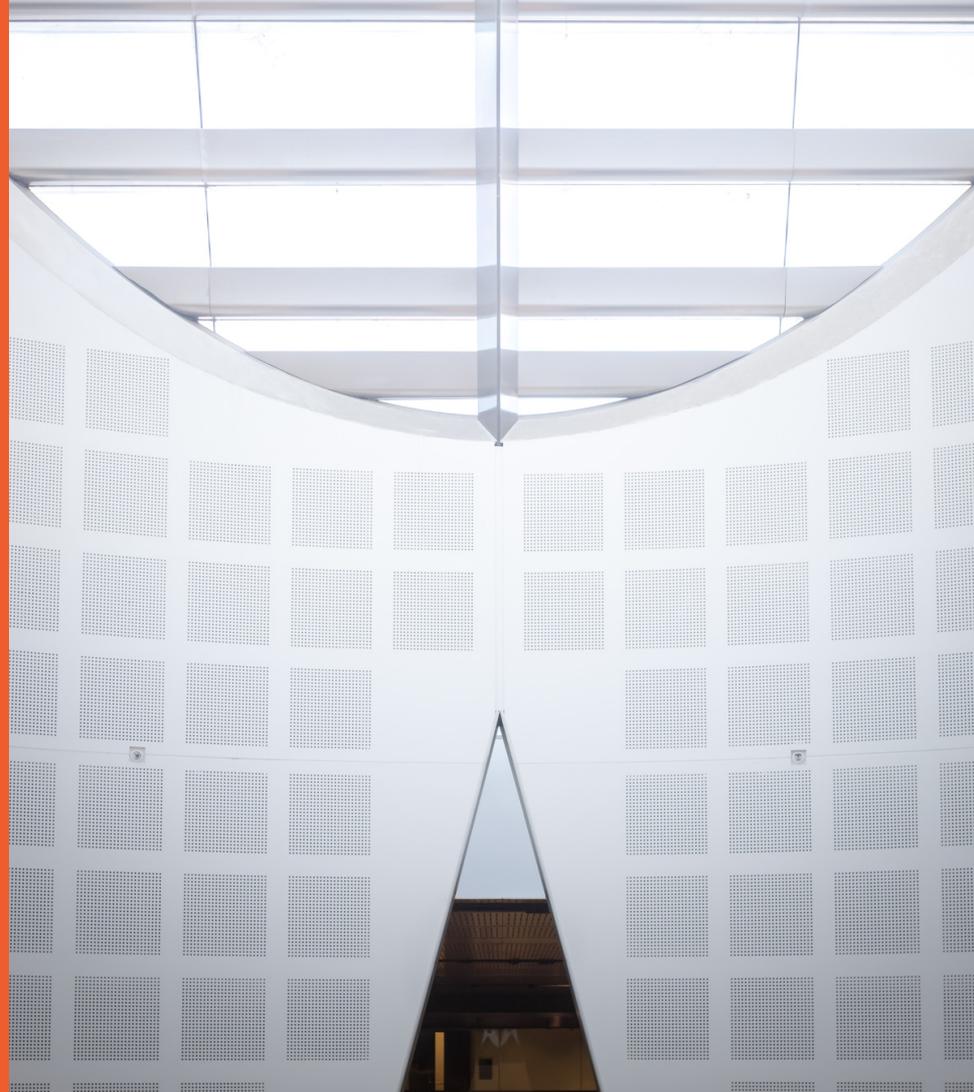


Research Gaps and Critical Areas of Enquiry in Open Adoption Studies

Connections for Life, National Permanency
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Presented by

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Presentation overview

- Background about the Institute of Open Adoption Studies
- Research gaps and setting the research agenda
- Preliminary findings: Perceptions of open adoption from out-of-home care in New South Wales

Background about the Institute of Open Adoption Studies

Institute of Open Adoption Studies

The Institute - a joint venture between the University of Sydney and Barnardos Australia – is a publicly funded independent research centre set up to inform and guide good practice in the area of Open Adoption.

The purpose of the Institute is to undertake child-centred research on open adoption practice for children and young people in out-of-home care (OOHC), when reunification with their family is not appropriate.

Institute Research Principles

- **Conduct** applied research to address the most pressing practice and policy issues
- **Develop** tools and resources to support good practice
- **Foster** research collaboration across relevant disciplines
- **Build** research capacity and capability within the OOHC and adoption sectors
- **Reflect** the voice and views of children, young people and families affected by adoption

Achievements in 2017

- Built a team of researchers
- Hosted research forum: Contact and Communicative Openness in Adoption, attended by 85 practitioners, researchers and policy makers
- Held ‘Sydney Ideas’ public event on contact in open adoption (podcast on our website)
- Initiated research collaborations

Plans for 2018

- Initiating several research projects, on topics including cultural identity for adopted children, siblings, post-adoption support, and contact with birth families
- Hosting a Policy Lab fellow to commence in March 2018, for collaborative research with practitioners
- Sponsoring visit and seminar by Professor Peter Pecora, Casey Family Foundation research director & Professor, University of Washington, Seattle
- Research forum planned on longitudinal research in open adoption, with Professor Harriet Ward and other international speakers (August 2018)

Research gaps and setting the research agenda

Research about lived experience

- What are the perspectives of children and their adoptive families and birth families on contact?
- What influences the experience of contact for children and families?

Planned research in 2018, using semi-structured interviews and arts-based methods. Will identify implications for practice.

Post adoption support

- What needs do foster carers and adoptive families identify for post-adoption support?
- What models of post-adoption support can be developed in the Australian context?

Plans to collaborate with service provider(s) to document requests for post-adoption support and evaluate models of service delivery. Current research with foster carers to identify what they recommend for post-adoption support.

Longitudinal research on children's trajectories in different permanency pathways

- What are the impacts of the 2014 reforms to the Care Act on the life outcomes of children in care, compared to children who entered care prior to the reforms?
- What are the differences between children in open adoption, guardianship, kinship care and long-term foster care?

The Institute has been awarded a \$22,500 grant through the Sydney Policy Lab to undertake a scoping study for development of a Category 1 grant application. Research team: Professor Judy Cashmore, A/Prof Stefanie Schurer, Prof Colm Harmon, Dr Qingsheng Zhou, A/Prof Amy Conley Wright

Public awareness and recruitment of potential adoptive families

- What is the public awareness of open adoption from OOHC in New South Wales?
- What are the motivations and barriers to adoption of children in OOHC among foster carers?

Research currently underway – preliminary findings emerging, with final report early 2018

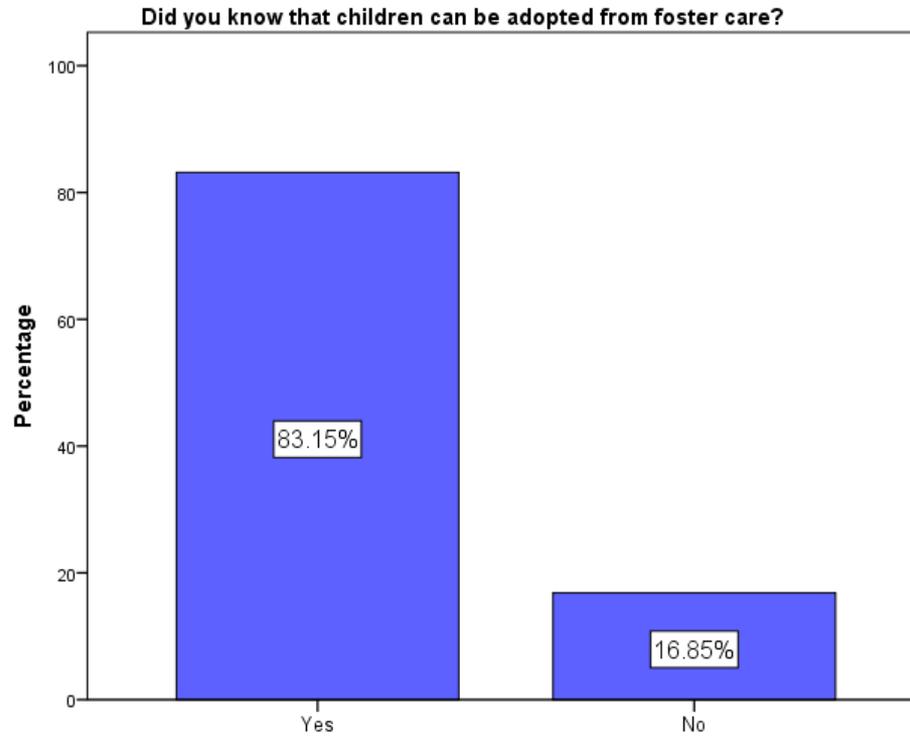
Preliminary findings: Perceptions of open adoption from out-of-home care in New South Wales

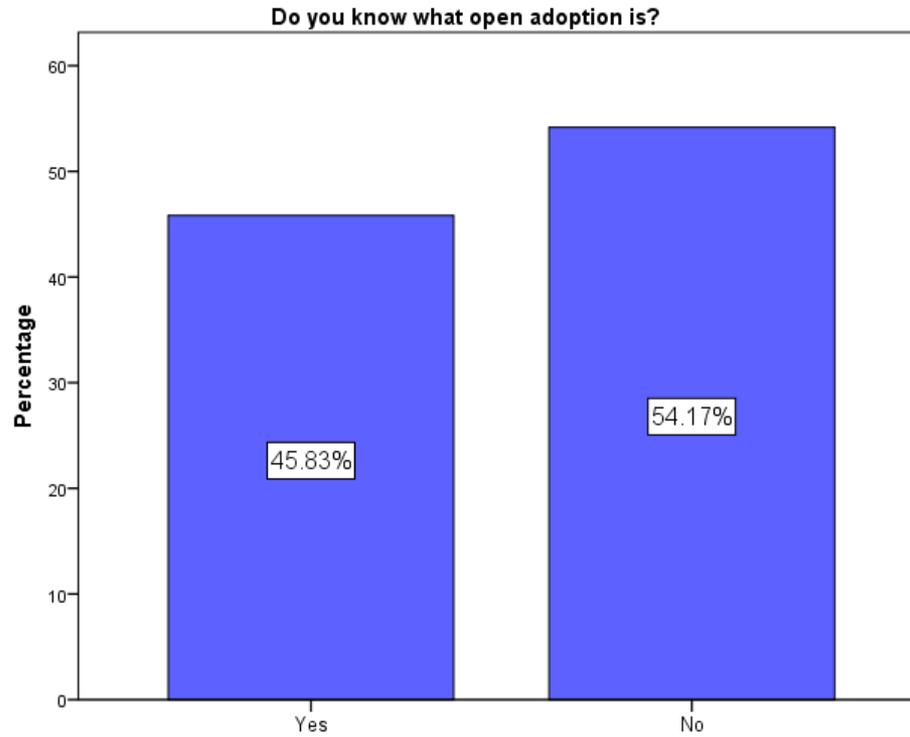
Exploration of perceptions, motivations and barriers to adoption from OOHC

- Focus groups and surveys with foster carers in 4 NSW regions
- Internet-based surveys with foster carers on what factors would influence their decision to consider open adoption for a child or children in their care
- Internet-based survey of people on the international adoption waiting list, regarding their potential interest in adopting a child from OOHC
- Internet-based survey on perceptions and awareness of open adoption in a representative sample of the NSW public

Public survey: Sample characteristics

Characteristic	Number (%)	Characteristic	Number (%)
Gender	482 males (46.8%)	Employment status	Unpaid work inside home (14.0%)
	548 females (53.2%)		Full time paid work outside of home (45.8%)
Age group	18-24 years (5.8%)		Part time paid work outside home (16.9%)
	25-34 years (27.8%)		Self-employed (6.9%)
	35-44 years (27.1%)		Volunteer work (1.6%)
	45-54 years (16.9%)	Retired (14.9%)	
	55-64 years (9.4%)	Highest level of education	Below Year 10 (2.8%)
65 years and over (13.0%)	Completed Year 10 (6.1%)		
Marital status	553 married		Completed Year 12 (11.7%)
	124 de facto		Certificate I, II, III, IV (17.8%)
	23 same sex couple		Diploma / Advanced Diploma (16.8%)
	226 single	Bachelor's Degree (30.9%)	
	26 separated	Master's Degree or higher (14.0%)	
	70 divorced	Do you actively practice a religion?	Yes (30.4%)
	15 widowed		No (69.6%)
Do you have any children?	Yes (61.7%)	Average household income per annum before tax	Less than \$20,000 (4.5%)
	No (37.5%)		\$20,000-\$39,999 (11%)
Area of residence	Urban – city (30.2%)		\$40,000-\$59,999 (13%)
	Urban – suburbs (43.9%)		\$60,000-\$79,999 (11.7%)
	Regional (19.6%)		\$80,000-\$99,999 (12.4%)
	Rural (6.3%)		\$100,000-\$119,999 (11.0%)
			\$120,000 or more (23.3%)
	Prefer not to answer (13.1%)		

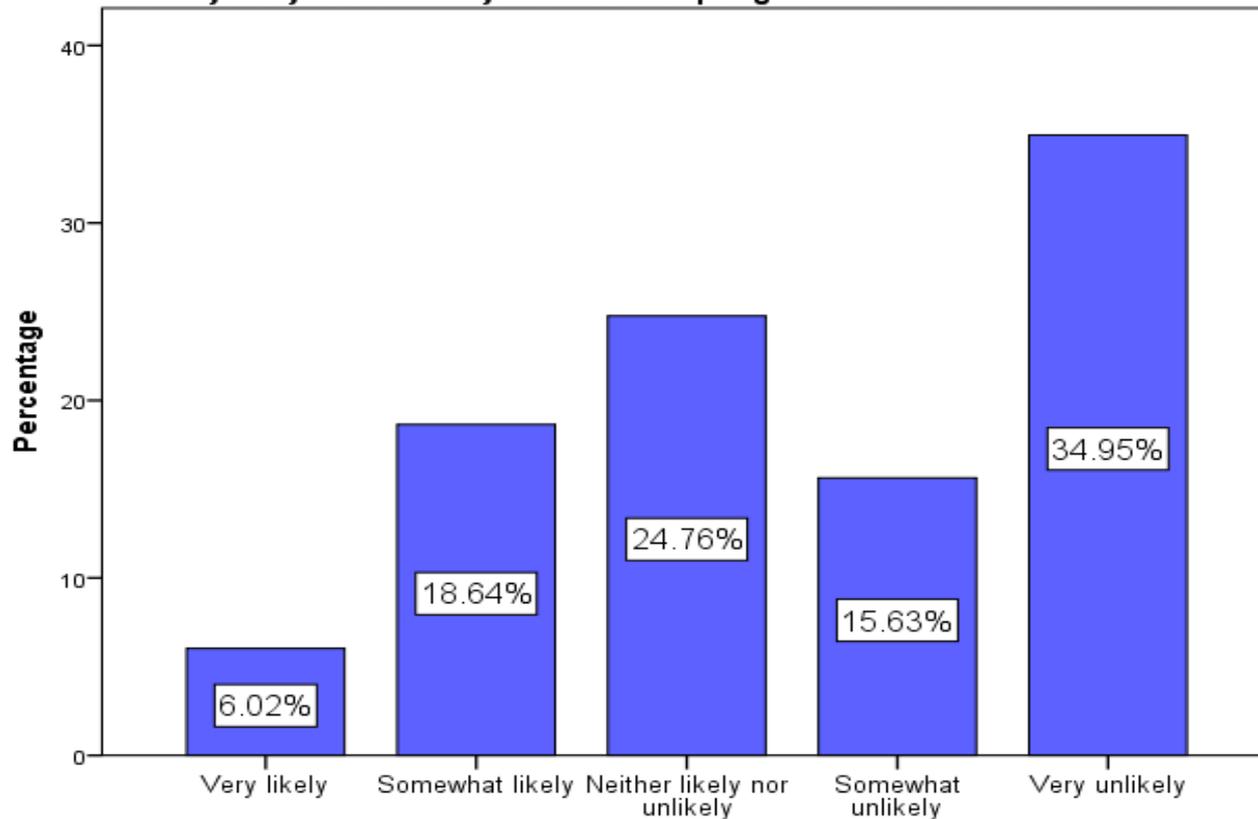




What does "open adoption" mean to you?

- “It’s a form of adoption in which the biological and adoptive families have access to varying degrees of each other's personal information and have an option of contact.”
- “Open adoption allows the child to maintain links with his/her birth family while being cared for by the adoptive parents.”
- “Both parties know the terms of adoption the ones adopting children and the ones putting their children up for adoption.”
- “Shared custody with the kids birth parents.”
- “Files are not sealed.”
- “No idea what the open part means.”

How likely are you to actually consider adopting a child now or in the future?



Which of these factors would encourage you to consider adopting a child from foster care?

- Factors:
 - Availability of financial support to meet the child's needs (33.11%)
 - If the application process was simpler (29.90%)
 - Availability of support services for adoptive parents (28.83%)
 - Clearer understanding of children in foster care and their needs (27.67%)
 - Better information on the application process (24.85%)
 - Confidence that the birth parents could not take the child back (24.08%)
 - Clearer understanding of what services are looking for in potential adoptive parents (23.98%)
 - More information about the children for whom adoption is being considered (23.69%)
 - More information on adoption practices today as I am concerned about what happened in the past (19.13%)
 - Other (6.00%)
- Nothing would encourage me (30.97%)

Foster carer focus groups (October-November 2017)

- Newcastle (Oct 2017)
- Paramatta (Oct 2017)
- Shellharbour (Wollongong area) – 20th Nov
- Sutherland – 24th Nov

Need for post-adoption support

- “I think with the reforms there needs to be the ongoing support afterwards, especially for the high-needs children, to say that these services are still going to be in place after adoption to facilitate for the children”
- Your own children don't make a lot of difference to your budget, but the foster kids do. They have their ear tests, eye tests, it's just ongoing, and the cost is prohibitive. The (adoption allowance) was recently reinstated it but at a lower rate, and it doesn't cover what needs to be covered, like paediatricians, psychiatrists, psychologists, speech therapists – all of these things that these kids have to go to. I know [foster child's name] would have love to have been adopted but I couldn't afford to do it, but I suppose reinstating some [of the allowance] helps.”

Ideas for recruitment and outreach

- “We see ads for foster carers on the telly all the time. If those ads were changed to *foster care OR adoption*, then I think you’d get a lot more people put their hand up and you’d get the right people doing it then because they are there for permanency. If the government’s priority is permanency and the community’s priority is permanency, then that’s got to come together really nicely.”
- “What’s critical when we’re talking about new reforms for adoption... the amount of people that say to me, I hear all the time, “I’d love to be a foster carer but I couldn’t handle giving them back”. And I think the foster care system is in crisis – we’ve got children who need permanency, there’s not enough foster carers. To me, it makes sense to make adoption a more viable option. Because you’ll open up the doors for more adoptive families, and foster carers who are going to be willing to adopt.”

Role of siblings (incl. biological children in family)

- “My other [biological] children couldn’t care less if they were adopted, weren’t adopted, or were fostered. They’re all their brothers and sisters. That’s it.
- “I asked my daughter first before we accepted the youngest one. ‘What do you think?’ She said, ‘we have to take him, he’s part of family. He’s [current foster child’s] baby brother’. When she said that, it made our decision easier because she didn’t feel left out.”
- “They are very for the adoption. We went through all the inheritance and told them we’d be splitting the money with her, and they couldn’t care less.”
- “My daughter has always accepted him as her brother. In her mind, there wouldn’t be a difference for her except for the change in name.”
- “I would never take another child on unless I spoke to my other kids. I have eight other ones – agency interviews should ask the children what they think. If a kid doesn’t want another one, they’d tell you.”

Why would you choose open adoption over foster care?

- “For the permanency, for the guarantee that they are with us for life. It will give me and the children surety, and it will give us choice.”
- “My child is so affected by insecurity and anxiety that by adopting him, he will be safe. He will know that he is not going to go anywhere. He will know that we are his forever parents. “
- “We want to be absolutely firm with him that he is our child forever. He started somewhere else but he is our son and he has a big family, but this is his home and this is who he comes back to as he develops and grows. It’s about permanency.”

Thank You – any questions?

For more information about the Institute of Open Adoption Studies and to sign up for our newsletter: http://sydney.edu.au/education_social_work/research/centres_and_networks/IOAS

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