

Is Open Adoption Best for the Biological Parent, Adoptive Parent, and the Adopted Child

For
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Dear Professor Stetz-Waters:

Here is my report, Is Open Adoption Best for the Biological Parent, Adoptive Parent, and the Adopted Child. This research has taught me a lot about open adoption and how it affects the families. I believe the research will help families who are giving a child up for adoption or who are planning on adopting. Thank you very much in your guidance and the information you gave on how to do the report.

While doing this research I found it hard to gather statistical information. This is because it is not known how many open adoptions occur each year. Research on open adoption also takes years and it is hard to keep in touch with the parties involved for the extended period of time. In the future I would love to do more research on this topic and actually become an advocate for open adoption.

As I researched this report I found it interesting that there are so many levels of open adoption. It seems perfect that you can have a restricted, semi, fully, or continuing open adoption and each person going through the process can decide on the level of contact they want. I hope that people that are going through the adoption process will use this information to make the right decision for them.

This research and paper was really fun to write. If you have any questions regarding this report please contact me through my email; crnstn25@hotmail.com.

Sincerely,

Kathy Cranston

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ABSTRACT

The argument of whether adoptions should be open is coming from a college student's interest in and experience dealing with people she knew that were adopted.

There are many sides to open adoption which show both the positives and the negatives. Most experts disagree on whether adoptions should be open or not based on the risks. One of the major positives of open adoption is that the child would have all the answers that he or she desired. The main negative to open adoption is that it could interfere with the building and bonding of the adoptive family.

There are four types of open adoption. These types are:

- Restricted Open Adoption
- Semi Open Adoption
- Fully Open Adoption
- Continuing Open Adoption

Each of these types of open adoption gives the families of adoption the level of contact that they desire. One type of adoption does not suite everybody so it is important to have a variety of choices.

There is no one way to go through the adoption procedures. What might be right for one family might be totally wrong for the next. Anybody considering giving a child up for adoption or adopting a child should consider the amount of contact that they desire before they start the process. The adoption agencies need to offer all the different types of adoptions so that the families can make the decisions for themselves.

Introduction

Over time adoption has changed from the closed form where no contact was allowed between the biological and adoptive families to a newer model where contact in some variation is allowed. Open adoption is where there is contact between the biological and adoptive families. Open adoption can come in many forms. It can be that the families never meet and continuous information is given through a mediator to full continuous contact where the biological parents are involved in the adopted child's life. The amount of contact depends on the desires of the biological and adoptive parents. It also depends on how good the relationship among the parties is. Most of the criticism and support of open adoption is based on the legal rights of the biological parent, adoptive parent, and of the adopted child.

The research done for this report will give information about open adoption so that an informed decision can be made to whether adoptions should be open or closed.

In this report I will talk about the history of open adoption, the processes of open adoption, the effects of open adoption on the biological parents, the effects of open adoption on the adoptive parents, the effects of open adoption on the child, the adoption agencies view, and the public's opinion.

The conclusion that this report has shown is that there is no right way of adoption for everyone. Each individual adoption should be based on the desires of the biological and adoptive parent. All adoption agencies should offer open adoption so that the families going through the adoption process can make up their own mind

Collected Data

History of Open Adoption

1800's. "State statutes did not bar access to open adoptions" (Berge, Mendenhall, Wrobel, Grotevant, McRoy). Anybody who gave up a child could have access to him or her if the arrangements with the adoptive parents were made.

Early 1900's. "Institutionalized secrecy in adoption took place" (Berge, Mendenhall, Wrobel, Grotevant, McRoy). Adoption agencies started to make adoptions closed. The biological and adoptive parents could not get each others information.

1940's. "States had enacted statutes that protected adoption confidentiality" (Berge, Mendenhall, Wrobel, Grotevant, and McRoy). Biological or Adoptive parents were not privileged to the others information.

1960's. "Secrecy became a synonym for discrimination and open records became a requirement" (Berge, Mendenhall, Wrobel, Grotevant, and McRoy). Adopted children felt that their human rights were being taken away from them by not having access to their information. They felt that it was not right that others knew more about them than they did.

1970's. "In response to pressure for greater openness, state legislatures began to pass amendments to sealed records laws" (Berge, Mendenhall, Wrobel, Grotevant, and McRoy). States were realizing that adopted children wanted their information and had rights..

Processes of Open Adoption

The reason that a biological parent would seek an open adoption is because they can choose the level of contact that they desire. They can choose to have a restricted open adoption, a semi open adoption, a fully open adoption, or a continuing open adoption. (Siegal)

Restricted Open Adoption

Restricted Open Adoption is when the biological and adoptive families never actually meet. They share information through a mediator for as ever long as they see fit. This form of adoption is chosen so that the adoptive child can get the information that he or she desires and the biological parent can keep track of How their child is doing.



Figure 1.1 A picture of an adopted family with the biological mother (Encarta)
Photo by Edmund Keene

Semi Open Adoption

Semi Open Adoption is when the biological parents meet the adoptive parents but there is no further contact. Birth parents choose this option when they want to make sure that their child is going to a good home but does not want or feel deserving of being in the child's life. The adopted parents do not want the biological parents in the child's life but want the information surrounding the adoption.

Fully Open Adoption

Fully Open Adoption is when the biological and adoptive parents meet and share information for a set period of time. This period of time is set by both parties and there could be further meetings or just further exchanges of information.

Continuing Open Adoption

Continuing Open Adoption is when the biological family is part of the adoptive family's life. These two parties will keep in contact throughout the child's life and could meet several times. Sometimes the biological parent plays a big part in the child's life.

The Effects of Open Adoption on the Biological Parents

Open Adoption has become the preference for most biological parents seeking adoption. It gives them a way of knowing how their child is doing. They can provide their child with a better home than they can give them without having to totally let go of the child.

Things in Favor of Open Adoption

Open adoption would give the biological parent information about their child. It could put their mind at ease. They would be able to see that their child is alive and well and that they made the right decision. They would be able to see that they provided a loving and secure home for their child. Open adoption also could give them an opportunity to get to know their child is in the future.

Open adoption could help the biological parent with the grieving process. The biological parent could see where and how the child lives and could relinquish guilt. They would not feel excluded because they were a big part in where their child ended up. In some cases they would help choose the parents.

Things against Open Adoption

Experts worry that open adoption could hurt the biological parents more than help them. They worry that the biological parent would not be able to heal from their grief if the child is still apart of their life. The fear is that the biological parent will never have a sense of closure which could cause a great sense of psychological damage. From a study done, "indications were strong that biological mothers who know more about the later life of the child they relinquished have a harder time making an adjustment than do mothers whose tie to the child is broken off completely by means of death" (Blanton, Deschner). The findings of this study were that if the birthmother was part of the child's life that it would be devastating for them to have no say in how the child was raised.

Another fear of open adoption is that the biological parent will not be able to give up the child emotionally. Due to the contact they will still feel that the child is theirs. It could also force biological parents into contact that they did not want. They might have wanted to have some contact so that their child would have the information but the adoptive family pushed for more and they felt that they could not turn them away.

One thing that the biological parent might be afraid of is that they will not get the contact that they were promised. They might have been told that they will be able to see the child but then the adopted parents do not allow them to. They might be afraid of getting close to the child and then having the child ripped from their life.

The Effects of Open Adoption on the Adopted Parent

Things in Favor of Open Adoption

There has been research done that shows that open adoption does have its benefits in helping the adopting parents raise the adopted child. The adopted parent might feel more empowered by having the information about the biological parent. The adopted parent would have the answers to the child's questions about who they are, where they came from, and why they were given up for adoption. They would also be able to deal with facts rather than fictions. They would not feel that they would have to make up a lie in order to please the child. The adopted parent would also be able to correct the child when the child had an untrue belief about the biological parent.

The adopted would also know where the biological parent was and not have to worry about them showing up and interfering in their life. They would know exactly how the birthparent felt about the adoption and why they gave the child up.

Things against Open Adoption

Open adoptions could bring a lot of insecurities to the adopted parents. Adopted parents might not want the added pressure that it could put into their life. They might be afraid of the biological parent interfering in their life. Open adoption could make it harder for them to bond with the child as well. The ties between the biological parent and child might make the adoptive parent feel uneasy about their role in the child's life. They might think that the biological parent sees them as just a surrogate parent to the child. Professionals are scared that this could bring a lot of insecurities to the biological parents and the family would not be as whole because of it.

The Effects of Open Adoption on the Child

Things in Favor of Open Adoption

Open adoption gives the answers to children that they would want. The adopted child would have a better understanding of where they came from. They would know:

- Their genealogy.
- Their ethnic heritage.
- Why they were placed for adoption.
- Their medical background.
- Who their birthparents are.

Adopted children feel that it is their human right to have these questions answered. They and many experts feel that these questions are what answer their basic questions of who they are.

Open adoption advocates have also found that open adoption can help with the child's psychological needs. A research done "found a census in the studies that adopted children who found their biological parents experience improved psychological changes as well as improved relationships with their adoptive parents" (Rompf). What this means is that knowing one's biological parents could help with the pain of separation. The child might feel more physically and emotionally intact if they know where they came from. They would also know that their adoptive parents were not keeping any secrets or hiding information from them. The adopted child would know what their birth parents are like. They have to somehow integrate facts surrounding their birth into their identity and knowing the truth could help.

Things against Open Adoption

People against open adoption are afraid of what it could do to the child. They are afraid that it could complicate a child's identity formation. The child is not mature enough to understand the relationships in open adoption and it could confuse them. They would not understand the difference in their two sets of parents. They would not know which one's they are supposed to bond with and it could hurt the process of bonding in the new family. The people against open adoption are also afraid that this might lead the child to reject their adoptive parents.

Another concern of open adoption is that the birth parent might lose touch with the adopted child leaving the child with a greater sense of loss. The child would then feel rejected for the second time. There also could be a problem with the birth parent that would make the adoptive parent ban contact with them in order to keep the child safe. The child not understanding this could feel a sense of anger towards his or her adoptive parents weakening the family structure.

Children That Do Not Want Contact

Sometimes it is the child that does not want the contact with the biological parent and forcing contact onto them could be detrimental. The child might have had a great adoption so they do not feel the need to have their birth parents in their life or to have any information from them. They also could have a low relevance to their adoption status. This means that they might know that they were adopted but it might not be important to them.

The child might not want contact because they are scared of what the contact could bring. They could be afraid of getting their hopes up and then having problems contacting the birth parent. They could also be worried that they are not important to the birth parent. The adopted child could be afraid that they would have a negative experience with their birthparent and do not want any more pain. The adoptive child might be scared to face the information surrounding their adoption. If they do not have contact then they do not have to think about why they were given up.

The adopted child might also be afraid of hurting their adoptive parents. Their adoptive parents have taken them in and cared for them and they do not want to cause them any pain. They do not want to make their adoptive parents feel rejected or that they are not good enough for the adopted child.

The Adoption Agencies View

Adoption agencies have now started encouraging a degree of open adoption. According to the article “Adolescents’ Feelings about Openness in Adoption: Implications for Adoption Agencies” recent studies have shown that there has been a “trend towards openness since 1987” (Berge, Mendenhall, Wrobel, Grotevant, McRoy). This study followed 31 agencies that provided adoption services to adoptive families and birthmothers from 1987 to 1999. The study found:

- In 1987, 36% of the adoption agencies studied offered fully disclosed adoptions
- In 1999, 79% of the adoption agencies offered fully disclosed adoptions.
- In 1999, none of these agencies offered only confidential adoptions.

Over this twelve year period the trend for open adoption increased by 33%. This could have been due to the added pressure from the public to make adoptions open. No matter what the cause today almost all adoption agencies offer open adoption to those who want it.

The Public’s Opinion

The public’s opinion of open adoption is mixed. Some people do not understand it and others think that it would cause too much damage to the families. While some think that it is the best thing for all the parties involved. Knowing someone who is adopted could be the biggest bases for if you approve or not. According to the article “Open Adoption: What Does the ‘Average Person’ Think” the results are mixed. They found that the majority of people do slightly approve of open adoption by a margin of 2%. One thing that was definitely agreed upon in their survey was that it is up to the child to initiate contact and not the biological parent’s decision. (Rompf)

Figure 1.2 shows the public’s opinion of open adoption and where most of the public stands. It shows that 52 percent of the population agree to some extent that adoptions should be open.

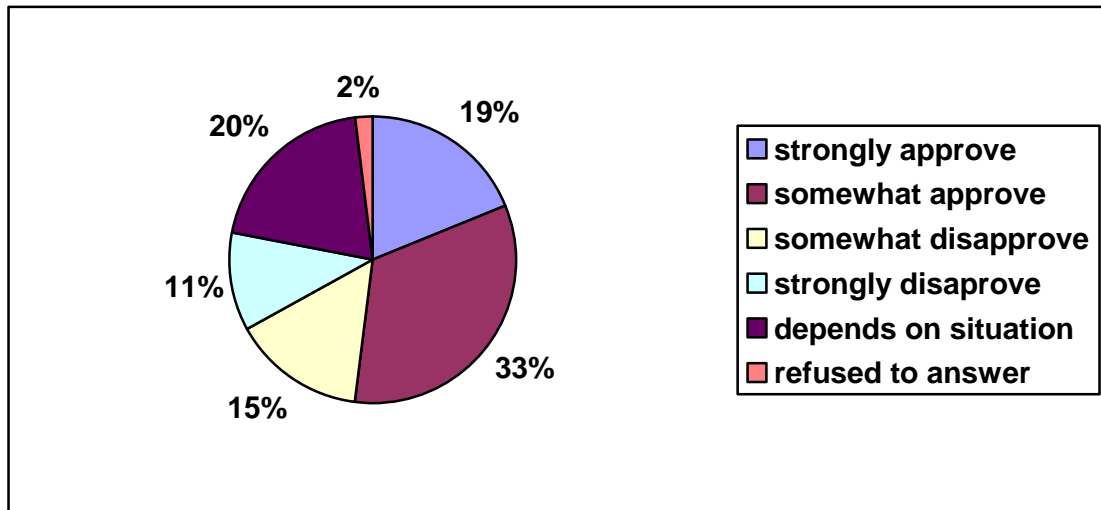


Figure 1.2 Information provided by Open Adoption: What Does the “Average Person” Think
Written by: Elizabeth Lewis Rompf

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

There are many different forms of open adoption. It is up to the biological and adoptive families to decide how much contact they want. There are a lot of things in favor of open adoption and a lot of things against open adoption as well. The thing that everyone has to consider is what is best for the biological and adoptive parents but most importantly what is best for a child. When deciding if adoptions should be open people need to remember that the relationship will change over time as do all human relationships. The families just need to come to terms with if it's a risk they want to take or not. If someone wants an open adoption they can get one at just about any adoption agency.

Recommendations

The recommendations that this study has found is that there should not be just one type of open adoption offered. Each adoption agency needs to offer all the different types of adoptions. The adoption needs to fit each individual person's needs. It is up to the families to choose whether they would like an open or closed adoption and the level of contact that they desire. There is no right way of adoption and there is no guarantee that the adoption that is chosen will work the way each person wants it to.

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