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o    <http://www.originscanada.org/adoption-trauma-2/trauma_to_surrendering_mothers/adoption-trauma-the-damage-to-relinquishing-mothers>

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You are here: [Home](http://www.originscanada.org/) > [Adoption Trauma](http://www.originscanada.org/adoption-trauma-2/) > [Additional Resources](http://www.originscanada.org/adoption-trauma-2/trauma_to_surrendering_mothers/) > Adoption Trauma: The Damage to Relinquishing Mothers

**Adoption Trauma: The Damage to Relinquishing Mothers**

These are studies detailing the long-term consequences to natural mothers (“birthmothers”) of surrendering a baby for adoption. This is information that is in standard and widely-known social work and psychology articles and research reports. Adoption “professionals” are familiar with these studies — the findings are common knowledge.

To give informed consent to adoption, mothers need to be informed of these risks. Adoption “professionals” have an obligation to provide mothers with this information. Often they only provide information from studies that show short-term positive educational and financial “outcomes” from surrender (and these “positive outcomes” are debatable in the long-term\*).

If you are a mother who surrendered your baby since 1978 and you were not informed of these risks (below), then you did not give informed consent to the adoption, as this information was deliberately withheld from you.

**Pannor, R., Baran, A., & Sorosky, A. (1978)**

         Half of mothers surveyed said they have continued to feel loss, pain, and mourning over the child they lost to adoption (even many years later — this included mothers who had surrendered up to 33 years prior).

         Only 30% expressed “comfort” about the adoption (thus 70% were not comfortable with the adoption and/or felt it was not the outcome they wanted)

**Rynearson, E. K. (1982)**

         Eight of the 20 mothers were so traumatized by signing the papers that they were amnesiac of it.

         All reported recurring dreams of the loss of the baby, with contrasting themes of traumatic separation and joyful reunion.

         All had unresolved grief, continuing to experience symptoms of mourning at the anniversary of the relinquishment.

**Winkler, Dr. R.; and Van Keppel, M. (1984)**

         45% of mothers surveyed stated that their sense of loss had intensified over the period since surrender and 6.4% stated it had remained the same. For the sample as a whole, this loss remains constant for up to 30 years.

         Compared to a carefully-matched control group, mothers who had lost a child to adoption had significantly greater psychological impairment afterwards.

         53% of the Western Australia respondents and 58.8% of the National Survey respondents stated the surrender of their babies was the most stressful thing they had ever experienced.

**Condon, Dr. J. T.(1986)**

         “over half of these women are suffering from severe and disabling grief reactions which are not resolving with the passage of time and which manifest predominantly as depression and psychosomatic symptoms” (p. 118)

         Over half had used alcohol or sedative medication to help them cope after relinquishment. (p. 118)

         Feelings of sadness and depression at the time of the surrender were rated on average as between “intense” and “the moist intense ever experienced.”

         For 67%, these feelings either stayed the same or intensified in the years since surrender, they did not diminish.

**Blanton, T., & Deschner, J. (1990)**

         Natural mothers registered significantly stronger symptoms than mothers whose babies had died in 8 of the 14 bereavement subscales.

         Comparing natural mothers in both open and closed adoptions with parents whose babies had died shows that natural mothers suffer more denial, atypical responses, despair, anger, depersonalization, sleep disturbance, somaticizing, physical symptoms, optimism vs despair, dependency,and vigor. (pp. 532-533)

         “Relinquishing mothers have more grief symptoms than women who have lost a child to death, including more denial; despair, atypical responses; and disturbances in sleep, appetite, and vigor.”

**Weinreb, M. (1991)**

         Mothers’ scores averaged in the mild to moderate range of depression at the time of the study, which was done a number of years post-surrender, significantly higher than the population average.. Indicates that surrender can lead to long-lasting depression.

         40% were still experiencing at least moderate acute grief.

**Wells, Sue (1993a and b)**

         136 out of 262 mothers (52%) found that thoughts about their children increased rather than decreased over the years. Unlike a normal loss or bereavement the child is living elsewhere. Many liken it to a “living death.”

         Half stated that the trauma has affected their physical health.

         Many experience symptoms of PTSD.

         207 out of 262 (79%) indicated that depression and anxiety, as well as difficulties with relationships and trust, as prolonged and profound consequences of surrender.

**Edwards, D. S. (1995)**

         … found a range of poor psychological outcomes. The women studied frequently described the experience of placing their children for adoption as the most traumatic event of their lives; and related multiple symptoms of posttraumatic stress

**Logan, J. (1996)**

         21% of mothers had made attempts on their lives

         82% reported significant depression as a result of surrender

         68% described themselves as having a significant mental health problem.

         32% had been referred to specialized psychiatric treatment on an out-patient or in-patient basis and 18% had received treatment for a continuous period of 5 years or longer. This compares to a normative statistic of 3% of all women in the U.K. who were referred in 1993 to the same treatment service.

**Kelly, J. (1999)**

         89% of mothers answered “Extremely true” to the statement “Relinquishing my child was a traumatic experience. 96% answered either “Extremely true” or “Very true.”

         95% selected the “most frequent” or “most severe” response to one or more items measuring unresolved grief.

         In response to items concerning depression, 51% reported experiencing severe depression since the relinquishment, with 97% reporting some degree of depression (mild, moderate, or severe).

         63% have had thoughts about killing themselves.

         85% stated it was extremely true that “I was either misled or not informed of the effects that relinquishment would have on me”

**Askren, H., & Bloom, K. (1999)**

         “A grief reaction unique to the relinquishing mother was identified. Although this reaction consists of features characteristic of the normal grief reaction, these features persist and often lead to chronic, unresolved grief. CONCLUSIONS: The relinquishing mother is at risk for long-term physical, psychologic, and social repercussions. Although interventions have been proposed, little is known about their effectiveness in preventing or alleviating these repercussions.” (p. 395)

         “comparable to losing an infant through death, it is a very stressful event for the relinquishing mother. This stress, combined with a powerful grief reaction, can predisopose these women to a number of long-term adverse effects” (p. 395)

         “A woman who goes through the birth process and then relinquishes her child is a risk for the additional emotional stress of lifelong grief” (p. 395)

         “The reaction of relinquishing mothers to the loss of their children have profound effects that can last for the lifetime of each woman.” (p. 396)

**Carr, M. J. (2000)**

         “all were traumatized by the act of relinquishing their child for adoption” (p. 341).

**Crowell (2007)**

         82% of mothers suffered depression after the surrender

         80% had feelings of inadequacy

         68% trust issues

         57% anger

\*The outcome of a longitudinal comparison study of mothers who surrendered vs. those who kept their children, thus putting into doubt the common adoption agency promise to expectant mothers that they will ‘benefit’ (socially, financially, and educationally) if they surrender their children:  
“The results from our 5 year follow-up lead us to the conclusion that … relinquishment is not a panacea for the problems of adolescent childbearing. Although parenters give birth sooner than relinquishers, almost half of the relinquishers continue to bear children. therefore, many relinquishers assumed the same parental responsibilities as the parenters in this study. “The educational difference between the two groups is small, and few from either group attend college. Earnings for both groups remain depressed.” — Winges, Barnes, Rader, Grady, and Manninen: “Long-Term Consequences for Adolescent Mothers Who Decide to Either Parent or Relinquish their Firstborn Child” (June 30, 1998). Downloadable for free from SSRN: ([http://ssrn.com](http://ssrn.com/)) or DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.104348

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