

# BEYOND THE ADOPTION ORDER

## A study of the continuity of adoptive placements



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**(2012-2013)**

This study is using a mixed method design to examine adoptions that disrupt after the making of the adoption order. The terms disruption/breakdown have been used in many ways. In this study, breakdown refers to a legally adopted child who is no longer living with their adoptive parent(s). The child may have returned to care, be living with the adoptive extended family, the birth family, independently, or in some other arrangement. Adoptees are defined as previously looked after children adopted out of care. Inter-country adoptions and step-parent adoptions have been excluded.

The main aim of this research is to explore the number and characteristics of the children who experience an adoption breakdown after the making of an adoption order. Within this overall aim, the four specific objectives of the study are:

1. To establish the rate of adoption breakdown post-order and to explore a) how long after placement breakdowns occur and b) how the rate compares with the stability of other types of orders such as residence orders and special guardianship orders
2. To investigate the factors that are associated with breakdown
3. To explore the experiences of adopters, children and social workers
4. To provide recommendations on how breakdowns maybe prevented

These objectives are being met using five sources of data:

- National survey of adoption agencies to collect data on adoption breakdowns
- Statistical analysis of the data (SSDA903) supplied annually by every local authority in England to the Department of Education.

- Surveys of adoptive parents
- Use of standardized measures to collect information on the wellbeing of children and adoptive parents.
- Face to face interviews with adopters, children, and agency staff to understand more about the experience and impact of disruption

### **National Survey of Adoption manager in local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies**

In 2012, every adoption agency in England was contacted and asked to supply information on all children who were legally adopted between 2000 and 2001 and experienced an adoption breakdown. Eighty-six percent of local authorities and 55% of voluntary adoption agencies provided information. Using the original ID numbers and information such as date of birth and the date of the adoption order, these children were identified in national data (SSDA903) on looked after and adopted children.

### **Statistical analysis of the national data on looked after children**

By identifying children in this database whose adoptive placement has broken down, we will be able to examine and compare children's placements that broke down with those that continue, and with those children placed on Residence Orders and Special Guardianship Orders.

### **Surveys of adoptive parents**

We are working with 13 local authorities who have sent a survey questionnaire to adoptive parents who legally adopted a child between 2002-2004 (n=630 families). From the survey responses we will identify: a) 40 families who state that all is going well; b) 40 families who report that they are experiencing intense difficulties and c) 40 families where the child is no longer living with their adoptive family. In response to demand, the survey was also placed on the Adoption UK web site, so that adopters who are not from our 13 local authorities can contribute.

### **Measures**

A pack of questionnaires that focus on wellbeing and resilience will be sent to each of the three groups of adopters.

### **Interviews**

In-depth face to face interviews will be undertaken with 40 families who are experiencing difficulty and 40 where the child has left. Children who have left their adoptive families will also be interviewed, when consent is given. The original placing/assessing social worker will be traced and interviewed. Managers of adoption support services will also be interviewed.