

SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE  
INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE

Submission

*From- June Smith*

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*A member of Origins Victoria (Inc.) a support group for mothers who had  
their children taken by the past welfare institutions practices in adoption. And*

*On behalf of all those mothers who were unjustly denied their rights to their  
own children and then condemned to silence.*

*June Smith*

*June Smith, 181 Wellington Street*

*The Secretary  
Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee  
Suite S1 59  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600*

*Dear Secretary*

***Re: Inquiry into children in institutional care***

*I have already submitted a personal submission to the inquiry, but wish to submit this submission of behalf of all those mothers too traumatised to do so for themselves. These mothers and their children, were separated from each other as a result of mostly unethical, often illegal, and at times downright cruel actions of the social welfare institutions and public hospital institutions in adoption practices during 1950's/60's and 70's. Hope this will be acceptable as these mothers have a right to be heard.*

*Also responsible for the actions of the welfare institutions, and hospital institutions in adoption practices were governments, both state and federal who turned a blind eye to the ever increasing number of babies taken from their single mothers for adoption during the above period.*

*Young, single vulnerable, unsupported girls who became pregnant in the above decades were incarcerated, in mostly public institutions specifically provided as homes for unmarried mothers. There they were deprived of all their human rights and were seen to have 'shamed'.*

*The fact was that most of these girls were in long term relationships, many of them later marrying the father of their child (gone to adoption). About 25 percent and perhaps more, I am led to believe never had another child, due to their emotional trauma surrounding the birth of their first baby.*

*These young girls were projected as a 'blight' on society. They were condemned by priests, and doctors, who were influential in ensuring these girls, were incarcerated and dehumanised, for their own self-centred reasons or patriarchal beliefs.*

*These institutions were managed by **all** religious denominations including the Salvation Army and I believe to be true that many of these homes received from the governments the rightful payment of 'inmates' of these homes. ie. Sickness benefit or special benefit.*

*Mothers-to-be were incarcerated in these institutions for weeks or months dependent upon how many months pregnant she was at the time of admission. Many of these girls were sent to these institutions in disgrace, rejected by their parents and families. Some of these girls had no where else to go.*

*No thought at all was given to the emotional or maternal needs of these young girls. They were de-humanised by being locked away from society, scorned by their families and society for their 'crime'. They were made powerless, no control over their own young lives, and at the mercy of others and therefore open to abuse. And abuse most of these young mothers-to-be suffered.*

*The average age of these girls was 19 years old. Some as young as fifteen and sixteen years. The statistics of this atrocity number in the tens of thousands of Australian babies being forcibly removed from their mothers during this time.*

Many of these young mothers-to-be were employed in these institutions in all forms of domesticity and childcare. They worked a full day, every day, for no wages. Some institutions (my first hand knowledge) were run like prisons for mothers-to-be, as mothers were not allowed to leave the home for any reason at all until after the birth of their child. i.e. Shopping, etc.

Whilst in these homes girls were surreptitiously brain-washed by the staff, doctors and priests who visited the institutions or who were met with by mothers as part of post-natal care, into being made to believe that their baby was for someone else.

During pregnancy a mother bonds with her baby. Single mothers are not precluded from this emotional bonding.

Their baby was referred to as 'the baby' this was done to disassociate the mother from her child. Interactions between the girls in these institutions were actively discouraged, this was done to stop the girls from supporting or comforting each other.

Many of these institutions insisted on false names for the girls. This change of name has been said in recent times, by the social workers of yesterday, to be done to protect the mother's identity. We deem this not to be true. We believe this was done to further dehumanise mothers.

Many doctors 'arranged' private adoptions and took 'responsibility' for finding family homes for these girls to live in until after the birth of their babies. Girls received a small wage in return for domestic work. The doctor in return 'arranged' for the adoption of the mothers babies, I am sure **not** out of the goodness of his heart (again first hand knowledge).

When these mothers gave birth to their first child the abuse was extreme and inhumane. Major public hospitals (also institutions) had, written on the mother's admission sheets 'BFA' baby for adoption or 'A' for adoption before the birth of her baby.

This was a premeditated evil, and against statutory law. Under the law mothers were to make the decision for or against adoption of their baby with their own free will and with full knowledge of the alternatives to adoption.

They were also to be made aware and have full knowledge of the implications of what adoption meant for a mother, **before** making a decision of such magnitude. I have yet to meet **any** mother who was given any of this information.

(These girls during these decades could not buy any item on hire purchase, not even a skirt, due to their age. Yet society and the law turned a blind eye to this fact when these mothers were forced to submit their babies to others.)

(On two separate occasions in the past six months I have heard nurses from the 1960's/70's say that they were **ordered** to remove babies from single mothers. They admitted it was wrong and that it was terrible to witness. Why was this allowed to happen!)

Mothers met with the horrors of the rapacious and unmitigated actions of those of the social welfare institutions and hospital institutions in adoption, who were intent on procuring her child at any cost to her. She suffered deceit, emotional blackmail, isolation, contumely behaviour and by the withholding of information of the alternatives to, and affect of adoption.

1. During the 1950's/60's and 70's, and even before, **Special Benefit** was provided by the federal government, to those who could not earn a "**sufficient livelihood**," and who did not meet the criteria for another benefit or pension under the Social Services Act.

2. Mothers had the right to claim maintenance from the father of their child

3. Mothers had the right to know of foster care for their child till they had recovered from childbirth and were able to establish a home for their own child if they were denied any support by their own families.
4. Mothers had a right to know of subsidised child-minding facilities (which were available) for mothers who had to work full-time.
5. Mothers had the right to know of the individual state governments assistance for single mothers
6. They had a right to know of state government housing

No mother I have met was informed of any of this, not one.

We were bullied by emotional blackmail. We were told we were selfish for wanting to keep our own babies, we were told our babies had the right to two parents, we were told we had nothing to offer our babies, we were told you have nowhere to take your baby, what are you going to do? etc. These words were said in a humiliating and disdainful way. This was done to take away one's own self esteem. To be worthless. But the worst form of emotional blackmail was that if we loved our babies we would not think about ourselves. This cruel and utterly despicable coercion was repeated over and over again until consent was signed. This was illegal duress. The law did not state the form of duress just that no duress was to take place.

These mothers had just been through the ordeal of childbirth, alone. They had heard their baby cry. Some like me held them and loved them. Some had their baby snatched from the womb before the mother had expelled the placenta. Some mothers were tied or held down to prevent them seeing their own baby. These mothers were then subjected, almost immediately, to emotional blackmail in an effort to get a signature for consent to adoption.

The violence and cruelty of these actions on a mother is beyond my understanding. It is without doubt the most inhumane treatment of a mother and her child I have ever encountered.

I am sure mothers were also medicated to get consents. In NSW mother's medical charts show large amounts of some drugs being used. In Victoria **no** mother has been able to obtain her medical records from our largest hospitals including The Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne.

In NSW, QLD, SA and I believe now WA can obtain all documents relating to their ordeal including the created identity of their child. This is denied mothers in Victoria.

Many mothers cried out for their babies only to be told they could see them for a minute when they had signed consent to adoption.

Many mothers breastfed their babies from days to months and then their baby was removed from them. They were then subjected to an onslaught of reasons why they should sign consent to adoption. Can you imagine for one moment their emotional state, after just having had their baby removed from them. One mother I know was told she had no right to be breastfeeding her own baby although she had not signed a consent.

Some mothers were told their baby had died when in fact their baby had been placed at the breast of married woman who had suffered a stillbirth - rapid adoption. The mother was then asked to sign a 'death' certificate that in actual fact was consent to adoption.

We mothers were administered drugs to dry up our milk, or have our breasts bound tightly (painful procedure) in an effort to prevent lactation even though no consent had been signed.

*All these brutal actions constituted unconscionable behaviour, breached the hospitals' fiduciary duty and breached their own duty of care.*

*These mothers had the **right** to be treated as other new mothers by the staff of these hospitals. They had a **right** to their maternity. They had a **right** to raise their own child*

*Mothers were left in wards full of married women and their new babies for days after their own baby had been taken away from them. Can you imagine what emotional trauma this did to these women.*

*Even today I cannot remember any mother being able to speak of her usually first born child without crying. I met one mother in the last few years who was adamant that she had done the 'right thing' in having her child adopted as there was nothing else she could have done. A few months later her daughter 'found' her. This woman then had a massive breakdown. Some mothers have repressed their memory of this atrocity and when something triggers off the memory it is very traumatic.*

*Because mothers were not provided with the information of alternatives to adoption and had been subjected to much emotional blackmail and pressure, not discounting the fact that they had not long been through the ordeal of childbirth, they unwillingly signed consents to adoption. These mothers then had to watch as others took her own baby from her and there was nothing she could do to stop this cruel and heartless, inhumane atrocity upon her. This barbaric onslaught on mothers and their children increased and increased year after year without any interference by the government as the overseers of the welfare institutions.*

*In 1979, at the First National American Adoption Conference in Washington D.C. Margaret McDonald Lawrence stated in part-*

*"In order to bring the issues surrounding the Intermediary system into clear focus, it is necessary to examine the myths and motives that surround the adoption experience. **Outsiders need to realize that social agencies not only control adoption procedures, but also control the information about the institution which is provided to the courts, legislatures and the public.**"*

*Some mothers, those who had been separated by the staff, from their babies in the public hospital institutions or welfare institutions, (both in conspiracy to procure babies from their mothers), who returned within the revocation period to claim their babies, were told, you are too late your baby has gone.*

*This was an illegal practice. These women were devastated when years later they found out that their babies were still in the hospital awaiting adoption when they came to claim them. They were illegally denied their own children.*

*Mothers were also informed that, your baby has already gone to the adoptive parents and has bonded with them, it would be cruel of you to take the baby away from them!*

*This too was an illegal practice as well as reprehensible behaviour. This is the type of inhumane people in the hospital institutions and welfare institutions at that time.*

*I hear now from those of the welfare system in adoption of yesterday, saying, "it was the Mores of the time" this too is an abuse of the mothers. No matter in history, wrong has always been wrong. Our consciences tell us when something is terribly wrong no matter who we are. These so-call human beings, those part of a planned social engineering scheme knew exactly what they were doing.*

*Here is an extract from Maeve O'Collins a social worker's vile paper, written in The Australian Journal of Social Work of February 1966. This woman had coerced many, many women to surrender their babies to adoption. This is what she wrote about placing our babies/my baby*

*"Our judgment in many cases is only a little better than chance, and our ability to assess possible problems, must leave a greater margin for error than perhaps any other field of social welfare." "This may mean that in the 'stress' of the moment, we place a child hurriedly, perhaps to the wrong couple, perhaps too soon, and perhaps to unsuitable people." "Results may not be readily assessed validly until 15 or 20 years after the original placement." Adoptive parents will always make mistakes because they are human, and will not always understand. Thus adoption is not a panacea, it will not always produce well adjusted adults, but it does seem to be the best plan we have to offer the child denied his own parents."*

*This woman is contemptible. My son was loved, wanted and not abandoned, as too were other mothers children, yet this woman took my son and many other mothers sons and daughters, denying both mother and her child the right to each other, in order for her to deceitfully create a fantasy family for others. During this time babies were still being removed from their young single mothers.*

*Mothers were emotionally blackmailed into believing their children would be better off without them. Many mothers found out years later that many adoptive parents suffered separation in marriage and that a single parent had raised their child! This crushes the very soul of us mothers.*

*Mothers whose subsequent children went on to university and 'good' careers have been confronted with their angry adopted child years later with a drug addiction or alcohol abuse. One mother met her only son, to see him die two weeks later from an overdose. Of course this did not happen to all our children but it happened to many. All adoptive children grow up with a feeling of abandonment. I know of an adoptee that was adopted and at 8 years old suffered paraplegia as a result of an accident, the adoptive parents took her back to the adoption agency! Her natural mother, who is still traumatised, as we all are, has refused to meet with her daughter. The life of this adoptee is one of bitterness and sadness.*

*One mother I know kept her baby. She lived in the country, her child went to day care and she worked to support him. The town social worker placed enormous pressure on this young girl, telling her she was hurting her child by placing him in care. She succumbed to his lies and believed she was harming her baby so she consented to her baby's adoption. The same social worker adopted her child!*

*The worst story, which unfortunately does not come under the jurisdiction of this inquiry, but needs to be told. Is of a migrant, non-English speaking girl, whose child was born by Caesarean section in a private hospital and subsequently taken for adoption. Later in her life she found the private 'doctor' had sterilized her so she could never have another child. I know this mother personally*

*I have met two very beautiful adoptees whose own natural mother's will not see them. One mother told her daughter my husband and my children do not want me to have you in their lives. Another, I do not want anything to do with you as I have told no one of you. The mental anguish of these children is palpable. Many children do not want to have contact with their mother, as they wrongfully believe their own mother gave them away.*

***This** is the immorality of adoption. Perpetrated by adoption agencies and supporters.*

*Our children's rights were abused also by those of the hospital and welfare institutions. They destroyed our children's truthful identity. They destroyed their heritage and gave them a created reality. Our children became commodities to be **used** by the welfare institutions. The abuse of our children is perpetuated even today, by their birth certificate stating that their adoptive parents gave birth to them.*

*They will never know they are adopted unless they are told. Many of these people finding out in later life that they are adopted feel betrayed and realize why they never 'fitted' in with their family.*

*I believe sincerely that many, many reasons for the high incident of mental health problems today can be traced to adoption or foster care. This was reinforced to me at a conference on separation in adoption at Liverpool Hospital last year, when a nurse from the prison system stated that a good percentage of inmates in jail have a background of foster care or adoption.*

*I believe this is caused by the destruction of the identity of all those involved in adoption especially for our children, who came to believe that they were neither a 'whole' of their natural family or a 'whole' of their adoptive family. These children had no voice and their rights were abused too. No one has the right to destroy a person's identity or heritage to please another. Unfortunately this destruction of a child's identity in adoption still happens today.*

*That is why adoption has **NEVER**, in my eyes, been in the best interests of the child. Not ever. A child has the right to the truth. Adoption is built on the destruction of identities, deceit, secrecy and lies.*

*Mothers who lost their babies to adoption have lived with lifelong trauma, grief and loss. This is a fact. Our subsequent children have had to live through a mother who suffered much inhumane treatment. Some mothers had trouble bonding with their subsequent children. This I am sure has caused emotional problems for these children. Some mothers became too protective of their subsequent children.*

*Many mothers over the years have had to take anti-depressants or sedatives to cope with trying to live with the loss of their child. Some mothers suffer alcoholism. Some mothers have attempted counselling only to be informed by the counsellor that adoption does work well for many. Mothers never go back to these people. No one has ever undertaken any real studies into the effects of adoption on mothers and their children, other than the promoters of adoption, the welfare institutions. What they say is taken as fact. In fact adoption has evolved mainly from their sole input. Mothers continue to be abused.*

*We have learnt not to trust in people. Many mothers lost their religious faith.*

*Mothers throughout the years have lived with the memories. Especially at the time of their adopted child's birthday. The birth, of their subsequent children and grandchildren. Christmas. Mother's day. A smell. A song. The word adoption. These mothers have suffered terribly. They were abandoned into silence and shame by the nefarious deeds of others.*

*Mothers still to this very day are being abused by the social welfare institutions in adoption, the governments and society by the use of the terms 'birth mother' and 'relinquishing mother' These terms are offensive and hurtful to us and negate our true identity of mother.*

*The term birth mother was replaced with our rightful identity of mother by the welfare institutions in adoption, used with success to dehumanise mothers and disassociate them from their children.*

*These institutions facilitate these terms to project the lie that we are somehow different, unnatural. An aberration. For society would not accept the removal of a child from a loving mother. So we are portrayed as indifferent, uncaring not like 'real mothers' and therefore it is acceptable that a 'birthmother' have her child taken for adoption.*

*For example. The often quoted adoption triangle – **birth mother, child, adoptive parent** is acceptable to society and therefore promoted by those of the adoption agencies/supporters. For society would not be comfortable with the term – **mother, child, adoptive parents** as this puts the adoption in a bad light*

*The Adoption agencies/supporters encourage and persist in the use of this term for their own ends. " Neither society nor the adoptive mother who holds the child in her arms wants to confront the agony of the mother from whose arms the baby was taken."*

*It is a cruel and untruthful term to label those mothers who were subjected to the inhumane practices of the past. This term should be banned from labelling the mothers who lost their children to those who promote its use. It is emotional abuse.*

*The term 'relinquishing mother' also promoted by those of the welfare institutions in adoption is used to identify mothers as unnatural who could 'give away' their own flesh and blood.*

*Neither I, nor thousands of Australian mothers relinquished our children during the 1950's/60's and 70's. They were taken by the rapacious unmitigated actions of others. It is too cruel a term to label these mothers. Their children have been forced to grow up with the lie that their own mothers 'willingly' gave them away. This must have caused tremendous hurt for our children to believe this lie.*

*There is a stolen white generation; this needs to be acknowledged.*

*The 1950's/60's and 70's are the decades of child abuse*

*This atrocity against mothers and their children demands acknowledgment by the social welfare institutions and hospitals in adoption, the governments and society. We mothers have carried this burden for too long.*

*June Smith*

*Member of Origins Victoria (Inc.) a support group for mothers who lost their children in past welfare institution practices.*

*Also, writing on behalf of all those mothers still too ashamed to speak out.*

*For people to heal, the truth must be revealed. Desmond Tutu*