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EDITORIAL

In children's best interests, what is the maximum age difference to adopt? 

The ISS/IRC study on the age of prospective adoptive parents has been brought up to date. A sizeable number of States impose a minimum age but few of them fix a maximum age.

The study on the legal required age conditions for prospective adoptive parents prepared in 2001 by the ISS/IRC has just been brought up to date thanks to information received from European Central Authorities. It is available on the website of the ISS at the following address: www.iss-ssi.org/Resource_Centre/Tronc_DI/documents/AgePAPs.pdf. It will be kept up to date on a regular basis, depending upon new data or possible corrections that we receive.

That being the case, the file shows that most legislation in countries of origin and receiving countries imposes a minimum age (between 18 and 35 years of age) for prospective adoptive parents. After progressively falling during the 20th century, this age limit has become a compromise between the concern to identify, as far as possible, adoptive affiliation with biological affiliation and that of guaranteeing adopter maturity and stability. Moreover, several legal systems impose a minimum age difference between the adopter and the adoptee (between

14 and 21 years), with the aim of guaranteeing an age difference similar to what one would find in a biological family.

The interests of the adoptee are also the basis for the requirement of a maximum age limit for prospective adoptive parents, stipulated - much less frequently - by certain legislation (between 40 and 60). Furthermore, certain legal systems impose a maximum age difference between the adopter and the adoptee (between 40 and 50). Of course, the actual demographic evolution strives towards delaying the age of parenthood, including the age of biological parenthood. But according to Human Sciences specialists, adoption presupposes, in fact, specific adaptive capacities and psychological flexibility, which are presumed to decrease with age. Moreover, the child's development can suffer from too old a parental model or the early death of the adopters. Finally, the motivation of those who envisage adopting late in life need to be closely scrutinised because it might stem too widely from grounds such as the need for support or the fear of loneliness or death, through which the child could be "instrumentalised".

The need for a certain legislative flexibility

As far as a maximum age to adopt is concerned, a legislative flexibility may correspond to the best interests of certain children. Adoption by older but experienced parents, particularly within a large sibling group, can, for example, have advantages for the adoptee, and even represent his/her only chance for integration within a family, particularly if he/she is a child "with special needs" (older, sick or handicapped, siblings...).

Legal exceptions to these age ceilings could in any case be envisaged for the adoption of children with special needs, relative adoptions and adoption of a child by his/her foster family, on condition that the adoption by this older family specifically corresponds to the best interests of the child involved.

What is more, practice shows that certain legal provisions limiting the age of adopters encourage the adoption of children with special needs. We could quote in this regard the Italian law that imposes a maximum age difference of 45 years between the adopter and the adoptee. Thus, it

encourages older adopters to adopt "older" children. In this context, the Lithuanian Central Authority has referred to its successful placement, notably in Italy; of children over 8 years of age (see Bulletin 3/2005).

Evaluation in the interests of each child

However, the current problem is that of older and older prospective adoptive parents (up to the age of 60 and above) wishing to adopt very young children. Paradoxically, legislation is more specific about minimal age limits for adopters, than it is about maximum conditions. Therefore, some serious thinking about the legislation could be usefully developed on this theme. Certification by law of a maximum age difference could, thus, be of considerable value, not just as a legal but also a symbolic reminder.

More fundamentally, if the age of applicants and their age difference with the child are important factors, they must figure in the overall package of elements to be taken into consideration in assessing, case by case, the suitability of prospective adoptive parents to adopt a certain category of children and within that, of a particular child, depending upon his/her specific needs. Even if a particular prospective adoptive parent's age does fall within the legal bracket he/she could still be considered, by the pluridisciplinary team of professionals in charge of his/her assessment, unsuitable to adopt a child of the age he/she has chosen: with the help of professionals he/she will have to revert, should the occasion arise, to reconsidering the request.

Whatever age or other characteristics of the prospective adoptive parents, the assessment of their request should, in point of fact, always be made in the best interests of the child. The law and the different parties which are the pluridisciplinary teams of Central Authorities and of other social organisms in the countries of origin and receiving countries haven't they, among their main functions, to respond in priority to the children's needs and interest to draw a frame, and if necessary, limits, to the desires of the prospective adoptive parents in the assessment of their suitability and in their matching decisions?

The ISS/IRC team

New administrative assistant: The ISS/IRC is happy to welcome Chantal Lucas- de Montmollin, a new administrative assistant, who shares the administrative tasks with Liliana Almenarez. Our two colleagues are primarily responsible for the administrative support of the team, the dispatch of the Monthly Review and the extension of the beneficiaries' network.

Of Swiss nationality, Chantal was born in Lesotho. She is bilingual French/English while Liliana is bilingual Spanish/French. Chantal has worked for the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations and for the World Young Women's Christian Associations.

INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTS CONCERNING CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF THEIR FAMILY

2005 UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS: Interventions and proceedings on children without parental care

ISS took an active part in this 61st UN Commission on Human Rights which met from March 14th to April 22nd.

The 61st UN Commission on Human Rights (CHR) met in Geneva from March 14th to April 22nd 2005. The CHR is an international forum, composed of 53 Member States, whose purpose consists in developing standards and supervising country situations. It also provides an opportunity for various actors, such as governments, NGOs, and human rights defenders to voice their concerns

(www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/chr/index.htm).

There are several opportunities for addressing the rights of the child during the CHR. They are principally dealt with as a specific item of discussion and a resolution dedicated to them is adopted every year. Numerous side meetings and briefings on various child related issues are also organized, mostly by NGOs.

Children without parental care

ISS took an active part in this year's CHR. Together with UNICEF, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and partner NGOs, it supported the adoption by the CHR of a resolution item recommending the development of *international standards on children without parental care* (see Editorial of the Monthly Review 72-73). More particularly, ISS invited various Central Authorities to support this project in their respective countries and developed informal contacts with the Governments in charge of drafting the children's rights resolution. With the support of other NGOs, it also delivered

an oral statement during the plenary session of the CHR (available at ISS/IRC).

The proposal was also supported by the Governments of Australia, Canada and New Zealand. In a joint statement, these countries took the floor to express their "particular concern for children who are living without family support" and to "encourage the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to develop guidelines in consultation with States in this area for the consideration of [the] Commission".

On April 19th 2005, the CHR adopted its Resolution on the Rights of the Child by 52 votes to 1. *Under item 17 of the Resolution, it "recognises the need for guidelines for the protection and alternative care of children without parental care", thereby taking into account our proposal.* However, although the mention of this project is a positive outcome, the wording of the Resolution raises some concern. By simply "recognising the need for guidelines", the CHR does not recommend any process for their drafting nor commit itself to ensure any follow-up. As a consequence, it does not guarantee that the future guidelines will obtain sufficient formal international support – although by implication it does at least presage the Commission's favourable response in principle to a valid initiative to formulate such a text.

A follow-up is necessary

Therefore, it is of utmost importance that all actors concerned by this project keep supporting this process, and ISS commits itself to doing so,

with a view to making sure that States and relevant UN bodies take part in both the drafting and the adoption of the future standards. Only formal support by States and international bodies representative of the international community will

give sufficient political and legal value to this document, and thus make it really helpful for legislators, officials, practitioners, monitoring bodies and, by extension, the vulnerable children it seeks to address.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE: Recommendation REC (2005) 5 of the Committee of Ministers to the member states on the rights of children living in residential institutions (adopted on 16 March 2005)

While reaffirming the fundamental role of the family and the need to prevent the placement of children, this text compiles a set of standards with a view to the qualitative improvement of institutionalization and respect for the rights of children in residential care.

The Council of Europe Committee of Ministers (which comprises 46 western and eastern European countries), wished to propose to its members common "principles and quality standards", based in particular on the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It recommends that states adopt legislative and other measures "with a view to achieving full implementation of the rights of children living in residential institutions " and to enable the latter "to grow in dignity, in the best possible conditions, without being marginalised during their childhood or in adulthood".

A reminder of the basic principles

The recommendation recalls, first of all, the basic principle according to which "the family is the natural environment for the growth and well-being of the child", and that placement remains the exception and should be avoided wherever feasible by preventive measures. These consist of supporting children and parents by responding, in the best possible way to their specific needs.

However, if placement must take place, the views of the child on the matter should be heard, depending upon his/her age and maturity, including on the modalities and periodic review of the placement. The family should be involved to the extent possible in organizing and planning the placement. The decision and the implementation of the placement will take place without discrimination. The placement should not last longer than necessary and must be reviewed regularly, *with the primary objective of the child's successful social integration or re-integration as soon as possible.*

When the child can be reintegrated in his/her family of origin, an assessment of his/her needs and support for his/her reintegration in family and social life be made. If the child's return to the family cannot be considered, the placement measure should be continued or an alternative measure be decided upon, with a view to the child's most harmonious development possible.

Specific rights for children living in residential institutions

On the basis of the principles thus put forward, the Recommendation recognizes a set of specific rights for children in residential institutions. Amongst them, figure the right to be placed in a residential institution *"only to meet needs that have been established as imperative on the basis of a multidisciplinary assessment"* and the right to benefit from a periodic review of the placement, which opens the possibility of considering alternative solutions in consultation with the child (on this topic, see Documentation Bulletin n° 12 of June 2003 on the life project for the child and family planning).

Maintaining contacts with the family and avoiding the separation of siblings, wherever possible and in the interests of the child, also belong to the rights recognized for children in residential institutions. Respect for the non-discrimination principle materializes in the form of equal opportunities and the lack of discrimination against ethnic, religious, cultural, social and linguistic origins. *The privacy of children must be respected* in the institutions, which must, furthermore, provide living conditions that allow them to grow in dignity (the right to an identity, the right to good quality health care, the right to respect for the child's human dignity and physical integrity, the right to a non-violent upbringing,

"including protection against corporal punishment and all forms of abuse"). Finally, the continuity of their upbringing must be assured (the right to have access to all types of education, vocational guidance and training; and the right to be prepared for active and responsible citizens).

Children must be duly informed about children's rights and the rules of the residential institution in a child-friendly. They must be involved in decisions concerning their status or their living conditions and must have access to a person they trust and a competent body for confidential advice on their rights. *An "identifiable, impartial and independent" body must also be foreseen so that they may at any moment assert their fundamental rights.*

Guidelines and quality standards for residential care that respects the rights of the child

Out of concern for the application of the above-mentioned principles and rights, quality standards have been elaborated that privilege the choice of a placement which is as close as possible to the child's environment, in the form of small "family-style" living units. A quality placement will be one that gives priority to the child's physical and mental health as well as to his/her full, harmonious development, "essential conditions for the success of the care plan". *The adaptation of each care plan to the profile of the child concerned will also contribute to this success and will prepare him/her for living outside the institution in the future.*

To achieve such objectives, *the institutions have to ensure* ongoing contacts between children and the staff and the internal organization, based, amongst other things, on the quality and stability of living units and mixed living units (when it corresponds to the best interests of the child). The training, the mixed composition and the sufficient number of staff must also be guaranteed, particularly to "develop appropriate co-operation with the child's parents"; the multidisciplinary team work and supervision; the existence of codes of ethics; and the use of available resources centred upon the child.

Member states bear responsibility for envisaging and setting up systems for the accreditation and registration of all residential institutions, in conformity with "regulations and national minimum standards of care"; as well as an efficient system of monitoring and external control of their activities. Any infringement of the rights of children living in residential institution should be sanctioned.

Finally, the Recommendation recognizes *the important role that non-governmental organizations*, as well as religious organizations and other private bodies play concerning children living in residential institutions. It advocates the definition of this role by states, which should not be released from their own duties in this field.

Towards an institutionalization more in line with the rights of the child?

At a time when an important number of governments and associations involved in the protection of children are active- often rightly so – in support of deinstitutionalization, this Recommendation provides a complementary proposal for improving residential care conditions. By recognizing the specific rights of children living in residential institutions, *it takes account of the need to envisage placement in certain cases, but blends this with indispensable guarantees.*

It is appropriate, in fact, to take action against the serious infringements of the rights of the child uncovered in residential institutions of several members of the Council of Europe (physical and moral ill-treatment, absence of educational follow-up for the child as well as a regular review of his/her placement and the elaboration of a permanency planning, overcrowded institutions, the lack of individual attention, insufficient material and human resources, etc).

Of course, the document is a recommendation which is not legally binding upon member states. Nonetheless, it reflects their will for a common policy in a sensitive area of children's rights. These guidelines must constitute a welcome contribution to generalizing a model for residential institutions, which show greater respect for the rights and the best interests of the child, *a model which deserves to be expanded worldwide.* This is one of the objectives of the UNICEF-ISS project that aims at adopting International Standards for improving the protection of children without parental care: www.iss-ssi.org/Resource_Centre/Tronc_DI/unicefronc_di.html; see to above The Human Rights Commission.

References: Council of Europe, [https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=Rec\(2005\)5&Sector=secCM&Language=lanEnglish&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=Rec(2005)5&Sector=secCM&Language=lanEnglish&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75); see also Bulletins n° 44 and 49 on the Convention on personal relations concerning children, equally applicable to children in residential care.

PROTAGONISTS IN MATTER OF ADOPTION

Source : *Permanent Bureau of the Hague Conference* :

http://hcch.e-vision.nl/index_en.php?act=conventions.authorities&cid=69.

- **Australia:** This country has updated the particulars of the Central Authorities of the following federated States: Australian Capital Territory, Queensland, Tasmania and Victoria.
- **Luxembourg:** This country has updated the particulars of its Central Authority, its competent authorities and its accredited agencies.
- **Portugal :** This country has updated the particulars of its Central Authority and has authorised two foreign accredited agencies for the adoption of Portuguese children : one Danish (DanAdopt Adress) and another Swiss (Bras Kind Adress).

LEGISLATION

INDONESIA: new policy on children affected by natural disasters

The new policy promotes family -and community- based care and proposes solutions that can be applied to the children who were affected by the tsunami and are still in need of long-term protection.

Due to the humanitarian crisis in Indonesia (see Monthly Review 1/2005), the Ministry of Social Affairs of this country released, on February 11th 2005, a *Policy on Separated Children, Unaccompanied Children and Children left with One Parent in Emergency Situations* (available at ISS/IRC web page: www.iss-ssi.org/Resource_Centre/Tronc_DI/documents/IndonesiaTsunami.pdf); for a similar document by the Government of Sri Lanka, see Monthly Review 2/2005).

The situation in Indonesia, and particularly in the Aceh province, which was the region hardest hit by the tsunami, is still cause for concern. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, to date (April 13 2005), nearly 127,000 people from the province are confirmed dead while a further 37,000 are still missing. In addition, there are still about 500,000 displaced persons living either in camps or with host families. The International Alliance of Save the Children also established a list of 1,151 children deprived of their parents in Indonesia, in an effort to implement family reunification programs.

To face this situation, the Indonesian policy promotes family - and community - based care, as alternatives to institutional care. As introductory fundamental principles, it stipulates that:

- *every effort must be made to ensure that children are able to stay with their families and communities, and that*

- *the priority must at all times must to reunite unaccompanied or separated children with their parents or family/relatives.*

In order to achieve these goals, the policy establishes a *registration and tracing process*. If a child can not be reunited with his or her parents, a *long-term/permanent family care plan must be drawn up for each child*.

Family care

According to the policy, unaccompanied children, that is those who have been separated from both of their parents and are not being taken care of by any other relative or adult friend, must be placed *in the care of families from their own communities*, with particular attention to the need to place them with families who are known to them, such as friends and neighbours.

Families which host separated children (separated from their parents but cared for by family members or friends) *must be provided with the support they need in order to continue to provide care for the children for the duration of the emergency*. Such support includes food and shelter, material assistance (clothes, household utensils/goods, etc.), organizing activities that are capable of providing/increasing family income, reducing or eliminating school fees, providing free health services, psychosocial support and education, making referrals to specialists and establishing parental support groups.

Such support must also be provided for families where the child is left with only one of his/her parents following, for example, the death of the other parent.

Finally, the policy spells out that *adoption should preferably not be contemplated during the emergency*. All efforts must first be made to facilitate family reunification. Adoption may be envisaged only once those efforts have failed to bear fruit. In this case, priority should be given to adoption by relatives who are known to the children.

Residential care

Residential care, such as children's homes and boarding schools, is not advised during the emergency. Indeed, the policy warns that "institutionalization might only serve to reinforce and perpetuate the separation of the children involved from their parents, and make the registration and recording, the tracing and reunification more difficult instead of easier. In addition, parents might be tempted to place their children in such institutions in the mistaken belief that they would receive better services and support in an institutional setting". Therefore, *residential care should only be envisaged as a last resort, within the emergency zone, preferably in a family- style setting and on a temporary basis*, in other words until the child can be

reunited with his/her parents or placed in community-based family care.

Best interests of each child

The new Indonesian policy is particularly interesting since it illustrates the principle that child protection and support interventions should not be perceived for their specificity alone, but should rather be assessed globally. International law foresees an order of priorities among the different measures applicable to this type of situation. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption envisage that *domestic family solutions must be given preference over other forms of care*. However, this order of priorities does not mean that protective measures for children deprived of their parents should be decided in the abstract in absolute fashion. On the contrary, each individual case should be studied on its own merits, with a view to promoting the solution which most corresponds to the best interests of that specific child (see also Editorial of Monthly Review 3/2005).

Sources: International Committee of the Red Cross, www.icrc.org; International Alliance of Save the Children, www.savethechildren.net/alliance; UNICEF-Banda Aceh, www.unicef.org; Save the Children-UK, www.savethechildren.org.uk.

RIGHTS OF CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF THEIR FAMILY

AMERICAS: ISS Regional Consultation on Children in Migration

Many children moving across frontiers are deprived of parental care.

In March 2004, the International Social Service (ISS) – United States of America Branch and the ISS Guatemala Correspondent organized a *Regional Consultation on "Children without Parental Protection in the Americas: Children in Migration"* in Antigua (Guatemala).

This Consultation brought together representatives from ISS General Secretariat, ISS-Canada, ISS-USA and ISS Correspondents from Latin America and Spain. Representatives from local universities, NGOs, UNICEF and the International Organization on Migration were also present. Attendance by 30 ISS Latin American and Caribbean correspondents was possible

through a grant from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) Conference Secretariat.

Vulnerability of migrant children to rights violations

The Consultation focused on children in migration in the Americas. Many of them move across frontiers without their parents or their primary caregiver. As a result, *they are doubly jeopardized: as - often undocumented - foreigners and as children deprived of their family*.

Among the themes addressed by the consultation were: the vulnerability of these children to rights violations; the failure of implementation of the existing international laws

on this matter due to absence of political and civic will; the need for advocacy and training of all professionals working with children without parental protection and the absence of coordination between them; trafficking and worse forms of child labour; and the lack of national and regional data on the numbers of children in migration.

The lack of national and international standards in this field was also addressed by the Consultation (for more information about the UNICEF/ISS call for international standards relating to children deprived of parental care: www.iss-ssi.org/Resource_Centre/Tronc_DI/documents/UNICEFISSProjectACall.pdf; see also above, the article on the Commission on Human Rights).

Outcomes of the Consultation

The Regional Consultation afforded attendees an opportunity to expand their knowledge about

programs and projects that help alleviate the problems associated with migration and to begin a planning process (at national and Latin-American level) for collaborative efforts dealing with children in migration and without familial protection. This consultation was also an opportunity for the participants to strengthen their knowledge of, and collaborative abilities within, the ISS 140-countries network (for more information about ISS network see: www.iss-ssi.org/About_ISS/about_iss.html).

A final document, including a resume of debates and recommendations printed by ISS-USA will be available in summer 2005.

For more information, please contact: Frances G. Connell, Coordinator of Training and Technical Assistance, ISS-USA, 207 E. Redwood Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21202; tel.: +1-443-451-1208, Fax: +1-443-451-1230, fconnell@iss-usa.org, www.iss-usa.org.

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESSOURCES

DOSSIER: ISS/IRC RESEARCH ON THE ADAPTATION OF ADOPTED CHILDREN

A recent study scrutinizes the results of inter-country adoption in Quebec from 1985 to 2002

On average, adopted children have no more difficulty than others in developing either a strong attachment or more problems in schooling. If in general they display more behavioural problems than native Quebec children, some of them turn out better than the latter.

How do children born abroad and adopted in Quebec adapt socially and in their schooling? This is the question explored by the study on "Inter-country adoption in Quebec from 1985 to 2002: Social adjustment in children of international origin adopted by Quebec families" lead by a team of children' development specialists directed by Rejean Tessier, full professor at the Laval University School of Psychology, with the support of the Quebec Central Authority. Based on a sample of 1333 children born abroad (in 10 different countries or regions) and who arrived in the Canadian province between 1985 and 2002, *the research analyses the adaptation of these children in terms of five main parameters: the child's age at the time of adoption, his/her sex, country of*

origin, age at the time of the study and the time passed since the adoption.

The study shows that, on average, *children aged less than six at the time of the study managed to develop an attachment to their parents as well as the native Quebec children* (there are no comparative data for older children). More specifically, *the younger the children were at the time of their arrival, the stronger the relationship they developed* (that is to say, stable and significant). The time spent in a risk situation - the living environment during the pre-adoptive period being considered such by the author - would, therefore, have more influence on the security of the attachment than would the quality (generally good) of the child's adoptive environment. However, it is wise to avoid speaking about insecure attachment until at least a year after the adoption, the period for building a

relationship. Furthermore, for all age groups in adoption, *the boys have more difficulty in developing a solid relationship*. Why? The question remains unanswered in the study.

Differences between boys and girls

The child's age and sex also play their part in the socialisation of the adopted children. As with attachment, *a short period of exposure to the pre-adoptive environment seems to reduce the incidence of behavioural problems*, whether they are internalising problems (anxiety problems, affective disorders) or externalising problems (problems of inattention and hyperactivity). In any case, *girls and boys are not in the same boat*. The former seem, in fact, to be better protected by an early adoption than their male counterparts, who are protected by such a measure only in the case of externalising troubles. These, in fact, affect boys more, which is also the case among children in Quebec who are not adopted.

By the same token, *the study shows that adopted children suffer, on average, more than others from behavioural problems and that the difference with their counterparts not adopted increases with age, particularly for boys*. Thus, these results suggest, in particular, that long term social adaptation is more difficult for them than for the girls. But these data must be interpreted cautiously, because they can result from variations in children's conditions of origin depending upon the time when they were adopted. Thus, certain years are associated with more troubles than others, like the years 1988 and 1989: 15% of children adopted during this period, in fact, suffer from various difficulties, as compared with only 7 to 8% of those adopted since 1996. The latter figures correspond with the usual norms in North America, and are also the same as those found for the children in Quebec who were not adopted.

The study sparks off a debate

At the schooling level, *the percentage of adopted children who fall behind (repeating a school year/years) is comparable with that for other children in Québec*. In this regard, the child's origin seems to represent a variable that cannot be ignored. According to the study,

children coming from Russia, Romania and from Mexico have more schooling problems than the others. The little tots from Asia, on the other hand, have fewer problems than small children from Quebec.

In short, adopted children, on average, have no more difficulty than others in developing secure attachment or with schooling problems. And if they display, in general, more behavioural problems than young native Canadians, some of them have less behavioural disorders than the latter. Researchers conclude from this that *adopted children do not constitute a clinical population in need of massive care and intervention to enhance the quality of their attachment relationships*. However, they do not deny the need to develop support services and propose a number of solutions: equipping parents who adopt in a more "at risk" situation, as in certain countries or at certain ages; helping them to adjust their expectations and to think of adoption as a long-term project; getting to know better the characteristics of the child's environment of origin and to inform the parents about it; organising rapid post-adoption follow-up adapted to the age at the time of adoption, to child's sex and to the period of time elapsed since the adoption; organising long-term post-adoption follow-up for evolving clinical situations.

The study by Professor Tessier and his team has sparked off a lively debate in Quebec. Some read into it that adopted children adapt well and do not have to be seen as children "at risk". On the other hand, others in particular express the fear that the conclusions of the study might jeopardize the provision of better reception services and care (post-adoption services) for adopted children, and underline the inevitable consequences of the ordeal of abandonment.

Sources: "Inter-country adoption in Quebec from 1985 to 2002: Social adjustment in children of international origin adopted by Quebec families", under the direction of Rejean Tessier. Available in French on the website of the Quebec Central Authority at the address:

http://www.adoption.gouv.qc.ca/fr/publications/colloques/20040505_tessier.pdf

Opposing articles on the website of the Canadian daily, Le Devoir (The Duty) (www.ledevoir.com), and on website www.espace-adoption.ch.

A Swedish compilation of research on adoptees and their life after adoption

The document summarizes and analyses more than 80 studies carried out by scientists in various Western countries. It notes, particularly, that adoptees are overrepresented in clinical groups.

The life of adopted children, their integration and possible social or specific behavioural problems are also in the focus of Swedish research on inter-country adoption entitled "Compilation of research on adoptees and their life after adoption". It was carried out in 2003 by Marianne Cederblad, Emeritus Professor of child psychiatry at Lund University, who summarizes and analyses the findings of more than 80 studies made by scientists in various Western countries.

The first finding: scientific literature shows almost unanimously that adoptees are overrepresented in clinical groups. They are reportedly even two to three times more numerous in suffering from psychiatric, relational or schooling problems, even antisocial behaviour. The picture painted by the Swedish study seems therefore more sombre than that of the Quebecker, Rejean Tessier (read above), with reservation that samplings of the different studies are probably not all comparable. It should, however, be taken with a pinch of salt.

Some studies included in this review did not, in fact, find any clear difference between adoptees and other children. Yet other research has shown that there are differences, but are due to a very small proportion of adopted children confronted with severe problems. The other adoptees develop without great difficulty. Nonetheless, according to most authors, adopted children suffer from externalising problems, especially boys. Depression and suicidal thoughts also taunt some of them, especially girls.

The adopted child's past has an impact on his/her adaptation

The importance of the age factor of children at the time of adoption is stressed as much in the Swedish document as in that of the Quebecker. A great many of the studies taken into consideration by the former show, in fact, that the older the child is at the time of adoption, the greater the risk that he/she will develop psychological or social problems. *In any case, more than age, it is supposedly the type of experience that the child has lived through in his/her country or family of origin, as well as the period during which he/she was exposed to it,*

that essentially plays the major role. It has, thus, been shown that mistreatment, malnutrition, negligence and emotional and intellectual deprivation impact the adaptation of children even several years after their adoption. In the same spirit, children who have spent long periods in an institution have more problems in developing a secure attachment. Information about the child's past, however, is often completely insufficient.

Among other topics that the Swedish research brings to light, that of schooling shows that *adopted children manage their studies, on average, as well as other children*, but less well than children of the same social class - upper - to which their adoptive parents usually belong. They are, on average, more numerous in benefiting from special courses. Their problems stem, essentially, from language difficulties, hyperactivity and lack of attention.

Professionals should be better trained

At the close of their research, the Swedish specialists conclude especially that *professionals should be better trained* to respond to specific problems of adoption, whether it is the social workers, paediatricians or psychiatrists. Adoptive parents should also be better informed. From this point of view, Marianne Cederblad considers that *discussion groups before adoption should be made obligatory*. Questions relating to the adoption of older children should be specifically discussed.

The Swedish specialists point out, in addition, *the weaknesses of the work that has been done*, particularly the fact that little of it considers adoptees as a heterogeneous group. They highlight also a lack of large-scale studies, the small amount of research into adoptees when they become young adults, or even the lack of comparisons between inter-ethnic adoptions and adoptions within the same ethnic group. The untouched field of investigation is, therefore, vast.

Sources: Compilation of research into adoptees and their life after adoption, Marianne Cederblad. Available on the website of the Swedish Central Authority: www.mia.adopt.se.

In its next Bulletin, the ISS/IRC will take this topic further by means of a general overview of other published work, and a critical appraisal of the ethical and practical consequences of this type of research.

FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES, SEMINARS SYMPOSIA AND COURSES 

- **United States of America:** 14th International Foster Care Organisation (IFCO) Biennial Conference “To Honor the Child (from Birth through Independence)”, Madison, Wisconsin, August 7-13, 2005. The conference will focus on foster care, adoption, permanence, reunification and other related topics. A Youth Conference for youth-in and out-of-care will be held concurrently with the adult conference. *Contact:* Cora E. White, IFCO-2005 Conference Secretary; P.O. Box 2534, Madison, WI 53701-2534; tel./fax: 1-608-274-9111, ifco2005@fostering.us, www.fostering.us/ifco2005.
- **Norway:** International Conference “Childhoods 2005: Children and Youth in Emerging and Transforming Societies”, University of Oslo, June 29-3 July 2005. The aim of the conference is to contribute to developing a truly interdisciplinary child and youth research field, where it is possible both to apply approaches of a single discipline and to integrate insights, perspectives and methods from different disciplines. The conference proposes the traditional outline of a scientific conference including plenary assemblies, sessions and workshops. Individual participants, papers and posters are welcome. Among the wide range of topics to be discussed, we wish to underline two specific themes: 1) “Family Policy, Gender and Early Childhood” which focuses on family changes and policy reforms, taking the ongoing redesign of childhood, motherhood and fatherhood as main cases; 2) “Caring for Separated Children” which aims at developing “best practices”. The Conference is open to researchers from the widest possible variety of disciplines such as sociology, political science, pedagogy, psychology, anthropology, ethnology, cultural geographies, economics, criminology, law, history, media studies, gender studies, medicine, literature, and cultural studies and from different geographical, social and cultural backgrounds. *Contact:* Conference Coordinator Randi Wærdahl; Faculty of Education, University of Oslo; P.O.Box 1161, 0318 Oslo; tel.: 47 22 85 82 78, fax: 47 22 85 82 41, childhoods@uv.uio.no, <http://childhoods2005.uio.no/index.htm>.

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