



House of Commons  
House of Lords

Joint Committee on Human  
Rights

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# The Violation of Family Life: Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women 1949–1976

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Third Report of Session 2022–23

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

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## Joint Committee on Human Rights

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The Joint Committee has a maximum of six Members appointed by each House, of whom the quorum for any formal proceedings is two from each House.

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## Summary

During the period 1949–1976, thousands of children of unmarried women were adopted even though their mothers did not want to let them go. Many of those affected, both mothers and children, have faced life-long suffering as a consequence of this separation. This inquiry has sought to consider whether the treatment of these women and children respected the right to family life, as we understand it today, and how they were affected by the severing of that crucial bond between mother and child. Our inquiry covers the period from 1949, when the Adoption Act 1949 was passed, up until 1976 when the Adoption Act 1976 came into force. It covers England and Wales, as there are separate inquiries in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The experiences of the mothers and their children are at the centre of this inquiry. They did not, as is often said, give their children away. Unmarried women who found themselves pregnant during this period faced secrecy and shame from the earliest stages. Those who would have seized the chance to keep their sons and daughters with them and brought them up themselves did not have the opportunity to do so. Societal and familial pressures, and the absence of support contributed to thousands of children being taken from loving mothers and placed for adoption.

We would like to thank those mothers and their children for sharing their stories and for their bravery for recounting what remains painful. There are thousands more whose stories we did not hear. We hope the recommendations in this report will, however, go some way towards positive change for all those affected.

Our estimate is that around 185,000 babies of unmarried mothers were adopted in England and Wales during this period though it is difficult to establish an exact figure. Each of those adopted people and their mothers have their own, individual stories, and we could not have undertaken this inquiry without the written and oral evidence we received from those affected.

Many young women were sent away from home to conceal their pregnancy, and many spent their final weeks of pregnancy and weeks after the birth in mother and baby homes. Some of our witnesses recounted the abuse they faced whilst away from home. We were struck by descriptions of the ways in which the women were being “punished” for what was seen as a transgression. There was an overwhelming feeling amongst the mothers we heard from that their treatment during and after giving birth was deliberate punishment for their pregnancy while unmarried.

We also heard about the continuing impact of the adoption of their baby on the mothers with many recounting ongoing mental health difficulties, others telling us the impacts on their family lives for decades. As one mother told us, “53 years later and here I am, a wreck because of what happened to me and my daughter.”<sup>1</sup> The mothers we heard from were subjected to cruelty because they were considered to have transgressed. Their treatment stands as an important reminder that human rights should be protected for all, including those who at any particular time are regarded as transgressors.

As well as the failure to acknowledge the reality of what was done to these mothers and their children, there continues to be a lack of adequate support from Government. Therapy is not sufficiently accessible and in practice Ofsted's requirement that counsellors must register to provide adoption support services acts as a restriction on the availability of counsellors. The Government should consider as a matter of urgency how to make sure that the necessary regulations to protect standards do not prevent mothers and adopted children getting the support they need. We think it is necessary for the Government to explore options for alerting them of the death of a child who has been adopted.

We heard evidence of the variation in quality of service provided by intermediaries (those paid by mothers and children to find relatives). The Government should reassess the regulations that apply to intermediaries, with a view to enabling them to offer advice to those who do not wish to be contacted on the routes and support available to them should their views change in the future.

We heard from adopted people of the barriers they face when trying to get their adoption records from local authorities (despite being legally entitled to them); that many suffer distress because of the disconnect between their birth certificate and adoption order; that they have difficulty discovering their family medical history; and face difficulties when seeking to visit their families abroad. The Government must pay attention to the difficulties faced by adopted children and seek to address them. For example, the Government should monitor and publish compliance by local authorities with adherence to the guidance that sets down deadlines for responses to requests for adoption records.

The Government has denied it was responsible for the treatment these women faced. However, public authorities were responsible for the way that their employees treated unmarried mothers. The Government is responsible for the conduct of employees of the State as well as, ultimately, for the conduct of employees of public bodies such as the NHS, who were involved in these practices in the course of their employment. The Government is also responsible for the policies and laws of the time, as well as the omissions of policy and law, that allowed these practices. The Government therefore bears responsibility for what happened to these mothers.

# 1 Introduction

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## Our inquiry

1. This inquiry looks at the experiences of unmarried women and their children who were adopted during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. We wanted to understand the situation faced by unmarried mothers whose children were adopted without them having a meaningful choice.

2. We launched our inquiry *The right to family life: adoption of children of unmarried women 1949–1976* on 23 September 2021. This inquiry sought to examine whether adoption processes respected the human rights, as we understand them now, of the mothers and children who experienced them, as well as the lasting consequences on their lives. In launching the inquiry, we knew we would be judging the past by today's standards and knowledge. We discuss the human rights implications later in this report.

3. We decided to focus our inquiry on England and Wales. Despite there being similarities with England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland had separate legislation and practices. We did not want to unduly affect ongoing work or inquiries in those jurisdictions. However, we did receive written submissions from Scotland and Northern Ireland, and we have taken the experiences of women in Scotland and Northern Ireland into account throughout our work.

4. Our inquiry covers the period from 1949 to 1976. Adoption practices, and the role of the State in adoption became more formalised over time, and the mid-1970s also saw societal changes, including greater access to contraception and abortion, greater access to welfare support, which we explore further in our report. Women may well have had similar experiences beyond the date parameters of our inquiry, and where possible, we have accepted their written evidence to us.

5. We received 142 written evidence submissions, 105 of which we were able to publish. We had over 260 respondents to a survey we conducted. We held three oral evidence sessions and heard from eight witnesses. We held a roundtable discussion with over 40 participants, who were either mothers or adopted people. We thank each and every one who contributed to this inquiry, in whatever form. We recognise that, for some, this is the first time they have shared their story, and we thank them for their bravery. We acknowledge that there will be many who did not share their story but may have wanted to.

6. This inquiry is unusual in that it looks at practices that occurred some decades previously, before many of our current human rights laws, and at a time when our knowledge and understanding of the impact of policies and practices was also different. It is not typical of the work of select committees (although not unknown) whose work is usually contemporary, scrutinising current policy and legislation, and lending our voice and expertise to ensure human rights are respected and upheld through current Government policy. This inquiry is not a detailed examination of adoption policy, either current or historic, and we do not seek to pass judgement on adoption more widely.



## Language

7. We became increasingly aware of the great sensitivity regarding the use of language during the course of the inquiry. Throughout this report we use the terms “birth mother” and “birth father” and “adoptive mother” and “adoptive father” only in order to be able to distinguish between biological and adoptive parents, though we are aware that the term “birth mother” is anathema to those women, who prefer simply to be described as they are, that is, mothers. We also use the term “adopted person” as an acknowledgement of the ages of those who were adopted as babies during the period of the inquiry. We hope from the context of our report it is clear where we refer to minors, and those who are adults.

8. We also share the strong antipathy to the allegation that they “gave up” their babies for adoption, which perpetuates the fiction that the mothers had a choice. In this report, we use the term “put up for adoption”.

## Numbers

9. We have tried throughout the inquiry to ascertain the number of mothers and children affected by these practices during the period. Office for National Statistics (ONS) data shows that the total number of adoptions in England and Wales was approximately 500,000 between 1949–76.<sup>2</sup>

10. In the BBC’s 2021 documentary ‘If You Love Your Baby... The Story of Forced Adoptions’, journalist Duncan Kennedy spoke of half a million babies being put up for adoption between 1945 and 1976, and stated that “hundreds of thousands” of women were pressurised to place their babies for adoption.<sup>3</sup>

11. This broad figure of half a million babies includes many different types of adoption. For example, in her written evidence, Judith Masson, Emeritus Professor of Law at the University of Bristol, describes how: “[s]tep-parent adoption by the mother and her new husband (not the baby’s father) was common until officially discouraged by the Children Act 1975 ... In 1950, 29 per cent of all adoptions were step-parent adoptions [and in] 1976, two-thirds of all adoptions were by a parent and step-parent ... ”<sup>4</sup>

12. In its written evidence, the Department for Education stated that: “Throughout the 1960s, almost 40% of adoptions were by the child’s natural parents (because of illegitimacy). Just over 60% were adopted by other relatives and non-related people. Over 90% of these non-parental adoptions involved illegitimate children.”<sup>5</sup>

13. It is difficult, therefore, to establish a precise figure for the number of adoptions of the babies of unmarried mothers by new adoptive parents. The figures for the re-registration of births—the process by which a child born out of wedlock was “legitimatised” (though some of these will have been by their birth parents)—and which totalled 185,000 in England and Wales between 1949–73 is the closest we have been able to establish.

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2 The ONS collected this data from 1974 onwards, before then it was collected by the Registrar General’s Statistical Review, which are available in yearly instalments [here](#), LSE Digital Library, [The Registrar-General’s Statistical Review of England and Wales, 1922–73](#)

3 “If You Love Your Baby... The Story of Forced Adoptions”, BBC News, June 2021

4 Professor Judith Masson ([ACU0053](#))

5 Nadhim Zahawi (Secretary of State at Department of Education) ([ACU0142](#))

## Inquiries in other jurisdictions

14. Our work echoes inquiries and investigations around the world, and we set out some of these below.<sup>6</sup> While each country will have its own unique situation, such as the Magdalene Laundries in Ireland and Northern Ireland, or federal governance structures, such as in Australia and Canada, we saw many similar themes that emerged from these inquiries in our work. Each country, and its citizens, has its own story to tell, and many have done and continue to do so with investigations, reparations, and redress schemes.

### *Australia and Canada*

15. In November 2010, the Australian Senate referred an inquiry into former forced adoption policies and practices to the Community Affairs References Committee. The Committee's inquiry resulted in a report on the *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices*, which was published in February 2012.<sup>7</sup> The Committee had to seek two extensions to its work due to the volume of submissions and complexity of the subject.<sup>8</sup>

16. The report was followed in March 2013 by an apology by the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard on behalf of the Australian Government to those affected by forced adoption or removal policies and practices:

Today, this Parliament, on behalf of the Australian people, takes responsibility and apologises for the policies and practices that forced the separation of mothers from their babies, which created a lifelong legacy of pain and suffering.<sup>9</sup>

17. This is the apology that has been referred to most frequently in the evidence we have received.<sup>10</sup> The Australian Government also provided financial assistance for support for those affected.<sup>11</sup> Currently the Department of Social Services (DSS) funds seven organisations to provide coordinated specialist support services across Australia.<sup>12</sup> The governments of New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory have also issued apologies and the Northern Territory Government has expressed support for the national apology.<sup>13</sup>

18. In 2018, the Canadian Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology carried out an inquiry into the issue of “the common practice, in the decades immediately following World War II of forcing Canadian ‘unwed mothers’ to surrender

6 There may be ongoing work or community-led activity in other countries which has not been included in our report.

7 Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs, [Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices](#), 29 February 2012

8 Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs, [Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices](#), 29 February 2012, para 1.2

9 Australian Government, Attorney-General's Department, [National Apology for Forced Adoptions](#), 26 March 2013

10 Anonymous (ACU0044); Betty Mills (ACU0063)

11 Australian Government, [National Apology for Forced Adoptions](#)

12 Australia Government, Department of Social Services, [Forced Adoption Support Services for people affected by past forced adoption policies and practices](#)

13 Australian Government, [National Apology for Forced Adoptions](#)

their babies to adoption, that was carried out.”<sup>14</sup> It reached similar conclusions to the Australian Senate inquiry and recommended that the Government of Canada issue a formal apology on behalf of all Canadians to the mothers and their children who were subjected to those practices in the years following World War II.<sup>15</sup> However, no apology has been forthcoming.

### *Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland*

19. Ireland’s Government established a Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes in February 2015 in order to establish what happened to the women and children who lived in the Mother and Baby Homes between 1922 and 1998. Unlike our inquiry, adoption was one of several issues that the Commission looked at. Other issues included vaccine trials and deaths in Mother and Baby Homes, as well as the investigation of specific institutions.<sup>16</sup> On 30 October 2022, the Commission reported that two main issues raised by former inhabitants of the Mother and Baby Homes were problems with the information and tracing systems and redress, and these were two of the focuses of its recommendations.<sup>17</sup> On 13 January 2021, the Taoiseach apologised in the Dáil: “for the profound generational wrong visited upon Irish mothers and their children who ended up in a mother and baby home or a county home.”<sup>18</sup> Archbishop Eamon Martin, the leader of the Catholic Church in Ireland also apologised.<sup>19</sup> In November 2021, the Irish Government announced a Payment Scheme and published an action plan for survivors and former residents of Mother and Baby and County Home institutions.<sup>20</sup>

20. In 2017, the Northern Ireland Executive commissioned research about the operation of Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries between 1922 and 1999.<sup>21</sup> This was published in January 2021, and, following its publication, the Northern Ireland Executive agreed to establish an independent investigation and a Truth Recovery Design Panel was established to design the inquiry. Following the Panel’s November 2021 report, the Northern Ireland Executive agreed to a public inquiry.<sup>22</sup> The Panel’s report also made a number of other recommendations, including formal apologies, compensation payments, and access to rehabilitation services.<sup>23</sup>

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14 Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, [The Shame is Ours Forced Adoptions of the Babies of Unmarried Mothers in Post-war Canada](#), July 2018, p. VI

15 Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, [The Shame is Ours Forced Adoptions of the Babies of Unmarried Mothers in Post-war Canada](#), July 2018, p. 17

16 [Chapter 32](#) specifically looks at adoption and chapter 36 addresses human rights.

17 Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Recommendations of the Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes

18 Dáil Éireann Debate, [Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes: Statements](#), 13 January 2021

19 [‘Irish church and state apologise for callous mother and baby homes’](#), The Guardian, 13 January 2021

20 Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, [‘Government approves proposals for Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme and publishes An Action Plan for Survivors and Former Residents of Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions’](#), 19 November 2021

21 Department of Health, [‘Research Report on Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries in Northern Ireland’](#), 26 January 2021

22 Truth Recovery Strategy, [‘N Ireland Executive will lead on Report Recommendations’](#), 12 November 2021

23 Deirdre Mahon, Maeve O’Rourke and Phil Scraton, Truth Recovery Design Panel, [Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses in Northern Ireland Truth, Acknowledgement and Accountability](#), October 2021, pp. 16–17

21. In June 2021 the Scottish First Minister committed to considering the issue of historical adoption,<sup>24</sup> and the Minister for Children and Young People in Scotland told us that she had met with Scottish representatives of Movement for an Adoption Apology and other campaigners and was planning further engagement. The online questionnaire inviting views from anyone affected by historical adoption in Scotland closed in April 2022 and work on analysing the responses continues.

### ***Other inquiries***

22. In 2016, the House of Representatives in New Zealand was petitioned for “a broad and full inquiry into the practice of ‘forced adoption’ in New Zealand during the 1950s to the 1980s”,<sup>25</sup> however while the Social Services Committee considered the petition, it did not recommend an inquiry.<sup>26</sup> In August 2020, the Social Services and Community Committee initiated a briefing as it was interested in what the petitioners thought an inquiry would achieve.<sup>27</sup> Its subsequent report recommended that the Government should consider “the concerns that exist about the practice of forced adoption in New Zealand from the 1950s to the 1980s and the actions it could take in response to these concerns”.<sup>28</sup>

23. In the Netherlands, the WODC (Research and Documentation Centre), part of the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security, commissioned the Verwey-Jonker Institute to undertake research into adoption between 1954 and 1984, including the role of organisations and the social environment.<sup>29</sup>

24. In 2015, an official apology was issued by the government and parliament of Flanders to the victims of the adoptions that took place in the region between the 1950s and 1980s.<sup>30</sup>

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24 The Scottish Parliament, [Meeting of the Parliament](#), 16 June 2021

25 [New Zealand Parliament, Petition 2014/0080 of Maggie Wilkinson](#)

26 Social Services Committee of the 51st Parliament, [Report on Petition 2014/80 of Maggie Wilkinson](#), 23 June 2017

27 Social Services and Community Committee of the 53rd Parliament, [Briefing on matters related to forced adoptions Report of the Social Services and Community Committee](#), August 2020, p. 2

28 Social Services and Community Committee of the 53rd Parliament, [Briefing on matters related to forced adoptions Report of the Social Services and Community Committee](#), August 2020, p. 2

29 Research and Documentation Centre, *Stuck in the hinges of time* (in the original Dutch)

30 [“Flemish government issues apology for forced adoptions”](#), The Bulletin, 25 November 2015

## 2 What happened

25. This chapter sets out the experiences of the unmarried mothers, their children and others. Every person's story is different, and yet there are striking similarities that feature heavily. The accounts that we heard in the written and oral evidence were, almost without exception, experiences that the mothers had kept secret for years and sometimes decades after the events. One of our overriding impressions has been of the long-lasting feelings of stigma and shame, which in some cases persist to this day. We were also struck by the 'double-dose' of shaming that the mothers suffered: first, the stigma of having been pregnant out of wedlock, and second the stigma of having 'given away' their baby.

### Pre-birth

#### *Discovery of pregnancy*

26. For many of the women who contacted us, the discovery they were pregnant was a frightening one. Ann Keen, who gave evidence to us, described herself as having been: "absolutely terrified".<sup>31</sup> But it was not the same for all. One witness described herself as "delighted" to discover she was expecting a child.<sup>32</sup>

#### *Early plans*

27. Some witnesses described their initial plans. "I had thought that I would be able to live with my dad and look after him (he was ill) and raise my child. He refused ... I couldn't believe it."<sup>33</sup> Others were in stable relationships, with they and the child's father wanting to keep the child together, but were prevented by their families, sometimes on the grounds of religion or class. While unplanned pregnancies would sometimes have resulted in marriage, there were many cases where this did not happen. Some witnesses simply did not want to get married: "I had no intention of marrying the father, despite the fact we had been together for two years."<sup>34</sup> In some instances, the father was already married.<sup>35</sup> In others, the pregnancy was the result of rape.<sup>36</sup>

### Abortion

28. While abortion was illegal for part of the period of this inquiry, for some mothers, the pregnancy occurred after abortion had been made legal and when access to free, medical abortion was available in England and Wales. We heard how, for some, the discovery of the pregnancy came "far too late" for a termination.<sup>37</sup> For other women, abortion was not an option they considered, often for religious reasons.<sup>38</sup> One woman described how abortion and adoption were the only alternatives suggested by her social worker.<sup>39</sup> Another woman

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31 Ann Keen ([ACU0034](#))

32 Anonymous ([ACU0001](#))

33 Anonymous ([ACU0001](#))

34 Anonymous ([ACU0001](#))

35 Ann Keen ([ACU0034](#))

36 Anonymous ([ACU0093](#))

37 Anonymous ([ACU0108](#))

38 Anonymous ([ACU0108](#))

39 Anonymous ([ACU0069](#))

pursued the option of an abortion, but at a time when the consent of two doctors was required, the second doctor declared her “fit and healthy to have a child” and refused his consent.<sup>40</sup>

29. Some women considered the possibility of an illegal abortion. Judy Baker, who gave oral evidence to us, said she was told of: “somebody who could do a backstreet abortion. I considered it for a little while, but it terrified me and I did not want to go down that road.”<sup>41</sup>

### **Fathers**

30. This inquiry has had little evidence to draw on from the fathers. We heard how unplanned pregnancies often occurred within the context of long term, loving relationships. One witness described how the father “supported me emotionally during the pregnancy”;<sup>42</sup> another of how her boyfriend “stood by me and supported me as much as he was allowed to.”<sup>43</sup> One told how her partner “approached the adoption agency to see if his name could be on the birth certificate... They would not engage with him at all.”<sup>44</sup> “[We] both gave our names to the Registrar, however only my name was recorded on the birth certificate.”<sup>45</sup> Others described how they went on to marry the father of the baby after the adoption, sometimes having more children, though not without considerable continuing anguish. Many previously strong relationships broke down under the pressure of the adoption of the first child. One described how she lost “both my son and partner”.<sup>46</sup>

31. We heard how those fathers who tried to support the mother were excluded from the adoption process, with instances of them being threatened with arrest and prosecution,<sup>47</sup> sometimes connected to the fact that the mother was 16 years old or younger and thus the victim of statutory rape.<sup>48</sup> References to the fathers by the adoption services were generally dismissive, with one referred to as the “putative father”.<sup>49</sup> Another woman reported that her family had told her boyfriend “not to discuss keeping the baby with me.”<sup>50</sup>

### **Adopted people**

32. We heard from many adopted children, now adults, on whom the impact of adoption was and continues to be considerable, and whose experiences we discuss later in this report.<sup>51</sup>

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40 Florence Keeton ([ACU0057](#))

41 [Q16](#)

42 Anonymous ([ACU0022](#))

43 Rosann Miller ([ACU0097](#))

44 Mrs Bernadette Wallman ([ACU0026](#))

45 Anonymous ([ACU0022](#))

46 Anonymous ([ACU0022](#))

47 Anonymous ([ACU0022](#))

48 Anonymous ([ACU0115](#))

49 Anonymous ([ACU0022](#))

50 Anonymous ([ACU0094](#))

51 See Chapter 3: The effects today



### *The role of the family*

33. In many accounts, the women's parents and in some cases wider family played a significant role in the child's adoption. Many women were excluded from any family discussion about the options open to them. One described herself as "just a cog in a wheel".<sup>52</sup>

### *Parents' reaction*

34. In most instances when the mother was still living at home, the news of her pregnancy was met with distress and often anger by her own parents. Ann Keen described how her mother: "was horrified and in so much shock that I could do this to the family."<sup>53</sup> Another witness described how: "Both parents said that I had brought shame on them and that I was 'disgusting'."<sup>54</sup>

35. One woman explained how she "couldn't tell [her] parents" and went instead to stay with a relative. When her mother eventually found out, she was berated as: "damaged goods, no-one would ever marry me now, I had brought disgrace to the family."<sup>55</sup>

36. We heard a number of accounts of the particular concerns of the women's mothers and fear that the pregnancy should be kept from their own father, one describing her mother as: "shocked and scared of my father finding out."<sup>56</sup> Sometimes this was out of fear of the father's anger;<sup>57</sup> on other occasions it was because of fear that the shock would exacerbate an existing medical condition.<sup>58</sup>

37. Some parents did want to support their daughter but were prevented by financial or health pressures. One witness described how: "The only person who was kind, was my mother."<sup>59</sup> Another explained that she bore "no ill will" to her parents, who were simply reflecting "societal attitudes of the time".<sup>60</sup> Judy Baker said: "my mum ... gave me a great big hug. I felt so sorry that I had disappointed her and she was just lovely."<sup>61</sup>

### *Secrecy and shame*

38. We received overwhelming evidence of the secrecy and shame that surrounded the pregnancy, from the start.

39. One witness described how she was made to feel she had "brought shame to the family";<sup>62</sup> another how her parents: "seemed more concerned about what the neighbours would think than about my wellbeing".<sup>63</sup> Another witness's mother said she would "not be able to face her friends and neighbours again" were the pregnancy to become known.<sup>64</sup>

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52 Anonymous ([ACU0108](#))

53 [Q16](#)

54 Diana Defries ([ACU0008](#))

55 Anonymous ([ACU0072](#))

56 Anonymous ([ACU0041](#))

57 Ibid.

58 [Q13](#)

59 Anonymous ([ACU0060](#))

60 Betty Mills ([ACU0063](#))

61 [Q16](#)

62 Anonymous ([ACU0041](#))

63 Diana Defries ([ACU0008](#))

64 Anonymous ([ACU0035](#))

40. We read many examples of the subterfuge that was employed to conceal the pregnancy from family, friends, and neighbours. One woman described how she “was not allowed to go out when I came home from work”;<sup>65</sup> others told of stories that they were studying abroad,<sup>66</sup> or taking a course in typing and shorthand.<sup>67</sup>

41. A sense of shame pervades all of the evidence that we have heard from the mothers who described feelings of “fear, anger, shame, guilt, sadness and grief.”<sup>68</sup> “I came to recognise”, wrote one, “that adoption was best because I was such a bad person.”<sup>69</sup>

42. For many, it was these feelings of shame that led them to keep their experiences of having their children “secret and bottled up for many years.”<sup>70</sup>

### ***Education and employment***

43. For some still at school, the pregnancy marked the end of formal education. One witness described how she was: “expelled from school and not allowed to return” and that the headteacher went so far as to tell the school assembly that no-one was to contact her.<sup>71</sup> Others returned to education having had the baby: “I carried on at school ...and then to university.”<sup>72</sup> We heard from women who were working when they became pregnant, including “a dark room technician at the hospital X-ray Department”<sup>73</sup> and a “nurse and midwife”.<sup>74</sup> Most feared dismissal, and would have had no legal redress had they lost their jobs.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, from the evidence that we heard, the reaction of the workplaces was generally negative, even for those who retained their role. “I was told by the Superintendent to think of the baby as being dead ... so I could return to work 4 weeks after the birth”, recalled one witness.<sup>76</sup>

### ***Early medical appointments***

44. We heard how mothers felt excluded from discussions about the future of their child from the earliest stages of their pregnancy. One witness wrote: “I recall them discussing the options as if I was not in the room.”<sup>77</sup>

45. This included early doctor appointments, when those took place, where women were excluded from the discussion or felt unable to ask questions because of the presence of their own mother. We heard examples of the dismissive and cruel way in which the

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65 Anonymous ([ACU0021](#))

66 Mary Husted ([ACU0092](#))

67 Anonymous ([ACU0094](#))

68 Judy Baker, ([ACU0018](#))

69 Anonymous ([ACU0021](#))

70 Mrs Veronica Smith ([ACU0031](#))

71 Anonymous ([ACU0022](#))

72 Anonymous ([ACU0108](#))

73 Anonymous ([ACU0001](#))

74 Mrs Bernadette Wallman ([ACU0026](#))

75 The legal framework for a claim for unfair dismissal did not exist then; nor did the discriminatory rights for pregnant women now protected by the Equality Act 2010; nor the protections in the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women which didn't enter into force until 1981.

76 Anonymous ([ACU0001](#))

77 Diana Defries ([ACU0008](#))



mothers were treated by those medical professionals. One woman remembered how: “[M]y (male) GP told me that I was a social menace.”<sup>78</sup> Another GP told the witness: “I hear you’ve been a naughty girl.”<sup>79</sup> After that, she recalled that: “he spoke only to my mother.”

46. From the earliest stages of the pregnancy, the women were offered little or no medical or ante-natal care, a pattern that continued in many instances until the very final stages of the pregnancy.<sup>80</sup>

### *Early contact with adoption agencies*

47. We heard how mothers were directed to adoption agencies through different routes. One described how her “parish priest linked me up with the adoption agency social worker”;<sup>81</sup> another how she was advised by “a local vicar’s wife”.<sup>82</sup> Once again, the mothers often felt hampered by not being alone and unable to: “talk in front of my mother... I probably would have said I wanted the baby if I had been interviewed alone.”<sup>83</sup> Another described how she had “attended but was not allowed to have any say”.<sup>84</sup>

48. Some hoped for advice on how to keep their baby, but were told that it was “wrong to even think that getting such help would be possible”.<sup>85</sup> One mother recalled how the adoption agency social worker “never entertained the idea that I would keep my baby.”<sup>86</sup> Another mother wrote: “I just asked for some help and everything spiralled out of my control after that. I was belittled and bullied into thinking I had only one option”,<sup>87</sup> namely for the baby to be adopted. She continued: “At no time was I told there was any way in which I could bring up my child... no financial support, no nurseries so that I could work and no housing available.” Another mother wrote: “No-one ever told me of the support that was available. I had no idea that there could have been an alternative outcome.”<sup>88</sup>

49. Many felt that they could have lived with their child and, sometimes, partner “with the correct information and support”.<sup>89</sup> All they had required was: “someone on my side and an ounce of assistance. If the adoption agency had just left me alone, or perhaps pointed me towards social services, I think I could have figured it out.”<sup>90</sup> Instead, many felt “trapped within a situation to persuade me to have my child adopted.”<sup>91</sup> There was “never any discussion about keeping my baby” wrote one witness, “I was ... just presented with a fait accompli.”<sup>92</sup> Another witness wrote: “I was forced into this decision by the professionals in charge.”<sup>93</sup> Almost all of the mothers we heard from “wanted to keep” their babies.<sup>94</sup>

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78 Anonymous ([ACU0001](#))

79 Diana Defries ([ACU0008](#))

80 Anonymous ([ACU0077](#))

81 Mrs Bernadette Wallman ([ACU0026](#))

82 Anonymous ([ACU0001](#))

83 Anonymous ([ACU0021](#))

84 Rosann Miller ([ACU0097](#))

85 Anonymous ([ACU0001](#))

86 Mrs Bernadette Wallman ([ACU0026](#))

87 Mrs Lorraine Le-gate ([ACU0005](#))

88 Diana Defries ([ACU0008](#))

89 Anonymous ([ACU0022](#))

90 Mrs Bernadette Wallman ([ACU0026](#))

91 Anonymous ([ACU0102](#))

92 Anonymous ([ACU0035](#))

93 Anonymous ([ACU0041](#))

94 Anonymous ([ACU0089](#))

### *The role of different professionals*

50. Even after the Adoption of Children Act 1949 saw a shift towards a central Government policy, with local authorities responsible for making arrangements for the adoption of children, the existing voluntary systems of the Church of England, Catholic Church, and Salvation Army largely remained in place leading to what Dr Michael Lambert describes as a “mixed economy” of statutory and voluntary provision.<sup>95</sup>

51. In their written evidence, mothers spoke of State employees, such as social workers and NHS doctors, nurses and midwives, as well as the employees and volunteers attached to those voluntary organisations. While we heard examples of kindnesses to the mothers,<sup>96</sup> the criticisms and descriptions of abuse refer to all of these institutions and cannot be ascribed to one group alone.

52. In its written evidence, the Salvation Army, whose last Mother and Baby home closed in 1980, described how this area of its work grew to support the vulnerable women who were seeking its support, and who were pregnant. While it acknowledges that were it “supporting such need today, our practices would be different”, it did also detail the orders and regulations under which its officers practised and the expectation that its services: “must be of a professional standard commensurate with other maternity institutions.”<sup>97</sup>

### *Moving away from home*

53. We heard how many mothers spent time in hostels or with family members, friends, or other contacts away from the mother’s home during their pregnancy.<sup>98</sup> While some described their treatment as kind,<sup>99</sup> and the host as having been acting charitably, for others the experience was very different. During her oral evidence Ann Keen said of the father of the house in which she stayed:

I want to say this, because many of the other mothers who are not able to speak today have also said the same. That man abused me very badly, because he said that nobody would believe me. He could abuse me because I was a bad girl, I was a wicked girl, so he could do what he wanted to me because he was able to, because nobody would believe me.<sup>100</sup>

54. We heard that most mothers moved into a mother and baby home for the final few weeks of their pregnancy, often six weeks before the birth. While each of the experiences detailed by the birth mothers was in its own way unique, we were struck by some of the recurring themes from the accounts of the stays in these homes. Some of the most compelling were the descriptions of the ways in which the women were made to feel they were being “punished” for their transgression. Numerous witnesses described how they were made to scrub stairs and floors. “We were made to scrub the floor on our knees and if we objected we were slapped ...”, recalled one of those mothers,<sup>101</sup> and one recalled being “used as domestics”.<sup>102</sup> In her oral evidence, Judy Baker recalled: “You had this great big

95 Dr Michael Lambert ([ACU0024](#))

96 [Q16](#)

97 The Salvation Army ([ACU0051](#))

98 Anonymous ([ACU0077](#)), Anonymous ([ACU0110](#))

99 Anonymous ([ACU0072](#))

100 [Q13](#)

101 Anonymous ([ACU0093](#))

102 Anonymous ([ACU0110](#))

belly, and you were kneeling down on your hands and knees scrubbing this staircase.”<sup>103</sup> Others described cleaning rugs<sup>104</sup> and being made to walk to church “in a crocodile every Sunday”.<sup>105</sup> Other accounts were a vivid reminder of the youth and camaraderie of the women living together for this short time: “We would want to listen to ‘Pick of the Pops’ on a Sunday and have a little dance about, again with our great big fat bellies”, said Judy.<sup>106</sup>

55. The mother and baby homes in which most of the mothers spent the days and weeks immediately before and after the birth, and from which their babies were taken to foster carers or adoptive families, existed in ordinary houses and buildings across the country. Some were run by the State, others by religious and charitable bodies. All were part of society’s way of “managing” the women who were regarded as having transgressed society’s moral standards, and their babies.

56. Of those who told us about their experiences, very few were given any medical advice or ante natal care in the final weeks of their pregnancy,<sup>107</sup> and many approached the birth in a state of unintentional ignorance and often fear. “I was never told what to expect when the baby came” said one, “... a traumatic experience for a 15 year old.”<sup>108</sup> “I had no idea what was going to happen”, recalled Judy Baker.<sup>109</sup>

57. A number of the mothers did not recognise the first signs of labour. While a few went on to give birth in the home, most were taken to hospital after the labour started.

## During the birth

58. The accounts of the birth that we heard had the common feature that mothers felt that their “punishment” for their unmarried status was simply continuing. One witness said: “The treatment in hospital was frankly unhumane.”<sup>110</sup>

59. We heard many examples of cruel phrases being used during the labour: “Have you learnt your lesson now?”,<sup>111</sup> recalled one. One mother was told she “deserved all the pain I got.”<sup>112</sup> “A doctor told me that I should be sterilised as I must be a nymphomaniac”, wrote another mother.<sup>113</sup> “I had no idea what he was talking about ... ” “You’ve had your fun - now you can pay for it”, another recalled overhearing.<sup>114</sup>

## After the birth

60. After the birth, many recalled how the baby was put out of their reach,<sup>115</sup> in one case “many feet from me”.<sup>116</sup> We heard how the refusal to communicate by some nurses and

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103 [Q16](#)

104 Anonymous ([ACU0102](#))

105 Ibid.

106 [Q16](#)

107 Betty Mills ([ACU0063](#))

108 Anonymous ([ACU0113](#))

109 [Q16](#)

110 Anonymous ([ACU0085](#))

111 Anonymous ([ACU0022](#))

112 Dawn Young ([ACU0016](#))

113 Anonymous ([ACU0117](#))

114 Anonymous ([ACU0099](#))

115 Anonymous ([ACU0022](#))

116 Diana Defries ([ACU0008](#))

midwives continued after the birth. One mother wrote: “I could not get anyone to speak to me. It was as if I wasn’t really there.”<sup>117</sup> Another mother remembered how: “[O]ne sister deliberately ignored me when I spoke to her.”<sup>118</sup>

61. Contact between mother and baby was minimised. “I wasn’t allowed to see, hold or feed my baby”, said one mother.<sup>119</sup> Another saw her baby “for a few hours after she was born” and then once more on the day she was discharged.<sup>120</sup> Some mothers were able to breastfeed their babies,<sup>121</sup> but others were only able to bottle feed their babies<sup>122</sup> “as it was considered that breastfeeding would create too strong a bond.”<sup>123</sup>

62. Many had no medical care after the birth. “I never had any follow up treatment or check up”, wrote one.<sup>124</sup> “I believe this lack of physical health care led to my being unable to have any further children”, wrote another, who said it was “[a]n indescribable grief.”<sup>125</sup>

### *Taking the baby*

We heard harrowing accounts of the babies being taken from the mothers, generally between 10 days and two weeks after the birth. “I never got to say goodbye. They took her into the next room where her new parents were waiting for her and that was it”, said Judy Baker.<sup>126</sup> “I was made to pick the baby up and hand it to [the] woman who walked away with him”, wrote another.<sup>127</sup> “[T]hey pulled her out of my arms”, said one.<sup>128</sup> “I had to hand my baby over crying and pleading again for help and to be allowed to keep him. The pain was unbearable ...”, wrote another.<sup>129</sup> Others recalled: “I remember my legs gave way under me and my precious infant howled as if her world was coming to an end ...”<sup>130</sup> and “I screamed and hung onto him like a woman possessed.”<sup>131</sup> One mother described walking her baby to the social worker’s car as “the longest, loneliest and most panic-stricken walk of my life.”<sup>132</sup>

## **Adoption**

### *Adoption as a decision*

63. Raising a child as an unmarried mother without support was nearly impossible at this time. Women told us that they were not given any information about options available to them, other than adoption.

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117 Ibid.

118 Anonymous ([ACU0021](#))

119 Anonymous ([ACU0110](#))

120 Anonymous ([ACU0072](#))

121 Anonymous ([ACU0093](#))

122 Anonymous ([ACU0117](#))

123 Anonymous ([ACU0110](#))

124 Anonymous ([ACU0072](#))

125 Mrs Eileen Griffiths ([ACU0006](#))

126 [Q16](#)

127 Anonymous ([ACU0093](#))

128 Anonymous ([ACU0068](#))

129 Anonymous ([ACU0041](#))

130 Diana Defries ([ACU0008](#))

131 Anonymous ([ACU0093](#))

132 Anonymous ([ACU0022](#))

64. The 1949 Adoption Act stipulated that a mother could not consent to adoption until at least six weeks after the birth,<sup>133</sup> and adoptive parents could not apply for an adoption order until at least three months after the child had been placed with them, during which time the birth mother had the right to “reclaim” the child.<sup>134</sup>

65. Although most signed the final legal paperwork, generally six weeks after their baby had actually been taken, the physical and mental trauma caused by the women’s unhappiness and reluctance to do so was abundantly clear from the evidence that we received.<sup>135</sup> Dr Michael Lambert, Fellow in Social Inequalities at Lancaster University, explained to the Committee that shame, stigma and guilt were the driving forces in restricting any meaningful conversation about other possible outcomes, and that it could be very hard to move away from that process once it was put into motion.<sup>136</sup> The evidence submitted to this inquiry corroborates this. One mother wrote about how she felt she: “didn’t have any choice or say in the adoption process”,<sup>137</sup> and another explained how she:

was worn down with what the adoptive parents could give the child when I could give him nothing. I was threatened with being arrested, my son being put into a children’s home if I denied him a good home with the adoptive parents and having any subsequent children taken away from me. I was told lies and coerced into allowing the adoption of my child.<sup>138</sup>

66. Pamela Hodgkins, an adopted person and founder of the National Organisation for Counselling Adoptees and Parents (NORCAP), explained how women experienced adoption and consent:

Many women report that after the birth of their baby they became part of a conveyor belt system moving towards adoption.

... Even after the application was made mothers could apply to the court for their child to be returned to their care with a good chance of success. The key was that no one explained the limits of their consent at this stage, whilst no one said this was final and irrevocable consent (which it was not) neither was it pointed out they could reconsider, explore other options and ask for their baby back.<sup>139</sup>

### *The process of adoption*

67. The time spent between the baby being taken and signing the legal paperwork finalising the adoption several weeks later was immensely difficult for the mothers from whom we heard. Presented with only two options, to “selfishly keep your child and ruin his life or relinquish him for adoption as the only way he can be happy” was an “intolerable choice” and many signed “while suffering anxiety and depression” and without fully understanding the implications of what they had done.<sup>140</sup>

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133 [Jatinder Sandhu, The birth mother and the evolution of adoption policy and practice in England since 1926, October 2012](#), p. 217

134 [Ibid](#), p. 23

135 [Veronica Ann Smith \(ACU0031\)](#)

136 [Q8](#)

137 [Anonymous \(ACU0030\)](#)

138 [Mrs. Lorraine Le-gate \(ACU0005\)](#)

139 [Pamela Hodgkins MBE \(ACU0032\)](#)

140 [Anonymous \(ACU0044\)](#)

## Post-adoption

68. Feeling as though they had no meaningful say in the adoption process only exacerbated the loss and anguish many mothers felt about being separated from their children. Many mothers were never able to recover from this painful experience. One woman described the adoption of her child as carrying a “gaping wound” for years after.<sup>141</sup>

69. The Rudd Centre for Adoption and Research Practice at the University of Sussex provided written evidence that explains that the experience of placing their children for adoption led to many mothers being unable to develop healthy relationships later in life. The women reported disruptions in their marriages, trying to maintain impossibly high standards in their own parenting, as well as being overly protective of their subsequent children.<sup>142</sup> One mother felt “re-traumatised” after having her second child, and struggled “with the concept of family,” and family events such as Christmas.<sup>143</sup> Ann Keen illustrated this when she told us:

I knew that my son would be six in January and I bought him a bike. I had been looking at this bike in the shop and I was so pleased to buy it. When I got back to where my car was parked, I knew I could not take it anywhere, so I just left it there. In my heart I had bought him a bike.<sup>144</sup>

70. For some mothers, the pain was so overwhelming that they “couldn’t bear to have another child, whilst my baby was still ‘out there somewhere’... I will never know the freedom of living without this loss, the hurt, the complicated damage and grief.”<sup>145</sup> Having children again later in life made the grief for the loss of her first child more acute for one mother: “I felt worthless and was overly sensitive to my children’s behaviour ... there was always the fear that I would be deemed unfit and the children taken.” Judy Baker said: “It is 53 years later and I am still a wreck because of what happened to me and my daughter. We have been quiet for so long because of this awful cloak of shame that has been put on us that we never ever deserved.”<sup>146</sup>

## Impacts on adopted children

### *Names changed, identity taken*

71. There was a pervading sense in the stories of adopted people of, in the words of one, a “[m]ysterious gap in my personal history.”<sup>147</sup> “All my life I have felt that a part of me was missing” wrote another.<sup>148</sup>

72. In her oral evidence, Liz Harvie said: “Life was good, but, as an adoptee, I always felt that something was missing.”<sup>149</sup> Later in her evidence, she continued:

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141 Anonymous ([ACU0117](#))

142 Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Programme ([ACU0071](#))

143 Anonymous ([ACU0001](#))

144 [Q16](#)

145 Anonymous ([ACU0085](#))

146 [Q16](#)

147 Dr Charles Twining ([ACU0007](#))

148 Anonymous ([ACU0114](#))

149 [Q18](#)



I have always known, and it was my normal, but inside I felt a bit alone, a bit lost, and I was always wondering what I had done to be given up by my parents. As a child, I thought I was not wanted, and that did not feel very nice. When I was older, I used to often ask many questions to my adoptive parents. I was just so curious as I was the kind of child who loved to be able to have an answer and an explanation for everything and to question why I was given away but there were never enough answers for me.<sup>150</sup>

73. One witness described how they felt “stripped of my identity”.<sup>151</sup> Others felt unable to ask questions about their background. One witness: “was admonished when I wanted to know who I was. It destroyed my sense of security and calm.”<sup>152</sup> Until they started to look into their background, another witness: “had not realised ... how desperate I was to know my true identity... I also wanted to know why I had been given up for adoption.”<sup>153</sup> One adopted mother wrote of her son: “I know he has always felt different and left out in some way.”<sup>154</sup>

74. Some vividly described their reaction at discovering their own birth name. On seeing her birth certificate, Liz Harvie said:

I saw my birth mother’s name for the first time, my birth father’s name, and their parents’ names and, most oddly for me, the name I was given at birth. It was like I was discovering a different person. This person lived somewhere else with a different name. Who was she?<sup>155</sup>

### ***Children told mothers gave them away***

75. For many of the adopted people from whom we received evidence, a particularly painful part of their own personal identity and understanding of their own story was the false belief that their mother had ‘given them away’. One wanted to know “Why did my birth-mother abandon me?”<sup>156</sup> Another described how, as a small child: “I did not understand why I was given away and I felt desperately sad about it... I used to cry at the thought my first mother didn’t want me, that I was unlovable.”<sup>157</sup> “My adoptive mother told me that my birth mother hadn’t wanted me,” said another.<sup>158</sup>

76. “Because I knew nothing of my mother’s struggle ... I grew up with the belief that my family hadn’t wanted me and therefore there was something fundamentally wrong with me, and my very existence ...”, wrote one adopted person.<sup>159</sup> Another described their discovery, on meeting their mother for the first time, that: “She did not give me up, she was made to have me adopted.”<sup>160</sup> For many, the feelings have never gone away. “I continue to feel like a dirty unworthy secret” wrote one.<sup>161</sup>

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150 Q19

151 Anonymous (ACU0048)

152 Anonymous (ACU0048)

153 Anonymous (ACU0081)

154 Anonymous (ACU0100)

155 Q19

156 Anonymous (ACU0086)

157 Ms C T Goldring (ACU0042)

158 Anonymous (ACU0038)

159 Anonymous (ACU0048)

160 Anonymous (ACU0081)

161 Anonymous (ACU0074)

77. It is striking that it has taken a great deal of time—decades - before we have faced up to the truth of what was happening to hundreds of thousands of mothers and their children. Babies were taken away from mothers who didn't want to let them go. They were told they had no other option and would, in the words of one witness 'with an ounce of help' have seized the chance to keep their sons and daughters with them and brought them up themselves.

78. While each experience is unique, we were struck by telling similarities in the stories we heard. Unmarried women were told that they had given up their baby for adoption, when in fact they felt they had no choice. We need to correct the record. Some children grew up thinking their mothers were feckless or irresponsible or gave them up without a care in the world. This is patently untrue. We have heard that many unmarried women put up their children because they wanted the very best for their child, and adoption was presented as the only option. However, that does not equate to giving up their child willingly. By saying mothers gave up their babies for adoption, there has been a perpetuation of a view that they didn't care or love their babies enough to keep them and were content to give them to another family.

79. The evidence that we have received has done something towards setting the record straight on what actually happened to many unmarried women who became pregnant during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, and the appalling way in which they were often treated by those whose job it was to help them—professionals such as social workers, medical staff including doctors, midwives and nurses and sadly, often, by their own family members.

80. The evidence from mothers and from adopted people vividly demonstrates the struggles that individuals continue to face every day in living with the impact of those brutal and cruel processes.

81. This is about principles. Human rights exist because of the inherent humanity of each of us. The mothers were subjected to this cruelty because they were regarded as transgressors. They were not, but it underlines that human rights should be protected for all, including those who at that time are regarded as transgressors.



## 3 The effects today

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### The continuing impact

#### *The experience of birth mothers*

82. We heard about the continuing impact of the adoption of their baby on the mothers. “I had panic attacks but my mother told me to get on with life”, wrote one mother;<sup>162</sup> “I became depressed and attempted suicide”, said another.<sup>163</sup> “Sometimes I would feel as if there was a kind of spring in the base of my spine and it would coil tighter and tighter”, said another.<sup>164</sup> One mother wrote: “I have suffered with my mental health over the last 57 years.”<sup>165</sup> “No-one can describe the mental trauma and emotions I have had to endure”, said another.<sup>166</sup>

83. Many found the experience of motherhood subsequently re-traumatising. “I suffered for over a year with post-natal depression and found that my experience of having my first son adopted impacted my maternal feelings and ability as a mother”, wrote one mother.<sup>167</sup> “My relationship with my son has never been what it should be ... my daughter was always at the back of my mind”, said another.<sup>168</sup>

84. At our oral evidence session, we asked if Judy Baker had “put it all behind” her, as so many mothers were advised. “No, never” she replied. “You can see that. This is 53 years later and here I am, a wreck because of what happened to me and my daughter.”<sup>169</sup>

85. Other mothers did not want to have another child or could not have another. “I could not ...consider having any more children until I saw him again”, wrote one.<sup>170</sup> When asked at our oral evidence session if she had gone on to have other children, Ann Keen replied: “No, I did not. I did not want any. I only wanted him.”<sup>171</sup>

#### *The experience of adopted people*

86. Some adopted people had experienced abuse - emotional, physical, and sexual—by their adopters and by others, the impact of which was ongoing. We heard written evidence of many adopted people who had felt the impact of their adoption on their subsequent adult relationships.<sup>172</sup>

87. We have heard much around the question of identity, including when adopted people had lost the cultural links of their original parents. At our roundtable event, we heard how those with mixed heritage felt they were left alone to “acclimatise” themselves to the fact and its implications.

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162 Anonymous ([ACU0021](#))

163 Anonymous ([ACU0022](#))

164 Mrs Bernadette Wallman ([ACU0026](#))

165 Anonymous ([ACU0035](#))

166 Anonymous ([ACU0041](#))

167 Anonymous ([ACU0035](#))

168 Anonymous ([ACU0072](#))

169 [Q16](#)

170 Anonymous ([ACU0044](#))

171 [Q16](#)

172 Eddie Gadd ([ACU0137](#))

### *The experience of other family members*

88. We heard some evidence about the experience of other family members. One wrote: “I think my husband had it right when he said to me ‘The point is that you not being allowed to raise your first child has affected all of us.’”<sup>173</sup> Some mothers described the impact on the children they later went on to have: “he was and still is a very sensitive person, who himself suffers from depression as a result of my effect on him.”<sup>174</sup>

### *The experience of reunions*

89. We heard evidence of the experience of reunions between mothers and grown children, who were often well into adulthood. Some had built happy relationships. “I’ve reunited with my son and we have a wonderful relationship”, wrote one.<sup>175</sup> “We have not looked back since”, said another.<sup>176</sup> Many are tinged with regret. In the words of one mother: “The man is returned to me, but not the child. The lost child is forever lost.”<sup>177</sup> Many felt unable to continue the contact. “I no longer have any contact with my daughter or grandchildren”, wrote one mother.<sup>178</sup>

### *Therapeutic support*

90. Many mothers and adopted people have accessed therapy and counselling to help them with the long-lasting effects following the adoption. A number spoke of the support they had received from the Post Adoption Centre (PAC), National Association for Reuniting Adopted People and their Parents (NORCAP) and the Natural Parents network (NPN),<sup>179</sup> though noting with regret that NORCAP is no longer in existence and the NPN on Facebook only.<sup>180</sup> While some of the counselling provided was free of charge, most is self-funded. At our roundtable on 27 April 2022, we heard of the difficulties some had had in accessing therapy, and of the shortage of qualified therapists available.

91. Under the Adoption and Children Act 2002, adoption support agencies provide help and support to adopted children and adults, including counselling.<sup>181</sup> Ofsted’s document *Introduction to adoption support agencies: A children’s social care guide to registration* explains that a counsellor needs to register as an adoption support agency if they provide an adoption-related service to people requiring counselling for adoption-related issues. However, if an adoption-related issue arises after counselling has begun and it is not the primary reason a person is undertaking counselling, registering is not necessary.<sup>182</sup>

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173 Dawn Young ([ACU0016](#))

174 Anonymous ([ACU0107](#))

175 Anonymous ([ACU0085](#))

176 Rosann Miller ([ACU0097](#))

177 Mary Husted ([ACU0092](#))

178 Anonymous ([ACU0068](#))

179 Anonymous ([ACU0001](#))

180 Mrs Veronica Smith ([ACU0031](#))

181 Ofsted, [Introduction to adoption support agencies](#), July 2015 (updated February 2019)

182 The document suggests that good practice would be to seek advice from a registered adoption support service, and if during the first session it emerges that adoption is the main reason a person is accessing counselling, the client should be advised of their right to access adoption support services, and that it is against the law to provide counselling on adoption-related matters without registering as, or being under contract with a registered adoption support service. (see: p. 8.)

92. We heard that this requirement to register to provide adoption support acted as a disincentive to many counsellors, and that there was a shortfall in the number of counsellors available to undertake this work as a result. In his oral evidence, Nadhim Zahawi, the then Secretary of State for Education, acknowledged this “barrier to adult adoptees accessing and receiving support”, and said that he wanted to “get rid of any bureaucratic barriers” to “improve service delivery” while being “careful that we do not sacrifice quality”. He went on to say:

We will consult very shortly on removing the requirement for providers of support services for adult adoptees having to register with Ofsted. In practice, that should make it much easier, and also more cost effective, for these providers to run their businesses. It will mean that support is more accessible for the adults who need it.<sup>183</sup>

93. **There is a shortage of counsellors able to provide post-adoption support and the existing process for Ofsted regulation is one barrier to counsellors working in this area. The Government should consider as a matter of urgency how to make sure that the necessary regulations to protect standards do not prevent mothers and adult adoptees getting the support they need.**

### Access to paper records

94. While adopted people have had a right to access their adoption records since 1976, we heard of the huge disparities in the length of time this took. In his written evidence, one social worker described how access to information helped many of his clients, but that the timescales “vary hugely between a couple of months to one or two years.”<sup>184</sup> At our roundtable event we heard how, having decided they wanted to investigate their adoption, adopted people felt frustrated at the unnecessary delays they met in their efforts to access their records.

95. Others also expressed consternation at the uneven provision of support services by local authorities since 2002, when the right to access records was extended, and local authorities were given a discretionary power to establish intermediary services.

96. **There are huge disparities in the timeliness of the responses of local authorities to requests for access to adoption records, to which adopted people have had a right since 1976, leading to unnecessary stress and frustration for those individuals who have decided to seek out family members. The Government should monitor and publish compliance by local authorities with adherence to the guidance that sets down deadlines for responses to requests for adoption records.**

### Transparency on birth certificates and adoption orders

97. We heard of the distress and the impact on sense of identity caused by the disconnect between the birth certificate and adoption order and of the need for a single piece of paperwork in order to make the identity of the individual clear before and after adoption and aid tracing.

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183 [Q29](#)

184 Nick Guy ([ACU0025](#))

98. In his oral evidence, the Secretary of State emphasised the importance of not routinely adding adoptive names to birth certificates to protect children, but said that processes had been introduced:

to aid tracing where both parties want this to happen, including for mothers and children from this period. Adoptive children over 18 and birth parents can add themselves to the Adoption Contact Register, which is held at the General Register Office. The Registrar-General may disclose that information from the Adopted Children Register and the Adoption Contact Register to the adopted-out adult in order for them to obtain a certified copy of their birth certificate.<sup>185</sup>

99. **Birth and adoption certificates contain different names, with no connection made between the two. *The Government should explore ways of ensuring a transparent link for those adopted people who wish it between both certificates, so that it is clear that they relate to the same person.***

## Medical history

100. Many adopted people told us of their frustration and embarrassment at not knowing their own medical history. Medical appointments were “a challenge and embarrassment which makes me reluctant to seek medical help”, wrote one adopted person.<sup>186</sup>

101. As well as the discomfort unwittingly caused by questioning by medical professionals, this had clear practical implications. In her oral evidence, Liz Harvie described a genetic condition that had been “discovered too late for me to have been able to manage it properly”.<sup>187</sup>

102. **Adopted people face serious practical difficulties in putting in place plans for preventative medical care because they do not have access to their parents’ medical histories. The disadvantages include a lack of access to benefits reliant on those details, for example free eye tests for those with a family history of glaucoma.**

103. *A system should be established so that a parent can pass on medical information that could be relevant to their child. This system would need to comply with data protection and privacy laws given that it would be dealing with sensitive personal data relating to health. However, this would facilitate adopted children being put in the same position as other children, whose parents can more readily chose to share sensitive relevant medical information with them.*

## Ability to travel overseas

104. At our roundtable event, we heard of the practical difficulties faced by adopted people in travelling to see birth relatives overseas, particularly during the pandemic.

105. **The restrictions during the covid-19 pandemic highlighted the barriers faced by people wishing to visit, often to support, members of their family. *The Government should put in place rules and processes that allow adopted people to identify themselves***

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185 [Q31](#)

186 Anonymous ([ACU0029](#))

187 [Q24](#)

*as a relative for the purposes of foreign travel and that mirror the requirements for foreign travel and visas that apply to other family members. The Government should encourage other States to adopt a similar approach in their own visa rules.*

## Intermediary services

106. We heard evidence of the great range in quality of service by those employed, again at the expense of the individual, to trace relatives. One mother wrote of “an amazing social worker who was tireless in her attempts to contact my daughter.”<sup>188</sup> At the roundtable event on 27 April 2022, some participants expressed concern about the quality of some intermediary work, and a strong feeling that intermediaries should not simply make contact with the relatives, but facilitate contact, for example by leaving contact details with relatives in case they changed their mind about making contact. In his evidence, the Secretary of State said: “Intermediary services provide a valuable role, but I expect them to be helpful, to respond quickly and to focus on easy access to support. I want to know if they are not doing these things and we will absolutely act on it. Whatever recommendations your committee makes around intermediary services, I will absolutely look at that.”<sup>189</sup>

**107. There is a wide range in quality of service by those employed, often at the expense of the individual, to trace relatives. While many were excellent, some were not, and some people were frustrated at the inefficacy of the complaints system for intermediaries. The Government should re-visit the complaint systems for intermediaries, and ensure that those systems are easily accessible and sufficiently promoted.**

**108. There is currently a missed opportunity for intermediaries to facilitate future contact between family members, without compromising on the importance of the rights of family members who do not wish to be contacted. The Government should reassess the rules for the way in which intermediaries operate, with a view to enabling them to offer advice to family members who do not wish to be contacted on the routes and support available to them should their views change in the future.**

## Knowing your child has died

109. We heard many stories of the perpetual concern of mothers about the whereabouts and lives of their children. Particularly poignant were the descriptions of mothers simply wishing to know whether or not their child was still alive, and the examples we heard of when a child had tragically died young. When asked what process might be put in place to at least notify mothers of the death of their child, the Secretary of State explained how: “[s]haring information of this nature in any structured or ordered fashion will be extremely difficult” but undertook to look at any practical suggestions that were made.<sup>190</sup>

**110. One of the most enduring and painful questions for mothers without contact with their child is whether or not they are still alive. The Government should explore the options for alerting mothers (who wish to be so notified) to the death of a child that has been adopted.**

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188 Anonymous ([ACU0108](#))

189 [Q32](#)

190 [Q33](#)

## 4 An apology

111. There have been calls for the UK Government to issue an apology to unmarried mothers and their children for the treatment they endured during this period.<sup>191</sup> Liz Harvie, an adoptee, told the Committee:

I would very much welcome an apology to be given to the birth mothers, the birth fathers, to the adoptees, even to the children of adoptees who are still affected by that forced missing link in their ancestral line. Please, an apology to all of us. We are sorry, but we want those words to carry the recognition of our trauma, our distress, our sadness, our grief, which, even though decades old, is still very raw and painful to us.<sup>192</sup>

112. In his evidence to the Committee, Secretary of State for Education Nadhim Zahawi expressed “deep regret” for what happened and went on:

I just want to say that these practices were simply wrong and I am sorry that this was the case, and more generally for what happened. I recognise the hurt and the pain that occurred and I am deeply sorry that so many went through this ordeal. I acknowledge the profound and lasting impact that this had on them, on their sons and daughters, and in some cases the fathers of their children. I am deeply troubled that they were not only so pervasive but that they persisted for so long. It is particularly distressing to see something so joyful and precious as parenthood being treated as something shameful which must be kept secret, despite those involved having done nothing at all wrong.<sup>193</sup>

113. In 2016, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the head of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, apologised for the role the Catholic Church played in these adoption practices:

“We apologize for the hurt caused by agencies acting in the name of the Catholic Church ... Sadly for unmarried mothers, adoption was considered to be in the best interests of the mother and child because of the associated stigma and the lack of support for lone parents.”<sup>194</sup>

114. While the Church of England has not issued a formal apology for their involvement in these adoption practices, a spokesperson also expressed regret in the same year: “What was thought to be the right thing to do at the time has caused great hurt. That is a matter of great regret.”<sup>195</sup>

115. We welcome the Secretary of State’s detailed remarks, his acknowledgement that these practices were “simply wrong” and for saying that he was sorry for what had happened. He did, however, stop short of agreeing an official apology was necessary because “the Government were not actively engaged”, continuing:

191 Sir David Amess, alongside Harriet Harman MP, delivered a letter to the Prime Minister on behalf of Movement for an Adoption Apology calling for a government apology. See Amess, David, [Sir David delivers a letter to the Prime Minister asking for an apology on forced adoptions](#), 27th May 2021

192 [Q24](#)

193 [Q25](#)

194 “Catholic church apologises for role in ‘forced adoptions’ over 30-year period”, *The Guardian*, 3 November 2016

195 *Ibid.*



I have expressed my deep, deep regret, very publicly and repeatedly, as I do again today, but I genuinely feel that the whole of society failed these women and children.<sup>196</sup>

116. During the past two decades, the UK Government has apologised on a number of different occasions for past, abhorrent events. One example is the apology in 2013 by William Hague, the Foreign Secretary at the time, for the “shocking” levels of violence during the suppression of the Mau Mau insurgency in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>197</sup> In September 2009, Gordon Brown, then Prime Minister, apologised for the “homophobic laws” that criminalised and sanctioned the chemical castration of gay men, such as Alan Turing and which meant that “millions lived in fear” and were treated “terribly” and “unfairly”.<sup>198</sup>

117. Most recently, David Cameron apologised as Prime Minister in 2010 on the day of the publication of the report of the Saville inquiry into the Bloody Sunday events on 30 January 1972, when thirteen people were shot dead when soldiers opened fire on civil rights demonstrators in Derry/Londonderry.<sup>199</sup> That apology was widely welcomed at the time, including by the people who had campaigned for such an apology. In it, he said:

... the conclusions of this report are absolutely clear. There is no doubt, there is nothing equivocal, there are no ambiguities. What happened on Bloody Sunday was both unjustified and unjustifiable. It was wrong ... I know that some people wonder whether, nearly 40 years on from an event, a prime minister needs to issue an apology ... But what happened should never, ever have happened. The families of those who died should not have had to live with the pain and the hurt of that day and with a lifetime of loss.

Some members of our armed forces acted wrongly. The government is ultimately responsible for the conduct of the armed forces and for that, on behalf of the government, indeed, on behalf of our country, I am deeply sorry.

I would also like to acknowledge the grief of the families of those killed. They have pursued their long campaign over 38 years with great patience. Nothing can bring back those who were killed, but I hope, as one relative has put it, the truth coming out can help set people free.<sup>200</sup>

118. Under the child migration programme 1930–1970, more than 130,000 children were sent to various countries, including Australia and Canada, for a “better life,” but instead “faced servitude, hard labour and abuse.” Gordon Brown issued a “full and unconditional” apology for this “wholly unacceptable practice” supported by “successive UK Governments,” and remarked:

Although we cannot undo the events of the past, we can take action now to support people to regain their true identities and reunite with their families

196 [Q28](#)

197 William Hague, [Statement to Parliament on settlement of Mau Mau claims](#), Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 6 June 2013

198 Gordon Brown, [Treatment of Alan Turing was “appalling” - PM](#), [The National Archives](#), 10 September 2009

199 [“Bloody Sunday: What happened on Sunday 30 January 1972?”](#), BBC News, 27 January 2022

200 [“Bloody Sunday: PM David Cameron’s full statement”](#), BBC News, 15 June 2010

and loved ones, and to go some way to repair the damage that has been inflicted. I can announce today support for former child migrants that includes the establishment of a new £6 million family restoration fund ...

There are many painful memories as a result of the child migration schemes, and for many, today's apology will come too late for them to hear it. We cannot change history, but I believe that by confronting the failings of the past we show that we are determined to do all we can to heal the wounds.<sup>201</sup>

119. The transatlantic slave trade took place between 1450 and the early 19th century.<sup>202</sup> During this time, between 10 million to 28 million Africans were forcibly removed from their countries and shipped to the Americas to be sold as slaves, in conditions so foul that millions died en route.<sup>203</sup> Having previously acknowledged that "Great Britain's rise to global pre-eminence was partially dependent on a system of colonial slave labour", Tony Blair in 2007 apologised for the role Britain played in the slave trade:

We are sorry. And I say it again now ... For us, the most important thing though is obviously to remember what happened in the past and to condemn it and say why it was so entirely unacceptable.<sup>204</sup>

120. The apologies for Bloody Sunday, the suppression of the Mau Mau insurgency, and the Child Migration programmes were made as statements to the House of Commons. Alan Turing was given a posthumous royal pardon for the treatment he endured, along with a written apology by the then Prime Minister, and the apology for Britain's role in the slave trade was given by Tony Blair during a news conference with the Ghanaian President.

121. By considering the events that culminated in these apologies, it is possible to outline common features, and perhaps even criteria, for situations where the Government must apologise. In these instances, the following common features apply:

- a) *the laws and attitudes of the time would be regarded as utterly unacceptable today.*
- b) *the way in which those affected were treated was manifestly and obviously wrong, and caused a great deal of pain and suffering.*
- c) *the State was ultimately responsible* by either act, omission, or both.

122. **There are a number of instances of the UK Government making apologies for occurrences of the past, which caused pain and suffering and in which the State had some involvement and that were clearly and emphatically wrong.**

123. **In this instance, many thousands of mothers have had a lifetime of pain and suffering because their babies were taken for adoption. This suffering was compounded by the subsequent branding of them as feckless and uncaring for having irresponsibly "given their child away". These untruths, the hurtful words implying that women "gave up" their babies for adoption, along with the secrecy and shame that have surrounded their histories for so long have intensified the pain of separation for mother and child.**

201 HC Deb, [24 February 2010](#), [Commons Chamber]

202 "[Blair says "sorry" for slavery](#)", Reuters, 20 March 2007

203 United Nations, [Slavery Remembrance Day: Background Information](#), 2008

204 Tony Blair, [Tony Blair's statement on the slave trade in full](#), 27 November 2006



124. What happened shouldn't have happened, and continues to cause pain today. A State should be ready to hold itself to account, to acknowledge wrongdoings of the past, and express regret for the actions and acts of omission that enabled them.

**125. An apology by the Government and an official recognition that what happened to these mothers was dreadful and wrong, backed up by the other actions recommended in this Report, would go some way to mitigate the pain and suffering of to those affected.**

**126. *There are some things that only a government can do, and it falls on the Government to make this apology.***

## 5 England and Wales in 1949–1976: adoption, human rights and society

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### Legislative framework

127. During the twentieth century there were significant changes in adoption law and practices, reflecting in part society's changing attitudes to unmarried mothers, and to single parent families. This section sets out in brief the developments in the period leading up to 1949, when the focus of this inquiry begins, until 1976 when it ends. During this period, the responsibility for adoption within central government was overseen by various departments, including the Department for Education, the Home Office, the Department of Health and Social Security, and the Department of Health.<sup>205</sup>

128. The Adoption of Children Act 1926 provided a legal framework for the courts to make adoption orders for the first time. Before then, adoption was unregulated and carried out on an informal basis within families or between unmarried mothers and couples. The Adoption Act 1939 gave local authorities more responsibility for adoption and established a process for its regulation, though adoption societies continued to be directly involved with the adoption process.

129. Dr Michael Lambert, Fellow in Social Inequalities at Lancaster University, described how in the aftermath of the Second World War: “political priorities embodied both ideals of social reconstruction for a new future, as well as the restoration of normality lost through years of war.”<sup>206</sup>

130. This inquiry starts in 1949, when the Adoption of Children Act 1949 provided that local authorities would make arrangements for the adoption of children and gave adopted children the same status as birth children, with the right to inherit.<sup>207</sup> Dr Lambert explained to us how, despite this shift towards a central Government policy, the voluntary systems that had existed up until that time, under the auspices of, for example, the Church of England, Catholic Church, and Salvation Army, largely remained in place leading to what he describes as a “mixed economy” of statutory and voluntary provision.<sup>208</sup> CoramBAAF, an adoption and fostering academy, noted that while the Act attempted to ensure that “the child and their rights, safety and needs are addressed... [w]hat it does not acknowledge is the child’s right to know they were adopted, who they were born to and ... their history and heritage.”<sup>209</sup>

131. Further Acts in 1950 and 1958 saw further increases in the involvement of local authorities and made provisions around the making of the adoption order, with the mother’s consent being required (which must be given no earlier than six weeks after the birth), and the requirement for the attestation of a Justice of the Peace. The Adoption Act 1968 allowed for the recognition of overseas adoptions under English law.

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205 Department for Education ([ACU0142](#))

206 Dr Michael Lambert ([ACU0024](#))

207 Ibid.

208 Ibid.

209 CoramBAAF ([ACU0116](#)), pg. 7

132. The Adoption Act 1976, which marks the end of the period of this inquiry, was largely a response to the recommendations of the Houghton Committee in 1972. The 1976 Act consolidated previous legislation and introduced the principle of ‘freeing a child’ for adoption, with each parent or guardian giving their consent to the making of an adoption order.

133. The period since 1976 has, as the Department for Education told us: “seen further major reforms in our legislation which have put children at the forefront of decisions, and which acknowledge the importance of keeping children in the family unit wherever possible.”<sup>210</sup>

134. The Government of the time should have recognised the crucial importance of the bond between mother and child and done more to ensure that the policies of the time helped them stay together. It was the State that was ultimately responsible for the actions and omissions within the adoption system that led to a failure to protect women and babies from the actions of some. This includes the failure to ensure that there was a set of clear standards of behaviour for those who played a role in adoption including public sector employees, such as social workers and medical staff, and for the voluntary bodies who played a significant role throughout the period.

## Human rights

135. The rights principally engaged in adoption decisions concern the right to family life and the rights of the child. The requirement to have regard to the best interests of the child in all decisions affecting a child is now commonplace in all decision-making involving a child. However, the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 and the UK statutes giving these rights legal value in UK law all post-date the timeframe for this inquiry. The concepts of best interests of the child, and the value now attached to keeping a mother and child together, were not as developed during the relevant time frame for this inquiry.

136. The right to family and private life under Article 8(1) of the European Convention on Human Rights, now incorporated into UK law by the Human Rights Act 1998 reads:

Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.

137. That right to family and private life was understood and interpreted differently in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, and was seen primarily as protecting the individual against arbitrary interference by public authorities. In 1979, the European Court of Human Rights held that Article 8 applied to the relationship between a mother and her child, and that: “respect for family life implies the existence in law of safeguards that render possible, from the moment of birth, the child’s integration in the family” regardless of her marital status.<sup>211</sup> It further held that respect for family life between an unmarried mother and her child placed a positive obligation on the State to adopt measures designed to ensure the child’s integration into their family from the moment of birth. That decision post-dates the period of this inquiry, but marks an important development in the interpretation of Article 8 rights.

<sup>210</sup> Department for Education ([ACU0142](#))

<sup>211</sup> *Marckx v. Belgium*, ECHR, judgment of 13 June 1979

138. In essence, while we are clear now that the right to family life and the rights of the child are engaged by the process of adoption, it cannot be said with any certainty that those rights would have been considered to be engaged to the same extent, between 1949–76. However, the impact on those involved, of course, would have been and continues to be the same in other ways.

### Societal views and pressures on unmarried mothers

139. In her PhD thesis,<sup>212</sup> Dr Sandhu, a social researcher and an oral witness to this inquiry, explains how unmarried mothers were considered a social problem during the 20th century and illegitimate pregnancy was rooted in shame and stigma and the women “condemned morally and spiritually”.<sup>213</sup> By the 1950s, social attitudes about birth mothers’ perceived “deviant behaviour” moved away from ethical and moral explanations and towards more psychological language, such as one description of a “neurotic character resulting from disturbances from her own family background.”<sup>214</sup>

140. Sexual restraint and traditional gender roles were important parts of respectability, with women judged more harshly than men. Unmarried birth mothers were often sent away from home, to hide the pregnant mother and to save her, and her family, from shame and embarrassment.<sup>215</sup>

141. As Dr Sandhu explained in her oral evidence, the alternative options available to the woman came with considerable restrictions.<sup>216</sup> Either the mother or father may not have wished or been able to get married, for different reasons.

142. Keeping the baby would be hard for the mother, whether she was living at home with her parents or in rented accommodation. Finding employment while pregnant or as a single mother presented its own difficulties, and while: “There was some welfare assistance available at the time, through the National Assistance Act [1948], but that would not have been sufficient to make the option of self-support realistic, particularly for those who did not have the support of the birth father or their families.”<sup>217</sup>

143. Sex education was cursory or non-existent at the time and contraception difficult to access for unmarried women and girls. While abortion was legalised during the period of this inquiry, for those women who would have wished to terminate their pregnancy before 1967, the option of a “backstreet” abortion would have been illegal and unsafe.

144. We read written evidence of the variety of pressures exerted on the mothers by society at the time. One witness described the church as having: “a strong hold on society” as well as the importance of “other people’s opinions of the family”. She went on to explain how “[m]any families were trying to become or had become upwardly mobile and there were strict rules to what was and what wasn’t accepted. If a young woman fell pregnant then they were expected to marry quickly... Women were expected to do as they were told by their families.”<sup>218</sup> Another described how: “[t]o be unmarried and pregnant was a shame

212 [Jatinder Sandhu, The birth mother and the evolution of adoption policy and practice in England since 1926, October 2012](#)

213 *Ibid.*, p. 77

214 *Ibid.*, p. 77

215 *Ibid.*, p. 78

216 [Q3](#)

217 Dr Michael Lambert ([ACU0024](#))

218 Mrs Lorraine Le-gate ([ACU0005](#))

on family values.”<sup>219</sup> We were struck by one mother’s description of how in the 1960s: “Although there was seemingly much societal progress, attitudes towards unmarried mothers hardly changed.”<sup>220</sup>

**145. The adoption practices that we have heard about lacked humanity and had a profound impact on the family lives of all involved. Many mothers were left feeling they had no real choice in the placement for adoption of their children.**

**146. The Government was ultimately responsible for the actions and omissions that led to a lack of protection for unmarried mothers and their babies, including by a failure to ensure that there was a set of clear standards of behaviour for all those working in the adoption system at the time.**

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219 Dawn Young ([ACU0016](#))

220 Anonymous ([ACU0077](#))

## Conclusions and recommendations

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### What happened

1. It is striking that it has taken a great deal of time—decades - before we have faced up to the truth of what was happening to hundreds of thousands of mothers and their children. Babies were taken away from mothers who didn't want to let them go. They were told they had no other option and would, in the words of one witness 'with an ounce of help' have seized the chance to keep their sons and daughters with them and brought them up themselves. (Paragraph 78)
2. While each experience is unique, we were struck by telling similarities in the stories we heard. Unmarried women were told that they had given up their baby for adoption, when in fact they felt they had no choice. We need to correct the record. Some children grew up thinking their mothers were feckless or irresponsible or gave them up without a care in the world. This is patently untrue. We have heard that many unmarried women put up their children because they wanted the very best for their child, and adoption was presented as the only option. However, that does not equate to giving up their child willingly. By saying mothers gave up their babies for adoption, there has been a perpetuation of a view that they didn't care or love their babies enough to keep them and were content to give them to another family. (Paragraph 79)
3. The evidence that we have received has done something towards setting the record straight on what actually happened to many unmarried women who became pregnant during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, and the appalling way in which they were often treated by those whose job it was to help them—professionals such as social workers, medical staff including doctors, midwives and nurses and sadly, often, by their own family members. (Paragraph 80)
4. The evidence from mothers and from adopted people vividly demonstrates the struggles that individuals continue to face every day in living with the impact of those brutal and cruel processes. (Paragraph 81)
5. This is about principles. Human rights exist because of the inherent humanity of each of us. The mothers were subjected to this cruelty because they were regarded as transgressors. They were not, but it underlines that human rights should be protected for all, including those who at that time are regarded as transgressors. (Paragraph 82)

### The effects today

6. There is a shortage of counsellors able to provide post-adoption support and the existing process for Ofsted regulation is one barrier to counsellors working in this area. *The Government should consider as a matter of urgency how to make sure that the necessary regulations to protect standards do not prevent mothers and adult adoptees getting the support they need.* (Paragraph 94)

7. There are huge disparities in the timeliness of the responses of local authorities to requests for access to adoption records, to which adopted people have had a right since 1976, leading to unnecessary stress and frustration for those individuals who have decided to seek out family members. *The Government should monitor and publish compliance by local authorities with adherence to the guidance that sets down deadlines for responses to requests for adoption records.* (Paragraph 97)
8. Birth and adoption certificates contain different names, with no connection made between the two. *The Government should explore ways of ensuring a transparent link for those adopted people who wish it between both certificates, so that it is clear that they relate to the same person.* (Paragraph 100)
9. Adopted people face serious practical difficulties in putting in place plans for preventative medical care because they do not have access their parents' medical histories. The disadvantages include a lack of access to benefits reliant on those details, for example free eye tests for those with a family history of glaucoma. (Paragraph 103)
10. *A system should be established so that a parent can pass on medical information that could be relevant to their child. This system would need to comply with data protection and privacy laws given that it would be dealing with sensitive personal data relating to health. However, this would facilitate adopted children being put in the same position as other children, whose parents can more readily chose to share sensitive relevant medical information with them.* (Paragraph 104)
11. The restrictions during the covid-19 pandemic highlighted the barriers faced by people wishing to visit, often to support, members of their family. *The Government should put in place rules and processes that allow adopted people to identify themselves as a relative for the purposes of foreign travel and that mirror the requirements for foreign travel and visas that apply to other family members. The Government should encourage other States to adopt a similar approach in their own visa rules.* (Paragraph 106)
12. There is a wide range in quality of service by those employed, often at the expense of the individual, to trace relatives. While many were excellent, some were not, and some people were frustrated at the inefficacy of the complaints system for intermediaries. *The Government should re-visit the complaint systems for intermediaries, and ensure that those systems are easily accessible and sufficiently promoted.* (Paragraph 108)
13. There is currently a missed opportunity for intermediaries to facilitate future contact between family members, without compromising on the importance of the rights of family members who do not wish to be contacted. *The Government should reassess the rules for the way in which intermediaries operate, with a view to enabling them to offer advice to family members who do not wish to be contacted on the routes and support available to them should their views change in the future.* (Paragraph 109)
14. One of the most enduring and painful questions for mothers without contact with their child is whether or not they are still alive. *The Government should explore the options for alerting mothers (who wish to be so notified) to the death of a child that has been adopted.* (Paragraph 111)

### An apology

15. There are a number of instances of the UK Government making apologies for occurrences of the past, which caused pain and suffering and in which the State had some involvement and that were clearly and emphatically wrong. (Paragraph 123)
16. In this instance, many thousands of mothers have had a lifetime of pain and suffering because their babies were taken for adoption. This suffering was compounded by the subsequent branding of them as feckless and uncaring for having irresponsibly “given their child away”. These untruths, the hurtful words implying that women “gave up” their babies for adoption, along with the secrecy and shame that have surrounded their histories for so long have intensified the pain of separation for mother and child. (Paragraph 124)
17. An apology by the Government and an official recognition that what happened to these mothers was dreadful and wrong, backed up by the other actions recommended in this Report, would go some way to mitigate the pain and suffering of to those affected. (Paragraph 126)
18. *There are some things that only a government can do, and for that reason that falls to the Government to make this apology.* (Paragraph 127)

### England and Wales in 1949 –1976: adoption, human rights and society

19. The adoption practices that we have heard about lacked humanity and had a profound impact on the family lives of all involved. Many mothers were left feeling they had no real choice in the placement for adoption of their children. (Paragraph 146)
20. The Government was ultimately responsible for the actions and omissions that led to a lack of protection for unmarried mothers and their babies, including by a failure to ensure that there was a set of clear standards of behaviour for all those working in the adoption system at the time. (Paragraph 147)



# Appendix 1: Adoption and human rights

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## Adoption and human rights

1. Adoption and its relationship to the right to family life can incite powerful emotional responses, affecting people profoundly. Adoption has the potential to engage the right to family life in Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights very significantly—including the right to family life of the child, their siblings, birth and adoptive parents, extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins), as well as any others with a relationship with the child that is akin to family life. The State has a duty to protect (as well as not to unduly interfere with) the right to family life.

2. Under existing laws, rights of the child considerations (under both domestic UK law and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) are at the fore of all decision-making regarding child protection and the placing of a child with a family or in care. Moreover, in relation to child protection, the State's positive duties to protect the right to life (Article 2 ECHR) and the right not to be tortured or mistreated (Article 3 ECHR) are engaged in that the State has a positive duty to (take reasonable steps to) protect children from abuse.

## The right to family life in the 1950s–1970s

3. Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights provides that “everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence”.<sup>221</sup> However, it was not until the Human Rights Act 1998 incorporated the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic UK law that the right to family life was directly enforceable in the UK. Therefore, the right to family life, as we now know it, was not part of UK domestic law between 1949–76.

4. The obligation to respect the right to family life was nonetheless recognised internationally, for example in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights 1948 and the European Convention on Human Rights, which entered into force in 1953.

5. Many core concepts relating to the rights of the child, including the development of principles such as the “best interests of the child”, did not appear in human rights law until later, for example with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989.

6. The ECHR case law, and in particular looking at the ECHR case of *Marckx v Belgium* in 1979, does suggest that, at least by 1979, the UK should have been ensuring that any legislation governing adoption and legal recognition of parenthood in the UK should respect an individual's right to family life.

## Annex: Survey results

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1) On 21 September 2021, we published a call for written evidence on the adoption of children of unmarried mothers 1949–76. We also published an online survey, promoted on our website and social media. Our survey closed on 30 October 2021, and we received 266 responses. Although our responses may not be fully representative, they do capture the varied points of view on the effects of historic adoption practices.

### The impact of adoption practices from 1949–76 on mothers and children

2) The painful and debilitating effects of past adoption practices on unmarried mothers and their children was a recurring theme in survey responses. Many respondents lamented that their adoption experience caused them to build a wall around themselves, preventing them from forging stable, healthy relationships with family members and partners later on in life. Responses included:

“Losing my only child to forced adoption in 1968 has coloured every part of my life. I never had other children. I was told by the family doctor, my parents and social service workers that I was a bad person, unfit to keep a baby. I have spent most of my life feeling as if I am a third class human being.”

“It has affected every aspect of my life, and my relationships with every person in my life: my parents, my husband, children, relatives and friends. It affected my interpretation of myself—a betrayer of trust, a person unfit to bring up children, a breaker of sacred rules governing the morals of society... The list is endless!”

“The mental health repercussions have been enormous and are ongoing. At the time, I was sectioned, then many years later I suffered from PTSD and it has taken years of counselling and therapy to keep me functioning.”

“My entire life has been affected by my adoption which I recognise as a trauma. I have struggled with knowing my full family history (there are gaps I will never be able to know), identity issues, rejection and acceptance issues, self-esteem and feeling “enough” because I was given up for adoption as an 8 month old baby.”

### Support provision

3) Most respondents recall there being no support for unmarried mothers and their children between 1949–76, or there being a concerted effort to prevent unmarried mothers from accessing what support existed to make sure they felt adoption was the only way. While some believe that support, and understanding of their experiences generally, has improved across society since this time, most felt that there is still a way to go to ensure that support services are accessible and effective for those who were subject to these adoption practices. Responses included:

“No support was given other than a Social Worker who wrote obvious lies to affect the adoption. This has been confirmed by being in possession of my Adoption Folder. No offer of assistance was given to help me keep my beautiful baby. No help was offered after the separation by way of counselling, you were expected to just get on with life, suffer in silence and not cause a fuss. It was not easy to try and trace your child until processes were put in place in recent years.”

“There is absolutely no support for adult adoptees. I am trying to organise counselling but it is prohibitively expensive. The requirement for Ofsted regulation of therapists supporting adult adoptees limits the pool of available help. The government enabled and sanctioned my removal from my family, there should be ongoing support for the consequences.”

“It’s a lot better now. When I was adopted and young, I wasn’t listened to or understood,”

“Support? None at all. I was told to forget that I had a son. I hid the fact of my motherhood throughout decades, until my son found me 38 years later and I found my voice.”

“I believe there was some governmental support available but ... the social workers never guided me towards any assistance as it was in their interests to keep me destitute.”

“... I did get child benefit for my daughter for the first few weeks, but the social workers took the book of coupons off me during an early visit once my baby was born. Along with her birth certificate which cost me 5 pounds. That tiny amount of money would have made a difference to me.”

## The role of consent

4) Most respondents believed that unmarried mothers did not have a meaningful say in the decision to adopt their babies. The pressure from their families, social workers, medical practitioners, the Church, and society at large was such that many vulnerable young, unmarried mothers were made to believe that they had no choice but adoption. Responses included:

“Really had no choice, the times they said but parents, church, society had a lot to do with this. We brought shame back then. It was a given to give up your baby, no choice. Keep the mother and baby together for a period of time and let her make a decision after some time with her baby. Don’t pull that child away from her right after birth; more time to make that final decision.”

“My mother did consent to my adoption but in reality she had very very little economic choice. She lived in a rented house with her mother & they were not eligible for any support/benefits. They were also conscious of the stigma surrounding unmarried mothers.”

“My daughter was fostered for 6 months, and I wouldn’t sign the adoption papers until I was told that the adoption would go ahead anyway, whether I signed or not.”

“Consent did not play much part as I was in a corner not being able to look after my child. If I had known the support that was actually available, but not offered, then the question of consent would have been quite different. The decision would have been from a situation of knowing all the facts and not being left ignorant. Consent would probably not have been given.”

## **Adoption and society, then and now**

5) The majority of respondents felt that the standards, laws and support for adoption today is much more supportive of unmarried mothers than it was between 1949–76.

“Today an unmarried mother has lots of support and is not treated like a fallen woman, it is beyond belief how things have changed in just under 50 years. There is no comparison really.”

“Freedom of choice. Back in the 60’s you had no choice, nowadays it’s not something the unmarried mothers have to be ashamed of.”

“At least today children who are adopted should be given information about their birth family - I had nothing - no medical information for example and when I was pregnant I had to explain that I was adopted so couldn’t provide any family medical history.”

“From what I understand people today are offered not only financial support but also physical and emotional support guidance and counselling. I wasn’t aware of anything being available at the time that my daughter was born.”

“It was more like punishment in the 1950s.”

“I think it’s probably more open today, less of a stigma to be an unmarried parent, and support is there in principal at least to keep children.”

“Today, the pressure and expectation my mother came under to have me adopted would be considered coercion. Also, the lack of supervision of my adoption by a social worker or similar (allowing emotional abuse and some physical abuse) would today be considered institutional neglect.”

## **The importance of an apology**

6) Respondents were mixed on the issue of whether a formal apology is necessary. Some felt that it was important for the Government to acknowledge that the treatment of unmarried mothers during this time was wrong, and to help alleviate some of the pain many of them and their children continue to feel. However, some respondents felt that no apology could make up for the harm done, while others pointed out that action to better support those that continue to be impacted by these adoption practices was as important, if not more, than a simple apology. Responses included:

“It would be unbelievably important to know someone was sorry.”

“Incredibly important because it acknowledges that I was failed and helps restore my self esteem.”

“There needs to be a recognition of what we experienced and lost. It is very, very painful to finally realise that we were actually stripped of all our human rights.”

“It’s an acknowledgement, but it can’t ever be enough to heal the wrongs that were perpetrated.”

“It will not bring my child back, however, it may allow my child and others to see that they were not unwanted or given away but taken and they had been and always were loved by their mothers. A more open tracing and information sharing may show that these apologies are honestly given. An apology is just that. An investigation and a possible rethink of adoption itself would be much more welcome to me.”

“I don’t care for apologies, what I would expect is some sort of free counselling offered to all people affected free of charge.”

“I have received no apology for the lies that were told. Generic apologies for their role would mean little to me. Proper care and support for those struggling with adoption losses, greater training and understanding of these losses within the medical and counselling fields is needed.”

“From my point of view whilst an apology might be helpful, especially to birth mothers; it is the recognition that adoption carries with it a trauma - for parents and most especially the child—that is the most vital issue. This needs to be acknowledged, openly, and with specific provision (and attached funding) being available and offered to those whom adoption has impacted.”

# Formal minutes

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**Wednesday 6 July 2022**

Hybrid Meeting

## **Members present:**

Harriet Harman MP, in the Chair

Joanna Cherry MP

Lord Dubs

Lord Henley

Baroness Ludford

Baroness Massey of Darwen

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

David Simmonds MP

Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen

Florence Eshalomi MP

## **The Violation of Family Life: Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women 1949–1976**

Draft Report (*The right to family life: adoption of children of unmarried women 1949–1976*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the Chair's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph. Paragraphs 1 to 146 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Annex agreed to

A Paper was appended to the Report as Appendix 1

*Resolved*, that the title of the Report be changed to the following: The violation of family life: adoption of children of unmarried women 1949–1976

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Third Report of the Committee to both Houses.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House of Commons and that the Report be made to the House of Lords.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

## **Adjournment**

Adjourned till 13 July 2022 at 2.45pm.

## Declaration of interests

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### **Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen**

- No relevant interests to declare

### **Lord Dubs**

- No relevant interests to declare

### **Lord Henley**

- No relevant interests to declare

### **Baroness Ludford**

- No relevant interests to declare

### **Baroness Massey of Darwen**

- No relevant interests to declare

### **Lord Singh of Wimbledon**

- No relevant interests to declare



## Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Wednesday 15 December 2021

**Professor Gordon Harold**, Professor of the Psychology of Education and Mental Health, University of Cambridge; **Dr Michael Lambert**, Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Lancaster; **Dr Jatinder Sandhu**

[Q1–12](#)

### Wednesday 16 March 2022

**Ann Keen**; **Judy Baker**

[Q13–17](#)

**Liz Harvie**

[Q18–24](#)

### Wednesday 25 May 2022

**Nadhim Zahawi MP**, Secretary of State, Department of Education; **Sarah Jennings**, Deputy Director of Adoption, Family Justice and Care Leavers, Department of Education

[Q25–34](#)

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

ACU numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Anonymised ([ACU0001](#))
- 2 Anonymised ([ACU0020](#))
- 3 Anonymised ([ACU0021](#))
- 4 Anonymised ([ACU0029](#))
- 5 Anonymised ([ACU0030](#))
- 6 Anonymised ([ACU0035](#))
- 7 Anonymised ([ACU0038](#))
- 8 Anonymised ([ACU0039](#))
- 9 Anonymised ([ACU0043](#))
- 10 Anonymised ([ACU0041](#))
- 11 Anonymised ([ACU0044](#))
- 12 Anonymised ([ACU0045](#))
- 13 Anonymised ([ACU0046](#))
- 14 Anonymised ([ACU0048](#))
- 15 Anonymised ([ACU0049](#))
- 16 Anonymised ([ACU0060](#))
- 17 Anonymised ([ACU0068](#))
- 18 Anonymised ([ACU0069](#))
- 19 Anonymised ([ACU0072](#))
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- 48 Anonymised ([ACU0133](#))
- 49 Anonymised ([ACU0134](#))
- 50 Anonymised ([ACU0138](#))
- 51 Anonymised ([ACU0140](#))
- 52 Anonymised ([ACU0141](#))
- 53 Baker, Mrs Judy ([ACU0018](#))
- 54 Barnardo's ([ACU0062](#))
- 55 Barnett, Harry ([ACU0091](#))
- 56 Burgess, Linda ([ACU0066](#))
- 57 Cater, Ms Clare ([ACU0004](#))
- 58 Chambers, Timothy ([ACU0061](#))
- 59 CoramBAAF ([ACU0116](#))
- 60 Cowley, Mrs Lynne ([ACU0023](#))
- 61 Davies, Miss Julie ([ACU0010](#))
- 62 Davies, Mrs. Felicity ([ACU0027](#))
- 63 Defries, Diana (Creative - artist / writer, Self-employed) ([ACU0008](#))
- 64 Diver, Alice ([ACU0126](#))
- 65 D, Anna ([ACU0083](#))
- 66 Elliott, Penny ([ACU0121](#))
- 67 Feast, OBE Julia ([ACU0125](#))
- 68 Gadd, Eddie ([ACU0137](#))
- 69 Goldring, Ms C T (Psychologist, Self employed) ([ACU0042](#))
- 70 Griffiths, Mrs Eileen (retired Clinical Psychologist, NHS) ([ACU0006](#))

- 71 Guy, Mr Nick (Adoption Social Worker, Mid and West Wales Adoption service) ([ACU0025](#))
- 72 Harvie, Mrs Liz ([ACU0014](#))
- 73 HODGKINS, Ms Pam (Founder and CEO until 2011, NORCAP (national support charity 1982–2014)) ([ACU0032](#))
- 74 Hart, Richard ([ACU0120](#))
- 75 Hodgkins, Pam MBE ([ACU0124](#))
- 76 Husted, Mary ([ACU0092](#))
- 77 Jones, Anne ([ACU0079](#))
- 78 Kane, Bernadette ([ACU0127](#))
- 79 Keen, Ann Lloyd (Fox); and Keen, Ann Lloyd (Fox) ([ACU0034](#))
- 80 Keeton, Florence ([ACU0057](#))
- 81 Lambert, Dr Michael (Fellow in Social Inequalities, Lancaster University) ([ACU0024](#))
- 82 Le-gate, MRS Lorraine ([ACU0005](#))
- 83 Lindsey, Margaret ([ACU0098](#))
- 84 Masson, Professor Judith (Professor (Emeritus), University of Bristol) ([ACU0053](#))
- 85 Miller, Rosann ([ACU0097](#))
- 86 Mills, Betty ([ACU0063](#))
- 87 Origins Scotland ([ACU0037](#))
- 88 Origins Supporting People Separated by Adoption Incorporated (Australia) ([ACU0009](#))
- 89 Pannett, Margaret ([ACU0052](#))
- 90 Parker, Mr Adrian ([ACU0056](#))
- 91 Partington, Peter ([ACU0075](#))
- 92 Probert, Rebecca (Professor, The University of Exeter) ([ACU0065](#))
- 93 Rudd, Andrew and Virginia Research and Professional Practice Programme ([ACU0071](#))
- 94 Selwyn, Julie (Professor of Education and Adoption, The Rees Centre University of Oxford) ([ACU0012](#))
- 95 Shannon, Ursula ([ACU0058](#))
- 96 Smith, Mrs Veronica ([ACU0031](#))
- 97 Southon, Mrs Karen Lesley ([ACU0047](#))
- 98 The Salvation Army (UK & Ireland) ([ACU0051](#))
- 99 Tims, Caroline ([ACU0128](#))
- 100 Twining, Dr Charles (Retired Clinical Psychologist, NHS) ([ACU0007](#))
- 101 Wallman, Mrs Bernadette (Midwife & Lactation Consultant, Self employed) ([ACU0026](#))
- 102 Westacott, Jane ([ACU0103](#))
- 103 Young, Dawn ([ACU0016](#))
- 104 Zahawi, Nadhim (Secretary of State, Department of Education) ([ACU0142](#))

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

### Session 2022–23

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Legislative Scrutiny: Public Order Bill	HC351- HL16
2nd	Proposal for a draft State Immunity Act 1978 (Remedial) Order	HC280- HL42

### Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Children of mothers in prison and the right to family life: The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill	HC 90 HL 5
2nd	Legislative Scrutiny: Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, Part 3 (Public Order)	HC 331 HL 23
3rd	The Government's Independent Review of the Human Rights Act	HC 89 HL 31
4th	Legislative Scrutiny: Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill (Part 4): The criminalisation of unauthorised encampments	HC 478 HL 37
5th	Legislative Scrutiny: Elections Bill	HC 233 HL 58
6th	Legislative Scrutiny: Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill (Parts 7 and 8): Sentencing and Remand of Children and Young People	HC 451 HL 73
7th	Legislative Scrutiny: Nationality and Borders Bill (Part 1) – Nationality	HC 764 HL 90
8th	Proposal for a draft Bereavement Benefits (Remedial) Order 2021: discrimination against cohabiting partners	HC 594 HL 91
9th	Legislative Scrutiny: Nationality and Borders Bill (Part 3) – Immigration offences and enforcement	HC 885 HL 112
10th	Legislative Scrutiny: Judicial Review and Courts Bill	HC 884 HL 120
11th	Legislative Scrutiny: Nationality and Borders Bill (Part 5)— Modern slavery	HC 964 HL 135
12th	Legislative Scrutiny: Nationality and Borders Bill (Parts 1, 2 and 4) – Asylum, Home Office DecisionMaking, Age Assessments, and Deprivation of Citizenship Orders	HC 1007 HL 143

Number	Title	Reference
13th	Human Rights Act Reform	HC 1033 HL 191
1st Special Report	The Government response to covid-19: fixed penalty notices: Government Response to the Committee's Fourteenth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 545
2nd Special Report	Care homes: Visiting restrictions during the covid-19 pandemic: Government Response to the Committee's Fifteenth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 553
3rd Special Report	Children of mothers in prison and the right to family life: The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill: Government Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 585
4th Special Report	The Government response to covid-19: freedom of assembly and the right to protest: Government Response to the Committee's Thirteenth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 586
5th Special Report	Legislative Scrutiny: Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, Part 3 (Public Order): Government Response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 724
6th Special Report	Legislative Scrutiny: Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, Part 4 (Unauthorised Encampments): Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report	HC 765
7th Special Report	Legislative Scrutiny: Elections Bill: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report	HC 911
8th Special Report	Legislative Scrutiny: Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill (Parts 7 and 8): Sentencing and Remand of Children and Young People: Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report	HC 983
9th Special Report	Human Rights and the Government's Response to Covid-19: Digital Contact Tracing: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2019–21	HC 1198
10th Special Report	Legislative Scrutiny: Nationality and Borders Bill: Government Responses to the Committee's Seventh, Ninth, Eleventh and Twelfth Reports	HC 1208

### Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Draft Jobseekers (Back to Work Schemes) Act 2013 (Remedial) Order 2019: Second Report	HC 146 HL 37
2nd	Draft Human Rights Act 1998 (Remedial) Order: Judicial Immunity: Second Report	HC 148 HL 41
3rd	Human Rights and the Government's Response to Covid-19: Digital Contact Tracing	HC 343 HL 59
4th	Draft Fatal Accidents Act 1976 (Remedial) Order 2020: Second Report	HC 256 HL 62

Number	Title	Reference
5th	Human Rights and the Government's response to COVID-19: the detention of young people who are autistic and/or have learning disabilities	HC 395 (CP 309) HL 72
6th	Human Rights and the Government's response to COVID-19: children whose mothers are in prison	HC 518 HL 90
7th	The Government's response to COVID-19: human rights implications	HC 265 (CP 335) HL 125
8th	Legislative Scrutiny: The United Kingdom Internal Market Bill	HC 901 HL 154
9th	Legislative Scrutiny: Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill	HC 665 (HC 1120) HL 155
10th	Legislative Scrutiny: Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Bill	HC 847 (HC 1127) HL 164
11th	Black people, racism and human rights	HC 559 (HC 1210) HL 165
12th	Appointment of the Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission	HC 1022 HL 180
13th	The Government response to covid-19: freedom of assembly and the right to protest	HC 1328 HL 252
14th	The Government response to covid-19: fixed penalty notices	HC 1364 HL 272
15th	Care homes: Visiting restrictions during the covid-19 pandemic	HC 1375 HL 278
1st Special Report	The Right to Privacy (Article 8) and the Digital Revolution: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2019	HC 313
2nd Special Report	Legislative Scrutiny: Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Bill: Government Response to the Committee's Tenth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 1127
3rd Special Report	Legislative Scrutiny: Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill: Government Response to the Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 1120
4th Special Report	Black people, racism and human rights: Government Response to the Committee's Eleventh Report of Session 2019–21	HC 1210
5th Special Report	Democracy, freedom of expression and freedom of association: Threats to MPs: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2019	HC 1317
6th Special Report	Legislative Scrutiny: Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, Part 4 (Unauthorised Encampments): Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report	HC 765



Number	Title	Reference
7th Special Report	Legislative Scrutiny: Elections Bill: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report	HC 911