# STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TITLE**  | **Historical Adoption Practices in Wales** |
| **DATE**  | **Tuesday 25th April 2023** |
| **BY**  | **Julie Morgan, Deputy Minister for Social Services** |

I am pleased to be able to make a statement to members today about historical adoption practices in Wales. This follows the Joint Committee on Human Rights inquiry into the experiences of unmarried women and their children who were adopted during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

The Committee looked at whether adoption processes respected the human rights, as we understand them now, of the mothers and children affected. It also examined the lasting consequences of these practices on their lives.

Earlier this year, at the ‘Big Adoption Conversation in Wales’, I offered my own apologies for what happened and acknowledged the lifelong impact forced adoption had had on the lives of many people.

Forced adoption practices predate devolution in Wales. But they continue to affect those who experienced them – parents, children and wider family members. For many, the feelings of loss, grief, anger and pain remain.

At the time when these adoptions took place, many of the women were young, vulnerable and experiencing personal crises. They were not always informed of any legal rights to look after their child themselves or provided with the help they needed to do so. Some were made to feel inadequate, immoral and undeserving when it came to raising their own babies. Adoption was put forward as the only option because of a lack of financial and other support, and the stigma associated with illegitimacy and motherhood out of wedlock.

Even now, many of those affected find it extremely difficult to open-up and talk about the life-long heartbreak they have kept to themselves for fear of still being judged.

The hurt endured by these historical practices extends beyond the birth mother’s relationship with her child.

Some children who were adopted in these circumstances have suffered a lifetime of insecurity and anxiety, despite being loved and cared for by their adoptive parents; some have an ongoing feeling that a part of them is missing and continue to question why their birth parents did not look after them and bring them up themselves.

The grief associated with “not knowing who they are” is common amongst these children and relates to loss of identity, lack of information about their origins, of both birth parents, and for many, including the children of ethnic minority parents, a loss of their wider cultural and ethnic background.

While the trauma of forced adoption has been well documented from a mother and child’s perspective, the impact on the father is often forgotten.

Birth fathers were generally disregarded and blamed for corrupting innocent girls. They had little or no say in what happened to the baby after birth, leaving them feeling helpless and unable to support their partners – they very often become the forgotten characters whose voices were ignored.

I therefore want to acknowledge fathers’ experiences when it comes to these historical practices too.

These practices were unethical, immoral and, may, in some cases have been illegal and I want to put on record today my profound sympathy for all those affected by historic forced adoption.

Regardless of the societal pressures or social norms of the day, such inhumane practices should never be an acceptable part of our society in Wales. The harm done to these individuals is great but as a government, we owe them every chance to live the rest of their days as free from trauma and torment as possible.

We cannot change what has happened, but I can provide assurances that adoption legislation and practices have been significantly improved since.

Adoption is now only considered when all other options have been fully explored.

Services are designed to help birth families stay together whenever that is possible, and when it is not, adoption provides children with safety, stability and the opportunity to thrive.

I would like to also acknowledge and put on record the important contribution adoptive parents continue to make on behalf of children by taking them into their homes and their hearts. We, the Welsh Government, are grateful to them for providing the love and support that all children need. Thank you.

As a government we are listening to people’s experiences and stories to ensure the right support and professional counselling for those affected is readily available.

The National Adoption Service has developed a web page specifically for those affected by historical adoptions. This provides a host of information relating to adoption support and counselling, access to records and intermediary services.

It will also be able to signpost individuals to other services including peer-support and advocacy groups, Welsh Government-funded post-adoption support services, and other long-standing non-government service providers.

My officials have already begun to work alongside the National Adoption Service to consider the issues outlined within the Joint Committee’s report and develop support services which will address the specific needs of those affected by these practices.

We have recently held a consultation event involving birth parents affected by historic adoption practices. This provided a safe space to listen and hear views, and to inform our service development. We will continue to engage with these parents as we develop our services.

Officials and the National Adoption Service have started scoping the regulatory changes that could be introduced in Wales to support the issues relating to the shortage of counsellors able to provide post-adoption support, alongside considering our intermediary services. We are also committed to fully exploring, with those affected, the key challenges they face with regard to adoption records, and we are currently scoping what an improved national access to records service for those affected by these historical practices could look like in Wales.

As we face future challenges, we will remember the lessons of family separation and continue to protect the fundamental rights of children and the importance of their right to be cared for by a parent. That is why, as part of our work to radically reform children’s services in Wales, we are committed to continuing to develop services that can support vulnerable families to stay together.

In closing I would like to convey my deepest sympathy and regret to all those affected, that due to society failing you, you had to endure such appalling historical practices in Wales – for this the Welsh Government is truly sorry.

**Check against delivery**

**Embargoed until after Julie Morgan MS, Deputy Minister for Social Services**

**has delivered the statement.**