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JOINT UN/WHO MEETING OF EXPERTS ON THE MENTAL-HEALTH ASPECTS OF ADOPTION

Final Report

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**JOINT UN/WHO MEETING OF EXPERTS
ON THE MENTAL-HEALTH ASPECTS OF ADOPTION**

New York, 15-20 September 1952

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JOINT UN/WHO MEETING OF EXPERTS ON THE MENTAL-HEALTH ASPECTS OF ADOPTION

Final Report¹

INTRODUCTION

1. Nature and Purpose of Adoption

This report is concerned with adoption procedures and the principles upon which they are based, with particular reference to the way in which they have developed within the structure of Western society. It is, however, hoped that, in calling attention to principles of mental health which are fundamental to good adoption practice, the report will lead to the improvement of present procedures. In discussing these principles, it has been obvious that they relate basically to the safeguarding of normal growth and development in the child, and, in particular, to the adequate growth of a capacity for harmonious relationships. In this connexion, it is recognized that the capacity of the mother and father for parental feeling towards the child plays a major role. In so far as the principles which are formulated here are derived from the structure of Western countries they may also apply to other areas where the Western pattern of culture now prevails, although the total country within which such areas exist may be of a different cultural pattern. Furthermore, in so far as these principles relate directly to fundamental aspects of the child's growth and development and to parental attitudes in general, they will also find their application in areas where patterns of care for dependent children take other forms.

Adoption is regarded as the most complete means whereby family relationships and family life are restored to a child in need of a family.

¹ The Executive Board, at its twelfth session, adopted the following resolution :

The Executive Board

1. NOTES the report of the Joint UN/WHO Meeting of Experts on the Mental-Health Aspects of Adoption ;
2. THANKS the experts for their work ; and
3. REQUESTS the Director-General to circulate the report as widely as possible.

(Resolution EB12.R2, *Off. Rec. Wld Hlth Org.*, 49, 1)

When constituted of mother, father, and children, the family shows itself to be the normal and enduring setting for the upbringing of the child. Experience within a family group, with its relationships between mother, father, and children, is of particular significance for the development of the child's more positive social responses. Adoption creates for the child in need of a family a situation in which new close relationships are made possible both for the child and his adopting parents. It usually means the severing of natural relationships. The goal of adoption is the incorporation of the child within the new family and providing him with all that a family means to its children.

In recent times, there has been an increased appreciation of the significance of adoption. It is now generally recognized that its main purpose is to ensure the well-being of the child. Of secondary importance is the satisfaction of the desire of childless people for children. It has, however, to be recognized that there is an inherent difference between the relationships constituted by adoption and the biological and relatively uninterrupted relationships between a child and his natural parents with whom he remains. None the less, the closeness of the relationships involved makes it essential that adoption be regarded as something more than an alternative to other less binding forms of child care. In fact, the object in adoption is to establish between the adopting parents and the child relationships which coincide as nearly as possible with those between parents and natural children.

2. Status of Children in Need of Adoption

The circumstances of children in need of adoption are varied. Some children are orphaned and are adopted by relatives. Some are adopted when the unmarried mother subsequently marries a man who is not the child's father. Other children who were born in wedlock are subsequently adopted by people unrelated to them. Still others whose mothers are unmarried are adopted by people related to them. There are other circumstances which make the adoption of children necessary, but questions relating to the adoption of illegitimate children would appear to need most discussion. Although in most countries little exact evidence is available of the relative numbers of illegitimate children, orphan children, or other legitimate children who are adopted, it appears that illegitimate children enter most frequently into the picture. Many points relating to the adoption of illegitimate children will, in any case, be relevant to the needs of any children who are adopted. There is also a great variation in the age at which children are made available for adoption. The majority of children seem to be available for adoption from infancy, although, in some countries, many children are not offered for adoption until a

later age. Some of their mothers have made great efforts to retain their children, and practical help has been available for them until the child reaches the age of two or three years. If the child ceases to be eligible for the particular kind of assistance given, or if he no longer fits into a setting which accepted him as a baby, the mother is then no longer able to keep her child, and this constitutes a damaging experience for both mother and child. In many such instances, the mother then decides that adoption is needed. A relatively small number of children, for various reasons, become available for adoption at an even later age.

The adoption of children who have brothers and sisters needs particular mention. Where brothers and sisters are suddenly deprived of the care of their natural parents, their normal response is to cling together. Such children may from time to time be in need of adoption. The wisdom of arranging adoption for one member of such a family group with the consequent complete separation from the others is open to considerable doubt. While the adoption of a number of brothers and sisters is usually difficult, experiments of a satisfactory kind have been made in finding groups of adopting parents known to one another who will take various members of the same family. In finding adoptive homes for members of a natural family it is necessary to give consideration to the strong emotional ties within the family group. The value of a permanent home to a child in these circumstances needs to be carefully weighed against the loss to him of his brothers and sisters, and their loss of him.

MAIN ASPECTS OF THE ADOPTION SITUATION

3. The Child and his Future

3.1 *The child's needs*

A child's satisfactory development depends in large part upon certain favourable environmental factors, particularly during the period of his early dependence. A favourable environment is found to be one which provides him with a continuity of warm, welcoming feeling, and care. It protects him from the bewildering impact of sudden and complete changes, especially when these are repeated. It gives wholehearted acceptance of the child as he is and enjoyment of him, not only making him a recipient of love, but giving him responsible objects for his love. It provides a background in which the certainty of good feeling is such that he is able to give expression to the conflicting and often hostile feelings aroused in him by inevitably frustrating reality without experiencing too great anxiety and guilt. Through its continuing support, it helps in the growth of his self-restraint. It provides him with the close companionship

of minds which encourage, and respond to, the awakening of his thinking, and with the expanding social interests which contribute to the growth of his independence and friendliness. In practical terms, what the young child needs is sustained parental care, that is, normal mothering with the accompanying enrichment of relationships with a father, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends. He needs the security of a family setting.

It may be true that life rarely allows all of this to any child, but there are degrees of deprivation and certain deficiencies which are more serious than others. Within the adoption situation lie the possibilities of most serious defects. The sudden separation of a child from those with whom he is familiar is a particularly disturbing experience, and the severity of this experience is intensified by repetition. It is, therefore, particularly necessary to consider what may be the possibilities of mitigating the effects of separation on the child who is to be adopted. It should be possible to prepare well beforehand the separation of a child from his natural mother. When the decision for adoption has been made by the mother before the baby is born, the problem of separation for the child can be largely overcome through the immediate placement of the baby with adopting parents. When, however, the mother has not made a decision before the birth of the child (and indeed in some countries this is not thought to be desirable), then close attention must be given to the quality of intermediate care to be provided for the baby. In any case, the baby needs protection from the effects of inevitable breaks in his relationships as he experiences adoption.

From a practical point of view, the quality of motherly care is of primary significance either within the foster home or within the nursery used for intermediate placement (see section 5, page 13). To make each transition easier for the child, it is of particular importance that he should be given opportunities to become familiar with the people to whom he is going, that no sudden change should be made, and that the child should in each change retain some object from the old environment to which he has been attached. In this way, some continuity of experience may be preserved.

The adopted child also needs other kinds of protection. Whereas the validity of a child's relationship with his parents is taken for granted, for the adopted child there arises the question of the acknowledgment of his adoption. Such acknowledgement is essential if he is to feel the same sincerity in his relationships to his parents as does the usual family child (see section 3.2.5, page 8). His relationships also require protection from possible intrusions which do not come in the way of children in an ordinary family. More is said about this point at a later stage in the report (see section 3.2.8, page 9).

3.2 *Considerations affecting adoption procedure*

There is, at present, a noticeable trend away from a mere material assessment of the adopting home and towards a more complete evaluation of the way in which this home and these prospective adoptive parents can meet the needs of a child. Points of major importance from the standpoint of providing emotional stability for the child include :

3.2.1 *The quality of parental feeling in the adopting parents.* The need of the child for warm love and acceptance has already been stressed, and it is of major importance to ascertain that the adopting parents are able to give these with steady genuineness. Their capacity for doing so will depend to some extent on the encouragement given to the development of parental feeling within the particular society, and mention should be made here of the importance of the encouragement of such feeling in all parent-child relationships. Adopting parents need also the capacity to accept an adopted child with his individual characteristics, and not to expect him to conform to their own wishes or expectations. Moreover, if their own child has died, the parents need to have time to resolve their own grief and sense of loss. If they are childless, it is important to know how they have adjusted to this fact and what steps they may have taken to overcome infertility. In general, reasons for wishing to adopt a child are an indication of the quality of parental feeling. The very complexity of motives and the difficulty of understanding them make it important to ascertain whether a child is wanted for its own sake, and not in order to "patch up" a marital relationship, or to attempt to cure a neurotic problem.

3.2.2 *The quality of the marital relationship.* This has a close bearing upon the extent to which the adopting parents can accept and love a child for its own sake. On the positive side, it is important to assess the strength of their feeling for each other ; their ability to share in the planning for a child ; and their recognition of the importance of both mother's and father's part in the life of the child. Indications of bitterness, guilt, mutual reproach about their childlessness, or other evidence of an unsatisfactory situation between them should be thoroughly explored, since a sound relationship of mutual love and respect is one of the primary requisites of the adopted child. In this connexion it is considered more appropriate for married couples to adopt children than for single women (with the exception of the child's mother), widows, or still more for bachelors, to do so.

While the need for safeguards and investigation in relation to the adopting home is recognized, any procedure for assessing its quality should be such as can be carried out with as little delay as possible.

3.2.3 *The age of the adopting parents and of the child.* Requirements as to the age of adopting parents are varied. Normality of family life is furthered when the age of the adopting parents is related to what would probably be the natural age of parents for the child. Insistence that the adopting parents must be older than, for example, 35, 40, or 50 years of age is therefore not in the best interests of the child. A particular objection to the adoption of a first child by parents as old, for example, as 50 lies in the possibility of their being too old to understand the problems of this younger generation, and of their leaving the child orphaned and again without a family. No child should wittingly be exposed to such a repetition of his earlier experience or to the risk of such misunderstanding. Similarly, stipulations as to the age of the child that make it possible for him to be adopted only in later childhood are undesirable.

3.2.4 *The presence in the adopting family of other children.* Parents who must build their families through adoption can best do so by aiming at natural patterns of age. The presence in the family of other children, whether natural or adopted, may constitute a more normal setting for the child. Usually it is best for the child to arrive in it as the then youngest member.

Insistence on proof of infertility of adopting parents would seem an unsuitable requirement, particularly in view of the known fact that birth of children to previously infertile adopting parents does occur; but evaluation of the reasons for which the adopting parents may have no children is found useful. It is, in any case, essential that the adopting parents have such a quality of parental feeling as will assure the accepted position of the adopted child within the family even should natural children be born later.

3.2.5 *The adoptive relationship.* The adoptive relationship should be as close as possible to the natural relationship. There are, however, certain difficulties to be met in the achievement of this. Possibilities arise for the child and his adopting parents of intrusions in their relationships of a kind not experienced by natural families. Protection from such intrusions is obviously desirable. For this reason, it is commonly felt that the identity of the adopting parents should be withheld from the natural mother, both for the protection of the adopting parents and of the child. There is also, in this sealing-off of the natural parent from the adopting family, a safeguard for the natural mother. She can make a more real relinquishment if she feels that there is no possibility of resuming contact with her child. For the sake, however, of the integrity of the child's relationship with his adopting parents, it is generally agreed that the child should be aware from a young age that he is adopted and accepted. It is open to considerable doubt whether the knowledge alone of his adopted

status is of sufficient reassurance to him. When adoption is arranged in such a way as to preserve the anonymity of the adopting parents and often without a direct meeting of the natural parent and the adopting parents, it is advisable to appraise the adopting parents of the positive qualities and personal characteristics of the natural mother. The child may later use such knowledge of his natural mother to enhance his acceptance of himself, his sense of reality and his control of his fantasy life. Should there be circumstances related to undesirable behaviour in the parents, it would seem suitable for the adopting parents to remain ignorant of these so that they may be genuinely unable to give such information to the child. While it is wiser for the adopting parents to be ignorant of severe shortcomings in the behaviour of the natural parents, sympathetic acknowledgment of simple facts about the natural mother will contribute to the establishment of the child's self-respect and confidence.

3.2.6 Factors affecting the child's relationships with his adopting parents. Over and above the need to withhold in many instances the identity of adopting parents from natural parents, there is a need to protect children from other possibilities of intrusion. The continuance of legal obligations towards natural parents and requirements that natural parents shall contribute to the maintenance of children after their adoption are obviously sources of such intrusion. It should, furthermore, be recognized that there is a relationship between the rights and responsibilities of parents. If, therefore, responsibilities are given up, it would seem proper that the rights of parents should cease, and vice versa.

In section 5 (page 13), allusion is made to the value of follow-up studies. It should be remembered that there is a possibility of intrusion if research appears to be in any way imposed on the adopting parents and their children, or if it is done in an unskilled way. The possibility of making a follow-up study should be fully discussed with the adopting parents, and their co-operation asked from the beginning of the agency's contact with the parents. An example of what should be considered to be unskilled work of this kind would be the sudden introduction of retrospective studies. Some research can, however, be undertaken even without direct personal contact with the adopting parents, such as may be done through the work of other community agencies.

3.2.7 Religion. In assessing the quality of the home there arises the question of its spiritual atmosphere. It is felt by many to be desirable for a child to be placed in a home of similar faith to his own, where this is known, or of the religion chosen by his mother.

3.2.8 The legality of adoption. Adoption is recognized as having a legal status in most countries. Though this is not universally so for

historical, religious, or social reasons, it seems necessary in order to safeguard the child's sense of security. It does, moreover, seem proper for the child to have the full legal rights of a child born in wedlock. Birth certificates and other official records should be in such a form that they are not prejudicial to the adopted child.

3.2.9 *The conferring of nationality with adoption.* There may be objections to the conferring of the nationality with adoption in the case of the adoption of adults. It would appear most desirable that nationality should be conferred on young children if the adoption is to give the most adequate sense of security to the child.

3.2.10 *The possibility of the annulment of adoption.* For reasons that may in part be historical, and for reasons arising from emphasis being first put on the interests of the adoptive parents, in some countries it is still possible for adoption to be annulled. In these countries, both the child and the adopting parent can ask for annulment. The grounds on which parents can ask for annulment need scrutiny. They include anti-social or reprehensible behaviour on the part of the child, criminal behaviour, ingratitude towards the adopter, mental disorder, feeble-mindedness, hereditary disease, and severe incurable physical illness. The recognition of deprivation in infancy as a cause of subsequent behaviour disorders makes it essential to consider carefully the timing of the placement of the child with his adopting parents (see section 5, page 13), so that parents may be protected in so far as is possible from the development in the child of difficulties arising from deprivation. The extent to which the adopting parents' behaviour or some disturbing circumstance may have a bearing on the development of such behaviour in the child as may be described as anti-social, reprehensible, ungrateful, or criminal, is to be in any case considered. The possibility of annulment constitutes a severe threat to the child's confidence and security, and provision for it is undesirable. In the event of the appearance of difficulties in the child, adoptive parents should be encouraged to use whatever services are available in the community for all children. The basic principle is stressed that all services designed for children should be equally applicable to adopted children, and adoptive parents should be subject to the same legal sanctions as are natural parents.

4. The Natural Mother and her Future

In a society which accepts unmarried mothers without difficulty, the having of a baby by an unmarried woman may in no way indicate personal psychological disturbance, as may be the case in a social group in which

conventions are more rigid. Considerations relating to the more tolerant situation will obviously be different from those affecting the situation usual in Western communities ; but, as already noted, it is the situation usual in Western communities that is under discussion here.

4.1 *The retention of the baby by his mother*

The desirability of the child's remaining with his mother may, to some extent, vary with circumstances. Some unmarried mothers are found to be young, promiscuous, and irresponsible. Others are immature though not promiscuous. Others are older and have had their baby of deliberate intent. Some have prepared for their baby and will be able to maintain it. Others wish to keep their baby and can do so only with great difficulty. Of these, some will be faced with relinquishing the child later should it become more difficult for his mother to keep him as he grows older. Some unmarried mothers have no wish to keep their babies. When a married woman has a child by a man other than her husband, the attitude of the husband may be so rejective that it may be wiser to have the baby adopted. In these various circumstances it is, however, desirable from the child's point of view that a decision as to his future should be made as early as possible.

There are undoubtedly instances in which it is suitable that the mother should keep her child and bring him up. Among the reasons which influence a mother to keep her child are :

- (1) her wish to have a baby for whom she can care ;
- (2) her recognition of her responsibility towards the baby and her wish to safeguard him ;
- (3) her wish to preserve her relationship with the baby's father ;
- (4) the readiness of the mother's relatives to accept the baby.

In circumstances where it seems appropriate for the mother to keep her baby, it is obvious that practical and financial provision must be made for the unmarried mother and her child, so as to ensure that she can give him adequate mothering and care. It is important, in this regard, that financial assistance for children in need shall be provided adequately for all children, and not in a way that discriminates against illegitimate children. The general social attitude towards the unmarried mother and her child has also to be taken into account if the best interests of the child are to be served. It is also necessary to consider whether mothers who retain their children have a good relationship with their own families, are of stable personality, and are capable of such a degree of motherly feeling as to make them able to bring up their children in spite of the difficulties involved.

Among the possibly less valid considerations raised for encouraging the mother to keep her child is the likelihood of her having another child if she surrenders the one she already has. The view of some workers is that the baby should be retained by the mother as a means of strengthening the morality of her behaviour. It is, however, known that the repetition of unmarried parenthood may be due less to behaviour arising from present circumstances than to behaviour determined by childhood experiences, the effect of which cannot readily be changed by contemporary influences. There has sometimes been too great pressure brought to bear on the mother either to keep or to relinquish her child. It is of great importance that case workers and others who have to do with the care of unmarried mothers and their children should understand their own attitude to the problem. Otherwise, it is possible that an unconscious attitude in the worker may lead her to influence the mother too strongly in one direction or another. It is, however, found that unmarried mothers tend, in the main, to be in great need of properly qualified help in arriving at an early decision about the retention or relinquishment of the baby, and it is therefore of the greatest importance that careful study should be made of the attitude of the workers involved so as to ensure that help of the most skilful kind is available to the mothers.

4.2 *The relinquishment of the baby by his mother*

Usual reasons for the relinquishment of the baby are the disinclination of the mother to keep him, the incapacity of the mother, bad relationships with her own parents, and economic and social difficulties. In each individual case a careful study should be made of the time at which the mother can relinquish the child with the least disruptive effects upon her. Some mothers prefer to relinquish their babies without seeing them; others, very soon after their birth. Some mothers decide to keep their babies for two to three months, or longer. The timing of the relinquishment of the baby thus varies for a number of reasons, some related to what is thought desirable for the well-being of the baby. Among the reasons advanced by various schools of thought on behalf of some delay in relinquishment are the value of breast-feeding, the supposed strengthening of the mother's moral behaviour, and the giving of time for the acceptance of surrender. Those who consider it desirable that the mother should relinquish the baby at birth are concerned to spare the mother the greater distress of parting with the baby when she has become fond of it. In some instances, a mother can more readily surrender her baby if given a little more time. In any case, whatever is regarded as a satisfactory arrangement for a particular mother needs to be related to what, from the baby's point of view, is desirable in the timing of his separation from his mother (section 5, page 13).

4.3 *The unmarried mother*

Over and above these considerations there remains perhaps the most difficult problem—the capacity of many unmarried mothers to be adequate mothers on whom the child can depend without the emotional support of a father and often without other family relationships and influences. There may be difficulties inherent in some unmarried mothers that make their keeping of their children a severe handicap to the child. There are grounds for questioning the capacity of some unmarried mothers to bring up their children. Apart from such difficulties, it is found that in some communities the retention of the child by an unmarried mother constitutes for him a severe social handicap. More research in this field is needed.

5. The Adopting Parents

Considerations affecting the adopting parents and their relation to the child focus on measures to strengthen and safeguard their position as parents. The aim is to help them to accept the child and to bring him up as a member of a normal family. Such measures would seem to be those which readily promote the parents' realization of their value for the child and their affection for and enjoyment of him, which in turn make possible for the parents a normal tolerance of the child's difficulties, especially those which are regarded by the parents as misdemeanours.

5.1 *Considerations relevant to the assessment of the child and the timing of his placement*

A point requiring particular examination would appear to be the timing of the child's placement. The following kinds of placement are at present made :

5.1.1 *Direct placement with the adopting parents after the birth of the child.* This immediate placement can be facilitated by careful work with the mother during her pregnancy. If adoption is to be made, it is agreed that this should take place as soon as possible. Some mothers can arrive at a wise decision about the baby's future before the birth of the child, especially when suitable help is available to them during pregnancy. The possibilities for the baby's future should be fully presented to the mother and her decision made in the light of these. Reference has already been made to the need for the worker involved in the situation to have a full understanding of her own attitude to it, so that she may avoid unduly influencing the mother, and be able to help the mother freely to make up her own mind. Immediate placement makes possible the continuity of individual welcoming care for the baby. In addition, the care of a

young infant is likely to evoke in the adopting mother an instinctive response of such a kind as to ensure the forming of a close natural tie between her and the child.

5.1.2 *Intermediate placement of the baby between birth and adoption.* While it may be desirable to avoid whenever possible intermediate placement, certain practical difficulties often make it inevitable. Such placement is, moreover, recommended by some people on the grounds that it allows time for necessary inquiries to be made as to the child's mental capacity and heredity.

5.1.2.1 *The child's mental capacity.* An assessment of the child's mental capacity can be made in such circumstances before adoption takes place, but there are certain considerations to be borne in mind. In the hands of adequately trained professional personnel, tests are useful for appraising present intellectual functioning. Test-results when combined with other relevant facts, such as a full developmental history, health record, medical and neurological examination, and parents' intellectual level, can give us an appraisal, the predictive value of which is better than chance; but so far as is known, predictions based on mental test-results from a single examination of a child between the ages of three and six years, or even on repeated tests of an infant or very young child, can be seriously wrong. It should also be remembered that in infancy an increase of six months in the child's age does not appreciably improve the possibilities for the prediction of intelligence.

The best appraisals of intellectual potentialities can be made only upon assembling data combining a number of devices: (a) a battery of tests which tap wide areas of functioning, (b) circumnatal data which might throw light on birth trauma, (c) a developmental history compared to norms of development, (d) a record of illness, especially detailed information with regard to diseases with a predilection for nervous tissue, afferent, central, or efferent, and (e) knowledge, if possible, of the parents' level of functioning determined by achievement and tests. In addition, at these early months, if a child who has had good physical care in a friendly environment is well and normally responsive, this may be one of the better indices to consider. This means that paediatricians who have followed children through a long period of time, psychiatrists, neurologists, psychologists, and social workers who know pathology, variability in normal children, and the research literature in the field, are needed to obtain the facts essential to the least faulty prediction. This will reduce the possibility that gross pathology will be overlooked and ensure that the slightly better than chance single devices may be combined, so that those children with a good potential will not be held out from adoption because one predictive tool of low predictive worth has been assigned a predictive significance which is unwarranted.

Perhaps, in regard to adoption, the major emphasis should be put on the closer scrutiny of the adopting parents. Those who could only accept and respond to a child of very high ability should be discouraged from adopting infants and should wait until children are available (through post-infancy loss of parents) who are old enough for predictions to be more accurate. And perhaps all adopting parents who want to adopt infants should be told:

“ This child may turn out to be of average ability, below average, or superior. So might one of your own! If emotionally you in honesty cannot incorporate a child into your life whether he be slow or accelerated, perhaps you should not take the risk nor allow him to take the risk that every parent and child has when, for better or worse, by delivery or by adoption, their lives become enmeshed.”

5.1.2.2 *Hereditary factors.* Delay in placement is also required by some agencies in order that full investigation may be made of the child's heredity. It is recognized that every individual is the product of an interaction between inborn tendencies and environmental influences. Thus, hereditary constitution may be a part-cause of every illness, physical or mental. The importance of hereditary causes in a given trait is sometimes judged by the difficulty of modifying the trait by known techniques of medicine or education. This attitude merely serves to emphasize the lack of absolute evidence.

The manifest characters or traits in any one individual are not themselves inherited but are the end results of causal chains in which genes may be significant elements. However, the evaluation of genes in adoption is made even more difficult since, in many cases, knowledge of the putative father is highly restricted.

No amount of genetical speculation can substitute in any way for the first desideratum in cases of adoption, namely, a complete assessment of the child (see page 14). In this way, physical or mental illness related to the hereditary factors which are well known can usually be elicited at an early stage. However, since many disorders which may be influenced by heredity have their onset later in life, it will be unrealistic to delay the adoption of a child for these considerations. In case of doubt, it would appear that adoptive parents should be informed of these in order to help them reach a decision. A possibility with parents who seem capable of taking this risk is that of permitting adoption at an early age. The alternative possibility would be the placing of the child in long-term foster care.

It is sometimes urged that the significance of hereditary constitution is in the setting of limits to individual development. It is equally true that developmental limits are also set by factors in the environment.

Adoption produces an experimental situation in which the effects of changed environment can be critically studied. If accurate records of adoption cases are made available for scientific study more frequently in the future than has been done in the past, in succeeding years the effects of environment upon physical and, particularly, upon mental, traits may be better understood than they are today.

Since intermediate placement is part of many current practices, careful consideration has to be given to it in order to mitigate its possibly damaging effects. It is found that damage can be reduced through the preservation within the changing circumstances of a familiar link. Previous comment has been made about this. It is also found that careful selection of foster homes for babies needing this relatively short-term placement can make adequate substitute mothering possible for the baby until he is able to go to his adopting mother. When a baby is placed for care during this intermediate period in a residential nursery, his development can also be considerably safeguarded, provided the nursery is small and the staff of the nursery capable of genuine motherly feeling. The homelike atmosphere of such a nursery is important from the point of view of its friendliness and comfort as well as from the point of view of its hygiene. The attachment of the children in small numbers to a particular member of the staff is also found to be of help. Staff within residential nurseries normally work a recognized number of hours, which makes it necessary for two or three individuals to be allocated to any particular small group of children. None the less, if the children become sufficiently familiar with this small number of people, the changes are less damaging to them than if they are vaguely in the care of a much larger number of members of staff. With careful planning of this kind, it is found that, while intermediate placement may not be desirable for the child, many of its bad effects can be reduced in severity; and the child can, in the meantime, be provided with a substitute home-life which may be of help to him.

In countries where both direct placement and placement involving delay are possible, there is a tendency on the part of the natural mother or of the adopting parent to circumvent delay by direct placement. Direct placement is, in general, regarded by adoption agencies as unfortunate, but it may be that the delay often involved in making inquiries for the safeguarding of the baby and of the adopting parents has the effect of producing impatience in the adopting parents and possibly damaging circumstances for the child. This indicates that agencies should act as speedily as possible in relation to the placement of children, without ever ignoring the vital necessity of obtaining data essential to successful adoption.

There is much evidence of the unfavourable effects of a change in the mother figure in infancy. Yet it is not unusual for children known to be available for adoption from birth to remain, for example, in a residential

nursery well beyond the age of six months so as to give time for the doubtful process of ascertaining the baby's suitability for placement. In order to avoid a disturbing change, the child should be placed in an adoptive home as soon as possible.

5.2 The probationary period after placement and before adoption is decided on

The recognition and safeguarding of the adopting parents' good feeling for the baby and of the firmness of the baby's relationship with them seem in some danger of being overlooked in arrangements which have as their express purpose the placing of a child with its adopting parents for a trial period before adoption is decided on, much as if he were supplied to them on approval. Such a procedure can well mean to parents that they and their motives are suspect, that the child is a doubtful proposition, and that their first attitude to him should be one of appraisal rather than welcome. The devastating effects upon the child of rejection after such a probationary period need also to be taken fully into account. Apart from his immediate distress, such behaviour may be produced in him as will make him subsequently unadoptable.

Such a probationary period may, however, have positive value, particularly if adequate skilled casework is available for the adopting parents during this period. It may give time to help the parents and child over the difficulties of adjusting themselves to one another. It also gives time for the completion of certain legal processes. When a probationary period is deemed advisable, such steps must be taken as will protect the parent and the child from anxiety and apprehension, and it should, in any case, not be prolonged indefinitely. During the probationary period, efforts should be made to bring the child within the range of normal services in the community.

5.3 The possibility of the adoption of handicapped children

There is now a growing realization that adoption is valuable for any child without family ties who is in need of a family and for whom a family can be found to meet his need. The adoption of handicapped children with a recognized physical or mental handicap has in the past for the most part been discouraged. This now appears more as an effort to protect parents from risks rather than to make helpful circumstances available to particularly needy children. As in relation to all adopting parents, careful evaluation of the parents' motives is needed, but there appear to be parents who are endowed with a quality of parental feeling which fits them for the care of a child with an acknowledged handicap. In actual experience, it has been found that adoptions of this kind can turn out well, provided the child's needs and the suitability of the home are closely studied.

6. Selection and Training of Staff to Assist with Adoption Procedures

Throughout this report there has been repeated mention of the need for skill in carrying out the steps which are required in effecting sound adoption for a child. Any review of adoption procedures shows that satisfactory implementation of the law demands special understanding and the ability to carry out very complicated processes with an awareness of what these mean to the people involved. The only way to ensure such skill and understanding is through the training of staff who are responsible for carrying out the adoption procedures and for giving service to the individuals concerned. While the part played in the process by those who are specially trained as paediatricians, psychiatrists, or psychologists is more accepted than previously, it is apparent that the part played by the social worker is not so generally understood.

The aspects of adoption covered in this report bring out the importance of the selection of the social worker, and of the requisite training not only in the law and the fixed adoption procedures, but in normal child development, human behaviour, personal relationships, problems of adjustment between children and adults, psychological problems associated with adoption, and in methods of dealing with this process so as to give the maximum of help to the individuals concerned.

In view of these considerations it is desirable that UN and WHO should assist in the development of such training in countries which request such help.

7. Conclusions

Among the broad conclusions reached are the following :

1. Every child needs a family and a home.
2. Adoption should have as its main object the well-being of the child.
3. Appropriate practical advice should be available to the natural mother so that she may decide freely whether to keep her child or whether to have him adopted.
4. If adoption is decided upon, it should be effected expeditiously so that the child may be safeguarded from the difficulties involved in undue delay. When immediate placement is not possible, for example for older children, abrupt changes in care should be avoided.
5. Adoption of brothers and sisters should not be arranged in such a way that their ties with one another are severed.

6. The adopted child should be given the same status, opportunities, and rights as those of a child established in its own family.

7. Adopting parents should be prepared to accept the normal risks which come the way of natural parents.

8. A mere material assessment of the prospective home should be replaced by an evaluation of the whole situation.

9. It is no amateur matter to decide which parents and home will fit each child, and no child should be placed haphazardly with any adopting parents.

10. Normality of family life is furthered when the age of the adopting parents is within the age-range of usual parenthood. Parents who must build their families through adoption can best do so by aiming at natural age-intervals between the children.

11. The child should be aware from a young age that he is adopted.

12. Adequate training facilities are necessary to develop the special skills required by social workers dealing with adoption.

13. Among the matters needing further research are the improvement of methods of prediction and other methods of diminishing risk ; the study of differences of development as between adopted and other children ; and the skills involved in carrying out adoption procedures.

The action of the United Nations through the Social Commission in initiating a study of the range of problems associated with children deprived of normal home life is greatly welcomed. Within that study, which will in due course cover problems of institutional care, day care, illegitimacy, guardianship, and home helps, the question of adoption in all its bearings is being given early consideration. Legal aspects of adoption and the practice of public and private agencies in carrying out adoption procedures are being currently studied, and the report on adoption practice is shortly to be published by the United Nations.

As a part of the total study, WHO and UN have co-operated to ensure that the mental-health aspects of adoption are given special attention. In doing so, both agencies have given recognition to the fact that the needs of deprived children and of children living in their own families are the same in relation to the circumstances which promote normal growth and development, particularly the development of harmonious relationships.

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