



ÚDARÁS UCHTÁLA na hÉIREANN
THE ADOPTION AUTHORITY of IRELAND

Reflections on the
Irish Domestic
Adoption Process
1952 – 2022
Technical Report

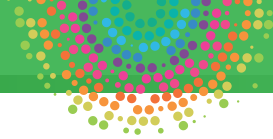


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Chapter 1

Introduction



1.1 Background to the present study

Adoption research in Ireland has explored the experience of those directly affected by adoption – adopted individuals, their birth and adoptive families (e.g. Wilson, Lordan & Mullender, 2004; McCaughren & Lovett, 2014). Such research has often been conducted by professionals and volunteers working in the area of adoption, leading to a wide variety of viewpoints in the literature from solicitors, social workers, medical professionals, voluntary advocates, and academics (e.g. Greene et al, 2008; O'Halloran, 2009; O'Shea et al, 2016; McCaughren & McGregor, 2018; McGettrick, 2020). This group are less frequently the subject of such research. Yet their experiences of being key stakeholders in a process rooted in law, against a backdrop of rapid societal change, are central to the understanding and further development of adoption policy and practice in Ireland.

The research conducted on the Irish domestic adoption process to date has outlined a number of challenges. For example, while there are a variety of stakeholders, the day-to-day procedures to effect domestic adoptions – the assessments, paperwork, and various associated processes – are typically carried out by social workers. McCaughren & Sherlock (2008) described some of the ethical and practical challenges faced by Irish social workers in this area. In a later paper, McCaughren & McGregor considered the impact of legislative and constitutional changes on adoption policy (2018), noting how social work practice has had to adapt rapidly over time in order to keep up. Moving away from the practicalities and towards the wider development of adoption, Ireland has developed a strong adoption activist tradition, focused on the human right to identity and birth information, gaining pace over the past 20 years. A small but growing body of international literature points to the key role of voluntary activists in progressing the human rights of those affected by adoption in the latter half of the 20th century (e.g. Condit-Shrestha, 2018; Gesteira, Agoglia, Villalta & Monsalve, 2021; Gibney & McKee, 2021). Less has been said to date in the literature about “advocates” – those who are not personally directly affected by adoption, but nonetheless choose to give of their time and relevant skills voluntarily in an effort to further the cause with which the activists are engaged. O'Brien and Mitra (2018) were commissioned by the Adoption Authority to conduct an Audit of Adoption Research in Ireland, and an Overview of Adoption Policy and Legislation. These publications should

be considered essential background reading to the present report.

The present study sought to build on all of this work, obtaining detailed accounts from a variety of stakeholders to explore their experiences of the Irish domestic adoption process, and including a number of professional and voluntary perspectives in the sample.

In late 2019, this study was proposed by the Executive and accepted by the Adoption Authority of Ireland's (AAI) research subcommittee for inclusion on the AAI's Research Strategy 2019 – 2022. Its aim and objectives (outlined below) were defined and agreed by the AAI's research subcommittee, in conjunction with the Research Officer. It was conducted directly by the Research Officer, Dr Judy Lovett, between 2020 and 2023, with support from Research Assistants John Regan and Amy Weinmann. Its design and method were approved by the AAI's research subcommittee and research ethics committee.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The **aim** of this study was to explore the experiences of a small sample of individuals (n = c. 12-15) who were involved with the area of domestic adoption in Ireland at any stage since its legalisation in 1952. The study's **objective** was to try and capture the experiences of these key stakeholders in Irish adoption, the roles they played, and their views of adoption and how it has changed.

The main **research questions** were as follows:

1. What are the individual experiences of professionals and volunteers working in the area of domestic adoption in Ireland?
2. What were the main challenges of working in this field, and how did they change over time?
3. How did legislative and policy changes over the years impact the practice of domestic adoption?
4. How did these experiences differ pre- and post-the changes brought about by the Adoption Act 2010?
5. What issues do we need to consider in Irish domestic adoption going forward? What can we and other countries learn from Ireland's adoption history?

A qualitative approach, grounded in social constructionism (e.g. Burr, 2003), was selected for answering the above questions. Fourteen participants took part in individual, audio-recorded in-depth interviews, guided by a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix v). These interviews took place across a 14-month period from December 2020 through to February 2022. They ranged in duration from 1 to 3.5 hours, and participants were given the choice of being identified or de-identified in the resultant report. Twelve participants chose to be identified, with a further two giving anonymous contributions. The raw interview transcripts of those who chose to be identified were developed into a narrative chapter each, through an iterative process between the Research Officer and the participant. In addition, the raw interview data from all participants were analysed thematically, using the system outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021).

Chapter 2

Sampling



2.1 Participant selection and recruitment

A purposeful, targeted sampling strategy was employed for this study (e.g. Cresswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). This technique is typically used when a particular area is being explored in-depth, and therefore requires the recruitment of specific, knowledgeable and experienced stakeholders. It was noted from the outset that due to Ireland's size, the changing profile of adoption over the years, and the years on which this study focused (ie 1952 - 2022) the pool from which to draw this sample was naturally limited, and thus a certain element of bias was unavoidable. Many of those who had actively contributed to the field in the earliest years would now, if still alive, be in advanced years, out of contact with those currently working in the area, or the level of their contribution to the field would not be not known about by those currently still active in the area.

Based on early, informal conversations about the study with the Adoption Authority's Board and Executive, a sample of approximately 12-15 participants was tentatively anticipated, but a specific target was not set. Malterud et al (2016) suggest that, in qualitative research, sample size should be re-considered throughout the study, based on the level of information, relevant to the study's research questions, that each participant shares. They recommend that the quality of the relevant information provided for the study from each interview should be assessed at intervals, and the sample size reconsidered accordingly.

Once the research questions had been finalised, the Research Officer and CEO compiled a short, draft list of potential participants with the relevant experience to answer these questions, as a starting point. Members of the AAI's Board, research subcommittee, and selected senior and retired members of the Executive were all briefed on the proposed study. They were then invited to individually contribute names of people whom they felt had been deeply involved with, or made a strong, clear contribution to, the area of domestic adoption in Ireland over the years. No specific parameters were provided around role type, qualifications, or length of time spent working in the area. They were not given the existing draft list of names, although they were invited to confer with each other if they so wished, in the anticipation that this would spark recollections and increase the number of relevant names generated.

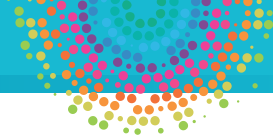
The study's design specified the inclusion of people with either professional or voluntary connections to adoption. This was purposeful, to acknowledge the strong role that voluntary activists and advocates have played in shaping the Irish domestic adoption process to date. People with a personal connection to adoption: adopted people, birth parents and adoptive parents, are naturally present in the

Irish activist community. Therefore, although the personal adoption experience was not the specific focus of this particular study, this group were nevertheless included and represented in the recruitment process as Irish adoption activists.

A draft list of names was drawn up from this consultation process, and prospective participants' principal connection to adoption was noted (e.g. social worker, solicitor, activist etc.), alongside multiple recommendations of the same person, where relevant. The Research Officer then conducted some additional background research to find out how long each person had worked in the area, and roughly what time period they covered. This was done largely through online research and informal conversations with the AAI Board and Executive members who had contributed names. This resulted in a list of 28 people. The Research Officer then sought to make contact with these individuals.

Contact was made initially via email or phone call. Due to the nature of the recruitment process, in many cases a member of the Board, Executive or research subcommittee made initial, informal contact with the proposed participant and flagged the idea of the study with them. If they were happy to engage in further discussion, their details were then shared with their permission, and the Research Officer contacted them via phone or email (whichever the participant had suggested) within a couple of days to discuss the study further. Once the participant was interested in taking part, a letter was sent (Appendix i), alongside a detailed information and consent form (Appendix ii).

A number of individuals opted not to take part for various personal reasons. Despite being perceived as having made a significant contribution to the field, in some cases upon contact the individuals felt that they did not make enough of a contribution to



the field to warrant meaningful participation in the study. One participant agreed to take part but sadly died shortly before the fieldwork began. A number of participants were in advancing years when recruitment took place. If participants were known anecdotally to be unwell or particularly frail, initial, sensitive contact was made by the relevant AAI representative with people close to the participant, such as adult children who were known to the AAI representative, or former colleagues. These “trusted gatekeepers” were invited to share details of the study with the potential participant, who could then decide whether or not to take part. In other cases, if potential participants did not reply despite a number of efforts to make contact or schedule an interview, the decision was taken that they effectively did not wish to proceed with participating in the study.

Three further participants were recruited through a snowball technique, whereby existing participants were asked, during their interview, if there was anyone else they felt we could or should speak to for the study. In one case, a participant indicated during the recruitment process that she would prefer to be interviewed only alongside her trusted colleague of many years, who was also her manager at the time. As both of them had made extensive known contributions to the field, and as the manager/colleague was willing to take part, the recruitment process was adjusted via an ethics amendment to enable this.

Fourteen people were interviewed in total. Participants were given a choice about anonymity, and could elect during the consent process to be

fully identifiable (e.g. Smith & Greene, 2014) or de-identified (see Ní Laoire, 2007). Twelve of the participants chose to be identified, with two electing to be de-identified, with no narrative chapter.

2.2 Participant Profile

As mentioned above, the sample was naturally limited, due to this being a specialist area, in a country with a relatively small population.

The 14 participants* (2 male/12 female) were broadly categorised in the following way:

- 3 x activists
- 2 x allies/advocates
- 6 x service providers (SWs, solicitors, academics)
- 3 x Adoption Board Executive/Board members

*(Adoptive parent, birth mother, & 3 adopted people included in the above)

However, it is important to note that the majority of participants in fact brought multi-faceted experiences to the interview, and the above list has been simplified for convenience. Participants had initially been recruited on the basis of the depth of their experience: known longevity and commitment to the area of adoption. However, during the data collection, it became apparent that many of them also had a wide breadth of experience. A more detailed understanding of the breadth of experience within the sample, as discovered through the data collection process, is illustrated below in Table 1.

Table 1: Complexity of participant profiles

Ppt	Activist	Adopted person	Birth parent	Adoptive parent	Advocate	Adoption Board Member	Social Worker	Solicitor	Academic	Publications
1						X		X		X
2							X			X
3							X			X
4							X		X	X
5				X			X	X	X	X
6						X	X		X	X
7							X			X
8	X	X			X					
9	X	X			X				X	X
10	X	X	X		X					
11					X					X
12					X				X	X
13							X			
14							X			

In one case, for example, a participant (who chose to be identified in this study) was initially identified as an academic who had written extensively on the topic of adoption, and this is why he was selected. However, once the process of recruitment had commenced, and initial conversations began, his other experience became apparent: he had qualified as a solicitor, had worked as a social worker, and was also an adoptive parent. This breadth of experience was typical of a number of the participants in the sample and reflects the nature of “expertise” in a particular area – that it is rarely one-dimensional.

Information was not collected regarding participant age – instead participants were asked how long they had worked in the area of domestic adoption for, on either a voluntary or professional basis. This question was open to interpretation, and the answers provided were participant-led. One activist,

for example, explained that, in terms of years of experience, they consider themselves to have had a lifelong involvement, due to having been adopted as a baby. Another activist, also an adoptee, chose to define their involvement from the time they first joined a peer-support group. The average years of experience in the area of domestic adoption, across all 14 participants, was 36 years, and collectively covered the years 1954 - 2022. The nature of their work meant that the participants either had an all-Ireland focus, or had been allocated to a range of specific counties across the country at different stages in their careers (this was particularly applicable to social workers). At the time of interview they were all living on the island of Ireland (both Northern Ireland and the Republic), most in the east (n=11), followed by the north (n=2), and south (n=1).

Chapter

3

Method



3.1 Methodological Framework

The aim of this study was to understand how Irish domestic adoption developed across a 70 year period, through the perspectives of key individuals who were involved with adoption, either professionally or as a volunteer, for a prolonged period within that timeframe. A qualitative methodology was chosen to answer the research questions and meet the study's outlined objectives. Qualitative studies are useful for documenting the oral history of a process, as they enable practitioners and policymakers to gain a clearer understanding of the development of practices over time from the nuanced details of individual experience (e.g. Vrzgulova, 2019). A semi-structured interview schedule was designed, containing open-ended questions to allow for flexibility in the discussion. The questions were reviewed by the AAI's research subcommittee and research ethics committee, and any feedback they provided was taken into account. The final interview schedule (Appendix v) was agreed upon and received approval from the research ethics committee.

Having been given a legal footing in the early 1950s, the Irish domestic adoption process developed during a time of rapid societal change. Many of the markers of that change – a gradual separation of Church and State, a society moving from cultural homogeneity to increased diversity, and the acceptance of different family forms – directly impacted adoption. With this in mind, the design of this study was underpinned by a social constructionist approach (e.g. Burr, 2003). Social constructionism posits that, rather than the area of focus, in this case “the Irish domestic adoption process” having a specific, unchanging, inherent meaning, individuals construct its meaning to them within the social and cultural norms of the time. Utilising this approach in developing our research questions ensured that the individual participants would have the flexibility to frame the Irish domestic adoption process within their own understanding and experience of it, taking into account the socio-political, historical and cultural context in which they were immersed.

The Research Officer had many years of experience conducting qualitative interviews with a wide variety of participants. As this particular sample involved a number of participants with a vast amount of expertise in a specialist area, it was important that they felt they could trust the Research Officer as an interviewer, and the interview process. In order to prepare for this, the Research Officer drew on some select elements of the elite interviewing literature (e.g. Lancaster 2017). She also studied each participant's published work (where applicable) or any other relevant documents, so that the participant would not need to spend unnecessary

time explaining particular elements of their own contribution or aspects of the history of adoption in Ireland. Every effort was made to ensure that this entire process put minimal stress on the participant, maximising the opportunity for capturing rich data.

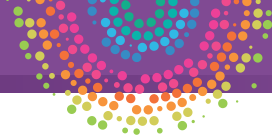
3.2 Research instruments

After providing informed consent (Appendix ii), participants were invited to complete a brief demographic questionnaire over the phone with the Research Officer in the days before the interview (see Appendix iii). This served a dual purpose. It enabled the Research Officer to begin developing a rapport with the participant prior to the interview itself, and it also meant that the Research Officer had some basic information, and a sense of the participant's experience in the area of adoption.

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed, based on the research questions and the existing literature around domestic adoption in Ireland. While core questions were asked of all participants, the interview questions were also tailored, in places, to the known experience of each individual, as gathered during the questionnaire (see Appendix v).

3.3 Data collection

When this study was initially designed in 2019, it was anticipated that it would involve in-person interviews. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this was adjusted to interviews via phone. As the pandemic progressed and other forms of online communications began to be used more routinely, participants were offered Zoom as an alternative. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the



type of interview chosen by each participant. Although Zoom has an inbuilt recording function, all interviews were audio recorded on a digital voice recorder which met with the AAI's data protection requirements. One participant, who did not wish to be interviewed over the phone for health reasons, elected to provide a handwritten submission instead, alongside a number of brief phone conversations to discuss the project. In this case the written submission was collected from the participant in person, and typed up by the Research Officer, who subsequently returned a copy, in person, to the participant.

Table 2: Interview Type

Type of interview	n
Zoom	8
Phone	4
Handwritten	1
In-person	1
Total	14

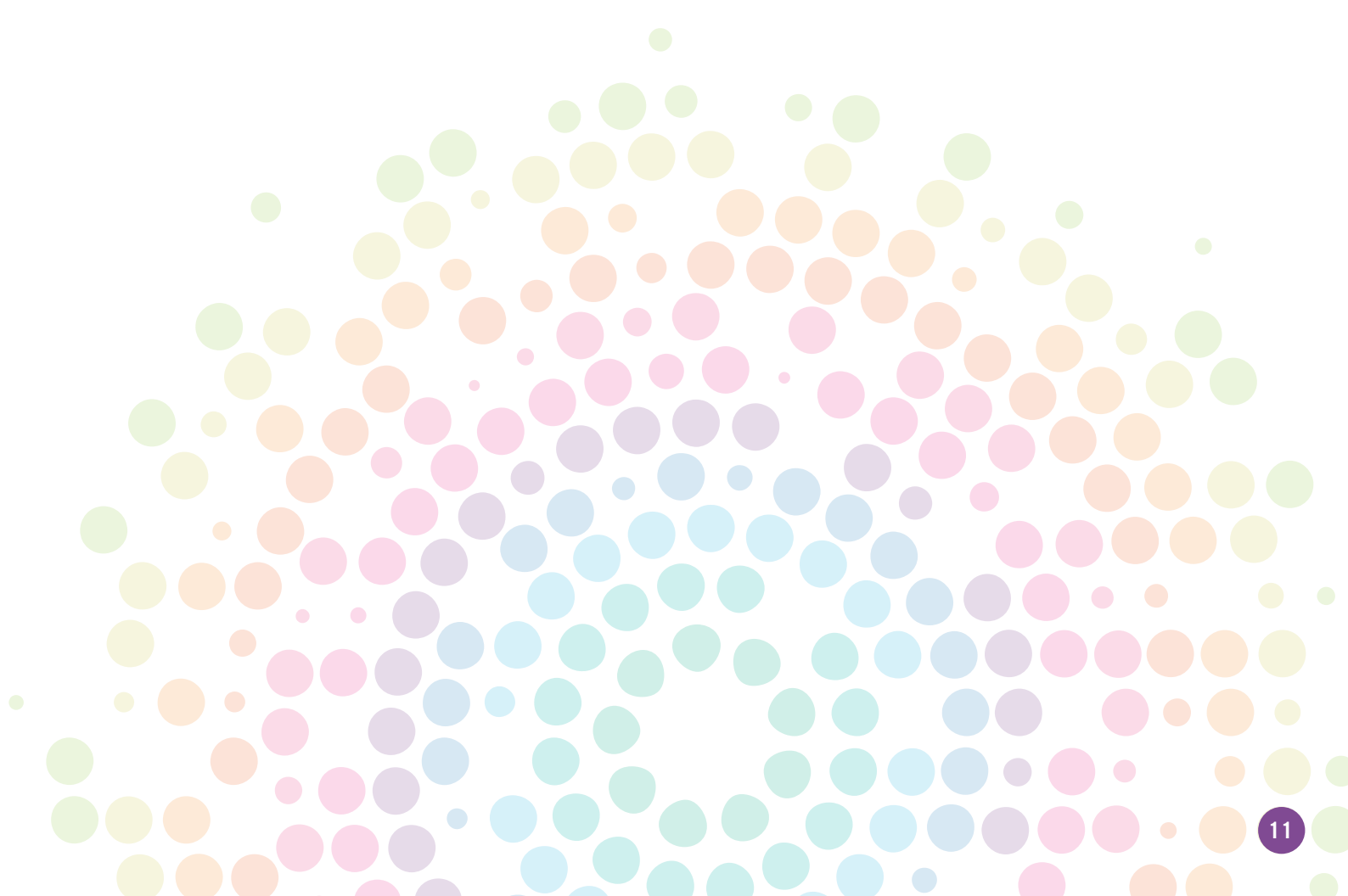
The length of the interview was participant-led. Each participant received a topic guide (Appendix



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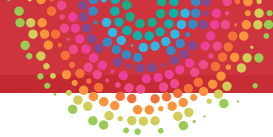
iv) as part of the initial informed consent process (Appendix i & ii), and was sent the full list of interview questions (Appendix v) via email a couple of days in advance of the interview, giving them time to prepare and consider their responses. Depending on the depth of conversation, and the participant's energy, the interviews were conducted across one or two sessions, typically lasting approximately 1hr and 15 minutes each. Each participant received a set of debriefing questions at the end of the interview, alongside contact details for support services to ensure that any risk of distress was minimised. The interviewer thanked participants for their contribution, outlined the next steps, and that she would be in touch in due course.



Chapter

4

Data Analysis



4.1 Editing the narratives

Once each interview was complete, the recording was uploaded to a secure cloud-based system, from which it was transcribed by a contracted professional transcription agency who were bound by a confidentiality agreement set out in their contract with the AAI. This had been outlined to participants as part of the informed consent process.

Upon receipt of the first raw interview transcripts, it was clear that rather than publishing them in their raw format, they needed to be shaped into a coherent narrative. In the case of the participants who had elected to be identified, the Research Officer edited each transcript into a draft narrative-style chapter using a method set out by Shopes (2011) for documenting oral history. This involved removing the interviewer's voice from the transcript so that only the participant voice remained. The advantages and disadvantages to removing the interviewer's voice have been discussed in the literature (e.g. Ritchie, 2015). However, in this case the Research Officer felt that removing the interviewer voice was the right decision for this particular dataset.

Returning to the Shopes (2011) method, the text was then minimally edited, and re-arranged into an order that made sense. Linking sentences or grammatical elements were added for clarity, while ensuring that the meaning conveyed by the participant was not affected. Once this process was completed, any identifying references to third parties were removed, and additional context was provided where necessary. This included adding in references to years, legal provisions, specific cases, or fleshing out acronyms, informal names etc. As participants were relying on memory, often going back decades, the details provided by each participant in relation to dates, organisations, and policy or legislative matters were fact-checked for accuracy as much as possible by the research team. References were added accordingly, in the form of footnotes. A short biography of each participant was drafted by the Research Officer to provide further context to the presentations of the narratives. Once this process was complete, the Research Officer sent the draft narrative chapter back to the participant via email or post, whichever the participant preferred. Copies sent via email were password-protected, while copies sent via post were registered for signature by the addressee only.

Once participants had received their first draft narrative, a back-and-forth iterative process typically

ensued between participant and Research Officer. This was very much participant-led. Most of the participants suggested minimal edits, while a small number wished to make a number of changes, including naming third parties where participants felt this was essential to their narrative. In some cases, email contact went on for up to a year after the initial interview, while participants considered the details in their chapters and made changes or additions accordingly. It should be noted that, when participants chose to edit their transcripts, it was generally because they wished to add in further detail, or had remembered more context. In one case, a participant wished to make substantial changes to the raw interview transcript upon its receipt. In this case, it was agreed that the transcript would be deleted, and the participant would instead submit a written chapter. Once the chapter had been submitted, the iterative process between participant and Research Officer continued as per the Shopes method. In a separate case, as a participant was physically frail, rather than engaging with an iterative process over the phone, the Research Officer invited the participant to select a trusted gatekeeper. Once this gatekeeper was selected, the Research Officer made contact with her, and outlined her role in the process (i.e. to support the participant). The Research Officer then called out to the participant's house, to read the narrative chapter aloud in the presence of the participant and her friend, who discussed various elements of it and made reviews/edits as they saw fit.

The purpose of this process of shaping transcripts into narratives was to ensure that each participant's contribution to the study could be read as a standalone piece. Furthermore, the Research Officer's input into the draft meant that there would be some level of standardisation of language and chronological order, which would ensure comparability and consistency across the chapters. The aim, in this instance, was to make each piece easily readable by a wide stakeholder audience, while still conveying the facts as they were presented by each participant in their interview.

A selection of narratives such as this can be presented in a number of ways. For simplicity and efficiency, the narratives in this report are being presented as individual chapters – one chapter per participant. The order in which they are presented in a report required careful consideration, to ensure that the overall story about the area under research develops in an arc from start to finish. As the Research Officer worked on the various narratives, it became apparent that the different chapters fell into a number of different “eras”, where certain “groups” (e.g. social workers, activists) seemed to come to the fore of domestic adoption. Therefore, the narratives have been grouped this way in the final report.

4.2 Thematic analysis

For the second part of the study, the original raw transcripts were thematically analysed using the method set out by Braun and Clarke (2021). Interview transcripts were initially coded by the Research Officer and Research Assistant. Four transcripts were coded in detail, independently, before the Research Officer and Research Assistant came together to compare and discuss individual codes. From this a coding frame was developed, which fitted with the coded data. This frame was applied to subsequent transcripts by the Research Officer, and adjusted as needed. When all coding was completed, the Research Officer developed a set of draft themes, and met with the Research Assistant to discuss them in further detail and tease out their meaning. These discussions led to the refinement and adjustment of themes until 3 clear themes were agreed upon. Both members of the research team were confident that the final set of themes fit the data, as presented in the raw interview transcripts. Finally, the agreed narrative chapters were also reviewed by the Research Officer to ensure that the themes arising from the raw data also generally fitted with the edited versions. This was implemented as an additional element of rigour and quality checking of both themes and the narrative editing process. It was anticipated that, were the themes to be a good fit, this would be a strong indicator that the narrative chapters were an accurate reflection of the original interviews, and though they had been edited, they had not changed substantially in terms of their core points. Through this process, the themes were deemed to be a strong fit for the narratives, in addition to the raw transcripts, and this is considered to be an indicator of the quality and rigour of this study.

“

For the second part of the study, the original raw transcripts were thematically analysed using the method set out by Braun and Clarke (2021).

”

4.3 Write up

The study was written up by the Research Officer, with input and support from the Research Assistant. It was then shared with a small number of senior staff within the Adoption Authority, before being legally reviewed by the Authority’s externally contracted legal consultants. All participants were sent a final copy of their narrative chapter for review and sign-off prior to publication.



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Appendices



Appendix i: Introductory Letter

[insert date]

Dear [insert name],

I am the Research Officer at the Adoption Authority of Ireland. As part of a 3-year research strategy, we are conducting a study called “Reflections on the Irish Domestic Adoption Process, 1952 – 2020.” The aim of this study is to capture, in detail, the experiences of a select number of people (c. 12-15) who have had a strong professional or voluntary connection to adoption in Ireland at any stage since its legal inception.

The members of the Authority’s current Board, Executive and research advisory committee were invited to contribute names of individuals whom they believed had been deeply involved with Irish Domestic Adoption over the years, and your name was contributed as part of this process. I am writing to let you know a little bit about the study, and to invite you to hear more about it, if you so wish. Please be aware that participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

With permission, I will be contacting all proposed participants via phone in the coming days and weeks, inviting them to hear more about the study. Please let me know your response to being contacted by ticking the box, signing below and returning to me in the enclosed SAE.

It is important to note that giving consent via the form below does not mean you are consenting to taking part in this research – just that you are open to the next step of receiving more information about it.

Kindest regards,

[Research Officer signature]

[email address/phone numbers]

I consent to being contacted about this research (please tick):

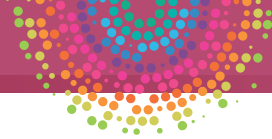
YES	
NO	

Print name: _____

Signed: _____

Contact Number: _____

Date: _____



Appendix ii: Information and Consent Form

[Date]

“Reflections on the Irish Domestic Adoption Process: 1952 – 2020”

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION & CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant,

You have received this information and consent form as you have been identified by the Adoption Authority as a person who has had a significant association with domestic adoption in Ireland, and you have consented to *receiving more information* about the study. Please read the form below in full, as it contains important information about participation.

1) What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to record reflections on the Irish Domestic Adoption process from individuals who have been directly involved with domestic adoption in Ireland, either professionally or voluntarily, at any point since its legalisation in 1952.

2) Who is conducting it?

This study is being conducted directly by the Adoption Authority of Ireland. As the Authority's Research Officer, I will arrange, conduct and analyse all interviews.

3) What will happen?

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary:

- If, having read this form, you are happy to participate, please complete, sign and return the attached consent form via email. If you would prefer to read and sign a hard copy, just let me know and I can post it to you with SAE.
- If, having read this form, you do not wish to participate, please just let me know via email/text/call (details on p.5). There is no need to return the consent form in this case. You do not have to give a reason, and all contact will be treated in strictest confidence.

Participation in this study involves two specific elements:

1. Completion of a brief demographic questionnaire. This will take approximately 2 minutes to complete with me over the phone. You are under no obligation to answer any of the questions.
2. The original design of the study included an in-depth, in-person interview. Due to the current restrictions, these interviews will now take place over the phone/Zoom.

It is important to note that you can elect to either be named or de-identified in this study. Further details are provided in Sections 5 – 10 of this form.

After receipt of your signed consent form, I will contact you via phone at a mutually agreed time to complete the very brief demographic questionnaire. I will then send you the interview schedule so that you can consider the questions a few days in advance of the interview. You are very welcome to contact me during this time so that I can provide support or assistance to you in considering the questions.

We will conduct the interview over the course of 1 or 2 phone calls (depending on how quickly we move through the interview questions) scheduled at a time of your choice. They will likely be 60 minutes or so each, will take place on different days, and will be audio recorded so that they can be transcribed. You can choose not to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish.

Once the interview is complete, the audio recording will be uploaded to a secure AAI computer. It will be transferred securely to a professional transcription service, who have signed the AAI's confidentiality agreement

and are fully GDPR compliant. Once I have securely downloaded your transcript, I will edit it into a draft narrative, and forward it to you for review. This may be a back and forth process, until you are fully satisfied to sign off on the final version.

A two-part report will be written up, with Part 1 containing the edited narratives from participants (with redaction/de-identification of 3rd party information as necessary), and Part 2 outlining and discussing the main overarching themes arising from the collation and analysis of all interview transcripts. In Part 2, illustrative quotes may be taken from individual narratives and used to explain certain findings or themes.

This report will be made publicly available, and there may be subsequent research outputs such as conference presentations, posters, journal articles, and press briefings.

Withdrawal from the study:

If you choose to participate, but subsequently change your mind, you can withdraw from the study at any time. If, shortly after the interview has taken place, you decide that you do not wish your data to be used, you can choose to withdraw your transcript and/or narrative from the study. This is in accordance with GDPR.

It should be noted however that once the full analysis and dissemination have taken place it may no longer be practical to withdraw your individual data, particularly once the report is in the public domain. Therefore, withdrawal of your data is feasible for up to 2 months after the finalised edited version of your interview has been agreed upon. Similarly, if you have elected to be named in the interview or vice versa but subsequently change your mind on your decision, you can request a change in this respect for up to 2 months after the narrative has been signed-off on.

If you have concerns about your data after this time has elapsed, please do get in touch and we can discuss on an individual basis. You have a right to Restriction of Processing under GDPR. This means that if we cannot practically withdraw or rescind information that is already in the public domain (e.g. a printed report in someone's possession), we can restrict its further dissemination upon request from you (e.g. removal of the report from a website etc).

4) Data Usage and Management:

Any data collected as part of research conducted by the AAI will be used and managed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation, the procedure outlined in the AAI's non-disclosure agreement, and clear data management procedures as set out in the AAI's Ethical Protocol (available on request).

Phone interviews will be recorded on a digital voice recorder and uploaded to a password-protected folder on the Authority's secure computer system at the earliest possible opportunity. They will then be immediately deleted from the digital voice recorder. Paper records including written submissions and demographic questionnaires will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the AAI. The only people who will have access to this filing cabinet are the Research Officer and the Authority's Data Protection Officer (in emergency situations only). The Authority itself is not a public office - a security tag is required for access. This provides an additional layer of security to any paper files connected to research.

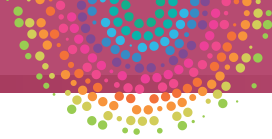
All paper and digital data will be retained for 5 years after the study has been completed. They will be securely destroyed by the Authority's Research Officer and data protection officer after this time.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

Each participant will be assigned a unique identifier code after consenting to take part in the research. This code will be used in place of your name to save and store all electronic data relating to you. One Excel file linking contact details to the unique identifier codes will be stored as a password-protected document on a secure computer at the AAI. The only people who will have access to this file are the Research Officer and the data protection officer (for emergency administrative purposes only).

5) Identification of participants:

The aim of this study is to generate the story of the development of adoption in Ireland from 1952 – 2020 from the accounts of people who were deeply involved with the adoption process, either professionally or voluntarily.



It is acknowledged that the population from which this sample of 12-15 participants has been drawn is a small one. With this in mind, much consideration has been given to the areas of confidentiality and anonymity, and the following design has been developed accordingly.

Part one of the report will include the publication of edited narratives, based on the interview transcripts. These narratives will have been agreed with you after your interview and prior to publication, so your full narrative will only be printed/disseminated with your final sign-off.

You can elect to either be named and identified on your narrative, or for it to be de-identified. If you elect to be named on your narrative, you will be fully identifiable. However, we will still de-identify any references to third parties. If you elect to be de-identified, your narrative will be de-identified in accordance with the guidelines set out by the Irish Qualitative Data Archive. We will also de-identify any references to third parties.

In both cases, once the interview has been transcribed, it will be edited into a narrative which will be sent to you for your consideration and sign-off. This may be a back-and-forth process with a number of communications between you and the Research Officer about the text, until you are completely satisfied with the level of information contained therein. It is important, when you receive the draft narrative from us after your interview, that you take time to consider the possibility of any potential reputational risk to you as a result of the publication of the narrative. Every effort will also be made by the Authority to ensure that any risk to you through the publication of identifiable text is limited. We will de-identify any information about third parties in your narrative, and all text will be subject to a legal review by the Authority prior to publication.

Part 2 of the report will involve the collation and analysis of all participants' transcripts, to assess any emergent themes. In Part 2, selected quotes may be taken from your transcript to illustrate points made in the dissemination. If you have elected to be named in the study, we will use your name with your quote. If you have elected to be de-identified, you will not be named in the quote.

Whether you elect to be named or de-identified, it is important to note that there are certain limitations to confidentiality and anonymity (see Section 7).

Please remember to indicate your choice regarding identification/de-identification on the attached consent form.

6) Publication and archiving of transcripts:

Interview transcripts may be saved in the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA) and disseminated through the Digital Repository of Ireland. This would enable people to access your raw transcript in future for research purposes. In accordance with their archiving guidelines, all interview transcripts will be fully anonymised before being archived, regardless of your choice about identification for the purpose of the present study. If you subsequently change your mind and do not wish your transcript to be archived, you have a right to Restriction of Processing under GDPR. While we cannot practically withdraw or rescind information that is already in the public domain, we can restrict its further dissemination, in this case by removing your own transcript from the archive.

Please indicate your consent to the archiving of your interview on the attached form.

7) Child Protection and Duty of Care:

While confidentiality and anonymity are of huge importance, this study is subject to the recommendations of *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children*. This places certain limitations on confidentiality and anonymity. As the Research Officer, I am Garda Vetted, have taken part in the Children First training and hold a valid Children First certificate. As an employee of the Adoption Authority, I have a duty of care to any children who may be discussed in the course of this research. If during the course of data collection any information is disclosed which makes me concerned for the welfare of a child, even historically, this will be reported without delay to the AAI's designated child protection officer and under such circumstances participant confidentiality and anonymity cannot be guaranteed. This is in keeping with the Authority's Child Safeguarding Statement:

<https://aai.gov.ie/images/CHILD-SAFEGUARDING-STATEMENT.pdf>

You will be informed, during or after the interview, if I feel that a child protection issue needs to be reported.

If during the course of data collection any information is disclosed about an illegal activity concerning adoption in the past, this will be reported without delay to the AAI's CEO and under such circumstances participant confidentiality and anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

It is possible that you may become distressed through reflecting on past events for this study. If you do become distressed, please let me know so that we can pause the interview if applicable, and discuss emotional support. The Authority's social work team are aware that these interviews are taking place and have a care plan in situ should anyone become distressed as a result. Their duty line is [number]. Please do not proceed with answering any further questions unless you feel emotionally able to do so.

8) Interviews and Transcripts:

All interviews will be transcribed by an Irish professional transcription service who have signed the AAI's confidentiality agreement and are bound by GDPR. If you would prefer, I can transcribe your interview myself - just let me know by ticking "no" to the 3rd party transcription statement on the consent form.

9) Benefits and risks of taking part:

The main benefit of taking part is that you will have the opportunity to share, in full, your own unique story and your own opinion on how adoption in Ireland was carried out while you were involved in the area.

As well as the narrative being published in full in Part 1 of the planned report, your raw transcript will be analysed along with those of the other participants, and the resultant themes emerging from this analysis will be written up and disseminated in Part 2. The write up may include the publication of a set of recommendations for policy and practice arising from the research. This could potentially be considered another benefit of taking part.

If you choose to be de-identified, every effort will be made, through a rigorous de-identification process in keeping with the guidelines set out by the Irish Qualitative Data Archive, to ensure that you are not recognisable through the text of your narrative. However, given the relatively small population size from which this sample is drawn, and the specialist nature of the report, there may be a small element of risk that you will be identifiable anyway, depending on the information disclosed and how it is worded. As you will have the opportunity to read your narrative in full, and to read specific quotes taken from your transcript to illustrate points in Part 2, we strongly encourage you to consider the potential identification risk of the text prior to any agreement to its publication. If you so wish, your de-identified narrative can be excluded from part 1, and instead will only be included in Part 2. This would mean that it would not be published in its entirety, but it would still be analysed alongside the others, and de-identified, illustrative quotes could be taken from it for Part 2.

If you choose to be identified, there is an element of professional reputational risk to you, depending on what you say during the course of the interview. In order to moderate this risk, any reference to third parties made during your interview will be de-identified. We encourage you to consider this risk prior to making the decision about identification. The final report will be subject to legal review by the Adoption Authority prior to publication.

10) Any questions?

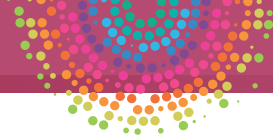
If you have any questions about this study or your participation in it, you are very welcome to contact me at any time via phone or email: [details]

11) Reporting and grievance procedure:

If, after taking part, you have any concerns about the way in which this research is being conducted and do not wish to raise them directly with me, you can share your views in confidence with my line manager, the Authority's CEO, who can be reached via [phone number] or [email]. You can also contact the Authority's duty social worker in confidence: [phone number].

12) Consent form:

If you are satisfied that you understand all the above, and feel you have no further comments or questions, please proceed to the consent form overleaf.



PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to take part, please indicate your responses **to every question** in the table below and **sign the consent form**:

		YES	NO
1	I have had the opportunity to read the enclosed information sheet in full.		
2	I have been given the chance to ask questions or talk about the study with the Research Officer via phone or email		
3	I am satisfied that I have received enough information about this study		
4	I understand what participation involves for me, i.e. completion of a demographic questionnaire over the phone, and a phone interview which will be audio recorded		
5	I consent to my recorded interview being transcribed by a professional transcriber, who is bound by GDPR and has signed the AAI's confidentiality agreement.		
6	I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time prior to or during my interview, without affecting my relationship with the Adoption Authority of Ireland		
7	I understand that I can withdraw my data from the study for up to two months after I have signed off on the agreed narrative		
8	I understand that there are limitations to confidentiality and anonymity in respect of the Research Officer's Duty of Care towards children, in line with the Children First recommendations		
9	I understand that there are limitations to confidentiality and anonymity in respect of any previously unknown illegal activity being disclosed as part of my interview		
10	I consent to my full interview transcript being archived after this study is completed (it will be anonymised in this case)		
11	I consent to taking part in this study		
12	Would you prefer to be identified or de-identified in this study? (please tick yes to one of the below only):		
	I choose to be identified		
	I choose to be de-identified		

SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____

Appendix iii: Demographic Questionnaire

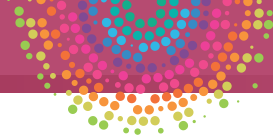
Reflections on the Irish Domestic Adoption Process 1952 – 2020

Pre-Interview Demographic Questionnaire

1.	Signed* consent form received (please circle/underline):	Yes		No	
2.	Date on signed consent form:				
3.	Questionnaire completed by:				
4.	Date of questionnaire completion:				
5.	Unique Identifier Code:				

*A signed consent form must be received in advance from all participants who complete this questionnaire.

6.	What best describes your role in relation to domestic adoption in Ireland? (please tick more than one if necessary)		
	i. Adopted individual		
	ii. Birth relative		
	iii. Adoptive parent		
	iv. Social worker		
	v. Adoption Board member		
	vi. Legal professional (please specify)		
	vii. Private Adoption Agency staff		
	viii. Advocate		
	ix. Activist		
	x. Journalist		
	xi. Member of religious order		



7.	Please specify the specific years you were active in the Irish Adoption arena (e.g. 1988 – 2002)		
8.	Total number of years spent working in Adoption		
9.	County/region of work		
10.	Organisation/agency		
11.	Please indicate your gender		
12.	Please indicate your nationality		

Appendix iv: Topic Guide

The interview schedule will be divided up into 3 distinct sections, as outlined below. Remember that you are under no obligation to answer all or any of the questions put to you.

The topics covered by the interview schedule include the following:

1. Your individual role:

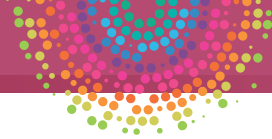
how you became involved in adoption, what your day-to day job entailed, the people you dealt with, your early working relationships & how they changed over time

2. The Irish Adoption System:

Your initial reactions to the System, legislative changes and how they affected your work, your opinions on the changing system as you encountered it, what worked well or not so well, key people, how Ireland compared to other countries

3. Your conclusions on Adoption in Ireland:

How you feel we as a society will reflect on Irish adoption in time, how you feel about your own role on reflection, your reactions to adoption in the media



Appendix v: Interview Schedule

“Reflections on the Irish Domestic Adoption Process 1952 – 2020”

Semi-structured interview schedule:

Introduction/General questions:

1. Initial introduction
 - *thank you, introduction to the study and aims for the interview. Suggested timeframe, any questions?*
2. So I know from when we spoke that your role was ”.....”. Can you tell me about your initial introduction to adoption in Ireland?
 - *What was your pathway into the role? How did you start?*
 - *How did you become interested in working in this area (was it a deliberate career move/happen by accident etc)?*
3. What had you known about adoption before starting work in the area?

Individual Role:

4. What was the day-to-day job like?
 - *Enjoyable, stressful, busy? First day, typical day?*
5. Who were the key stakeholders or organisations that you dealt with most frequently in your role?
6. What were your early working relationships in this area like?
 - *Supportive, slow, helpful, rigid, authoritarian, positive/negative, collegial?*
7. How did those working relationships develop over time?

The Irish adoption system:

8. What were your first reactions to the systems and processes you encountered in your role?
 - *Processes, legislation, assumptions challenged etc*
 - *Did anything surprise you?*
9. How relevant was the legislation of the time to your job?
10. Do you remember key legislative changes that took place while you were there? What kind of impact did they have on your work?
11. Did you feel there were any prejudices in adoption?
 - *religious, gender-specific, racial etc?*

12. Did things in adoption change during your time in the area?

- *How? What made the changes happen - policy, legislation, people? What were the turning points?*

13. What worked well in the Irish adoption system?

14. What didn't work so well?

15. Do any particular moments stand out for you from that time as turning points?

- *positive or negative, what was biggest challenge you faced, was there a highlight?*

16. Were there any stand-out people who you felt made a difference (positive or negative)?

17. Would you do anything differently in your position if you had that time again?

18. Did things change for you after the 2010 legislation?

- *How? What was better/worse?*

19. Do you have any thoughts on how Ireland's handling of adoption compares to other countries?

- *Are any countries doing it well, badly, did you ever have direct contact with other countries in your role?*

Conclusions:

20. How do you think we, as a society, will reflect on our handling of adoption over the years?

21. When you reflect on your career in its entirety, what position did your adoption-related role play?

- *Was it the most significant job you had, the most stressful, average, satisfying, etc?*

22. What reaction, if any, do you have to adoption-related news or media portrayals since leaving your role?

- *(interested, disinterested, frustrated etc?)*

Debriefing questions:

23. Is there anything else you would like to add?

24. Do you feel there are any additional questions that other interviewees would benefit from?

25. How do you feel now, having done this interview?

26. Are you happy enough to finish now?

Thank you for your time.





ÚDARÁS UCHTÁLA na hÉIREANN
THE ADOPTION AUTHORITY of IRELAND