Research on Open Adoption

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In 2012 ..

- Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute Published the Executive Summary "OPENNESS IN ADOPTION: FROM SECRECY AND STIGMA TO KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTIONS - Authors: Deborah H. Siegel, Ph.D. and Susan Livingston Smith, LCSW

- The results summarized survey findings from 100 infant adoption programs in the US regarding their practice surrounding openness.

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EVAN B. DONALDSON
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Openness in Adoption

**From Secrecy and Stigma
to Knowledge and Connections**

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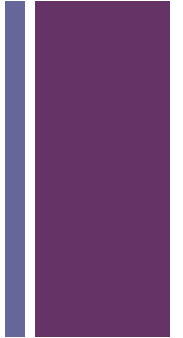
Current Adoption Statistics

"Closed" infant adoptions have shrunk to a tiny minority (about 5 percent), with 40 percent "mediated" and 55 percent "open." In addition, 95 percent of agencies now offer open adoptions.

Collectively, research demonstrates how openness benefits all three members of the triad.

ADOPTEES

- Youth in open adoptions have a better understanding of the meaning of adoption and have more open communication about adoption with their adoptive parents

- Adolescents with ongoing contact are more satisfied with their level of openness than are those without contact, and they identify the following benefits:
  - Coming to terms with the reasons for their adoption
  - Physical touchstones to identify where personal traits came from
  - Information that aids in identity formation
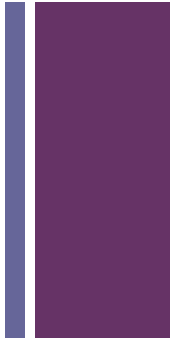 - Positive feelings toward birthmother

BIRTHMOTHERS

- Women who have placed their infants for adoption and then have ongoing contact with their children report less grief, regret and worry, as well as more peace of mind than do those who do not have contact.

ADOPTIVE PARENTS

- Adoptive parents, like most participants in open adoptions, report positive experiences;

- More openness is also associated with greater satisfaction with the adoption process.

- Adoptive parents as a group report positive experiences with open adoptions and high levels of comfort with contact. For them, greater openness is linked with reduced fear of and greater empathy toward birthparents, more open communication with their children about adoption, and other benefits in their relationships with their adopted children.

Longitudinal studies on the effects of open adoption:

Minnesota/Texas Adoption Research Project (MTARP)
Deborah Siegel's research: Openness from the adoptive parents' perspective

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# Minnesota/Texas Adoption Research Project (MTARP)

- 35 adoption agencies that facilitated voluntary infant adoptions with all three levels of openness participated in the study.

- Each agency stratified their total population so that the researchers could randomly select a representative sample of families for each level of openness.

- The final sample included 190 adoptive parents, 171 adopted children and 169 birthmothers. The sample was overwhelmingly, white, protestant, and middle or upper class, from 23 states representing all regions of the United States. It included representative samples of families in open, semi-open, and closed adoptions.

The first wave of research, when the children were between the ages of 4 and 12, with the majority between the ages 5 ½ and 8 ½ years, found that:

- There was no relationship found between adoption openness and self-esteem, either positively or negatively.

- Children's understanding of adoption increased as they reported having more information about their birthparents.

- Children whose adoptive and birthparents had collaborative relationships were doing better on ratings of psychosocial adjustment.
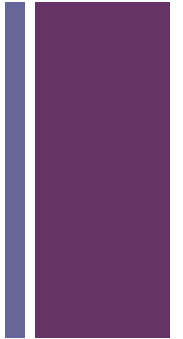
During the second wave of research, the children were ages 11-21 years, with most between 12 ½ and 15 ½ years. The data showed that:

- Adopted adolescents and adoptive parents who had contact with their birthmothers were the most satisfied of all the groups with the level of contact.

- Those with no contact were the least satisfied.

- None of the adoptees who had contact with their birth mothers felt any fear, hatred, surprise, anger, or confusion about who their parents were.

- Adolescents in open adoptions reported significantly lower levels of externalizing behaviors than those in closed adoptions.

Deborah Siegel's Research

Focus: Openness From The Adoptive Parents' Perspective

- 21 sets of adoptive parents were interviewed in three waves. The sample was composed almost entirely of white, middle to upper middle class, heterosexual, two parent families who adopted white children.

- In the first wave of the study, when the children were under a year, the researcher found that adoptive parents were overwhelmingly and strikingly positive about open adoption, often because they believed it was in the best interest of their child.

- This trend continued in the second wave of the study when the children where six and seven years old. Strikingly, no adoptive parents indicated they wished they had less openness. Any wish for a change in openness was for more contact, not less. Again, parents believed that openness was in the best interest of their child.

Focus: Openness From The Adoptive Parents' Perspective (continued)

- In the third wave when the children were 14 and 15 years old, adoptive parents were explicit in how they believed openness benefitted their children. All of the adoptive parents saw openness as helping their child deal with identity issues, and none felt that openness exacerbated the issues of adolescence. All of the adoptive parents expressed positive feelings about open adoption.

- Finally, adoptive parents even felt positively about contact with birthparents who had mental health or substance abuse problems, noting that birthparents did not engage in threatening behaviors during contact, and that the benefits of contact were still important for their adolescent.

*Note: No children had run away to live with their birth family.

THANK YOU!

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