the process of trying to develop a consistent information reporting system. The Adoption Coordinator in Alberta states that province's rate of disruption is very low and believes that there have been less than 10 disruptions out of approximately 150 adoption placements for the past seven years.

The possibility of disruption was recognized as early as the 1920s in some of the American legislation. The decision to end the placement could be made by the agency placing the child as well as by the adoptive parents. "The adoptive parents could choose to discontinue the placement if the child was shown to manifest feeblemindness, venereal disease, epilepsy or insanity which existed prior to the adoption and was unknown to the adoptive parents" (Valdez & McNamara, 1994, p. 391). The agency could also revoke the adoption if the adoptive parents were found to be neglectful or abusive.

Cohen and Westhues (1990) note that articles about disruption began to appear in the literature as early as 1965. Cohen (1981) states that

there is little data available on special needs adoption disruption in Canada. In her examination of adoptive placements in Ontario, she found that the incidence of disruption increased from about 4% in 1971 to 7% in 1978. The increase in the incidence of disruption paralleled an increase in the proportion of special needs placements. Cohen felt it was reasonable to infer that there was a higher incidence of disruption or breakdown in special needs placements.

Much of the research on adoption disruption focuses on special needs placements. While there is no standard definition of what special needs means, increasingly the children available for adoption fall within this category. "Many of the children who now find their way into the adoption pool were considered unadoptable in the past, having been defined as hard to place or special needs because they were older, physically or mentally handicapped, from a racial minority, part of a sibling group or high risk" (Cohen and Westhues, 1990, p. 4).

While many researchers agree that the rate of disruption has increased in the past 15 years, there is disagreement about the actual percentage of adoptions that disrupt. A number of studies consider 10% - 15% as a realistic figure (Kadushin and Seidl, 1971; Festinger, 1990; Kagan and Reid, 1986). However, Westhues and Cohen (1990) caution that the results of studies on disruption of special needs children need to be

interpreted carefully due to differences in the definition of special needs, small sample sizes and sampling procedures.

In looking at adoptions that have disrupted, most researchers have focused on the interplay of three main factors: the adopting parents; the children themselves and agency/systemic/worker issues. The following sections of this chapter will examine some of the characteristics of each factor and how these may relate to disruption.

Characteristics of Adoptive Parents Related to Adoption Disruption

Steinhauer (1991) notes that there is general agreement that the relationship between the adoptive parents and the adoptee is a key factor in determining whether the adoption will be successful.

Motivation

The adoptive family's motivation to adopt a child can play a role in their ability to deal with a difficult adoption placement. Zwimpfer's (1983) study expressed concern about parents wanting to adopt a child to replace a deceased biological child. Westhues and Cohen's (1990) study indicated that those who sustained adoption placements "were less likely to have given inability to carry a baby to term as their reason for adopting than were families who disrupted" (p. 148). These parents did not expect the adopted child to be like the child the couple were unable to produce. The authors note that

when adopters use adoption primarily as a means to solve their infertility problem, the adopted child is often placed in a situation where the performance expectations are high, tolerance for difference is low and the couple have not mourned their inability to produce their own child

(p. 151).

Cohen (1981) found that some families who experienced disruption had not really resolved the issue of why they wanted to adopt an older child.

Acceptance

A number of writers have looked at the issue of acceptance as a factor in adoption disruption. One of the key factors in determining whether an adoption will be successful is whether the adoptive family can accept the difference between adoption and building a family biologically (Hartman, 1984). "Those adopting go through a unique process in order to become adoptive parents, often without the support and sanctions that are available for biological parents" (Spaulding for Children, 1976).

Acceptance of one's self and of the child's needs and identity appear to be crucial to the ability to sustain an adoption placement.

Acceptance of self which DiGiulio (1988) defines as the tendency to perceive oneself as a person of worth, accepting both one's faults and

virtues, is closely related to the acceptance of others. He feels that the ability to accept one's strengths and weaknesses leads to the acceptance of "the individuality of others" (p. 424). This includes the adoptive parent's ability to accept the adopted child as a separate individual.

DiGiulio claims that the adoptive parents' acceptance of difference is the key to successful parenting in adoption. The family needs to be able to accept the adopted child as different with "different roots, and [sometimes] dual allegiances" (p. 164). It appears to be important for adopting parents to be able to experience their role as different from that of biological parents and then facing up to pressures in rearing and accepting their adopted child without taking a defensive stance. Ward (1981) contends that parents with a "broad psychological recognition of kinship can more readily nurture adopted children, since they do not see kinship as strictly limited to the biologically nuclear family, the extended family or the clan" (p. 25).

Acceptance also plays a role in the adoption of children with a history of sexual abuse. Braden (1981) states that a need on the part of the adoptive parents to deny the child's past can cause problems in the adoption. Braden expressed some concerns about adoptive parents with a judgemental attitude towards the abusing birth parents. By this he meant being so horrified by the abuse, the "prospective parents cannot

move beyond it and relate to the child's need, it does not mean

acceptance of abuse" (p. 364).

Entitlement

Unlike biological parents, adoptive parents must deal with the issue of

entitlement. This refers to the adoptive parents' sense that they have "the

legal and emotional rights to be parents to their child" (Reitz and Watson,

1992, p. 125). For some families adoption means instant parenthood, and

even those couples who have previously parented, may have to deal with

novel behaviour in their adopted children. Adoptive parents may face

confusion about what constitutes a good adoptive parent, because of a

general lack of role prescriptions for adoptive parents (Barth and Berry,

1988, Groze 1996). One study found that "adoptive parents lack a sense

of entitlement to their children and thus feel personal debasement based

on their adoptive status" (Berry, 1990, p. 408).

Prew, Suter and Carrington (1990) note that "the challenge of feeling

entitlement to each other as a family is also affected by community and

extended family reaction to adoption. "When a child is misbehaving and

causing pain in the family, the adoptive parents may be advised by well

meaning friends and relatives to give the child back; 'after all, he's not

really your child'" (p. 5). Adoptive families may face different expectations

than biological parents. Prew, Suter and Carrington (1990) write that

community expectations of parenting may be higher for adoptive families and parents who make the decision to disrupt an adoption may experience extra pressures from outside sources. "Relatives may imply the family has failed, or agency personnel may believe the family wasn't really committed to the adoption or give up too early" (p. 9). Unrealistic expectations of themselves to make the adoption a success may put extra pressure on a family or a family may hesitate to seek help when difficulties arise or even deny the existence of problems or negative feelings.

Shifts in the Family System

The adoptive family faces a number of challenges in creating new roles and relationships and creating a new family system.

Adopting an older child/special needs child creates stress for the family and challenges the family's equilibrium. The family's ability to deal with and accept these changes contributes to whether or not they will be able to sustain the adoption.

Ward (1981) states that the ability to parent an older child is related to the permeability of the family. Sustaining families seem to have been able to accept and make changes to family functioning as needed. Cohen's (1981) study of adoption disruption indicated that those families who experienced disruption could not cope with the change necessitated by the adoptive child. For example, one family was not very comfortable with

having a new person enter into the family and resented all organizational changes they had to make. In fact, in some of the disrupted families, there was the expectation that the system was not going to change in any way. Some families were not really prepared emotionally for accepting a disturbed child into their family system and not used to the reality of living with such a child.

The self concept of the adoptive parents also plays a role in sustaining the adoption. Ward (1981) claims that "if they can tolerate negative behaviour and allow the child to receive emotional rewards from others and do not have an unhealthy dependence on the child to meet their own emotional needs" (p. 26), the adoption is less likely to disrupt. Steinhauer (1991) notes that adoptive parents who had strained relationships with their own parents, had not successfully separated from their family of origin, and had low self-esteem were likely to run into difficulties "raising another's child" (p. 332). He further notes that "adoptive parents with significant needs of their own left unfulfilled, can experience enormous strain trying to meet the needs of problematic older adoptees" (p. 333). He felt that the adoptive couple needed to have "enough other gratifications in their own lives and relationships" to ensure they were not dependent upon the child's ability to meet their emotional needs (p. 333). Gill (1978) felt that having high expectations that needed to be achieved

within a certain time period or attempting to fit the child into "the family mould" also lead to difficulties. Parental expectations about the ideal or dream child or rigid, high expectations may not be congruent with the reality of the adopted child, (Groze, 1996).

In some of the families that disrupted, Prew, Suter and Carrington (1990) found that there was a perception of a mismatch between the adoptive child and the family. The parents and child may have had different defensive styles or different ways of communicating; for example, loud and outgoing vs. quiet and introspective.

Berry (1990) found that one of the most common complaints of adoptive parents was the mismatch between what they expected from the adoption or the child, and what actually happened. These "unmet expectations are often a precursor to disruption" (p. 410).

Barth and Berry (1988) and Valdez and McNamara (1994) also comment on the need for adoptive parents to have flexible expectations and to have support available for themselves. Flexibility and the ability to find new ways to problem solve help in sustaining adoptions. Adoptive families' self-reports of disruption included comments that they had run out of alternatives. Braden (1981) also felt that adoptive parents needed the ability to persevere and the ability to wait for the child's commitment, while making their own without reservation. Kagan and Reid (1986) found that

the ability of parents to find alternatives and persevere were crucial in sustaining adoptions.

In their study of 76 older youths placed in adoptive homes, Kagan and Reid (1986) found that adoptive parents who were able to find constructive ways to deal with their angry impulses and the children's destructive impulses were more likely to sustain the placements. Adoptive parents who denied any negative emotional reactions to the children placed in their homes tended to be prone to more difficulty. "Parents who were able to handle their negative emotional reactivity toward the children experience greater successes in their attempts to adopt" (Valdez and McNamara, 1994, p. 394).

Frequently, adoptive parents need to come to terms with the intense feelings harboured by the children who join their family. Acceptance and understanding of these feelings, as well as having coping skills to deal with these issues, help sustain the adoption. Kagan and Reid (1986) state that "adoptive families need to be carefully prepared for the experience of grief, loss, detachment and anger that an older emotionally disturbed youth is likely to stimulate within an adoptive family" (p. 72). The authors feel that the adoptive parents need to understand the child's "paradoxical need for both security within a family and safe self protection from intense feelings of anxiety and rage stimulated by family living" (p. 72). Kagan

and Reid feel that the ability and willingness of adoptive parents to both experience and handle these kinds of feelings can be indicators of success in the placement.

Groze (1996) notes that "families without adequate support systems are at greater risk for a range of difficulties than are families with well-developed support systems" (p. 11). Social supports can provide a family with a buffer against stressors.

Adoption can place a lot of strain on the marital relationship. Traditionally, the adoptive mother is the primary caregiver and may bear the brunt of the child's behaviour. Gill, 1978; Cohen, 1981; Kagan and Reid, 1986; and Westhues and Cohen, 1990, have all written about the stress on the marital relationship. In order to be involved in a successful adoption, Braden (1981) believes that it is essential for the couple to have open and direct communication in their marriage. Cohen (1981) found that the father played a pivotal role in sustaining the adoption. In her study, she found that the adopted child would attach to the father and other siblings before the mother. This could be a fairly lengthy process and the mother needed the support and affirmation for her parenting so she would not feel like a failure. In families that did not disrupt, the husband was able to provide that support.

In their 1990 study of 58 adoptive families Westhues and Cohen (1990) used the Family Assessment Measure to assess family functioning (Skinner et al., 1983, 91, 93). Sustaining adoptive families were "characterized by wives who score their husbands positively on values and norms and by husbands who assess general family functioning in affective involvement and affective expression positively and both themselves and their partners as slow in task accomplishment" (p. 148).

Due to their degree of involvement in the family, the fathers in the sustaining group assumed an active nurturing role.

It would seem that the wives/mothers in the sustaining group have been able to handle the child's reluctance to bond with them in that they have allowed the father to be more affectively involved in the family and both parents have been relaxed about task accomplishment in family. (p. 150)

Kagan and Reid's (1986) study also discussed the father's role, in terms of rigidity or flexibility in handling problems, as a factor correlated with positive outcome.

Other Demographic Characteristics

A number of demographic characteristics do not seem to be associated with adoption disruption. Rosenthal and Groze (1992) indicate that "the

associations of ethnicity, family structure, and income and education levels to risk for disruption are weak in strength" (p. 7). Valdez and McNamara (1994) found that certain characteristics of adoptive families such as education, race, religion, marital status and family size did not consistently influence adoption disruption.

Kagan and Reid (1986) citing other authors, found that a number of issues were not related to adoption outcome. Among these factors were race, physical handicaps in the children, single or two parent family, family income, presence of other children in the adopted home or the educational level of the adoptive parents. However, Kadushin and Seidl (1971) noted that placement failures occurred more frequently when families had their own children and/or other adopted children. Barth and Berry (1988) confirmed this finding when they noted that families with other adopted children in the home were at high risk. Kadushin and Seidl (1971) postulate that social workers may not be as rigorous in assessing homes where there was a previous adoption or older children and as a result, parenting skills may be overestimated. Workers may also be prejudiced in their favour, after a successful adoption or after completing one favourable home study.

The research on sibling placement yields mixed findings as to the likelihood of adoption disruption (Rosenthal and Groze, 1992). Kadushin

and Seidl (1971) suggest that placement of siblings in the same home is associated with increased risk while Festinger (1990) found a lower rate of disruption in sibling placements. Festinger also suggested that siblings who have histories that are particularly problematic are more likely to be separated.

Zwimpfer (1983) found disruption related to marriages of less than three years. Westhues' and Cohen's (1990) study of 58 adoptive families indicated that those who sustained adoptions were married longer.

There also appear to be some situational factors associated with adoption disruption. These include financial stress, death, or divorce of an adoptive parent, mental or physical illness of an adoptive parent, moving or other family disruptions (Melina, 1986).

It would appear that a number of factors are significant in adoptive parents ability to sustain an adoption. Ward (1981) states that there are a multiplicity of factors that affect the parent's ability to form close bonds with a new child including:

> the life history and past relationships of the adult, the social
>
> concepts and support present in the immediate environment,
>
> preparation for parenthood, sense of entitlement to the child,
>
> characteristics of the child and the goodness of fit of these

characteristics and the parents expectations and a fund of positive

interactions with the child. (p. 32)

Characteristics of Children Associated with Adoption Disruption

"Adopted children enter the family with a unique set of circumstances"

(Bourguigon and Watson, 1987, cited in Spaulding for children - p. 1).

Age at Placement

There is considerable research to support the idea that older children

adoptions are at greater risk for disruption. Valdez and McNamara's

(1994) study of adoption disruptions found that older child placements

were more likely to disrupt. Rosenthal and Groze (1994) also noted that

age at placement was a predictor of increased risk of disruption. Kadushin

and Seidl (1971) found that age at placement was clearly related to

placement failure. However, they note that age as a factor is complicated

by a number of other variables. The older child brings significant life

history into the adoption placement and these factors affect behaviour that

can contribute to disruption. Valdez and McNamara (1994) note that the

older the child at placement, the greater the probability that the child has

been exposed to adverse developmental circumstances. Fein et al. (1983)

state that children who disrupted did less well on the emotional and

developmental functioning, family adjustment and school functioning

measures than those whose placements did not disrupt. Barth and Berry's

(1988) examination of a number of factors in adoption disruption found that the degree of external behaviour problems was a better discriminator than was the child's older age, indicating that when the two characteristics are analyzed together, it is the behaviour, not the age that predicts disruption.

Behaviour

Prew, Suter and Carrington's (1990) small sample of adoption disruption found that there were a number of characteristics almost always present when the adoption disrupted. The children in these situations were described as superficially charming and engaging, indiscriminately affectionate to strangers and used affection to manipulate. They persistently asked nonsense questions and chattered incessantly.

One study (Partridge et al. cited in Berry, 1990) found that caseworkers attributed disruption to the child's behaviours or personality. The behaviours most closely associated with disruption were eating problems, sexual promiscuity, suicidal tendencies, fire-setting, stealing and vandalism. Other behaviours of children in disrupted adoptive placements included defiance and lying and general manipulative, uncooperative behaviour, poor school performance and/or poor school behaviour, explosive tempers and violent behaviour, running away, poor personal hygiene and substance abuse (Valentine, et al., 1988). Acting out, aggressive or externalized behaviour is strongly associated with risk of

disruption as is self-abusive and punishment seeking behaviour (Rosenthal and Groze, 1992).

Barth and Berry (1988) found that a history of sexual abuse and consequent acting out behaviour precipitated disruptions. Braden's (1981) study of adoption placements of sexually abused children noted that the "overt seductiveness of a sexually abused child may cause problems" (p. 363). The family who adopts these children has to be aware of behaviourial issues that can make parenting difficult. "The prognosis for family commitment for these children (i.e. recipients of all kinds of abuse), who have become largely self parenting, regardless of age, is guarded at best" (p. 362). He is somewhat more hopeful for children who have been sexually abused. "Emotionally and sexually abused children seem to be more ready to unlearn earlier responses" whereas "children who have been physically abused repeatedly appear to have the hardest task in re-grouping" (p. 362). Rosenthal and Groze (1992) also found that a history of physical and sexual abuse prior to adoption was a predictor of increased risk of disruption.

Livingston, Smith, and Howard (1994) found that sexual acting out behaviour was significant in differentiating the disrupted and non disrupted groups during both foster care and adoptive placements. The abused child has to deal with"an interweaving of issues related to the sexual abuse

trauma and grief issues involved with separation from the child's family of origin and attachment to a new family" (p. 492).

Livingston, Smith and Howard (1994) note that, for some children, the emotional demands of attaching to the adoptive parents, trusting and yielding control, in some ways brought about a resurgence of long submerged issues related to sexual abuse. Failure to resolve sexual abuse issues may affect the child by intensifying behaviour problems or creating increased resistance to attachment. In addition the adoptive parent's ability to deal with the knowledge of a child's sexual abuse and sexual behaviours also affects the child's acceptance and adjustment in the adoptive placement.

Other Factors Associated With Disruption

Other factors associated with disruption were length of time in temporary foster care (Fein et al., 1983), psychiatric hospitalization prior to adoption placement (Rosenthal & Groze, 1994), and Steinhauer (1991) noted a diagnosable conduct disorder prior to placement as a factor negatively correlated with adoption success. Kadushin and Seidl (1971) and Melina (1986) found that multiple placements were strongly associated with placement failure. These children tended to have more frequent school problems, difficulties in behaviour outside of the home and continued difficulty in social relationships. Steinhauer (1991) also found

that those placements where a child "as a result of personal experience, has developed an established personality, set ways of behaving and/or exaggerated needs likely to decrease acceptability to adoptive parents" (p. 336) were at high risk for disruption.

Groze (1996) states that children who have spent extended periods of time in group or residential care "may not have developed the interpersonal and social skills to live successfully with others or may not have a very good idea about how families function" (p. 12).

Older children, even those who may be well prepared for adoption and want to be adopted, enter the adoptive situation with a "past history of living in family systems that did not work" (Bourguignon and Watson, 1987, p. 6). The childrens' perception of the new family may be coloured by past experiences and initial responses may well be those learned in the past.

In an attempt to create familiarity in the new family situation, "it is not unusual for the child(ren) to promote coalitions and triangulation to diffuse intimacy and their control in this family environment" (Groze, 1996, p. 12). Such behaviour can create stress in the family system.

Cohen (1981) made mention of the dilemma of placing for adoption those children who had psychologically bonded with their foster families. Among the factors Steinhauer (1991) listed as being negatively correlated with adoption success were the sudden removal of a child from a

successful long-term placement in which the child had bonded and was doing well and "adoptions involving the severing of a strong emotional bond to a birth parent, foster parent or natural sibling unless access is granted and supported" (p. 336).

Barth and Berry (1988) noted that researchers did not find ethnic or racial differences between children in disrupted and sustained placements and nor were differences in disruptions by gender generally reported.

Rosenthal and Groze (1994) found particularly good outcomes for children with developmental disabilities and that the presence of a disability such as hearing or vision impairment, mental retardation or serious medical condition was not an important factor influencing outcome.

Barth and Berry (1988) noted that sibling group placement was associated with adoption disruption. Kadushin and Seidl (1971) stated that the "stress of an instant family imposes a heavy burden on the adoptive parents and the adoptive family that might have succeeded in adopting one child finds it cannot cope with two or more children at once" (p. 35). In these situations, the risk for each child becomes greater because the behaviour of any one child in a sibling group increases the risk of removal of all children in that group. However, Rosenthal and Groze (1992) state that the research findings regarding the presence of other children in the home are "complex and contradictory" (p. 10).

<u>Agency Practices and Relation to Disruption</u>

Child welfare agencies play a crucial role in the placement of children for adoption. They are involved in the preparation for adoption placement, for assessing and approving applicants as adoptive parents. Therefore, the role of social worker/agency in disruption situations also needs to be examined.

As noted previously, the outcome of the adoption placement is in large part determined by the match between the child(ren) and the adoptive parents. As part of the process, agencies prepare both the children and prospective adoptive applicants for the placement. Zwimpfer (1983) has noted that social workers assessing adoptive applicants may be too positive in their assessment of parenting ability. "Clearly [she wrote] nearly 1/3 of the breakdowns would not have come as any great surprise to the evaluating social workers" (p. 172) In looking at why many of the applicants were approved in the first place, Zwimpfer commented that social workers may have found it difficult to reject applicants who very much wanted a child.

<u>Social Worker Characteristics</u>

Social worker experience does not seem to play a major role in the outcome of adoption placements. Barth and Berry (1988), state that having years of experience in child welfare is moderately associated with

more stable placements, "More experienced workers [that is, more than 10 years of adoption experience] were somewhat more likely to handle cases that were predicted to disrupt but did not" (p. 145). Social workers' characteristics were generally not related to the outcome of the placement. However, there was some evidence that experience did seem to make a difference especially for the highest risk cases. The number of workers actually involved in a placement had a negative influence on the placement; whether the placement disrupted or not. Families reported that having more workers made placements more difficult.

<u>Disclosure of Information</u>

The amount of information about the child available to the adoptive parents and how this information fits with their ability to parent seems to be another significant factor in outcome. Kopels (1995) notes that standard adoption practice from the 1920s to the 1970s favoured non-disclosure to the adoptive parents of information about the child. In reviewing American practice, Kopels notes that failure to disclose sufficient medical and background information about a child has been identified as a factor contributing to adoption disruption. Lacking sufficient information, parents may have unreasonable expectations, feel ill prepared and unable to cope with the child's needs. Barth and Berry (1988) echoed this concern and noted that the most important service characteristic

discriminator was whether the information provided about the child was too positive, indicating the importance of realistic information about the child. The more information deficits the parents reported, the higher the probability of disruption.

Nelson (1985) stated in some instances social workers knew information but chose not to disclose it.

Bureaucratic and financial pressures do place children, under-staffing, fear that children will not be placed if their histories are known and antipathy of workers and agencies are among the identified factors that cause workers not to disclose important medical and psychological information. (p. 21)

Chema et al. (1970) feel "that a couple needs time to react to the proposed child and need assurances from the worker that if the child is not right, the couple are free to withdraw from further consideration of the child without affecting their chances for another child" (p. 457). They state it is crucial to present a well balanced picture of the child without minimizing the behaviour problems. Barth and Berry (1988), in looking at disruptions, noted that one of the most important discriminators was the stretch required by the adoptive parents to adjust to the differences between what they expected in the child and the reality, indicating the more the parents had to stretch, the higher the probability of disruption.

However, sufficient information of itself is not always enough to ensure

a successful outcome. Barth and Berry (1988) contend information about

a child's difficulty is not sufficient and "parents need preparation about

ways to manage challenging behaviours, how long the family integration

process might take and

the likelihood that there may be unpleasant surprises and how to manage

them" (p. 169).

Preparation

Adoption preparation seems to be especially important for those

families involved in special needs adoptions. One study of 171 special

needs adoptive families found that 60% felt the agency had not adequately

prepared them for the adoption (Nelson, 1985). "Satisfaction with agency

preparation was the second most critical predictor of the parent's

satisfaction with the entire adoption, second only to the child's ability to

attach" (Berry, 1990, p. 406).

Post Placement Services

Disruptions were rarely precipitous and occurred usually as the result

of "a last straw". Failure to find appropriate interventive services was cited

as a contributor to disruption.

Post placement services were viewed as having a vital role in helping

to sustain adoptions. Delayed or insufficient contact with the placing

agency, lack of appropriate interventions, failure to provide adequate preparation for adding another child into the family and preparing children already in the family and the need to adequately prepare adoptive parents were all cited as needed to ensure enduring placements (Ward & Lewko, 1987; Gill, 1978).

Barth and Berry (1988) contend that post placement services were few and generally inadequate to the task of preventing disruption. Families that disrupted sought the agency's help later than families that were stable. While social workers made significant efforts to save threatened placements, they had few or adequate resources to call on.

Conclusion

As the material in this chapter indicates, a multiplicity of factors are involved in adoption disruptions. One of the most consistent findings is that older children, in particular those who have experienced a number of disruptions in their lives, and/or have a history of abuse and neglect, are more likely to be involved in adoption disruptions. Many of the children who enter the child welfare system due to concerns regarding abuse and neglect remain in "limbo". A long time lag between entry into the system and adoption placement has been associated with adoption disruption (Westhues & Cohen, 1990). Aitken (1993) notes that a "child's mental health and ability to form relationships can be permanently affected by lengthy periods of limbo" (p. 681). In order to increase the opportunity for a child to experience "the continuity of care in a nurturing environment" and decrease the risk of an adoption disruption," (p. 681) agencies need to act expeditiously when it is apparent that a child's needs will not be met in a birth family and make timely plans for permanent wards. Aitken (1993) believes that agencies can expedite the process of obtaining permanent wardship in order to promote permanency planning and the potential for adoption.

One of the other factors associated with disruption in older child adoption is the degree to which a child still holds emotional ties to foster

family and birth family members. A number of authors including Steinhauer (1991) and Aitken (1993) have discussed the need for more open forms of adoption and those with access provisions.

The role of the adoptive family in disruption has been examined in some detail in this chapter. The family's need for accurate information about a child and the implications for care are crucial in making a determination as to whether a particular child can be parented in a particular family. Adoptive parents need to have resolved infertility issues and be able to accept and understand the long term issues of parenting a child that has not been born to them. The ability of the family system to be flexible and the quality of the marital relationship are also important factors in sustaining adoptions.

Katz (1980) states "adoption in and of itself puts a family at some degree of risk and adoption practice must take this into account" (p. 161). She notes that "the social worker has a major responsibility to educate beginning adoptive couples about the difficulties inherent in adoption and to help them learn if they have the capacities that will be needed" (p. 162). The role of the agency/social worker in the initial preparation, matching and post placement contact has been discussed in this chapter and it would appear that there are ways that service can be provided to "reduce

the probability that an adoptive placement will break down" (Westhues and Cohen, 1994, p. 16).

A number of authors have noted that disruption is rarely precipitous and the choice of disruption as a coping alternative will arise in a variety of families, "but will be most likely when the child's behaviour has been consistently problematic and/or the parents' management of that behaviour has been consistently ineffective and neither party expects the future to bring change" (Barth & Berry, 1988, p. 181). The agency has a role in providing ongoing support, intervention, and resources to adoptive families to help reduce the risk of disruption.

While the decision to disrupt an adoption is a painful choice for all of those involved in the process, "the success of adoptions cannot be evaluated only on basis of placement stability" (Barth et al., 1988, p. 232). Festinger (1990) states that rates of adoption disruption must be taken into context. Disruption rates for older/special needs children have risen, she points out, because more risks have been taken in placing children who once would not have been considered adoptable. "While considering the placements that have not been successful, one should take into account the number of adoptive placements that have been made, with the promise of permanency for a child which would not have been made in the past" (p. 485). Barth and Berry (1988) echo some of these sentiments.

They note that the best coping strategy in some situations may be to withdraw from the adoption and if well handled, disruption can facilitate further growth. The authors state that many children who are involved in disruptive displacements are placed again. Kadushin and Seidl (1971) found that 50% of the children in their study who were involved in a disruption went on to a successful adoption placement.

While the vast majority of agency adoption placements remain intact, the possibility of disruption is an ever present consideration. As this chapter has shown, an understanding of the risk factors is important in developing adoption practices that may reduce the probability of disruption.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach looking at individual case studies was taken to both gather and evaluate data for this study. The purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of some of the factors that are involved in adoption disruption. Factors which support or promote enduring adoption arrangements were not examined in this study. This approach was chosen for a number of reasons. Yin (1994) notes that case studies are useful for answering questions about "how" and "why" something has occurred. Case studies can be more useful in documenting individual outcomes than measuring standard quantitative outcomes. Case studies may, however, include both quantitative and qualitative methods, depending on the research.

There is limited information about adoption in Canada and a lack of data on adoption disruptions, particularly special needs disruptions (Westhues and Cohen, 1990). The majority of studies on disruptions have also focused on relatively small samples.

Data from Manitoba's Central Adoption Registry, which maintains records of all agency adoption placements, indicates that disruptions constitute a small part of the total number of adoptions. Because there are few disruptions and little in-depth information is available, the research "lends itself to a method of inquiry that focuses on a process of discovery

rather than one of hypothesis testing" (Tutty, Richards and Grinnell, 1996, p. 147). This calls for the use of qualitative methods. The aim of this study is to understand the experiences of the people involved, including those aspects of the situation that may be unique to them. Qualitative research can help in exploring these issues in depth. This report primarily reflects the perceptions of the social workers who were involved in adoption planning for children and the subsequent disrupted placements. It is their written records which constitute much of the data in this study.

Patton (1987) notes that qualitative methods allow for the study of selected issues and cases in depth and detail "because the data collection is not constrained by predetermined categories of analysis" (p. 147). Qualitative approaches provide depth and detail about a smaller number of people and cases. Patton (1987) further states that qualitative methods are appropriate when detailed information is needed about certain cases. As the aim of this research is to understand why some adoption situations disrupt, it is appropriate to use a method that focuses on the unique qualities of individual situations as opposed to a comparison of all client experience. An attempt was also made to ensure that cases from each of the four Winnipeg Child and Family Services offices were chosen and that they represented a range in age, gender, ethnic/racial groups and sibling group formation, as well as a range of placement situations. All of the

children could have been considered older and or special needs because of age, risk factors from both family history, behavioral and developmental issues, loss issues, and/or number of previous placements.

Data from the files varied from case to case but included such things as social worker case notes, other file recording, professional assessments, social histories, correspondence with other social workers/other professionals, adoption assessments, and home study information. Data was also collected from semi-structured interviews with social workers who had been involved in adoption disruptions.

Prior to interviewing the participants, an interview guide was developed to make a list of questions or issues to be explored in the course of the interview. (see Appendix B). The questions addressed such topics as disruption factors associated with the children and topics relating to the adoptive family, including questions about motivation, family functioning and how the decision was made to end the placement. The interview guide is attached in Appendix B.

Patton (1990) stated that an interview guide "provides topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe and question" (p. 200). The guide allows the interviewer to be "free to build a conversation within a particular subject area, toward questions

spontaneously and to establish a conversational style but will the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined" (p. 200).

Data Collection

Yin (1994) notes that evidence for case studies may come from a number of different sources. For this study, two main sources of data collection were used, case records and interviews with social workers. In order to address issues related to reliability, the strategy of utilizing and triangulating data sources was employed. "This means comparing and cross-checking consistency of information derived at different times and by different means within qualitative methods" (Patton, 1994, p. 331). Patton (1994) further goes on to state that "it means validating information obtained through interviews by checking program documents and other written evidence that can corroborate what interview respondents report" (p. 331). In this study, records were corroborated by interviews. In most instances, however, the interviews provided a fuller account of the situation than had been contained in the file recordings.

The first data source consisted of agency files of permanent wards who were placed for adoption. A purposeful sampling strategy was used to gather this data in order to look at a variety of cases that had been involved in disruptions. Guba (1981) states that purposeful sampling is "intended to maximize the range of information uncovered" (p. 86). Berg

(1995) states that when developing a purposive sample, researchers use their special knowledge or expertise about a group to select subjects who represent this population.

In order to obtain a workable sample, all agency adoptions in Manitoba from 1990 to 1996 were examined. This time frame was chosen in order to obtain a workable sample, to ensure that it would be fairly easy to access information and that the time period was recent enough to allow workers to have good information recall. The data was obtained from the Central Adoption Registry of the Child and Family Support Branch. The Registry maintains records of all adoptions and all agency permanent wards available for adoption and all prospective adoptive applicants are listed with the registry.

Registry data showed that 771 children were placed for adoption during the six year time frame under review. Thirty-two children were involved in disruptions. These numbers included a variety of situations such as infant adoptions and adoptions of foster children by foster parents. In yearly terms, the disruption rate ranged from appropriately 1% to 8% (see Appendix A). For the purposes of this study, adoption disruption refers to the removal of a child from an adoptive placement prior to the legalization of the adoption (Kadushin, 1980; Festinger, 1990). The child is returned to the care of the child welfare agency and the information is

recorded in adoption statistics (Barth and Berry, 1988). Festinger (1990) notes that the term disruption came into use as a substitute for such harsh words as "breakdown" or "failure", reflecting a view point that a child's removal from a particular adoptive placement signified an interruption in the path to a goal, rather than a final outcome" (p. 201). This study did not examine situations where the children returned to agency care after legalization. This is a different phenomena which would call for the examination of additional factors.

Although there were a total of 32 disruptions, seven cases were excluded from this study. These cases involved agencies outside of Winnipeg and it would have been difficult to access physical file information. The 25 remaining cases represented children who were permanent wards of Winnipeg Child and Family Services. Ten cases from this group of adoptions were chosen for in depth examination. The ten cases were chosen in an attempt to represent a range of adoption placement situations such as extended family placement, sibling group placement and placement into families with previous adoption experience as well as no prior adoption experience. One case included two children who were members of a sibling group who were placed together. An attempt was made to include cases that represented a range of variables such as age, gender, and ethnic/racial background. At least one case

from each agency area was included in the study. Disruption situations which involved catastrophic or unpredictable life events (Melina, 1986) such as death, illness, or divorce, generally were excluded. Cases in which the adoption was not legalized, but the child remained in the home on a foster care basis were not included in the sample.

The second data source consisted of interviews with social workers involved in disruptions. Before the participants were interviewed, a pre-test was done with the interview guide. The guide was reviewed with a social worker who was not an interview candidate, but had extensive experience in both child welfare and the adoption field. The social worker provided positive feedback about the topics contained in the guide and suggested some additional areas that could be considered particularly in terms of the role of the worker in the process.

Eleven social workers who had been involved in disruptions were initially selected and were sent information about the thesis research, an interview guide, and a consent form. In selecting the social workers, an attempt was made to represent all four areas of Winnipeg Child and Family Services. A number of the workers who were selected as interview participants had been involved in more than one disruption. Seven of the workers were eventually interviewed and all agreed to be audiotaped. Interviews generally lasted about an hour and were held in offices that

were convenient for the workers. The seven workers provided limited

demographic information about themselves. Because the pool of social

workers involved in adoption work in Winnipeg is rather small, only general

information about the characteristics of the participants will be reported in

order to avoid providing information that could be viewed as identifying.

The participants had a range of experience in child welfare from a

minimum of approximately ten years to over twenty years of experience.

Adoption experience ranged from almost 10 years to over 20 years. All of

the participants had some level of post secondary education.

Workers were asked to talk about the adoption disruptions in which

they had involvement and to comment upon factors they felt were

significant. They were also asked about issues relating to disruption in

general and information they felt would contribute to a greater

understanding of the issue. An interview guide is attached in Appendix B.

The interview focus reflected the central aim of the study, which was to

understand why some adoptions disrupt. The secondary focus was to

examine implications for adoption practice.

This writer made brief notes highlighting some of the main points after

the completion of the interview. The tapes were transcribed by an

administrative support person who had experience in transcribing

audiotapes, but was not employed by a child welfare agency in the field of

adoption. The transcribed narratives from the social workers provided me with their perspectives on adoption disruption. Each transcript contained some difference in terms of content and style. As a social worker currently employed in the area of adoptions, I felt I was able to establish a good rapport with the workers who were interviewed and was able to accurately understand the concepts and terms they used because of common work experience and a knowledge of the field. All of the social workers who were interviewed were very forthcoming in sharing their information and perspectives. The tone of the interviews was very thoughtful and workers were able to reflect on their actions and were open in discussing their feelings about the situations in which they were involved.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Data Collection Methods

Both methods of data collection used have strengths and weaknesses. Yin (1994) noted that both documentation and archival records are stable and allow for repeated viewing. The information can be exact in terms of references and details of an event and allows for a broad coverage, for a long time frame and many events and settings. One of the weaknesses of this data is related to the issue of bias. This can include a reporting bias which reflects the bias of the author or the data can be biased selectively if the information is incomplete. If more than one author contributes to the documentation, the information may reflect a variety of perspectives.

Information may not be recorded accurately or information may be omitted from file records. Yin (1994) also states that access to documentation may be deliberately blocked or there may be limited accessibility due to privacy concerns.

Semi-structured interviews, using an interview guide, provide structure but also allow the interviewer to probe beyond the answers given to the predetermined questions. The sequence and wording of the questions can be adapted during the interviews. Having an interview guide means that certain topics are covered in each interview and increases the likelihood that data are comparable. Analysis of the interviews can illustrate issues that are common or dissimilar in each cases. Yin notes (1994) that interviews can be biased due to poorly constructed questions and a response bias. If interviewees are asked to comment on the events in the past, there can be inaccuracies due to poor recall and reflexivity, that is, the interviewee provides the information the interviewer wants to hear. The flexibility in wording can result in different sorts of responses that can reduce the comparability of responses.

Semi-structured interviews are based "in prior knowledge of the issue under investigation and are formulated in words familiar to the research participants and reflect the researcher's attempt to approach the world from the informant's perspective" (Tutty et al., 1996, p. 158).

Ethical Considerations

Consent to examine the files of permanent wards and adoptive applicants involved in adoption disruptions was obtained from the Director of Child and Family Services as per section 76(18) of the Child and Family Services Act. (see Appendix C). Agency approval for this study was also obtained. A proposal of the thesis research was reviewed and was approved by the Faculty of Social Work Ethics Review Committee.

The case records of the permanent wards were the primary source of data about both the child and the adoptive families. It was anticipated that agency files would have some information about the child and the adoptive families and would have some information about the pre-placement process, issues after placement and the disruption placement. As noted, consent to have access to this information for the purpose of research was obtained in accordance with the Child and Family Services Act. The main data source about the adoptive applicants was the adoption family assessment or "home study" which is considered agency property. Under current legislation, a copy of this study is not given to the adoptive family.

The report does not contain any identifying information about the children or the families, for example, profession or, ethnic background. All information collected from this data source was secured in a locked file and this researcher was only one who had access to the information.

Interviews with social workers involved in disruption situations formed one of the data sources for this study. Workers were sent confidential letters describing the study and the participation requested of them. Those who volunteered to be interviewed were asked to sign consent forms agreeing to participation. Workers were asked to discuss situations/case records in which they had personal involvement. Workers were given some information about the questions or areas that were to be discussed during the interviews and they were advised that they were free to refuse to answer any questions. Workers were also advised that they were free to withdraw their consent at any time during or after the interview. The confidential letters sent to the workers describing the study were followed by a phone call to clarify any information. Workers were also advised that they could contact my thesis advisor for further information or clarification. All of the social workers interviewed for this study were employees of Winnipeg Child and Family Services and as a colleague, I was not in a position of influence.

Participants were asked if they were willing to have their interviews audio-taped. They were advised that a written transcript of the tape would be made. The tape was transcribed without the participant's name and workers who were interviewed were identified by numbers. Participants were advised that the tapes and transcripts were locked in a secure place

and that the tapes would be erased at the conclusion of the project. A copy of the transcript would be made available to the participant if requested. The social workers who agreed to be interviewed were also be advised that I was the only one who knew the identity of the case that would be discussed and that all identifying information would be masked in the written report. Interviews were held at the participants' convenience and in a location of their choosing. The data was also available to members of my thesis committee.

Workers were asked to discuss case situations that were very difficult for them both professionally and emotionally. As there was a risk that the interviews could cause emotional distress, participants were advised that they were free to decline to discuss any issues/questions they found upsetting, and in the signed consent, workers were advised that I would be able to provide them with information about referrals to counselling if necessary.

Participants were advised that a summary of the results could be made available, if requested, at the completion of the study. (see Appendix D)

Data Analysis

Tutty et al. (1996) state that the main purpose of analysis in qualitative studies is to sort and organize the information that has been collected "in

such a way that the themes, and interpretations that emerge from the process address the original research problems" (p. 90).

Tutty's work and some of Patton's (1980, 1987) writings on qualitative evaluation were helpful in establishing a guide to analyze the data in this study.

Data analysis began after all the case material had been collected and all the interviews had been transcribed. Copies of all the documents were made. One copy was used for writing on and another copy was used for cutting and pasting (Patton, 1987). All the data was read a number of times to become familiar with the complete data set. Notes were made in the margins of pages or on pieces of paper that were stapled to the documents about questions and ideas and beginning thoughts about how to categorize the information. Tutty et al. (1996) describe this process as writing analytical notes and contend it is a useful strategy for organizing the researcher's thoughts. They also note that the process of writing analytical memos is "what some authors refer to as leaving an audit trail" (p. 99).

Once all the data was reviewed, a case record was written for each adoption disruption case. Patton (1980) states that the "case record pulls together and organizes the voluminous case data into a comprehensive, primary resource package" (p. 303). The information from the case

records was used to construct the findings. The patterns and themes that were found in the data emerged "out of the data rather than being decided prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1987, p. 150).

Each case was reviewed to look for information that would be relevant to the aim of the research question.

The data was re-read to identify the important experiences, issues, and ideas. Patton (1987) states that at this point the analyst is looking for "quotations or observations that go together, that are examples of the same underlying idea, issue or concept" (p. 149). These pieces of information were highlighted and organized into various categories. Pieces of information were compared with other pieces of information to determine their similarities or differences and to determine if they should be placed in the same category. Cutting up the second copy of the document was helpful in putting pieces of information or quotes together to determine if they did fit together in the same category. The process of organizing the data into various categories was a lengthy one and involved re-examination of the data to ensure nothing was missed. Themes were generated from the categories of information. The relationships between the categories were examined in order to develop subthemes and then organize the material into themes. Some categories "contained enough

information to be considered themes in and of themselves" (Tutty et al., p. 108).

Once the data in each case was analyzed, a cross case analysis was done to determine similarities and difference between the case situations. The themes and patterns that emerged from the cross case analysis are described in the findings section of this thesis. The findings from this study are compared with the themes and findings from the literature on adoption disruption in the discussion chapter of this thesis.

The framework that emerged for organizing the data was based upon the stages involved in the adoption process. In order to gain a better understanding of adoption disruption, it is important to have an understanding of the stages or phases of adoption.

Because the data for this study was collected from two different sources, reviews of written records (client charts) and interviews with social workers, the themes and categories generated from each source are laid out in table form. Although the interviews corroborated the information in the written records, the interview material addressed some additional issues.

CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS

A framework for describing the adoption process was used to organize the material and themes from each stage of the process as discussed in the research methods chapter.

Adoption Process

All of the adoptions followed a similar process. A decision was made by the agency to place a child for adoption. The child was prepared for adoption and listed with the Central Adoption Registry. Prospective adoptive applicants applied to adopt and then went through an agency preparation process (although this was not the same in all cases and almost non-existent on some cases). A home study or family assessment was done and the family or couple were approved as adoptive applicants by the agency. They were then registered with the Central Adoption Registry.

Prospective adoptive applicants were referred to social workers by the registry for a particular child who was available for adoption. The families were considered by the worker and if a worker felt that the family would meet the child's needs, the family's worker (who may not have been the same person as the child's worker) contacted the child's worker. Information was presented to the family, and they may have requested additional information and consultation from other professionals both prior

to and after meeting the child. A decision was made to proceed with the adoption plan and the pre-placement process began. This involved an initial meeting between the family and child and getting a commitment to proceed from both parties and then beginning a series of visits to spend time together. An adoption placement agreement was signed and the child joined the family and the "new family" began a probationary period before legalization. Disruption occurred at some point after placement, prior to legalization.

Sample Description

1. Children:

A list of children who were permanent wards of child welfare agencies and who were involved in adoption disruptions was obtained from the Central Adoption Registry. This study's focused on children who were permanent wards of Winnipeg Child and Family Services and the adoptive families with whom they were placed. Because of the small sample size and concerns with confidentiality, the sample will be described in very general terms. (Table 4.1)

Five of the children were part of a sibling group, although they were not necessarily placed for adoption with the sibling. The children ranged in age from toddler to 11 years, at the time of adoption placement. Five females and 6 males were included in the sample. The children had a

range of placement experiences before the adoption placement occurred.

In some situations the children had had a number of foster placements

and had gone back and forth between foster home and parental care. In

other situations children had relatively stable placement histories. A range

of ethnic/racial backgrounds were represented. All of the children had

become permanent wards through the court process. Factors in birth

family history reflected a range of issues including mental illness,

substance abuse, neglect, and suspected physical and sexual abuse.

The children exhibited a variety of difficult behaviours. (Table 4.2) In

some instances the children were exhibiting some degree of

developmental delay or behavioral difficulty. In some cases the children

were at risk for these behaviours. Four of the children in this study were

subsequently replaced in adoptive homes and the adoptions were

legalized.

2. Adoptive Families

The description of this sample is rather limited due to concerns about

confidentiality. The adoptive families represented a wide range of

experience. Some families were urban and some lived in rural areas. The

sample included single parents adopters as well as adopters who were

extended family members. The adoptive families represented a range of

different ethnic/racial backgrounds, although no Asian families were

involved in this study. Education and income ranged from those adoptive

parents employed in "blue collar" work to those with post secondary

education and employed in professional fields. In the majority of

situations, the adoptive parents had other children, either biological

children or children who had joined the family through the process of

adoption. The adoptive families had a wide range of previous adoption

experience ranging from those who were anticipating parenting a first child

through the process of adoption to those who had previous disruption

experience. None of the adopters were parenting children with special

needs.

<u>Presentation of Findings</u>

The findings will not be presented in the form of individual case

studies. Some research participants were concerned that descriptions of

individual case studies would be too identifying. Yin (1994) states that

there are varieties among written forms of case studies. In some

situations there may be no separate chapters or sections devoted to the

individual cases and the "entire report may consist of the cross case

analysis" (p. 135).

Data from two different sources, written case records and interview

transcripts of social workers employed in adoption work, are referred to in

the findings. Direct quotes or comments from data sources have been

used to enrich the presentation and illustrate various issues and themes. The sources of the quotes or comments are given when they are used. In order to maintain confidentiality, some of the information in the quotes may have been masked. For example, the gender of the child referred to in the quote may have been changed.

In organizing the results of this study, a framework for understanding adoption disruption was developed (Tutty, et al., 1996). Within each data set, a number of themes and categories were identified (Table 4.3 and Table 4.4). The relationship between the themes was examined and a number of major themes were identified. Within each major theme, a number of sub themes or secondary themes were identified.

Findings

Understanding the disruption was the overarching theme identified by a review of agency records and interview transcripts. A number of other identified themes are related to it. These themes will be discussed in the context of the stages of an adoption placement.

Making the Decision to Adopt:

Motivation

The issue of why a family wanted to adopt a child had significance through out the whole adoption process. In interviews, some workers commented that the commitment of the family to the adoption rested in

part upon their reasons for adoption. The adoptive families in this study wanted to adopt for a variety of reasons. The majority of families already had children, some through adoption or some biological children. File recordings indicated that the adoptive parents wanted to add to their families for a variety of reasons including an idealized view of what an appropriate number of children was, the desire for a child of a specific gender or simply to experience parenting another child. Some families were hoping to become parents for the first time through the process of adoption. Some adoptive parents saw themselves as re-uniting their families by adopting an extended family member. Some families wanted to adopt an older child because of the waiting time for infants and some parents who had already had the experience of parenting an infant, felt an older child would be a better fit in their family. Some parents who had older children did not want large gaps between the children already in the family and the adopted child.

In interviews workers noted that they were very aware of people's motivation to adopt. Concerns were expressed about the reasons why people wanted to adopt a child. In look at motivation, one worker commented

> I'm very cautious with people that are rescuers. People come to parenting for very selfish reasons....So I never mind so much if they're the rescuing bit at the beginning I want to make sure they've moved out of the rescuing at the end. Because those adoptions probably will

not succeed. Disrupt at some point down the road, once the parents feel that the child's not being grateful enough

Pre-placement

In both file information and workers interview issues around the pre-placement phase were raised. One of the most consistent themes was that of preparation.

The research indicated that the extent to which both the children and the families were prepared for the adoption placement and their subsequent adjustments varied considerably. In one situation a family did their own preparation and were not involved in any preparation work with the agency. In other situations, families attended agency educational/information programs, did reading and homework assignments and had several in depth interviews during their home studies as part of their preparation process. While the preparation process provided families with information about what to expect, some workers noted that it is difficult to prepare families for all the challenges they would face. During interviews, some workers commented on this issue.

> They have no idea (during the preparation process) I tell the client what we're doing now is very academic and I'm going to tell you all about these behaviours and everything but you know it's going to be a shock when it happens.

> I think we present the information, but people have to be willing to take it in.

My personal belief is that families have no idea what they're getting into. Even though we do a very good job preparing families, but I think it's like anything. Even as a parent, I mean, I have had lots of family members who have had children, so it certainly wasn't that I was in isolation, but you know when the job is given to you 24 hours a day, you have no idea what it entails and it's hard to tell people.

The actual pre-placement process varied from situation to situation. Workers were aware of "red flags" during this period and in some situations slowed down the process in order to accommodate the needs of those involved. One worker, in an interview, noted "the visits had to be slowed down so the adoptive parents would feel more comfortable with the process." Another worker who was interviewed, commented about this process and said

> making sure that [you] always tell people you're going to have a false ready first. Everybody has a false ready, the kids, the foster parents, the adoptive parents - three days after they've left, [the foster placement] they want to go home. And you have to be very careful, we have to be very strong as workers not to fall into the false ready.

Whether or not they had been involved in an extensive preparation process, a number prospective adoptive parents had some understanding or awareness that there would be difficulties and the majority of home studies available indicated some willingness to be prepared for dealing with this issue. File information also indicated that adoptive parents were appraised of potential behavioral or developmental difficulties.

In one home study, the prospective adoptive parents described their

awareness that the family would experience adjustment issues and

indicated their willingness to adapt. They stated, according to file notes,

> it would be wishful thinking to think a new child would fit right into our existing family. We will have to give and take, make compromises and learn a lot about each other. We all very much want another child and will commit ourselves to making whatever emotional adjustments are necessary to make this child part of our family.

In another home study, the worker wrote that the adoptive

> parents are preparing themselves for various behavioral problems because of the trauma the child had experienced. "They realize they may have to accept sudden unexpected bursts of anger, depression, frustration and confusion. They would be sympathetic to the child's losses. Both are willing to accept any form of counselling if needed - for the child and for the family."

In a letter to an agency, one worker wrote to another that

> The adoptive family was appraised of the potential of hyperactive behaviours and potential learning problems and did not feel this would pose a barrier in their desire to adopt this child.

The Children

The preparation process with children varied by the age and

circumstances of the child. In order to prepare children, social workers

completed life books to address family of origin issues and consulted with

other professionals regarding adoption planning for the children.

The following comments, taken from various file dictation, indicated

that the children were eager to move into their adoptive homes after the

preparation and pre-placement process.

The child was intensely excited about having a family...She thinks that having her own mom and dad is a great idea.

The child was very eager to meet the new mom and was very proud of his lifebook and his new home and parents.

...he informed his foster mother that he did not want to stay and was eager to leave.

The child responded favourably during the pre-placement process and by the time visits had increased to include an overnight, was anxious to join a new family.

In one case, the file notes documented that a child did not want to leave its placement to move to the potential adoptive home and provided the worker with "evidence" to support a desire not to move.

Post Placement

After the adoption placement occurs, there is a probationary period before the adoption is legalized. Katarynych (1991) describes adoption probation as

the process following the child's placement with the selected family. The central goal of adoption probation is the attachment of the child to the adoptive parents and other family members and the bonding of the adoptive parent to the child. (p. 153)

Both the file information and social workers' comments during interviews indicated that there was an initial "honeymoon" period after the adoption placement. The families began a process of making adjustments and may have encountered some minor problems that they were able to resolve. Generally, there was a feeling of optimism. File dictation

recorded on a visit shortly after the adoption placement occurred was

typical of the information described in the initial post placement phase.

The file notes indicated that

> The child seemed to be settling in well and called the adoptive parents mom and dad and was very relaxed and affectionate to them. They felt his manners and behaviour were generally very good. There have been some issues about bed time and the child needed to be told several times to do something but generally the adoptive parents were pleased with the way the child was responding.

Even in one situation where both the child and the family had some

ambivalence about the adoption plan and a foster placement crisis

necessitated a change in the date of the adoption placement, there was a

sense of hope that the placement would succeed.

After the honeymoon phase, workers and families usually described a

period of testing. In an interview one worker commented [that once]

> "the honeymoon is over and the testing is in full swing, that this was the time the adoption was going to disrupt or be in serious trouble."

Child's Behaviour

After the post placement "honeymoon" phase, there frequently was a

period of testing when the child displayed a wide range of behaviours that

challenged the family's expectations, commitment, coping and parenting

skills. File notes described these behaviours in some detail and the range

included sexualized behaviours, lying, stealing, hoarding of food,

bedwetting, refusal to listen, displays of sadness/grief, acting out

behaviour, destructive and harmful actions to self and others and

destruction of property. File recordings described some of these

situations:

> The teacher said she never saw a child who could use manipulation like she did.

> The child had smeared faeces in the bathroom over two objects and had initially denied and then admitted doing it.

> The child has wet the bed on several occasions.

> Behaviours reported in the adoptive setting included faecal smearing, cutting his fingers with a knife until they bleed, running away...these inappropriate behaviours continued to escalate.

> ...the child's anger and rage is now erupting, stemming from the child's past destructive environment of abuse...even in a good space, calm, happy, on an even keel, having fun, the child will still do something destructive.

Families reported their frustration to workers who recorded the following concerns. One family told their worker, "she has totally frustrated us with her perpetual lies." Another family reported

> If we do not regulate everything she eats, she will eat until she throws up, yet she never complains of being hungry...If not supervised, she will eat food such as used gum, candy, etc. if she finds it on the playground or in the street.

Family Functioning

The reality of dealing with the child's behaviour and adjustments to

adoptive parenting impacted on the family's functioning. One of the most

significant findings of this study was the difference in the role of the

adoptive mother and the adoptive father in the disruption. Both workers'

interviews and the written records identified this theme. The role of adoptive mother seemed to carry some additional challenges, although both parents decided together to end the placement. Because adoptive mothers tend to be the primary caregivers, the child(ren)'s reaction to the adoptive mother was more intense. In their interviews, workers commented frequently on this theme.

> We always warn adoptive parents that often the child will attach more strongly to one parent than the other.

> Mom is probably the one that is going to get the most flak. It seems that children, older children, have formed expectations of mothers and have different roles of fathers. [Mothers] inherit a legacy that they haven't created and have a long struggle to get through that. But I think it's incumbent upon us to warn adoptive mothers and do that loud and clear. I think in a lot of places, moms really get it in the neck, there's something really volatile about the mothering role and the female of the home really gets the most obnoxious testing behaviour and a lot of dads get off scott free.

In a number of situations, adoptive mothers and children entered into situations that became progressively more negative and it became more difficult to have positive interactions.

> File notes contained the following comments;

> The child and adoptive mother began having power struggles.

> ...it was clear that the adoptive mother's anger with the child was obvious. She [the adoptive mother] declared she had no affection for the child...the relationship with the child was continually adversarial.

The adoptive mother was feeling overwhelmed with the responsibility. Since the child was rejecting them [the adoptive parents] and the adoptive mother in particular, she is rejecting him. The adoptive mother seemed to make an abrupt change of heart when she felt the child was rejecting her.

The adoptive mother said "I have given all, but receive nothing back."

The adoptive mother found it very hard to deal with the child's rejection and was hurt by it. Her parenting skills were held in high regard in the community and by other family members. She prided herself on being available to her family.

The child's behaviour had a considerable impact on the father, the relationship with other family members and on the marital relationship in general. In one file dictation, the worker wrote that

"the child really knew the [adoptive parents] Achille's heel, the child already knew the weaknesses of the mom and the relationship between mom and dad and really worked it."

Fathers who were having a positive experience with the child were caught between their commitment to their spouse and family and their commitment to the adoptive child. The father's ability to support his wife around parenting issues vis a vis the adoptive child played an important role in the placement.

In an interview one worker commented,

I think the adoptive father had a different view [than his wife]. He could see his wife was in a lot of pain, but he wasn't able to do anything about it.

Another worker commented during an interview that the adoptive

couple's differing perceptions of the adoption placement placed

additional stress on the situation. The worker stated that the adoptive

father

would minimize and [the adoptive mother] would exaggerate, so when she turned to him saying you know he makes me feel lousy, he'd go, "don't worry." She wasn't getting any affirmation from him. He still couldn't nurture her and he couldn't reach out to her and understand her pain because he wasn't experiencing the same thing from the child, so then again how is she going to keep herself going.

Sometimes adoptive fathers were not prepared to continue the placement

because of the stress on the marital relationship and the family. One

father told a worker that he was not prepared to have his family ruined by

one individual.

In an interview one worker stated that

The adoptive father was very supportive. It was very hard for him because he was very supportive to his wife and he was also trying to support the child who was making a connection to him.

Other interviewers contained similar comments:

The adoptive father is the strong person in this and would like to continue working with the child, but realizes that the placement is causing problems between his wife and himself and the other children.

The father really saw he had to make a choice...he made a previous commitment to his wife and he would respect her decisions and her feelings, and that's what it came down to.

While stress on the marital relationship obviously impacted on other

members of the family, the impact of the adoptive child on other members

of the nuclear family was not clearly defined in the data. Adoptive parents

reported that the adoptive child's behaviour had a negative impact on the

children already in the family. In one family, the adopted child was

described as rejecting towards the child already in the family. The notes in

the files indicated there was some competition or jealously between the

adoptive child and the biological children. There was a lot of triangulation

in one family which led to power struggles and the adoptive parents felt

caught in loyalties issues with their own child. The adoptive parents felt

caught in a struggle between their biological children and the adopted child

and at various times made alliances against the adopted child. One

adoptive family advised their worker that

> in recent months [the adopted child] has become isolated by our
> children. The constant lying and seemingly lack of effort to conform to
> family rules and expectations have made it very difficult for our children
> to accept this child.

Siblings Placements

Siblings who were placed together did not always have the same

experience with the adoptive family. In some situations a decision was

made to separate siblings prior to placement. The adoption experience

sometimes helped to clarify the needs of the siblings. File dictation in one

sibling file indicated that the adoption experience "helped the child

crystallize feelings about the sibling" and helped both the child and the

worker realize the connection that really existed between the siblings.

Sibling placements also highlighted the issue that siblings do not

always have the same needs and workers need to examine this issue fully

in making placement decisions. In one situation where siblings were

placed together and one of them was having a difficult time, a file

document from a psychologist indicated that the "relationship between the

two siblings should not be the primary criteria for future planning."

Comments from interviews echoed some of these sentiments:

> I think [sibling placements are riskier] just because in some families
> where children are from such a deficit of love and nurturing and they
> learn to compete with each other for whatever little bits there are, ...I
> was also horrified at the thought of ever separating siblings but what
> [the psychologist] said, really began to make sense. So, I've come to
> a balance in that you can separate siblings. What you have to ensure
> is that there's a connection that remains with them, that the adopting
> parents commit to ongoing contact with the other siblings, so it's a
> balance where the child is going to get the parenting and nurturing he
> needs without having to compete with a sibling, but where they can
> maintain the connection.

> We had tried many families with blended visits and people were
> just, they'd see the two of them and how active they were and how
> demanding. They wouldn't have any part of them. And they were
> staying more and more in this foster home which was not
> functioning well, you know. So we decided that we'd split them...

The Disruption Phase

1) Expectations

Disruptions occurred when the child did not meet the parents'

expectations or when parental expectations that they could change a

situation did not happen. This theme was identified in the written case

records. In spite of preparation and education efforts, some adoptive parents felt that their love and good intentions would be enough.

One worker wrote in file notes that the "adoptive parents felt their love, commitment and parenting style would help the child overcome her behaviours." Another file note read

all the information they shared in their concerns was known before placement, but they had expectations that with intense work, they could make a difference.

Sometimes parental expectations escalated the situation. From a file which notes that a family was concerned about the child's ability to learn, the following quote illustrates this point.

They found that the child wasn't interested in learning...and had tantrums when they tried to teach him.

After disruption, file dictation indicated that one family suggested their file be closed as it was now "clear to them that the children for whom the agency needed families, did not meet their expectations."

2. Inability To See Change

It also appears that some adoptive parents became worn down in the process of trying of parent. In spite of what they viewed as their efforts to change the situation, they were not able to get a positive response from the child. This theme was identified in the analysis of the written records. While the adoptive parents may have known that child's behaviour was

part of the adjusting and bonding process, in some instances it became

overwhelming for the adoptive parents. The following quotes from a

number of case files illustrate this issue

> After approximately a year of dealing with an emotionally and behaviorally troubled child, the adoptive parents gave up their rights.

> The adoptive parents were given the background of deprivation but even though they had been informed they were not prepared for the aggressive outbursts that have frequented the child's behaviour in the ensuing weeks.

> The adoptive parents felt the child required more attention than they could provide.

> The adoptive mother called to say that she and the adoptive father decided they could not proceed with adopting the child...She felt the child was not bonding, that the child was not committed to them as parents or to work on any of the behavioral issues, such as lying. They felt they had given him all the love, caring, explanations, etc. and they had nothing else to give.

> One family told their worker that in spite of all their efforts, they had been unable "to reach the child's inner self."

3. Loss of Hope

One of the major themes that emerged from worker interviews, was

that once adoptive parents reached a certain point, they had lost hope and

were unable to see or think about things improving in the future and were

not open to any kind of support or intervention to try and change the

situation.

Various quotes from workers' interviews are illustrative:

> It was quite clear [the adoptive parents] were caught up in a negative

spiral, accentuating only the negative and unable to elicit a positive response form the child or from themselves of him. We discussed the possibility of turning this around and some ways I began to do this but it was quite clear that the adoptive parents had not any interest in doing this.

What I also tried to do was help the parents help the child with the feelings of sadness, that this was an opportunity for them to be part of sharing that with her and part of the bonding and attachment process...And I noticed that I had difficulty in getting acceptance of that idea, that by helping her out of her sadness,...that it would benefit them. [These parents had some preparation] so it's not like we were springing something new at the time. Conceptually this had been discussed before, but here it was real life and you often forget what you talked about or thought about before.

I spent a lot of time trying to explain that the child's behaviour changes will be slow and hopefully they [would] become to feel more positive...The family didn't want our direct involvement in helping the child become part of their family...

The adoptive mother seemed to make an abrupt change of heart when she felt the child was rejecting her. The attempts of the worker to help her with her feelings were rejected.

The adoptive parents felt they no longer had that long term commitment they once had and would not parent the child even if supports were in place

The adoption placements deteriorated to the point where the parents

felt that they could not continue with the placement. Interaction between

both the adoptive parents and the children became increasingly negative.

One worker described the process in an interview:

After these various things happened, they reached the point where they said they did not want to continue being parents...and in that period of time...I saw withdrawal of affection and interaction. I saw the parents being more strained, not relaxed. [One of the adoptive parents] was a very exuberant person, and [one] was quick with a

laugh and sense of humour and I saw these things not there. Saw more quietness and worry, the parents had worried conversation, so I was aware of all those changes and finally they said they wouldn't be able to continue.

Support

The need to provide support to the family throughout the adoption process and especially during the post placement "testing phase" was identified in a number of worker interviews. While workers identified the need for supports to the family in the community, many of the comments focused on the support provided by the agency and the workers. Comments indicated that families needed access to workers to help them through difficult times.

> You need workers available and you need workers who know about issues, family dynamics, developmental issues.

Workers identified the need to make sure the support was timely, workers needed to know when to intervene and to instill a sense of hope that things could improve.

When talking about adoptive families, one worker noted

> I always believe when I'm working with families, that it's the parents that I need to support...it's the parents we have to keep healthy, because if they start loosing hope...if they get down to a certain point, that's it.

Some workers acknowledged that sometimes all the agency support available could not prevent a disruption. One worker stated:

They had an absolutely superb adoption worker, highly skilled. If there was a hope to hold it together, it would have been held together.

In one situation however, the adoptive parents felt that the agency did not

provide them with enough help and they felt they had to struggle in order

to get the limited amount of support they received.

File recordings indicated that in some situations resources were available

for adoptive parents but were not used.

<u>Acceptance</u>

Workers frequently mentioned the theme of acceptance in the

disruption process and indicated that the inability to accept the child

contributed to the disruption. They felt that acceptance of the child had to

come before any behavioural changes could occur. The following quotes

from interviews illustrate this point.

> The parents couldn't accept the child's behaviour and the child got quite angry. I think that the issue is acceptance of the child has to come first before you pay any attention to trying to change things.

> It's acceptance in all forms...the acceptance of the total identify [of the child] including the name.

> The attachment is the first big thing you have to work on and acceptance has to be unconditional. Make sure it's unconditional because these kids haven't had that, they haven't had the opportunity. They're so fragile that they can't tolerate any criticism.

In one situation however, the adoptive parents indicated prior to placement

that they were unable to accept certain behaviours in children. The child

placed with them exhibited these behaviours although these behaviours

had not been known prior to placement. There were, however, other issues related to acceptance of this child's identity that contributed to the disruption.

In some situations the disruption helped the adoptive parents clarify what they could accept, and what they needed from a parenting experience. One set of adoptive parents had difficulty accepting a child's behaviour and had expectations of what they considered as age appropriate behaviour. The couple realized during the course of the disruption that they could best accept an infant or a very young child, not an older child. In an interview, the worker stated that

> couple was able to say honestly at that time that one of the things they
> learned was that they were not parents for an older child.

Extended Family Adoptions

Both the interviews and file recordings identified extended family placements as having unique characteristics. Workers felt that extended family members had to deal with special issues. Often they had to face family pressures to adopt to keep a child within the family system. In addition they had to deal with boundary issues and loyalties and contacts with birth family members. In one case, a child placed in an extended family adoptive home bore a strong resemblance, in both appearance and attitude to his birth parents, and it triggered some of the adoptive parents unresolved feelings about this relative. In another situation discussed by a

worker, the adoptive relative didn't really view the situation as an adoption and didn't expect to have to work on attachment issues because in his mind, there was an attachment based on a "blood connection" and the relative expected to have a ready made bond with the child on this basis.

Family of Origin Issues

The adoptive child's behaviour sometimes triggered responses that reminded adoptive parents of their own family of origin issues. Family of origin issues also affected both parents ability to adapt to or accept certain situations. When commenting on family of origin issues, one worker who was interviewed said

I think they're vital. Because they are tapes in our minds. And so if that button is pushed and we then jump into that and we don't have the control of our impulses or we can't think things through.

Case files also noted that unresolved family or origin issues impacted on the adoption placements.

Role of Social Workers

All of the workers had a significant role to play in the adoption process, either as the worker for the child or the family and in some cases, workers assumed both roles, preparing the child for adoption, doing the home study, supervising the adoption placement and dealing with issues related to the disruption.

Workers generally felt that those involved in adoption should either

have some experience or understanding of adoption issues. Among their

comments were the following:

> I think you have to have a really good understanding about the
> dynamics of adoption, dynamics of older children adoption and the
> ongoing dynamics of adoption with families. I think adoption is such a
> high risk because you're dealing with people and all their feelings and
> all the variables and everything...And nobody wants a breakdown. So
> all we can, I think, is just use our skills and be there and be supportive.
> You know somebody who comes in and who is new can do a very
> good job too. I think part of this is our own personalities and how we
> work with people and how comfortable we make them feel. And if we
> don't know the answer, go get an answer. If you don't know, admit
> you don't and try to work together.

Workers saw the ability to understand adoption issues as necessary in

providing adoptive families with support in dealing with difficult times.

> "I think it's important to have, whether it's from reading or from
> experience, you need some depth of understanding of what the issues
> are for people and some ability to anticipate what that's going to be
> like for them.

> ...You need workers available and you need workers who know about
> issues, family dynamics, developmental issues.

> [Understanding adoption issues] I really think that's critical in
> understanding and normalizing and helping the child and seeing the
> child on a regular basis.

> I think adoption workers need to have some background in protection
> work because you need to have to be able to understand where those
> kids are coming from.

A few workers commented that those without skills or a good

understanding of the issues were not helpful in the adoption process.

Some workers expressed unease about placing with workers who had a

lack of a knowledge base and were not able to prepare their families adequately.

When asked about their ability to assess families particulary during the homestudy process, some workers admitted that it was not always possible to be aware of all the issues. One worker commented

> "I think back...what kinds of home did I really approve...because you're really relying on self reporting.

Another worker stated "most time for home studies, people are putting their best foot forward."

In talking about a homestudy a worker said

> And doing homestudies there are a number of people who want older children and as we talk together during the assessment, there emerges there's a lot of things that they say that tell me they need to grow together from a younger stage...they may have a lot of worries about baggage...when you hear those kinds of worries, we really talk with those parents...and I didn't have that with this couple...they seemed to have the kind of understanding...to accept that child who was at that developmental stage.

During the interviews, workers talked about their feelings of responsibility towards the children for whom they were finding permanent homes. Workers were very aware that the agency took "children away from families that were not able to meet their needs." Adoption workers saw themselves as trying to find families that would meet those needs and where they saw it was not happening and there was a disruption, "that pushes all our buttons."

One worker indicated that a disruption caused the worker to go back and re-examine the whole situation, to see if any factors had been missed and re-examine their assessments. In one disrupted situation, file notes contained a

letter written by a worker talking about this process. The worker wrote

> I have read the [home]study over a number of times, trying to second guess myself...But I suppose we can go over this a million times.

Sometimes social workers acknowledged that they had had concerns about the adoption plan prior to the placement, but decided to proceed with placement for a variety of factors.

Reflecting upon a disrupted adoption, a worker stated

> "You look back and think, I should have known, and I do know, it's not that I didn't know at the time. It's just that you're so desperate for homes."

In a situation involving an extended family placement, the worker commented

> "sometimes you think, with this placement ...it's not going to be the greatest place, but it's family."

In another situation where the adoption disrupted, the workers had concerns about an aspect of the adoptive family behaviour but decided to proceed with the placement. The worker stated

> "They were just really completely the wrong family and we walked into that...and unfortunately I still regret it to this day that I let them go ahead and sign papers..."

Impact of Disruption

Workers frequently identified guilt as an issue after disruption. The

impact of disruptions is illustrated in the following quotes from interviews:

> The guilt you feel is awful. That date...is etched on my mind. They become benchmarks in your career. I think all those things, the day you get those phone calls [about the disruption], I always remember them.

However the worker also noted the need to get past the anger,

> because you genuinely have to join the family in that belief [that is, making a leap of faith, that things will get better] and that's a crucial piece. You have to be willing to get down and work through the directions with the family and slug it out. And if you're angry then you can't [do that]. So I think that the worker's problem is to get past that. And in subsequent ones [risky adoption placement] it's been a team kind of thing, and it needs to be a team thing. The family needs to feel that the worker is on their side.

Another worker commented...

> it doesn't matter how many years you've been doing it, it's hard to have disruption. It tears everything, it just tears everything...I feel anger towards the couple and hurt and disappointment for the child. I feel anger and then I have to step back and work through it. And I feel disappointment and anger with myself. I think that's good. If you ever take it too lightly, that, "well it happens" and we'll just walk through it and do it, then you've lost it. so I think it's okay, but I think the other thing is to know what I can learn from that.

Other workers commented...

> I think that the case [a disrupted placement] that will stay with me the rest of my life.

> The first that disrupted, I felt really guilty. I was thrown at the time.

> Telling the child and removing the child. It's the worst imaginable thing you have to do.

Workers also talked about the anger they felt towards adoptive families

who disrupted but acknowledged that to be able to support families, and

be effective in helping them through difficult times, they had to move

beyond their anger.

During an interview one worker remembered

> getting a call at home from this particular family and I was cutting
> something or doing something or other, and I can remember going
> back to my task after the phone call, and I was so angry I took a huge
> chunk out of my thumb.

Social workers were able to identify some positives in adoption disruptions.

They helped workers learn more about the adoption process, about

themselves as workers, about the needs of the children and helped

adoptive families clarify issues of their own.

Examples of comments from interviews are illustrative

> So in some respects [the disruption] was almost a positive thing
> because it allowed the child to start dealing with some issues that had
> been underneath the surface. I know that Spalding in the States said
> that adoption disruptions are not necessarily a negative thing. They
> will give us information about the child we weren't aware of before.

> As workers we're constantly learning...every time we have a disruption
> we learn more about what to do and what not to do and about one's
> self.

> One of the worst things you can think of are disruptions, the pain is
> unimaginable. Yet having said that, people grow and they're strong
> and more mature as a result and the opportunity is there for everybody
> that has been involved in it.

> I think sometimes there are situations that should disrupt...I've done

some replacements from disruptions and it's been great. It's really great in that you can do a lot of good work....So I guess along the way we learn that disruptions can be healthy. It's how they're handled. If they're done from out of anger, then the child feels that and it becomes much more difficult. There has to be anger and disappointment and all those kinds of things, but the worker has to work with the couple on that and then we have to make it for the child.

In spite of their involvement in adoption disruptions, workers remained

optimistic. A number believed that no child was unadoptable, the

challenge was in finding the right kind of parents.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION FOR PRACTICE

Introduction

This chapter will highlight some of the major findings in the study and compare them with the themes identified in the literature on adoption disruption. Implications for practice will be discussed and some suggestions for future research will be noted.

Hartman (1984) states that "the whole process of building a family through adoption is very different than becoming a family through biological parenting" (p. 106). Kirk (1964) argues that the acceptance of this difference is one of the most influential factors in determining whether an adoption is successful. Separation, loss, and grief are core adoption issues and concerns around attachment and entitlement also play a significant role. "In adoption the process of building attachment, a sense of belonging and entitlement takes place over days, months, and years" (Hartman, 1984, p. 106).

Watson (1996) states that adoption rearranges the membership and boundaries of the families of those involved. "Adoptive families struggle with redefining their boundaries, modifying the structure and changing the rules that maintained the system before the adopted child arrived, and reassigning roles among family members" (p. 531). A number of other authors (Barth and Berry, 1988; and Rosenthal and Groze, 1992) have

looked at the adoptive families in terms of stressors and coping responses. Barth and Berry (1988) indicate that the adoptive family may face more simultaneous stressors than other families.

The family needs a range of coping resources to assist in its primary task which is the "integration or blending of members from two previously separate families into a new family" (Watson, 1996, p. 46). A "pile-up" of stressors may over tax the family's resources. In some situations the family is unable to cope and the adoption disrupts.

An understanding of the issues involved in adoption is helpful to understanding the issues involved in disruptions. As the primary focus of this study has been to understand how and why adoptions disrupt, it will be useful to compare some of the themes in the literature on disruption to the themes identified in this research.

Demographic Characteristics of Children Associated with Disruption

There is considerable evidence in the literature that indicates that older child adoption placements are at greatest risk for disruption (Rosenthal and Groze, 1994; Kadushin and Seidl, 1971; Barth and Berry, 1988). After examining a number of studies, Festinger (1990) noted that age has been a consistent predictor in outcome. She states that

whether one examines age at entry into foster care, age when the children became legally free for adoption, or age at the time of the

adoption placement, children whose placements disrupted were older than those who were adopted. (p. 208)

Other demographic factors such as gender or race of the child had no significant bearing on the outcome of adoption placements, although males were slightly over-represented in disruption statistics in two studies. Festinger's review found that the total length of time in care prior to the adoptive placement yielded mixed results. However, the average number of placements in foster homes and group settings was a consistent predictor of disruption . In general, children who disrupted had had more placements and "their prior histories of care were more problematic" (Festinger, 1990, p. 210).

The findings in this study generally support the literature, however the small size of the sample must be kept in mind. The majority of children in this study were over the age of two and of those, a number had multiple placements, including a number of moves back and forth between parental care and alternate placements.

Demographic Characteristics of Adoptive Families

The literature suggests that a number of demographic characteristics do not seem to be associated with adoption disruption. Festinger (1990) reviewed a number of characteristics of adoptive parents and their association with disruption outcomes. She found that factors such as the

age, race, eduction, and income of adoptive parents had essentially no bearing on the outcome of adoption placements. These findings are supported by Rosenthal and Groze (1992), Valdez and McNamera (1994), and Kagan and Reid (1986). The findings from this study seem to be consistent with the research literature. The families involved in the sample represented a range of income groups, occupations, racial/ethnic origins and educational backgrounds. The most significant factor was the presence of other children in the adoptive family. A majority of the families in this study had children prior to the arrival of the child whose placement eventually disrupted.

The literature on adoption disruption reports mixed findings regarding the placement risks if there are other children in the home. Rosenthal and Groze (1992) state that findings regarding the presence of other children in the home are complex and contradictory" (p. 10). Festinger's (1990) review of disruption indication found that most aspects of households such as number of other children, their ages, gender, and race were not linked to outcome. Kadushin and Seidl (1971) found that unsuccessful placements occurred more frequently when families had biological and/or other adopted children. Barth and Berry (1988) found that families with other adopted children in the home were at high risk.

One can speculate as to the reasons why other children in the home can be factors in disruption. Family roles change with their arrival of a new sibling and other children may need to make unanticipated changes to accommodate the new family member. Siblings may resent the increased attention the new family member receives and there may be issues around sibling rivalry. The adopted child may also cause a lot of stress on the marital relationship and the children already in the family may have difficulty coping with this issue. Inappropriate social behaviours by the adopted sibling may be a source of discomfort to the children already in the family. Adoptive parents may compare the adopted child to a previously adopted child or to a biological child. However, Rosenthal and Groze (1996) claim that "families with both biological and adopted children tend to deny differences more than other adoptive families do" (p. 526). Dealing with the needs or special needs of the adopted child may create additional stress on the family and tax their ability to cope. Zwimpfer (1983) noted that families with multiple additional stressors are more likely to have an adoption disruption.

Preparation

The first stage in the adoption process involves the pre-placement phase. This involves among other things, the decision to adopt, the preparation process and the pre-placement process. One of the themes

identified in the study is related to the issue of preparation. Berry (1990) states that there are many good reasons for agencies to properly prepare and support adoptive families. She notes that "adoption disruption has been associated with the unrealistic expectations of adoptive parents and preparation addresses to seek and modify these expectations" (p. 405). Preparation also helps adoptive parents become more aware of the issues they will face post placement and the preparatory process allows adoptive parents to think about the type of child they can best parent. Some of the literature on adoption disruption indicates that "satisfaction with agency preparation was the second most critical predictor of the parent's satisfaction with the entire adoption, second only to the child's ability to attach" (Berry, 1990, p. 406). Based upon the research done in this study, it is very difficult to both evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the preparation as well as the adoptive parents' satisfaction with the preparation. The degree of preparation for both the children and the adoptive parents varied considerably and even some of the parents who had a considerable amount of preparation eventually had disrupted placements.

Workers acknowledged that even with preparation, some families were challenged by the realities of the post placement phase and having to deal with difficult behaviour.

Information Disclosure and Matching

The literature on adoption disruption suggests that the amount and type of information about the child available to the adoptive parents and how this information fits with their ability to parent, seems to be a factor in the placement outcome.

Watson (1996) states that "knowledge and information strengthen the family system [and] withholding information worsens difficulties by not preparing families for behaviours" (p. 101). The information in this study seems to indicate that for the most part adoptive families were well aware of the children's background information and had the opportunity to meet with other professionals involved to obtain additional information.

In some situations, however, the post placement behaviour was unexpected. Among examples cited were unexpected levels of anger on the part of the child, unanticipated grief reactions and sexualized behaviours. These issues were certainly not anticipated by the workers who placed the children.

Prew, Suter, and Carrington (1990) found there was a perception of a mismatch between the adoptive child and the family in some disruption situations. Both file notes and workers' comments indicated that attempts were made to find appropriate matches between children's needs and parental expectations.

While the file information did not always provide clear explanations of why a decision had been made to proceed with a particular adoption placement, it was clear that consideration had gone into the adoption planning. Some families who had been referred for particular children were "rejected" and in some cases, adoptive applicants decided not to proceed after hearing about a particular child. The research did indicate, however, that social workers proceeded with placements in some situations where they may have had some concerns. Placement crisis and foster home concerns were sometimes factors in the decision to proceed with placement as well as the sincere hope for a "forever home" for the children. While this is in the realm of speculation, it may have been more difficult for a worker not to proceed with the adoption plan if the intended placement was the home of an extended family member.

In one situation, there was some post disruption discussion as to whether the child should have been placed for adoption due to a history of behaviours that would have been extremely challenging for any parent.

Extended Family Adoption

The literature on disruption contains little in this area. The literature talks about the risk of placing children who are psychologically bonded to foster families and/or extended family members or who have significant connections with members of the birth or extended birth family without

maintaining these connections (Steinhauer, 1991). These findings from this study indicate that issues around motivation, boundaries, loyalty, and commitment are important factors in extended family adoption placements.

Siblings Placement

A number of sibling groups were represented in the sample population studied in this research. Some were placed together and some were placed individually. While all of the placements disrupted, the findings were not conclusive. Workers held a number of different opinions about the value of placing siblings together. Workers believed that siblings did not always have the same needs and those needs were not necessarily met in the same adoptive home. Workers did see the value in "maintaining" positive connections with siblings who lived in different homes.

The literature was contradictory about the results of sibling placements. Rosenthal and Groze (1996) have written that siblings who are together can work on issues of loss separation, and attachment to their biological families, while "siblings who are separated cannot work on these issues together" (p. 57). Rosenthal and Groze (1996) note that a number of factors affect placement decisions regarding siblings. These include "worker and agency philosophy, sibling interaction, circumstances of the

child when entering the child welfare system and placement availability" (p. 55).

Child's Behaviour

The literature on adoption disruption and the findings in this study indicate that adoptive families go through an initial "honeymoon phase" followed by a testing phase where the work of family integration and family building begins. Both the literature and these findings are consistent in describing negative behaviours by the child during this phase. Hartman (1984) states that

the honeymoon ends when the child begins to feel stirrings of caring and longing which bring back the old pain that he or she has experienced in relation to adults and to rejection. The child's response to these stirrings is to fight the attachment, to be hostile and negative or begin a long period of testing to demonstrate that the family, like all other families, will not be able to or willing to "hang in there" with the child. (pp. 8-9)

Adoptive children also struggle with other issues such as entitlement. While legal entitlement to a family comes with the signing of the adoption placement agreement, a sense of emotional entitlement is more slow in developing. Prew, Suter and Carrington (1990) suggest that children may hold back commitment, with responses that maintain distance. Children,

especially those who come from backgrounds of abuse and neglect, may wonder if they are entitled to families to care for them and love them. Barth and Berry (1988) suggest that children removed from their birth homes because of neglect, abuse or abandonment may have underdeveloped abilities to make attachments. Difficulties in the development of parent-child attachments may influence adoption disruption. Some writers describe the child as being an active partner in the adoption (Barth and Berry, 1988). Ziegler (1994) states that the adoption commitment must be made by both the child and the family. Steinhauer (1991) contends that although they may have been prepared, children may not have a lot of awareness of what adoption involves. He states "to be clear as to whether a given child is ready or able to make a meaningful commitment to adoption, if indeed that is possible, requires the wisdom of Solmon and the patience of Job" (p. 338).

The findings from this study indicate that dealing with negative behaviour was very trying for families, particularly when there was a perception that things would not get better. Festinger (1990) states disruptions are rarely precipitous. This study generally supports this proposition. Many descriptions of disruption involved the family's statement that they had run out of alternatives. Families indicated that they had tried a number of ways to make the placement work, but in the

end, saw no other option than to disrupt. The length of time involved in dealing with problems may be overwhelming when families feel that none of their efforts to improve the situation have helped.

Barth and Berry (1988) state that there may be few rewards for the adoptive parents in the early stages of the adoption. They believe that parents can tolerate delayed rewards for only so long.

"The development of reciprocity or positive exchanges is an indicator to the family that the adoption is working out and provides a resource that the family can draw on during the inevitable trying times. After a time the failure to develop a living relationship with their children is regarded as a deep loss (p. 174).

This study's findings support Barth and Berry's claims. Families who disrupted talked of giving and giving and getting nothing back. As a result they lost hope that anything could effect change. Barth and Berry (1988) contend that when behaviour fails to improve, expectations of a "happy family future are abandoned" (p. 174).

Both the literature and this study found that adoptive parents had some difficulty dealing with sexualized behaviour. Dealing with children who have been sexually abused poses some particular challenges. (Berry (1990) indicates that sexually abused young children have more extreme internalized and externalized behaviour than non-abused children.

Livingston, Smith and Howard (1994) have found a strong association between disruption risk and a history of sexual abuse.

The literature indicates that children with a diagnosable conduct disorder prior to placement are at more risk for disruption (Steinhauer, 1991). Children in disrupted placements also tend to do less well in terms of emotional and developmental functioning, and school functioning measures than those in placements that do not disrupt. In this study, file recordings documented a variety of emotional and developmental difficulties in the children placed for adoption. It would seem that these behaviours made caring for these children particularly challenging. However, the behaviours alone are not sufficient to explain disruption in all cases.

In certain situations, the adoptive family had difficulty accepting the child and in some instances, expectations around behaviour exacerbated the situation and sometimes this led to a very negative interaction pattern.

Role of the Adoptive Parents

Family Functioning

The whole family is affected by the adopted child's behaviour and inability to cope with the behaviour is a leading indication of disruption (Cohen, 1984). One of the significant findings of this study's research was the differential impact of the child's behaviour on the adoptive parents.

Adoptive mothers experienced more negative interaction with adoptive children than adoptive fathers. The placement put a lot of stress on the marital relationship and in some instances, the adoptive father was unable to support the adoptive mother in the situation. Sometimes the child was described as "tearing the family apart" and fathers supported their wives in deciding to disrupt the placement. There is considerable support for this finding in the literature. Westhues and Cohen (1990) found that the adoptive father played a pivotal role in special needs adoptive placements and his active involvement in parenting and ability to nurture and support the adoptive mother played a crucial part in making sure the placement did not disrupt. Westhues and Cohen (1990) suggest that a

> nurturing husband/father can have a great impact upon what
> happens in the marital relationship as well as with the children.
> The marital dyad must be able to communicate their emotions
> directly and appropriately in order to solve the problem events of
> the day, as well as larger issues. (p. 150)

Support

The issue of support has been mentioned frequently in the literature on disruption. This study found at least one instance where an adoptive family felt they didn't get enough support from the agency. There were a number of instances, however, when supports were available to a family

and were not utilized and in some cases, all the supports available was not able to sustain the placement. Workers talked about the need for support but acknowledged that at certain points, when families had lost hope, no offer of support was sufficient to prevent the disruption. Barth and Berry (1988) found that families who were involved in disruptions sought the agency's help later than families that were stable. When to intervene and what kind of support seems to be particularly important in adoption situations that are at risk.

Family of Origin Issues

Workers in this study indicated that family of origin issues impact upon the adoptive family's functioning and responses to various issues. Steinhauer (1991) agrees and notes that "adoptive parents with specific needs of their own left unfilled can experience enormous strain trying to meet the needs of problematic older adoptees" (p. 333). He states the "couple must have enough other gratifications in their own lives and relationship that they are not dependent upon the child's ability to meet their emotional needs at the time of the adoption - or possibly ever" (p. 333).

Role of Social Workers

Barth and Berry (1988) state that social worker characteristics such as gender and race are generally not related to the outcome of the

placement. While both experienced and unexperienced workers have been involved in disruptions, they found that experience did seem to make a difference for the highest risk cases. "A higher number of workers on a case did, however have an important negative influence on the placement" (p. 153). Whether or not they had high risk placements that ended in disruption, families reported that having more workers made the placement more difficult. In this study, social workers indicated that experience in or at least an understanding of adoption issues, was important in disruption situations. In the literature on adoption disruption, Zwimpfer (1983) commented that social workers assessments of adoptive applicants tended to be positive. The scope of this research was too limited to explore this option however some workers did acknowledge that they had some ambivalence about the placements but proceeded at least in part because of the chance of finding a permanent home for the child. There is certainly evidence in the literature to suggest that there are considerable benefits in obtaining permanent homes for children. Westhues and Cohen (1990) found that

> all special needs children placed for adoption in [their] study
>
> improved in one or more areas of functioning (physical, emotional,
>
> social or cognitive). This finding is an important argument for
>
> permanency planning for children. It appears that children improve

in their functioning once they have been placed into a family on a permanent basis. (p. 10)

Impact of Adoption Disruption on Social Workers

The literature on disruption has not focused to a great extent on the impact of the disruption on the workers themselves. Some studies have looked at the role of the worker on the disruption (Zwimpfer, 1983). Some of the literature on disruption from Spaulding (1976) has examined the impact on the worker. The findings from this study indicate that disruption has a significant impact both personally and professionally. Anecdotal reports from workers in the child welfare system suggest that adoption workers have the "nice job" in the agency and that adoption work is not as stressful as other child welfare work. The reality is that adoption workers are concerned about the impact of their assessments and decisions and realize that adoption is not a final point in the permanency planning process but that adoption issues last through out the lifetime of the child, the adoptive family and the birth family. Findings indicated that disruption triggered feelings of guilt and anger and workers needed to find ways to deal with these feelings in order to assist the children and families involved in the disruptions. Workers were able to see some value in disruption. They were able to identify some positive outcomes in helping to replace

children and learning more about the needs of both the children and the adoptive parents.

Value of the Study and Implications for Future Research

This study extends the knowledge in the field of adoption disruptions. There is limited research in the field of special needs adoption disruption in particular, especially within a Canadian context. While this study's findings were consistent with many of the themes identified in the literature, there were findings that are not well discussed in the literature. One of these issues relates to extended family placements, and the other relates to the impact of disruption on social workers. These issues have the potential for further study. This study also points to a number of other issues that could be studied further. Study of adoption disruption from the perspective of the adoptive parents would increase understanding of the issue and would probably have some important practice implications. Valentine et al. (1988) state that "the primary source of information utilized to increase understanding of disrupted adoptive placement has been professionals in the adoption field" (p. 134).

When a few adoptive parents were interviewed in a limited manner for some research purposes, "many differences between their perceptions of adoption and those of workers emerged" (Festinger, 1990, p. 216). The

perceptions of the adoptive parents would extend the knowledge in the field of disruptions.

As adoptive mothers seemed to have experienced most of the children's difficult testing behaviours, research aimed at a better understanding of their experiences and feelings would be valuable.

This study discussed the issue of preparation for adoption. An evaluation of current preparation practices and further research in this area may be helpful in providing an increased level of service to children and families. An evaluation of current post placement supports, including agency and community, may shed some light on gaps in service.

The feeling of the social workers who had a professional stake in the outcome of the adoption merit some in-depth consideration in future research. Media coverage of child welfare work usually tends to focus on the removal of children from their families and social workers can be portrayed as uncaring and bureaucratized. Research that can challenge this notion is valuable to both the social work profession and child welfare agencies.

Finally, this study suggests that there is a need for more research on the long term outcomes of special needs/older child adoptions.

<u>Research Limits</u>

While the aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of why and how adoption disruptions occurs, there are a number of limitations. The research is based on a very small sample and only a very small number of social workers were interviewed as well. The findings are largely a reflection of social workers' perceptions. The narrow focus of this study does not allow for generalization of the findings.

<u>Implications for Practice</u>

Based on the findings, some implications for practice will be discussed.

1) <u>Adoption Planning</u>

If age and number of placements are associated with disruption, then child welfare agencies seem to have the responsibility to do good case planning to ensure that children can be in a position to have a permanent home. Aitken (1993) has expressed concerns about children being in "state of limbo" while agencies take a long time to make planning decisions. She believes that reducing the delays "that result from unnecessarily protracted court and agency processes is a major way to reduce the impact of extended limbo status on children" (p. 690). Aitkin also notes that children come into care having experienced significant trauma and

have little prospect of successfully bonding in a permanent placement if the limbo period is extensive. Agencies can expedite the processes of obtaining provincial wardship in order to promote permanency planning and the potential for adoption, a potential that otherwise diminishes. (p. 691)

The literature on adoption indicates that as special needs adoptions have increased, so have the rates of disruption. However a number of authors have indicated that the risk is an "acceptable one" and have argued that the benefits of an adoptive home are worth it to children. Barth and Berry (1988) indicate the data suggests that adoption is a far more stable and beneficial placement than long term foster care. While researchers do not know all of the effects of "disrupted" adoptions on children, the evidence "suggests that adoptions do have broad and lasting advantages over other permanency planning options and appear worth the calculated risk" (p. 232). The authors further contend "that when older child adoptions succeed, they may be the most complete and beneficial intervention in all the human services" (p. 232). Rosenthal's and Groze's (1992) work on special needs adoption and Rosenthal's (1996) longitudinal study of special needs adoption indicate that these adoptions can be successful.

Some of the workers interviewed felt that no child was unadoptable. Rosenthal and Groze (1992) believe that for almost all children who

cannot return to their biological families, adoption is the best option. They also believe that from a pragmatic perspective, however, not every child should be adopted. For example, they state that "some children with severely abusive behaviours cannot be managed in a family setting" (p. 218).

Steinhauer (1991) argues that adoption should be seen as one alternative on the continuum of permanency planning. He states "it should never be assumed that adoption is bound to be the best plan" (p. 354). He argues, that in the case of a child who is "emotionally bonded to natural parents, the accessibility to birth parents which is more common in foster care than in adoption might result in less pressure in the dynamics of a foster family than an adoptive one" (p. 354). He goes on to state that "in some such cases, planned permanent foster care with tenure might involve less risk for both child and parents that might adoption, even if access could be guaranteed" (p. 354).

In practice reality, not all adoption plans mean termination of connections with members of birth family or foster families. There are certainly adoptive parents who are willing to be very open and flexible in their definition of family and who are willing to have contact with those people who are meaningful in the child's life. The task for adoption

workers is to assess the needs of children and try and find the option that best meets that child's needs and will be in the child's best interest.

2) Preparation

Both the literature and the findings from this study discussed the need for preparation. In terms of practice, there is an ongoing requirement to prepare both adoptive parents and children for adoption.

While an in depth preparation process may not guarantee against disruption, it provides all of those involved in the adoption experience of a better understanding of what to expect. Steinhauer (1991) states that in terms of practice, the preparation process and the pre-placement process provide the worker with an opportunity to address issues that may be issues at some future date. He states "it is crucial to discuss and fully work through all such difficulties at this time since the communication and problem solving process set up at this stage are likely to become needed again and again over the years" (p.337). This stage of the adoption process lets the worker become aware of concerns and what they might mean and provides information on how to pace the process.

An agency preparation program also allows potential adoptive applicants a chance to determine whether the adoption plan they are considering is truly one they wish to pursue. The preparation that adoptive parents undergo contributes to a process whereby certain applicants

"select" themselves out and decide not to proceed. The process may make people more aware of the issues involved in adoption and make them realize that adoption or certain types of adoption are not appropriate for them, thereby lessening the risk of disrupted placements. One child welfare agency suggests that approximately 1/3 of the people who attend the agency's older/special needs child program, which is designed to make prospective adoptive applicants more aware of issues involved in adopting these children, do not proceed with this type of adoption.

3) Parenting Children with an Abuse History

The literature and this study have indicated that parenting a child with a history of abuse, particularly sexual abuse is challenging. Workers may need to offer therapeutic interventions to both the child and the family to help resolve a number of issues related to the abuse and integration into the family and the adoptive parents may need some assistance in acceptance of the child's history and understanding and accepting the child's behaviour. Barth and Berry (1988) have also suggested the provision of behaviour management training for adoptive parents.

4) Extended Family Placements

The issue of extended family adoptions may assume greater importance for child welfare workers whose mandate includes keeping children within the family. As the research findings suggest, workers need

to assess motivation and boundary issues in extended family adoptions. These families may need some assistance in integrating and forming attachments and adoptive parents may need in assistance in understanding that a "blood connection" may not mean an automatic attachment.

5) <u>Sibling Placements/Placements with other Children in the Family</u>

Decisions about whether siblings should be placed together present some challenges for workers. Both the literature and this study suggest that there are no easy answers to the issue. Placement decisions need to be made on a case by case basis. However, if siblings are separated, it may be beneficial to maintain contact and the issue may be finding adoptive families that can support this plan.

While it is difficult to determine if the family with other children is at greater risk for disruption, it would appear that workers need to consider a number of factors when considering adoption placement in a family. The needs of the child to be adopted are of prime consideration and certainly some children could be better off in a family with siblings. Workers need to consider the family's motivation, (i.e.) does the family want a sibling for other children, for example, the expectations of all family members around the placement, the family's current functioning, and problem solving ability and the adaptability and flexibility of the family system. The other children

in the family should be involved in the assessment/preparation process although their ability to fully understand the impact of another child in the family may be limited.

6) Impact on the Marital Relationship

There is considerable evidence that the adoption placement impacts on the marital relationship and the role of adoptive mother/wife carries some particular challenges. Given this finding, it may be particularly important to do a careful assessment of marital relationship/family functioning in the home study process as well as ensuring preparation for the wife/mother and husband about the dynamics likely to be encountered in the adoption placement. Assessing the family's supports, coping style and resources and providing alternate ways of problem solving and additional supports may be helpful in assisting the family. Understanding the experiences and feelings of the adoptive parents, particulary the adoptive mother, will be useful if the couple decide to proceed with another adoption plan in the future.

7) Support

After adoption placement, the new family has to establish a different family system. The difficulties in doing this sometimes leads families to feel that the best option is to disrupt. The issue of support has been

mentioned frequently in the adoption literature on disruption and in these research findings.

The challenge for workers is knowing when to offer the support and how to assess the family's functioning. A number of workers noted that the sense of loss of hope could come quickly and families could become exhausted quickly. The need for frequency of contact seems important and the type of support also seems to be important. An understanding of adoption issues is helpful to families in terms of helping them normalize and reframe issues. Watson (1996) states that although adoptive families may enter treatment at a time of acute crisis, "therapists must strive to validate their adoptions and to keep ownership of the problems with the family" (p. 531). Watson also notes that in the middle of a crisis "adoptive parents often feel that the adoption was a mistake or that they have failed as adoptive parents or that the adopted child came to them with inherent problems that are now endangering their family" (p. 531). Watson believes that the worker should reframe the crisis as one that families often experience in response to the task of raising adoptive children. He also believes that brief solution therapy techniques are effective with adoptive families, particularly those with special needs children.

Support is also needed in providing respite to adoptive parents and financial assistance so they can continue parenting, particularly for those

adoptions involving a sibling group. In terms of practice, the Child and Family Services Act has a provision for adoption subsidies. There has been some concern that situations for which subsidies apply are rather limited but the provincial government and child welfare agencies are currently looking at a few "test cases" in which the subsidy provisions are much wider. The new legislation in adoption also contains the provision for financial assistance.

This writer believes the issue of supports outside the worker or agency is important in all adoption situations but may assume more importance in certain geographic areas. When children are placed in small or remote communities, families may have limited access to formal supports such as psychologists and workers may not be readily available. When placing special needs children in these situations, workers may need to be cognizant of which family and friends are available and if they will be able to support the adoption. Access to other resources such as schools that are able to deal with challenging kinds of behaviour may be a consideration in adoption placement. The community, family and friends can be stressors to the adoptive family. Barth and Berry et al. (1988) note that families who can turn to friends and extended family for support during times of stress have fewer adjustment problems. Kagan and Reid's (1986) study of the adoption placements of emotionally disturbed youth

found that the number of people willing and able to offer assistance to the adoptive family was associated with placement stability.

Adoption support groups composed of fellow adoptive parents were seen as being especially helpful in providing non-judgemental understanding and empathy during difficult times (Barth and Berry, 1988). Barth and Berry also suggested that workers might do well to focus on building, assessing and enlisting familial and social support for the placement. They noted that adoption workers rarely had contact with members of the family's social support system during the assessment or in order to strengthen the placement.

Families who have been involved in disruptions have some recommendations about the kind of support that is valuable (Valentine, Conway, and Randolph, 1988). They felt that workers who trusted and empathized with the adoptive parents were beneficial and that workers who listened carefully to the parents' description of the child's behaviour helped reduce the stress. Parents "appreciated workers who listened carefully and were empathetic respectful and nurturing' (p. 150). The awareness that the worker recognized the enormity and stress of parenting a difficult child was supportive to parents. Valentine et al. (1988) note that "workers who acknowledge that most people do not have the skills to

parent children with extreme behavioral disorders are in a better position to provide families with the special assistance families need" (p. 150).

8) Child's Behaviour

Inability to cope with a child's behaviour was frequently cited as a reason for disruption in this study. The literature on adoption indicates that the child's behaviour is a significant factor in disruptions. While the child's behaviour is not the sole determinant of the success of the placement, it is important for workers when placing children to have a good understanding of the child's behaviour so this information can be shared with adoptive parents. This information can be helpful in dealing with or managing the behaviour. Some authors (Barth and Berry, 1988) have suggested using some form of a child behaviour checklist to assess children's behaviour. It is also important for agencies to know how to gather information from birth families as this information may have implications for the child's behaviour and development. For example, if a birth parent indicates she/he left school at an early age, it is worthwhile exploring the reason for this. If there is a learning disability in the family history, there may be some implications for the child who is being placed for adoption.

9) Information Sharing

Currently there is limited information about the number of children in Canada who are involved in adoption disruptions A number of provinces do not keep accurate records of disruptions which makes it difficult to share information. More consistent record keeping would facilitate further research in this area. Daly and Sobol (1994) note that "the lack of provincial consistency in record keeping has impeded the possibility generating more detailed analysis and assessments of social policy initiatives" (p. 498).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Adoption practices have changed considerably over the past few decades and as a result, children who were once considered unadoptable, due to age or special needs, are now being placed. There has been an increase in the incidence of disruption as the number of older child/special needs placements has increased. The aim of this study has been to gain a better understanding of the issues involved in adoption disruption and to look at some of the implications for social work practice. A qualitative research approach was taken to both gather the data for this study and evaluate it. Data was obtained from the provincial government's Central Adoption Registry about the number of disruptions. Ten cases involving permanent wards of Winnipeg Child and Family Services were chosen for an in-depth study. Seven social workers who were involved in adoption disruptions were interviewed.

Adoption disruptions have been examined from a variety of perspectives in the literature and a number of factors have been identified as predictors or correlates with adoption disruption. Among these are characteristics of the child such as age, a history of multiple placements and a variety of behavioral issues. Characteristics of the adoptive family have also been examined and motivation to adopt, preparation to adopt, and presence of other children in the home have been reviewed. The

impact of an adoption on the marital relationship has also been examined. Studies on adoption disruption have also focused on practice variables such as the role of the agency and the worker.

It was anticipated that many of the themes identified in the literature would also be identified in this study. The findings from this study are consistent with the literature in many ways. Some unanticipated findings involved extended family placements and the impact of disruptions on social workers.

The limitations of this study have been examined and some ideas for future research have been suggested. These ideas include an examination of disruption from the adoptive parents' perspective, an evaluation of the preparation process and an evaluation of support services. Implications for social practice, including clear permanency planning decisions, the need for preparation and support and the need for accurate information about a child's behaviour, have been discussed.

This work illustrates some of the difficulties faced by adoptive parents and social workers. It is clear from this study that adoption reshapes people's lives. When adoptions disrupt, it is not only the adoptive parents who feel they may have "failed", but also the social workers who have been involved in the adoption planning and placement. The family that adopts an older/special needs child faces some unique challenges and

may be at a greater risk for disruption. The issues discussed in this study

provide an increased understanding of adoption disruption. It is hoped

that this information can be helpful in reducing the incidence of disruption.

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APPENDIX A
TABLE OF MANITOBA ADOPTIONS AND DISRUPTIONS
1990 - 1996

TABLE OF MANITOBA ADOPTIONS
AND DISRUPTIONS

YEAR	TOTAL NUMBER OF ADOPTIONS	NUMBER OF DISRUPTIONS	PERCENTAGE
1990	100	3	3%
1991	112	5	4.5%
1992	110	7	6.4%
1993	103	3	2.9%
1994	87	7	8%
1995	146	6	4.1%
1996	113	1	<1%

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

The research literature on adoption disruption seems to have focused on the interplay of three main areas; the adoptive parents, the children themselves and agency/worker/systemic issues. Interview questions will focus on these three areas. Participants will only be asked to discuss situations in which they were involved.

Participants will be asked for information about the children. This may include information about:
- how a decision was made to proceed with adoption planning
- the child's preparation for placement
- the matching process
- disruption risk factors associated with the children.

Areas for discussion about adoptive families may include such issues as:
- the family's motivation to adopt
- the family's understanding of adoption issues
- the family's functioning/marital issues, etc.
- the adoption preparation process
- what issues/factors became significant after placement
- how the decision was made to end the placement

Participants will also be asked how the situation has increased his/her knowledge/understanding of adoption disruptions.

The interview format will be informal and will not be limited to the aforementioned topics. The interview can include any other issues or topics the participant feels would be relevant to gaining a better understanding of adoption disruption.

Participants will also be asked to provide some basic demographic information so the final written report can include a general description of the interview sample.

APPENDIX C

AGENCY CONSENTS

Request for Access to Agency Records for Research Purposes

As per Section 76 (18) of the Child and Family Services Act, and further to my original research request (a copy of which is attached). I am requesting permission to have access to Child and Family Services records within Winnipeg Child and Family Services East Area and Winnipeg Child and Family Services Northwest, Southwest and Central areas for the purposes of research. I have examined a number of files of adoptive applicants / permanent wards who were involved in adoption disruptions and I would now like to be able to examine a "control "group of families/ children who shared similar characteristics but were involved in adoptions that have been legalized as a comparison in order to try and determine what factors appear to be significant and to look at implications for practice.

Sandra Mendell , B.S.W.
Winnipeg Child Family Services East Area

RECOMMENDED :

David C. Waters
Area Director

Date

APPROVED :

Keith Cooper
Chief Executive Officer

Date

APPLICATION TO RESEARCH RECORDS

THE CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES ACT

TO: Phil Goodman, Executive Director
Child Welfare and Family Support
Room 201 - 114 Garry Street
Winnipeg, MB
R3C 4V5

1. I/we, __SANDRA Mr N P r i s__ and __Harvy Frankel__ .

applicants, hereby apply to access the records listed below in order to conduct

bone fide research for the purpose of __an MSW degree. The focus of the research__

__is on adoption descriptions and the research would involve an examination__

__of CFS records from 1990 to the present of both adoption applicants and__

__permanent wards who were involved in adoption disruptions.__

Title	References

2. I/We undertake not to disclose or publish the contents of any record or part thereof which could reasonably be expected to identify the subject of the record or any other person who is identified in the record.

3. I/We understand that access will be granted to the records listed above for the stated purpose of the project only and for the duration of the project or up to one year from the date of the approval of this application, whichever date comes first:

_____   _____
Date   Applicant

_____   _____
Date   Applicant

APPROVAL OF APPLICATION

I, Phil Goodman, Director of Child and Family Services, do hereby approve the application

by ___Sandra Mendell___ and ___Harvy Frankel___ to access the files listed in this application and in accordance with the terms and conditions set forth in this application.

JUL 02 1996
_____   _____
Date Approved   Director of Child and Family Services

Manitoba

Family Services	Child and Family Support	2nd Floor – Suite 201 114 Garry Street Winnipeg MB R3C 4V5 CANADA

(204) 945-6964
FAX: (204) 945-6717

May 27, 1997

Ms. Sandra Mendell
Winnipeg Child and Family Services - East Area
222 Provencher Boulevard
Winnipeg MB R2H 0G5

Dear Ms. Mendell:

Re: Extension of Approval to Access Records

I have received your request for an extension of my approval dated July 2, 1996, to access records for research purposes.

I hereby authorize you to continue accessing records identified in your original application for a further period ending on May 1, 1998. I understand from Mr. Ken Cairnie that you need the additional time to complete your study.

Good luck in your endeavour. I look forward to learning about your findings.

Yours truly,

Phil Goodman
Executive Director

KC/js

WPC\KC\EXTENSIO LET

RECEIVED

MAY 30 1997

Winnipeg Child & Family
Services - East

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

<u>ADOPTION DISRUPTION STUDY</u>

You are being asked to participate in a study about adoption disruption. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview guided by the attached areas of discussion.

This study is being conducted as part of an M.S.W. thesis requirement under the auspices of the Faculty of Social Work. It has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty and by my thesis committee. The principal investigator is Sandra Mendell 944-4016. The thesis advisor is Dr. Harvy Frankel, Faculty, School of Social Work, 474-8378.

The aim of this study is to develop an understanding of why some adoption situations disrupt, and the implications for practice on adoption placements. The study will be limited to an examination of disruption situations that occurred between the years of 1990-1996. Data will be collected from two main sources, case file information and interviews with social workers who have been involved in disruption situations. Consent for the purpose of research have been obtained from the Director of Child and Family Service as per section 76 (18) of the Child and Family Services Act.

The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of the factors and processes involved in adoption disruptions.

Before you make a decision about participating, we want to be sure that you fully understand your rights as a potential participant.

You should be aware:

<u>Participation on this study is completely voluntary.</u> It is up to you to decide whether or not you want to take part in the study.

<u>You do not have to answer every question.</u> If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you decide to participate and encounter questions or areas of discussion that you would rather not answer, I will respect your wishes. Of course, I would appreciate it if you could respond to all of the questions so that my information is more complete. Your response is also not limited to

the question guide and you are free to add any information that you feel is relevant or important to this area of study.

As noted, the aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of adoption disruptions. The intention of this study is to be as objective as possible and not make judgements about workers' practices or children or adoptive families. The question areas for discussion are designed to help provide a context for each situation so that the individual stories can be understood.

A discussion of disruption situations runs the risks that participants may be asked to recall situations that were emotionally or professionally difficult. In the event that this should occur, participants will be offered information on referrals to appropriate resources.

Your responses will be kept completely confidential

Participants will be asked if they are willing to have their interviews audio-taped. This method of interviewing will be used because it will provide an accurate record of the questions and responses. If participants are uncomfortable with this situation, notes will be taken during the interview.

Your interview responses will be identified by a number and will not contain your name or other identifying information. If requested, participants can have a copy of their transcripts. Tapes will be erased after the completion of this study. All interview responses and other collected data will be kept on a secure locked setting. Staff from Winnipeg Child and Family Services will not have access to the information you provide, except in the form of the final written thesis.

While it is unlikely, it may be possible for a person within to Child Welfare system to determine or guess the identify of an interview participant.

Reports of the research will not include any identifying information. Details that could be considered identifying will be masked in the thesis report. The investigator is legally and ethically bound to maintain total confidentiality.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating. If you have any questions, please feel free to discuss them with either myself or Dr. Frankel before signing the form.

A summary of the results will be made available to interested participants, if requested, at the completion of the study.

I have read and understand the above. I have also had an opportunity to explore any concerns with one of the investigators. I have also had an opportunity to receive clarification on any item that I did not understand. I feel I am in a position to make a decision regarding my participation and have decided to participate in the study.

A copy of this agreement has been provided to me

_____   _____   _____
Name (print)   Signature   Date

Table 3.1

SELECTED FACTORS OF CHILDREN
INVOLVED IN DISRUPTED ADOPTIONS

Age	N=11
Under 2	2
2-4	3
5-11	6

Gender	
Female	5
Male	6

Ethnic/Racial Background	
Caucasian/European	8
Aboriginal	2
other/mixed	2

Number of Previous Placements	
1	2
2	1
3	5
4	0
5	2

Table 3.2

SPECIAL NEEDS AN/OR BEHAVIOURS IN
CHILDREN KNOWN PRIOR TO ADOPTION PLACEMENT

Developmental Delays
Delays in cognitive skills
Delays in language skills
Functioning at border line level

Medical Needs
Medical condition requiring medication

Difficult Behaviours
Physically aggressive/abusive
Disruptive behaviours
Manipulative
Difficult to manage/oppositional

Needs/Behaviours Related to Family of Origin
Disruption of attachment
History of neglectful/inadequate parenting
Unable to address feelings of loss
Possible sexual abuse history
At risk for developmental delay/behavioral difficulties
Family history of substance abuse
Potential for hyperactive behaviours

Social Functioning
Poor social interaction
Emotional maturity below chronological age
Immature coping strategies
Unwilling/unable to trust

Behaviour Related to Abuse
Sexualized behaviours

Involvement With Professional Services
Play therapist/psychologist involvement
Speech/language services
Child Development Clinic involvement

Table 4.3

THEMES AND CATEGORIES FROM
WRITTEN RECORDS

MAJOR THEME: UNDERSTANDING ADOPTION DISRUPTION

SUB THEME: MAKING THE DECISION TO ADOPT

   1)   Motivation

SUB THEME: PRE-PLACEMENT

   1) Family's preparation and understanding of adjustment issues
   2) Children's readiness for adoption placement

SUB THEME: "HONEYMOON" PHASE

   1) Children's initial post placement responses
   2) Family's adjustments

MAJOR THEME: CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR ISSUES

   1) Testing behaviour

MAJOR THEME: FAMILY FUNCTIONING

   1) Family responses to behaviour
   2) Impact on family

MAJOR THEME: ROLE OF ADOPTIVE MOTHER/FATHER

SUB THEME: SIBLING PLACEMENT

MAJOR THEME: MAKING THE DECISION TO DISRUPT

SUB THEME: UNFILLED EXPECTATIONS

   1) Inability to change the situation

SUB THEME: 1) Need for support

SUB THEME: 1) Issues related to extended family adoptions

SUB THEME: FAMILY OF ORIGIN ISSUES

Table 3.4

THEMES AND CATEGORIES FROM
SOCIAL WORKER INTERVIEWS

MAJOR THEME: UNDERSTANDING ADOPTION DISRUPTION

CATEGORY: MOTIVATION

SUB THEME: PREPARATION FOR PLACEMENT

1) Educating adoptive parents
2) Understanding of adoption adjustment issues

POST SUB-PLACEMENT THEME

1) Acknowledgement of honeymoon phase

MOJOR THEME: FAMILY FUNCTIONING

1) Family's responses (to behaviour)
2) Role in preparing adoptive mother
3) Adoptive father issues

SUB THEME: SIBLING PLACEMENTS

1) Identifying sibling needs

MAJOR THEME: MAKING THE DECISION TO DISRUPT

SUB THEME:

1) Loss of hope
2) Support
3) Acceptance

SUB THEME: EXTENDED FAMILY ISSUES

SUB THEME: FAMILY OF ORIGIN ISSUES

MAJOR THEME: ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS

1) Understanding of adoption issues
2) Deciding on an adoption plan

IMPACT OF DISRUPTION

1) Personal
2) Professional

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IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA-3)

150mm

6"
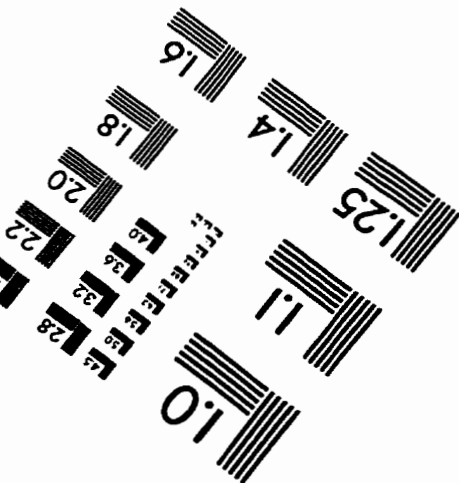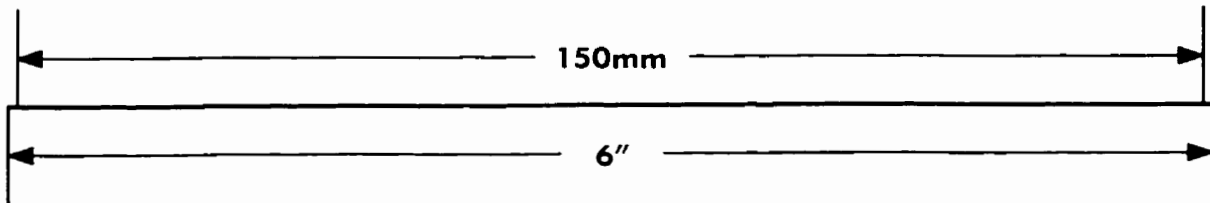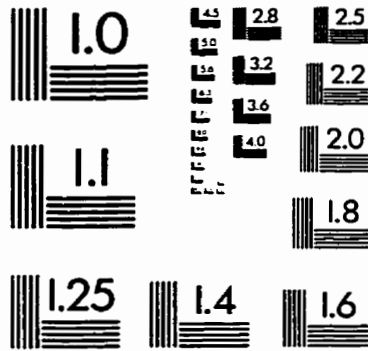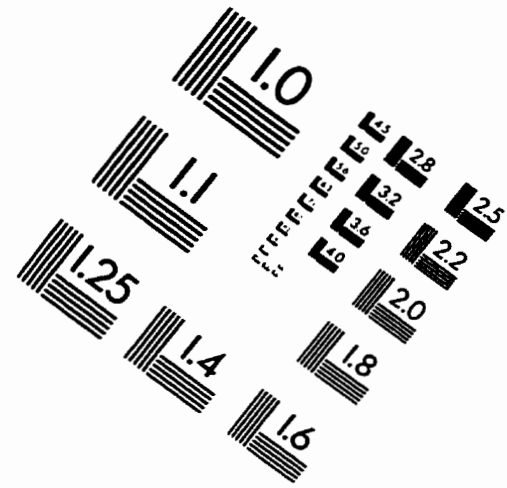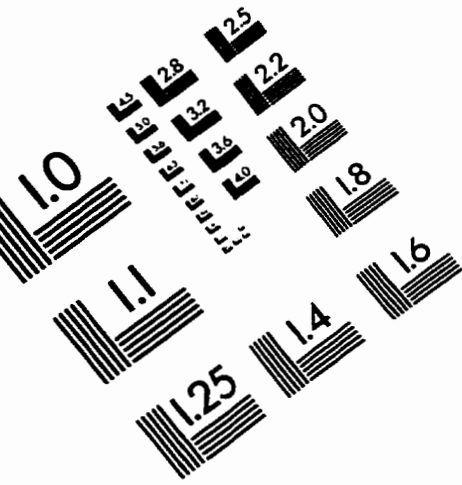
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