

What is the history of open adoption in the United States?

The origin of statutory requirements in the early 20th century, that adoption be confidential and that birth certificates and adoption records be sealed, began with **early laws** such as the Minnesota Act of 1917. By the **early 1950s** almost every state had amended its adoption statutes to create complete anonymity for the birth parents. Beginning in 1974, research demonstrates that some of the psychological problems observed in adolescent and adult adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents appeared to be **directly related** to the secrecy, anonymity, and sealed records of adoption. Open adoption became **increasingly common** in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s as research and practice began to promote the principles of open adoption. (*Baran and Pannor, 1993*)

What research has been conducted on triad members in open adoptions?

- Research to date indicates that birthmothers commonly view open adoption **positively**. (*Berry, 1993*)
- In Belba's 1987 study, measuring minimum, moderate, and maximum contact with birthmothers of 12 adoptive couples, adoptive parents reported that they **appreciated** having contact with birthmothers to answer questions as they arose. (*Berry, 1993*)
- Not all outcomes, however, have been positive. In a 1990 mailed survey of 59 relinquishing birthmothers, 18 in open adoption and 41 in confidential adoptions, Blanton and Deschner found that birthmothers in open adoptions were **significantly more troubled** than those in closed adoptions in the areas of social isolation, sleep complaints, physical symptoms, despair and dependency. ("Openness" was defined as meeting at placement.) (*Berry, 1993*)
- In a 1993 study, Gross interviewed 32 adoptive parents and 16 birthmothers, and surveyed 75 adoptive parents from a private agency. Gross found that **72%** of adoptive parents were "**very satisfied**" with contact with birth mothers, **19%** were "**basically satisfied**" but had some reservations; **2** families were **dissatisfied** and had ceased contact. **Fifteen** of the sixteen birthmothers were **satisfied** with contact. In the questionnaire sample, a relationship was found between more frequent contact and a higher degree of satisfaction with the placement. (*Grotevant and McRoy, 1998*)

The following statistics are based on the Grotevant and McRoy longitudinal study on open adoption. Between 1987-1992, information was collected from 190 adoptive families and 169 birthmothers experiencing varying levels of openness in their adoptions.

The data from the study, a snapshot of families taken 4 to 12 years after the adoptive placement, revealed:

- Fears that birth parents would attempt to reclaim their children or otherwise intrude on adoptive families' lives are **not apparent** in families with fully disclosed adoptions.
- Openness **does not interfere** with adoptive parents' emerging sense of entitlement to parenthood.
- Having a fully disclosed adoption **does not guarantee** successful grief resolution, as is evidenced by the broad range of grief resolution ratings among birthmothers across all adoption arrangements in this study.

*In the same study, thirty-one adoption agencies were also interviewed on their practice toward the range of openness. The agencies were measured in two time intervals: **Time 1** was between 1987 and 1989 and **Time 2** was 1993.*

- Only 11 of the original 31 agencies (**35%**) offered **fully disclosed** adoption options as part of their standard practice at Time 1. Four to five years later, 22 of the remaining 29 agencies (**76%**) offered full disclosed adoptions.
- By 1993, **2/3** of the agencies offered the continuum of openness in adoption, from confidential to fully disclosed. In 1987, most agencies offered only confidential and mediated adoptions.
- **2/3** of the fully disclosed adoptions in this sample **did not start** as fully disclosed: 5% began as mediated and 14% began as confidential.

(Grotevant and McRoy, 1998)

Bibliography

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