Parenting concepts and experiences of adults abandoned as infants

Lorraine Sherr, Kathryn J. Roberts, Natasha Croome

Corresponding author:
Lorraine Sherr
Institute of Global Health
UCL
Rowland Hill St.
London
NW3 2PF
l.sherr@ucl.ac.uk

Parenting concepts and experiences of adults abandoned as infants

Abstract

Parental concepts are crucial in understanding family, relationships and psychological functioning but may vary according to family experience. This study of adults who were abandoned as infants explores three perspectives - their concepts of their biological parents who have abandoned them, their adoptive parents who have raised them and themselves as parents on the birth of their own children. Qualitative interviews with 16 adult survivors of infant abandonment were conducted and thematically analysed. Although some justified and felt forgiveness for their biological mothers, others sustained feelings of anger and resentment. The majority had no views or thoughts on their biological father. Relationships with adoptive parents were mixed – some were supportive and loved yet others were distant and troubled. For those who had children of their own, such births represented the first moment of true biological and genetic continuity and were precious. Others, however, were challenged or avoided parenting. This study is the one of the first steps to understanding the long-term effects of abandoned infants in terms of the parenting they receive and the intergenerational effects on the parenting they provide to the next generation. Such insight should inform parenting preparation for adoptive parents in the case of those abandoned and subsequently adopted as well as support for survivors of infant abandonment when they reach adulthood.

Keywords: Abandoned infants; Adoption; Parenting

Introduction

Infant abandonment, the act of relinquishing all interests in your own child with no intent to re-claim them, endures as an ongoing issue worldwide (Pruitt, 2008; Sherr, Mueller & Fox, 2009). Abandonment remains illegal in many countries, and as such, rates of abandonment are difficult to identify (Lee, Li, Kwong & So, 2006; Mueller & Sherr, 2009; Sherr, Mueller & Fox., 2009) and vary dramatically e.g. 3000 per annum in Italy (Ferrara et al, 2013) to 16 per annum in the UK (Sherr, Mueller & Fox, 2009). The lasting implications of abandonment on survivors is only beginning to be explored and there is limited knowledge regarding the psychological and social implications of such abandonment particularly with regard to the notion of parenting relationships. Parenting relationships are important models for children, informing their psychological adjustment as they grow and develop. Such relationships, can also influence their subsequent parenting behaviour to their own children across the generations. The concept of parents has been claimed to feed into the understanding of family, relationships and psychological functioning (Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch & Ungar, 2005; Maccoby, 1992; Hoghughi, 1998). For abandoned infants, there are three perspectives of parenthood to consider and that need to be understood. The first is their concept of their biological parents who have abandoned them. The second is their concept and experiences of their adoptive parents who have raised them and finally there is the concept and experiences of themselves as parents as they have children of their own and the intergenerational experiences are possibly revisited on their children.

Abandoned infants are usually studied together with adopted children and there are assumptions (untested) that issues in terms of development and adjustment are similar for the two groups. Studies rarely focus on the abandoned infant and their experiences are conflated with all adopted children. This may be short-sighted as this group may have specific experiences and needs (Mueller & Sherr, 2009; Sherr, Roberts & Croome, 2017; Sherr, Roberts & Croome, 2018). The evidence on the effects of adoption on child development and adjustment is mixed, although adoption is seen as being the best process to ensure healthy development in children separated from their birth parents (Johnson, 2002). The different adoption subgroups need to be understood (Nickman et al., 2005); studies do point out the importance of small subgroups in terms of challenges (Brand & Brinich, 1999), and although a variety of different subgroups have been studied (Burrow et al., 2004), there are none that have examined abandoned infants. Jones (1997) highlighted adoptees may feel like they have been abandoned or rejected by their birth parents so do not feel as if they belong. It is important to note the main case study used by Jones (1997) was one of an abandoned infant. Whether these experiences are the same as other adoptees subgroups are important to differentiate.

There is a growing body of literature concerning the relationships and the thoughts of adult adoptees regarding both their birth and adopted parents. In a study of adult adoptees compared to a non-adopted sample, significantly fewer adoptees had a secure attachment style and more were classified as having a preoccupied or fearful/avoidant attachment (Borders, Penny, & Portnoy, 2000). Feeney, Passmore & Peterson (2007) reported similar findings, however, parental bonding was found to

be a more significant predictor of attachment than adoptive status. Open and caring relationships with adopted parents facilitated adjustment and a secure attachment style (Feeney et al., 2007). Farr, Grant-Marsney and Grotevant (2014) found, in sample of US adult adoptees, the perception of attachment to both their adoptive mothers and fathers was fairly positive, with no significant differences between the two. Adoptees who felt more secure in their attachment to their adoptive parents reported more positive experiences of communication regarding their adoption. Irhammar and Bengtsson (2005) investigated attachment in a group of adult international adoptees. Group attachment status was not significantly different from norms; however, those with an insecure attachment were associated with late adoption, a desire to know more about their biological roots and increased motivation to actively search for information about their birth parents.

 Level of curiosity was also found to be positively associated with information–seeking behaviour regarding birth parents in adult adoptees (Wrobel et al, 2013). In particular, the reason for being adopted and medical histories of biological relatives are of a great concern. Presence of external facilitators such as offers of assistance from adoptive parents or others increased information-seeking behaviours. Internal barriers (e.g. not feeling ready) increased curiosity but decreased information-seeking when adoptees searched for their birth mother whereas external barriers (e.g. agency policies) increased curiosity which in-turn increased information-seeking for birth fathers (Wrobel et al, 2013).

When reunions do occur, a biological link or having similar features has been shown to be one of most important aspects to adult adoptees (Modell, 1997). Passmore

and Chipuer (2009) found female adult adoptees that are similar to their birth father in terms of physical attributes or personality traits expressed more positive contact experiences. These, however, did not always occur since how favourably the birth father viewed contact was also linked with positive reunion experiences. The interaction between the birth mother and birth father was also highlighted as being important. If the birth father had treated the birth mother poorly the adoptees tended to feel worse about their birth father and the reunion (Passmore & Chipuer, 2009). Modell (1997) found adoptees were more likely to accept a model of friendship or extended-family kinship with their birth parents than a parenthood model although some adoptees no longer were interested in further contact with their birth parents after the first meeting.

Attachment and parenting prior to adoption are important issues, but this is mostly studied among inter-country adopted children and previous institution dwelling children, rather than abandoned infants (van Londen, Juffer, & van Ijzendoorn, 2007). Parental styles are important and indeed parental interventions to promote sensitive styles can affect attachment (Juffer, Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 2005). Yet, there is little in terms of child perspective or child intervention. Such voices complement the understanding and can enhance policy (Berge et al., 2006). In a qualitative study exploring adult adoptees experience of parenting young children, Greco et al. (2015) highlights the notion of the adult adoptee revisiting their adoption history, exposing a dual sense of belonging for the adoptee and the diverse impact of this sense of belonging on the family relational network. Yet, as abandoned infants are so rare, there is very little literature

understanding their experiences and conceptualising their views so as to inform policy, practice and support in the life course of their experience once recovered. Resolving the issues of adoption is seen as a lifelong process (Smit, 2002), however there is a dearth of literature on the experiences of adopted children who were abandoned as infants. Where there is literature, it tends to focus on the policy surrounding placement and management (Mueller & Sherr, 2009), detailed issues regarding abandonment occurrence (Sherr, Mueller, & Fox, 2009; Winter, 2010), legal status and health care rights and advice around birth certification, or historical commentary (Presciutti, 2011), with a psychological understanding of emotional experiences only beginning to be explored (Sherr, Roberts & Croome, 2017; Sherr, Roberts & Croome, 2018).

There is solid evidence that parenting style is an important factor in child development (Sherr et al 2017). The quality of parenting has been measured and found to be associated with many outcomes in the child such as social skill acquisition, learning, adaptive mental health (Morrison et al 2014) with long lasting outcomes on the child into adolescence and adulthood (Walker et al 2005). Thus it seems important to explore the effect of infant abandonment experiences on the parenting practices over time when they enter adulthood and have children of their own.

This study provides a basis for conceptualising basic emerging themes around parenting issues for abandoned infants interviewed as adults.

Method

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the University College London ethics committee (2454/001).

Sample

A purposive sampling method was used and participants were recruited through invitations and requests via self-help and media groups associated with infant abandonment in the United Kingdom. The inclusion criteria required participants to be over 18 years of age, have a history of abandonment as an infant (<1 year) in the United Kingdom (UK) and be fluent in the English language. Seventy-five individuals were contacted regarding the research. Twenty-five responded with interest but due to scheduling difficulties only sixteen interviews were conducted. No incentives were offered for participation. Prior to data collection full consent was obtained from all participants. Study information was given to all participants. No participants refused to participate or withdrew from the study.

Data collection

Concepts of parenting and abandonment were explored using semi-structured interviewed, following a detailed topic guide. This topic guide aimed to elicit information on participants' abandonment history, their accounts of their biological and adoptive parenting experiences and concepts, their views on becoming a parent in their own right and the meaning of parenting to them. A psychologist, under the supervision of a senior psychologist conducted all interviews. Interviews lasted between 33 and 108 minutes (M = 61.81, SD = 22.03). Referral for support was available if required, but was not utilised by any participants.

Data analysis

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were subjected to systematic interrogation to explore themes and hand coded accordingly using the constant comparative method in which data is collected and analysed simultaneously (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The research team, identified similarities and differences in the data by systematically comparing each new piece of text with previous theme exemplars. By comparing new data against previously generated themes, definition and clarity were achieved and new themes were created. Higher order organisational themes were then created to provide an overview of the data and emerging concepts. Relationships between themes and higher order themes were developed through the use of conceptual maps and clustering. This was an iterative process which was repeated until data saturation was reached. Coding was undertaken by the research team with two researchers coding half of the manuscripts to ensure consistency in coding. All themes were reviewed by the whole research team and discrepancies in coding were discussed with the first author having final approval. Given the distinctive accounts of the individuals, which would be highly identifiable, specific names and places have been altered to protect the identity of participants. No other alterations to the data were made.

Reflexivity

The collection of data and all analysis was undertaken by a team of research psychologists. All data were discussed collectively within the research team inclusive of a discussion of identified themes. The research team were encouraged to reflect on their interactions with the data and participants and consider how this may have impacted on interpretation and the data collection process.

Results

Participants

Sixteen participants contributed to the study (seven males, 9 females). Participants' age ranged from 26 to 76 years (M = 59.50, SD = 13.78), with the majority (75%) above 50 years. Fourteen participants (87.5%) had children of their own and three (18.75%) reported having grandchildren.

Thematic analysis

Higher order analysis identified 4 major themes; the concept of the biological mother, the concept of the biological father, the concept of adoptive parents and abandoned babies grow up to be parents themselves (Shown in table 1). Four distinct sub-themes were identified when participants discussed their biological mother (understanding, anger and animosity, desire for a reunion and genetics) whereas only one sub-theme was identified for the biological father (no impressions or thoughts). Three sub-themes were identified in relation to participant's adoptive

Concept of biological mother	Concept of biological father	Concept of adoptive parents	Abandoned babies grow up to be parents themselves

parents (disclosure, life experiences and difficulty to maintain a positive relationship). The final higher order theme was examining feelings around being parents themselves and three sub-themes were identified (biological link, impact of own experiences and adoption).

Table 1. Higher order themes and associated sub-themes

- Understanding

- Anger and animosity

- Desire for reunion

- Genetics and health

- No impressions or thoughts

- Disclosure

- Life experiences

- Difficulty to maintain a positive relationship

- Biological link

- Impact of own experiences
- Adoption

Concept of biological mother

The themes around participant's biological mother involved extreme emotions from sadness and forgiveness to anger and pain. The concept of mother was well thought through and carried clear articulations of potential circumstances and emotions around their abandonment.

Understanding

Eight participants expressed an understanding of the actions of their biological mother. Positive attributes were given based on the fact that the infant was discovered or abandoned in an area where the infant was likely to be found. Also participants discussed how difficult it must have been to abandon a baby and the reasons behind this.

> *I (don't) really bear her any malice really or hold a grudge. I realize it must've been exceedingly difficult for her to carry a baby for 9 months and then give the baby up (Female, 64)*

> *… because of all the clothes I was wearing I'd obviously been cared for she obviously must have thought … that they wanted me to be found … obviously to make sure that I was warm and I wouldn't perish so I don't have any animosity at all. I don't hold any animosity towards her at all (Female, 65)*

One participant expressed that they had over time become more understanding to the reasons that may have caused the abandonment.

> *I wasn't angry but I just couldn't understand the reasons why and I was too immature to realise that desperate people do desperate things (Female, 47)*

Anger and animosity

A second theme emerged in relation to anger and animosity – with expressions of long lingering pain and resentment. Such perceptions express deep felt rehearsed feelings, often reflecting long term feelings, evolving over time and ever present. Resentment was particularly strong when the participant had been abandoned in a location where they were "lucky" to have been found.

> *The thought of being pushed into a bush or on a park seat because you can't cope with the baby or you've had a baby and you didn't want one … is horrendous (Female, 64)*

> *I don't know because we don't know what sort of woman this bloody mother of mine was (Male, 68)*

Anger for some faded over time and they expressed more positive feelings towards their birth mother now than they did when they were younger.

> *The anger was sometimes very difficult to deal with. I just felt very angry for a lot of the time and I couldn't understand or work out my place in life (Female, 47)*

Desire for reunion

Thirteen participants had started to look for their birth mother and more information regarding their abandonment. Five participants explicitly expressed a desire to reunite with her. One participant's desire for a reunion was driven by a "forgiveness" motivation whereas for three other participants it was to understand the reason why they had been abandoned. For many a dream or imagined scenario of reunion is present with a range of motivations or scenarios thought through.

I've always wanted to have a reunion … to say 'I just want to know why you did it, I forgive you completely and 100% forgive you and I would like you to meet my family and that's all' (Male, 67)

So then again I'm just curious to speak to my biological mother you know and ask her what reasons, I mean how did she physically manage to do it and how did she manage to avoid dealing with everyone for the past 50 years (Male, 50)

Genetics and health

This theme reflects the participants' worry regarding the health of their biological mother and how this may in turn affect them.

…the woman needs medical help (Male, 68)

Whilst looking for information regarding his birth mother and abandonment, one participant found two other half-siblings who had also been abandoned. This participant expressed concerns about a possible "gene" which may have been passed on.

And then I worry about the psychology of my mother who must obviously have some sort of genetic (erm), predisposition that would allow her to, you know to abandon a baby. I'm sure there must be some genetics and you know some psychology, I know there's the environment and the genetics but you know it does worry me, would I, could I have, you know that genetic predisposition to you know, just get up and go and abandon a baby, a child whatever but then again not (Male, 50)

Concept of biological father

No impressions or thoughts

There was a notable gap of any concept of their biological father. The majority of participants interviewed did not have any thoughts or considerations and for some the prompt question was the first time they had considered him. This is in sharp contrast to the previous theme regarding their biological mother. It tends to suggest that mothering and the concept of a mother holds a higher order importance in the thoughts and concerns of this group.

> *The thought never crossed my mind (laughs) it's funny isn't it, I don't know why but no (Male, 46)*

> *The strange thing is I don't ever think about having a birth father. I have absolutely no clue, but never once do I think about having a birth father, which is a little bit bizarre (Female, 47)*

Concept of adoptive parents

Close relationships with adoptive parents were described. However, for some there were barriers, boundaries and resentment either from always feeling that they did not belong, or holding some resentment about being abandoned, not having full disclosure or being treated differently. Although abandoned infants have their own specific concerns with regards to adoption; these themes do highlight some overlap between adults abandoned as infants who were subsequently adopted and the experiences of children who were adopted and not abandoned.

Disclosure

The moment of disclosure had a big impact on many participants. Both the consideration of adoption and of abandonment emerged as intruding in the relationship with their adoptive parents. Those whose were disclosed to later found this particularly difficult to cope with.

Obviously, I loved her as a mum but when I found this out and I found out she wasn't my mother, my feelings for her changed in a negative way really which I didn't want to happen. I think I was a bit cold towards her (Male, 46)

I had no reason to believe that my parents weren't who I thought they were and it was quite a shock you know to find out that in fact I was adopted and abandoned … it kind of always upsets me and annoys me that whenever I think about my adoptive mother, my mother, in the same thought, the same breathe I always now think well she wasn't in fact my mother and I don't like having that thought (Male, 50)

Life experiences

The reflections of the adopted children's life experiences revolved heavily around the relationship they had with their adopted parents and how they were treated growing up. This needs to be viewed in the general description of a range of experiences, varying from positive parenting experiences and close emotional ties from adoptive family as well as negative accounts.

They used to lock me up in a little room, a locked small room and that was my bedroom, there was nothing in it but a bed, nothing (Male, 67)

Five participants mentioned they were "lucky" they had been adopted by a wonderful couple.

I've been very lucky I've had a very happy life I was extremely lucky that I had the people that adopted me it's just so fortunate. And I think in my case how my parents brought me up to know right and wrong, gave me the best that they could. … it might be a funny thing to say, but I feel lucky actually because of the couple that adopted me (Female, 65)

The explanations for the negative experiences varied, often relating to both child and parental issues.

> *I'm sure a lot of the problems me and mum had was because we were insecure. You know always that worry that we were going to get sent back or that we didn't know where we were going to get sent back to or we wouldn't be loved enough or we didn't fit in (Female, 57)*

Difficultly to maintain a positive relationship

This theme reflects the lack of attachment some participants had with their adopted parents which carried on into their adult life. This was due to a variety of reasons including older age adoption.

> *So I was adopted but because I was totally aware of what was going on- the selection process I thought there was never a real bond between myself and my parents. I've been measured up for these new parents you know I'll make the best of it but, you're totally distant from them unfortunately. You're totally aware that they're bringing you up. Even when I went to their funeral I said to a friend at the time I said it's just like going to the funeral of a friend. You know we had good times and bad times. I didn't get any affection from my father (Male, 68)*

> *I don't have anything to do obviously with (them) anymore and that's it really (Female, 53)*

Abandoned babies grow up to be parents themselves

Parenting for some was too difficult to contemplate, while for others it has become one of the most important parts of their lives. Themes which emerged from analysis

related to the first moment of a blood relative being very special, a sense of wanting to ensure high quality parenting to compensate for their own experience or an on-going enduring desire to provide love and protection.

Biological link

Fourteen participants had biological children and nearly all mentioned the fact they now have a genetic link or blood tie to another human being.

> *The only person(s) I'm related to in the world are my son and my grandson (Female, 70)*

Even one of the participants who did not have children mentioned the importance of being connected genetically to someone.

> *If I ever have a baby, that's the first time I will ever have a flesh and blood of my own (Female, 47)*

One participant reflected upon the issue by describing the embarrassment of being adopted by a couple who do not look like him.

> *So that's another thing isn't it, being abandoned you're being adopted into a family of people that don't look like you. I used to do anything to avoid…I feel so embarrassed saying this about my mum and dad…because I didn't want to be seen with them (Male, 70)*

Impact of own experiences

For some the experience of parenting allowed for opportunities to compensate and make up for their own experience from their adopted parents.

> *I'm aware of all the pain and injustice that was inflicted upon me. That makes me careful not to do it. It constantly makes me aware to be careful, to control your anger, to step back and think and to just talk (Female, 73)*

One participant felt their start in life may have affected her ability to bond with her children and grandchildren.

> *The fact is that I've probably found it harder to bond, with my grandchildren it's the same, I find it difficult to interact and that may be a sign of my start in life (Female, 64)*

Participants who had experienced poor childhood relationships with their adopted parents found it difficult since they did not have a "role model" to use when parenting their own children.

> *I've tried my best to be parent but I didn't have a role model let's put it like that, it's quite hard, it's very hard (Female, 53)*

Adoption

This theme was only mentioned by one participant but is extremely poignant. None of the participant had adopted children but one participant did give one of her own children up for adoption (she went on to have more children who were not given up for adoption) and deeply regrets the decision.

> *The decision to have my son adopted was the worst thing I ever did. I regret it but I haven't, I won't look for him because I want him to find me if he wants to (Female, 65)*

Discussion

This qualitative study highlights the specific situation of adults abandoned as infants. This group have a mixed concept of their biological mother; at times understanding and excusing the abandonment, while at other times experiencing a long-lasting anger and resentment. Their personal history of parenting was identified as an important factor in their life and their adjustment. Yet, these adults who were

abandoned as infants and raised as adopted children rarely have any thoughts or conceptions of their biological father. This finding seemingly differs from studies of adopted adults generally (Passmore & Chipuer, 2009). There are mixed recollections of their adoptive families. For some there are positive experiences with long standing commitment and love, while others found the adoption and the disclosure of abandonment a barrier to their relationship. Relationship deterioration over time and into adulthood seemed to be a possibility. Similar experiences have been noted in children who have been adopted and were not abandoned (Feeney et al, 2007).

For this group, becoming a parent marks the moment when their first genetic links can be unequivocally established and this has significant meaning for them. The majority approach parenthood and even grandparenthood with eagerness for the most part, yet, few report that having a child was too much of a challenge and, for whatever reason, do not have children of their own. The importance of being genetically connected to another person or identifying similar physical features has also been emphasised by adopted children who have not been abandoned (Passmore & Chipuer, 2009; Modell, 1997). This may suggest the importance of biological heritage with regard to adoption generally rather than just abandonment. The data suggests that parenting issues for adults abandoned as infants may well affect their life experiences and their need as well as their desire for support. Their experiences of parental attachment may be affected and specific interventions may benefit this group. The literature suggests that the circumstances of adoption may affect subsequent attachment and this data suggests a need for abandonment, as a reason for adoption, to be further studied as a subgroup.

Thus, this exploratory study into a rare and understudied group highlights the concept of parenting and future needs, as abandoned infants grow up and have children of their own. Preparation and planning may well be important within adoption preparation for this subgroup of children. Furthermore, this study accentuates the potential need for special care and sensitivity for this group at the time of their own child's birth. There is an on-going need to understand the emotional challenges for this group and to provide adequately for their needs.

There are some limitations to these data. Adults abandoned as infants are a difficult group to recruit; therefore, the authors recruited via self-help and media groups. This may bias the data since individuals who attend these groups may have more concerns regarding the abandonment then those who do not. The response rate was only 33%, which may suggest the final participant set is not generalizable. The age skew is also a consideration, suggesting the data may be generalizable to older adults' experiences of infant abandonment; however, it should be noted that the younger participants did display similar themes to those above fifty. Further research is required to identify whether younger adults of infant abandonments do experience the same feelings and concerns as older adults. This study only examined participants who were abandoned as infants (under 1 year); therefore, is not able to generalise whether these experiences would be similar to non-infant abandonment.

This study provides insight into the concepts of parents and parenting for individuals of infant abandonment. This group has unique characteristics since they have no knowledge of their birth mother or father (and no definite access to such

information), they have experience of being adopted and the majority have experience of being a parent themselves. This study provides a foundation for further research. Further evidence is required to fully comprehend how infant abandonment affects these individuals in terms of their relationships to their adoptive parents and their children and how similar these experiences are to adopted adults who were not abandoned. The psychological ramifications of infant abandonment are lifelong and the unique experience of this group means that their needs should not be simply included within the general needs of those experiencing adoption. The experience of parental relationships is important within this group and seemingly has long-lasting consequences. As such, these experiences lend insight into the emotional and psychological needs of those who have been abandoned as infants and be well placed to inform the preparation of adoptive parents of abandoned infants.

References

Armstrong, M. I., Birnie-Lefcovitch, S., & Ungar, M. T. (2005). Pathways between social support, family well being, quality of parenting, and child resilience: What we know. *Journal of child and family studies*, *14*(2), 269-281.

Berge, J. M., Mendenhall, T. J., Wrobel, G. M., Grotevant, H. D., & McRoy, R. G. (2006). Adolescents' feelings about openness in adoption: Implications for adoption agencies. *CHILD WELFARE-NEW YORK-*, *85*(6), 1011.

Borders, L. D., Penny, J. M., & Portnoy, F. (2000). Adult Adoptees and Their Friends: Current Functioning and Psychosocial Well-Being*. *Family Relations*,*49*(4), 407-418.

Brand, A. E., & Brinich, P. M. (1999). Behavior problems and mental health contacts in adopted, foster, and nonadopted children. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *40*(8), 1221-1229.

Burrow, A. L., Tubman, J. G., & Finley, G. E. (2004). Adolescent adjustment in a nationally collected sample: Identifying group differences by adoption status, adoption subtype, developmental stage and gender. Journal of Adolescence, 27(3), 267-282.

Farr, R. H., Grant-Marsney, H. A., & Grotevant, H. D. (2014). Adoptees' Contact with Birth Parents in Emerging Adulthood: The Role of Adoption Communication and Attachment to Adoptive Parents. *Family process*.

Feeney, J. A., Passmore, N. L., & Peterson, C. C. (2007). Adoption, attachment, and relationship concerns: A study of adult adoptees. *Personal Relationships*, *14*(1), 129-147.

Ferrara, P., Gatto, A., Paolillo, P., Vena, F., Ianniello, F., & Romagnoli, C. (2013). Abandoned newborn. Neglected Phenomenon? Early Human Development,

89, 45–46. doi:10.1016/S0378-3782(13)70095-1

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (2009). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Transaction Publishers.

Greco, O., Rosnati, R., & Ferrari, L. (2015). Adult Adoptees as Partners and Parents: The Joint Task of Revisiting the Adoption History. Adoption Quarterly, 18(1), 25-44.

Hoghughi, M. (1998). The importance of parenting in child health. *BMJ*,*316*(7144), 1545-1550.

Irhammar, M., & Bengtsson, H. (2005). Attachment in a group of adult international adoptees. *Adoption Quarterly*, *8*(2), 1-25.

Johnson, D. E. (2002). Adoption and the effect on children's development. *Early human development*, *68*(1), 39-54.

Jones, A. (1997). Issues relevant to therapy with adoptees. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, *34*(1), 64.

Juffer, F., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., & IJzendoorn, M. H. (2005). The importance of parenting in the development of disorganized attachment: Evidence from a preventive intervention study in adoptive families. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *46*(3), 263-274.

Lee, A. C., Li, C. H., Kwong, N. S., & So, K. T. (2006). Neonaticide, newborn abandonment, and denial of pregnancy – Newborn victimisation associated with unwanted motherhood. Hong Kong Medical Journal, 12(1), 61–64.

Maccoby, E. E. (1992). The role of parents in the socialization of children: An historical overview. *Developmental psychology*, *28*(6), 1006.

Modell, J. (1997). "Where do we go next?" Long-term reunion relationships between adoptees and birth parents. *Marriage & family review*, *25*(1-2), 43-66.

Morrison, J., Pikhart, H., Ruiz, M., & Goldblatt, P. (2014). Systematic review of parenting interventions in European countries aiming to reduce social inequalities in children's health and development. [Research Support, Non-U.S. Gov't Review]. BMC Public Health, 14, 627. doi:10.1186/ 1471-2458-14-1040

Mueller, J., & Sherr, L. (2009). Abandoned babies and absent policies. *Health policy*, *93*(2), 157-164.

Nickman, S. L., Rosenfeld, A. A., Fine, P., MacIntyre, J. C., Pilowsky, D. J., Howe, R. A., ... & Sveda, S. A. (2005). Children in adoptive families: overview and update. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, *44*(10), 987-995.

Passmore, N. L., & Chipuer, H. M. (2009). Female adoptees' perceptions of contact with their birth fathers: Satisfactions and dissatisfactions with the process. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *79*(1), 93.

Presciutti, D. B. (2011). Dead Infants, Cruel Mothers, and Heroic Popes: The Visual Rhetoric of Foundling Care at the Hospital of Santo Spirito, Rome*.*Renaissance quarterly*, *64*(3), 752-799.

Pruitt, S. L. (2008). The number of illegally abandoned and legally surrendered newborns in the state of Texas, estimated from news stories, 1996-2006. Child Maltreatment, 13(1), 89-93.

Sherr L Macedo A Cluver LD Meinck F Skeen S Hensels IS , Sherr LTS, Roberts K, Tomlinson M (2017) Parenting the other oldest profession in the world – a cross-sectional study of parenting and child outcomes in South Africa and Malawi, Health Psychology and Behavioura Medicine, Volume 5, Issue 1 p 145-165

Sherr, L., Mueller, J., & Fox, Z. (2009). Abandoned babies in the UK–a review utilizing media reports. *Child: care, health and development*, *35*(3), 419-430.

Sherr, L., Roberts, K. J., & Croome, N. (2017). Emotional distress, resilience and adaptability: a qualitative study of adults who experienced infant abandonment. Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine, 5(1), 197-213.

Sherr, L., Roberts, K. J., & Croome, N. (2018). Disclosure and identity experiences of adults abandoned as babies: A qualitative study. *Cogent Psychology*

Smit, E. M. (2002). Adopted children: core issues and unique challenges. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, *15*(4), 143-150.

Van Londen, W. M., Juffer, F., & van IJzendoorn, M. H. (2007). Attachment, cognitive, and motor development in adopted children: Short-term outcomes after international adoption. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, *32*(10), 1249-1258.

Walker, S. P., Chang, S. M., Powell, C. A., & Grantham-McGregor, S. M. (2005). Effects of early childhood psychosocial stimulation and nutritional supplementation on cognition and education in growth-stunted Jamaican children: Prospective cohort study. [Research Support, Non-U.S. Gov't]. The Lancet, 366(9499), 1804–1807. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(05)67574-5

Winter, A. (2010). Abandoned in Brussels, delivered in Paris: long-distance transports of unwanted children in the eighteenth century. *Journal of family history*.

Wrobel, G. M., Grotevant, H. D., Samek, D. R., & Von Korff, L. (2013). Adoptees' curiosity and information-seeking about birth parents in emerging adulthood Context, motivation, and behavior. *International journal of behavioral development*, *37*(5), 441-450.