

ADOPTION AS PART OF THE IRISH CARE SYSTEM: A NEW CHALLENGE FOR SOCIAL WORK?

Authors: Dr Valerie O'Brien & Ms Angela Palmer

Email: valerie.obrien@ucd.ie & angela.palmer@ucdconnect.ie

Dr Valerie O'Brien. School of Social Policy Social Work and Social Justice, UCD was a member of the Irish Adoption Board 1998 -2010. She is currently researching the adoption of children from the Irish care system with Ms Angela Palmer; comparative Indian / Ireland adoption practices with Ms Sahana Mitra & the adoption of children to and from USA with Dr Joyce Maguire Pavao, Cambridge MA, USA.

Angela Palmer is a PhD scholar at UCD in the area of young people's experience of adoption from the care system and the policy making process. She previously worked as a policy analyst, journalist and advocate.

Abstract

Placing adoption as an adjunct to the care system will have many implications for current service delivery and especially for social work practice. Not only is it likely to change the nature of care planning, foster and adoptive parent assessment and social work involvement in judicial processes, but it also has implications for the profession's relationship with adoption. This seismic shift requires keen deliberation at a policy and practice level if best outcomes for some of the most vulnerable children in Irish society are to be realized. The debate needs to include those individuals affected by and responsible for legislative change, policy formation and best practice and its implementation (O'Brien and Palmer, 2015). This paper sets out to explore a number of the issues involved.

Key words: Adoption; Foster Care; Social Work; Ireland, Consensual Adoption; Termination of Parental Rights; Children.

Adoption Reform and Use of Adoption for Children in the Care System

Since adoption legislation was enacted in Ireland by the 1952 Act, 44,270 children have been adopted (AAI, 2014). The adoption code introduced by the Act was seen 'as a private, consensual mechanism designed to facilitate a legal transplantation of a child into the adoptive family' (Shannon 2010, p 445). The 1952 Adoption Act only permitted non-marital children to be adopted, and has been amended numerous times – in 1964, 1974, 1976, 1988, 1991, 1998 and 2010 - with notable changes being made in the 1988 Act in respect of the adoption of children of marriage and in the 2010 Act in respect of intercountry adoption.

The 1988 Adoption Act, made provisions concerning the parental consent issue by providing for the adoption of children, regardless of their marital status, against the wishes of their natural parents. There was, however,

a high threshold set for abandonment, termed as the complete failure of parental duty until the child reached 18 years of age. Within decision-making, this meant the right of the family unit was privileged over the right of the child to be adopted. Adoption remains predominantly consensual in nature and the proposals contained in the Adoption Bill 2012 serve to fundamentally shift this basis.

Up to this point, the numbers of children adopted from the care system remains low. Out of a total of 116 adoptions in 2013, 17 were adopted from LTFC (AAI, 2015a). This figure rose to 23 in 2014 (AAI, 2014). Many children are adopted prior to their 'aging-out' of the care system. In 2014, for example, 65 per cent of adoptions from LTFC occurred when the foster child was 17 years of age (AAI, 2015b). The reasons for adoption at this age has not been researched fully, but anecdotal evidence shows that in many cases it is driven by the foster child and foster parent's desire for legal permanence.

Constitutional Amendment and Adoption Bill 2012

The 2012 Children's Referendum was passed by a majority of 57.4 per cent to 42.6 per cent, with a turnout of just 33.5 per cent (McMahon, 2012). The Adoption Bill, 2012, which accompanied the constitutional referendum, offers a new route to a permanent living arrangement for children in the care system. The proposed bill lowers the threshold of abandonment, outlined in the 1988 Act.

Article 42A in the Irish Constitution permits married parents, for the first time, to place their child for adoption; it permits children born to both married and unmarried parents and those residing within a specific time-frame in LTFC to be adopted. Article 42A.1 recognizes that all children have rights and pledges to protect those rights by law. It makes provision for children to have their views established and permits the courts to identify rights for children on a case-by-case basis. It is envisaged that children's rights will be central to this new development.

Trends in Adoption: Past and Present

The shocking treatment of vulnerable children (Ryan Report 2009), women in mother and baby homes (Goulding 1998, Milotte, 2012) and Magdalene laundries (Smith 2005) and the place of adoption as a mechanism by which the transgressions associated with birth outside marriage society were dealt (Maguire 2002, O'Brien 2013b,) with has been a recurring theme in recent years in Ireland. The publication of various government reports since the early 1990s documenting the abuses of the past has irrevocably changed the political and social landscape of Irish society.

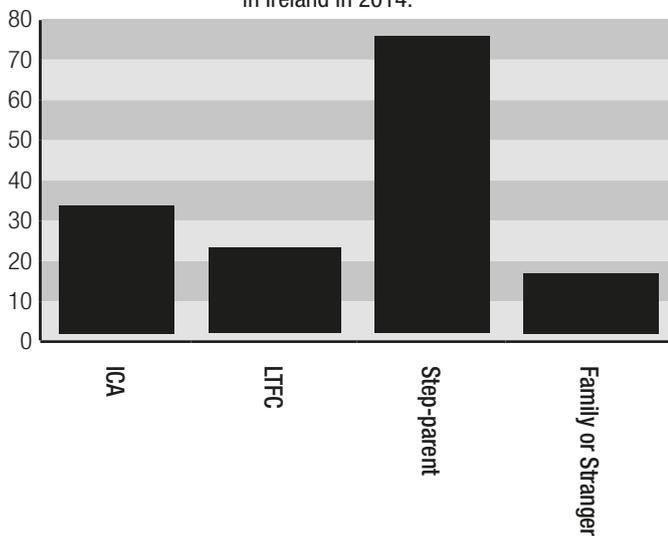
Significant change can be traced back to the early 1970's and these changes have significantly shaped the place of adoption in Ireland. The introduction of an unmarried mother's allowance in 1973 (Considine et al, 2009), the abolition of the status of illegitimacy in the 1980's (Farren, 1998) and the lessening social stigma attached to pregnancy out of wedlock has led to a decline in adoption. This is apparent when considering that in 1974,

61% of non-marital births were placed for adoption, whereas thirty years later in 2014, the corresponding figure was 0.46% (AAI, 2014).

A snapshot of the 146 adoptions that occurred in 2014 and presented in Fig 1 shows the variation occurring across the different adoption categories. Parent(s) relinquishing of their new born children (by consent) to an adoptive family continues to represent a very small percentage of the overall cohort (15 cases). A total of 23 adoptions related to children adopted out of the LTFC (a significant number of these would have been contested by birth parents). Step-parent adoptions accounted for 74 family adoptions, while 34 intercountry adoptions were registered.

The biggest change in adoption has occurred in recent years in relation to the numbers of intercountry adoption. For example, 307 ICA adoptions were registered in 2009, whereas the numbers fell to 72 in 2013 and to 34 in 2014. The enactment of the 2010 Adoption Act, which regulated intercountry adoption, occurred at a time when there was a major decline occurring internationally in respect of intercountry adoption (Selman 2006). In the context of an overall decline in adoption numbers, it is indeed timely to consider the implications of increasing the use of adoption for children in the care system as a means of providing for their needs.

Figure 1: Different Strands of ICA and Domestic Adoptions in Ireland in 2014.



Note: There is no breakdown separating family and stranger adoptions in the 2014 official statistics. It is likely that the majority of adoptions in this category are stranger as the bulk of family adoptions are contained in the step parent category. The ICA figure represents adoptions that were registered by people habitually resident in Ireland.

Source: AAI Annual Report, 2014

Key Issues in the Debate

The seismic shift in which adoption is moving from a system based largely on parental ‘consent’ to one in which state institutions are given greater powers in deciding ‘who is to be adopted’ requires keen deliberation at a policy and practice level if best

outcomes for some of the most vulnerable children and family members in Irish society are to be realized. The boom to bust era and government spending cuts has increased stress on many families and now more than ever, a consideration of how power, values, needs and interests in the complex area of child and family welfare are constructed is crucial. The government’s adoption proposals will need to be handled with transparency and honesty, allowing opportunities for the different stakeholders to deliberate discuss and debate the key issues. The debate needs to include all those individuals affected by and, responsible for legislative change, policy formation and best practice and its implementation (O’Brien and Palmer, 2015). To this end, a number of pertinent issues facing social workers are now outlined. It is hoped that this deliberation will enable social workers to take a lead position in the debate.

Best Interest of the Child, Financial Incentives and Long Term Foster Care

The welfare and the ‘*best interest of the child*’ principle are central to the constitutional change. A big issue is how the ‘best interest’ principle will be determined within this proposed legislative structure. Within practice, policy and legal arenas, there is very little agreed definition as to what constitutes the best interest of a child. Professionals policy-makers, and wider society, need to be very mindful of what is involved and how the ‘best interest’ principle is constructed /structured, including what the discourses are that are shaping adoption reform. It is important to ask what is the purpose and desired outcomes associated with the changes outlined in the 2012 Adoption Bill.

For many social workers, the *best interest of the child* is to be connected, to be part of, their extended family; if it is at all possible. For some, the closed nature of adoption represents a severance of those relationships, regardless of the rhetoric concerning the importance of openness (Palmer, 2015) and potentially contradicts existing models of social work practice, which are based on transparency, ethical practice and empowerment (McCarthy, 2015).

In Britain, there has been huge resistance among some social workers around government adoption initiatives because they are largely seen as an efficiency drive based on financial targets. The establishment of financial incentives and government set performance targets has raised ethical questions regarding the UK and US adoption processes (O’Halloran, 2009). Financial incentives should have no place in child welfare policy. Their introduction can create a loss of trust between the courts and child protection authorities in relation to what is in the best interests of the child (Parkinson, 2003).

For over 30 years, social workers in Ireland have achieved success in achieving stable outcomes for many children within long-term foster homes. This is an achievement of which the profession is proud (Palmer, 2015). If the primary focus of the 2012 bill is the *best interest of the child*, finding better ways to manage what works within

the current foster care system in order to create higher rates of permanency should also be an option (Palmer, 2015) in tandem with utilizing adoption. There are other legislative provisions, which could be considered, such as different types of Guardianship that provide permanence to the placement but do not completely sever all legal relationships between the child and their birth family. This is also an opportunity to examine different options within LTFC and how innovations such as 'Home for Life' - as developed in New Zealand - might have a place to play in Ireland. There is undoubtedly a place for both LTFC and adoption in the care system but a major challenge is to ensure that change does not have unintended consequences. It is imperative that adoption reform does not de-stabilise the LTFC placement option and the existing relationships within. This is an important consideration, given that foster care is the backbone of the Irish child welfare system.

Shifting Perspectives and Permanency: Parental Rights versus Right of the Child

The objective of planning for permanence is to ensure children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond (O'Brien and Conway, 2004). Ireland's commitment to family based care for children in care, and the use of LTFC as a permanent placement option, is aligned with European and Nordic countries, New Zealand and most Australian states with the exception of New South Wales. Will a policy shift that legislates for greater termination of parental rights in place of family preservation align Ireland more toward the American 'permanency planning movement': a movement that has also been influential in the UK? The manner by which the American concept of permanence has been interpreted mainly as a legislative mechanism, has seen many children freed for adoption without finding an alternative family and as a consequence leaving care with no legal relationship to any family (Mallon et al, 2005). If legal permanence is used as the key to reposition adoption within the Irish care system, how will the concept of permanency be constructed to take account of specific Irish cultural, political and historical contexts?

What is important to note here is that there is a difference between the emotional and relational aspect of permanency, as opposed to the legal aspect (Sanchez, 2004). Some argue that policy shifts in the UK and the US have placed the child's right to adoption above the parent's right to a family life (Lind et al, 2003) and that this has led to parental rights being terminated too early (O'Halloran, 2010).

The constitutional amendment changes the balance between children's and parents' rights. It is, as yet, unclear how the provisions under Article 42A in relation to children's rights will manifest in practice. Looking ahead, the possibility of children themselves having the right to choose adoption over LTFC in specific circumstances needs careful consideration; and to determine how and

if social workers can and should advocate for this to happen (O'Brien and Palmer, 2015).

A number of issues need clarification with respect to children's involvement in choosing adoption over LTFC. Examples of issues that need clarification include: Who will be responsible for assessing the child's capacity to form his/her individual views? Will this be determined by social workers themselves or is it for the court to decide? Will the child be expected to speak as part of the court proceedings, or will his/her opinions be noted in reports, or both? Since the Adoption Act of 1952, a level of experience has been gained within the social work arena on consulting children above seven years of age. This expertise should be utilized within any future practice developments resulting from the legislative changes.

Adoption may be a good choice for some children, some birth parents and some prospective adoptive parents. The work of the agency, the social worker, the courts and, other professionals, need to ensure that sound decisions are made and that both sets of parents (birth and adoptive) and the children involved are offered long-term help with the Adoption Plan

Adoption, Contact and Identity

Adoption law in Ireland involves the total transfer of all legal rights and responsibilities between one set of parents to another. In recent years at a practice level, a degree of openness has developed between birth and adoptive parents and the child (O'Brien 2013). While research into this practice is limited (McCaughren 2010) at an anecdotal level, there is evidence that openness occurs predominantly through various levels of information exchange and in a smaller number of cases, periodic and limited face to face contact. There are variations in contact and access practices across the different strands of adoptions.

Contact on the other hand is a central and established - though sometimes contested - part of the LTFC system. It is widely recognized that a high level of skill and resources to ensure that its benefits are realized is required. As it stands, the Adoption Bill 2012 makes no provision for a contact order to be attached to an adoption order, in spite of the central place of contact within the long term foster care system.

Adoption is a lifelong process (Maguire Pavao, 2005) and any policy shift towards increasing adoption must learn from past mistakes (O'Carroll, 2002). A big risk of adoption is losing connections that are intrinsic to identity formation. The closed system of adoptive practices has historically left adopted people in Ireland devoid of rightful knowledge concerning their biological roots. This has resulted in a lifetime of loss and suffering for many (Kelly, 2005). While openness and contact can mitigate the risk - the risk being loss of one's sense of identity (*who am I?*) but navigating the processes involved remains complex and somewhat controversial practices (Collins et al, 2008).

So, how will existing contact practices for children in LTFC who proceed to be adopted, be handled within the new legislative framework? For this cohort, legal permanence through adoption may be important but so too is retaining their sense of identity and connection to birth family (Parkinson, 2003).

Children will need to have a clear understanding of all the stages of the adoption process going forward. Contact plans will need to be something that the child desires and is in his or her best interest. Adoption plans should include details of the arrangements for maintaining links, and where possible regular contact, with birth parents, wider birth family members and other people who are significant to the child. Plans should also detail how and when these arrangements will be reviewed (O'Brien and Conway, 2004).

Plans will need to be made on an individual basis but the assumptions underpinning decision-making will need to be transparent and accountable. The need for specific support services will be central to contact. Through the lifetime of their adoption, children and their adoptive parents will need to be given access to ongoing support services that meet their assessed needs. These include advice and counselling, health, education, leisure and cultural services when needed.

So while there is no shortage of what might constitute best practice, there remains a salient issue in the 'greater openness within adoption' developments. That issue remains to be flagged and centers on how a new network between two families is constituted as part of adoption. Firstly, as consulting the research regarding openness and contact in adoption shows, it is crucial that a distinction is made between adoptions that are based on relinquishment i.e. 'consented' and those in which the state was involved in terminating parental rights. The main reason is that the basis for adoption in studies are not always obvious and claims made in one context may be used inadvertently to make claims for all adoptions.

Secondly, while it is now generally recognized in foster care that once a child is shared, a new kinship network is developed that forever links two families. The reality is that many adoptive families may not be hugely invested in taking this 'shared kinship' perspective on board, and instead see it more as something they have to do more on an individual basis for the child (McDonald 2015). The processes involved are complex, and variations in the backgrounds of the two groups of parents may present challenges. The adoptive and birth families may not always have the capacity to deal with the issues it raises. If contact is seen to be something that is in the *best interest of the child*, supports and access to post adoption services will be crucial in enabling its achievement.

Post-adoption Support Services

The Adoption Bill, 2012, makes no reference to post adoption financial or support services within the adoption process. These supports will be critical to ensure best

outcomes to be realized. It has been shown that these services need to be available long after the finalization of the adoption (Maguire Pavao, 2005). The lack of state provision for post-adoption services runs the risk of only attracting potential adoptive parents who are financially capable of sourcing these services independently of the state. This in itself raises serious ethical questions.

It also raises the question of the financial incentives underpinning the policy shift. The danger here is that adoption as a care option is being politically driven as it represents a cheaper alternative to LTFC. Is it right to elevate adoption over other forms of permanence? It is important here that reunification and permanence within the extended family are not short-circuited (Kirton, 2013). The provision of accessible and standardised post adoption services and financial packages for adoptive families will be crucial to mitigate the financial incentive claims. The development of successful, new practice models need to include the input of the practitioners and users of services (O'Brien and Conway, 2004).

Birth parents and birth families also need to have access to good quality, non-judgmental post adoption services (McCarthy, 2015) that recognize both the short-term and long-term impact of adoption on their lives. This should include information about local and national support groups for birth parents. Policies and procedures for informing birth families of significant events in the life of the adopted person could also be considered.

Impact on Professional Practice

Implications for Service Delivery Models

The proposed legislative reform will alter the position of adoption within the care system at both a legal and practice level. Within the child welfare service delivery system, adoption has resided in a peripheral position, being viewed as the 'Cinderella' of the system (O'Brien and Richardson, 1999). In the 1990s, ICA and domestic adoption teams worked separately to the alternative care and child protection teams. In 1999, there was a total of 17 social workers countrywide, working fulltime on ICA services and, a minor number in the area of domestic adoptions (O'Brien and Richardson, 1999). Up to the 2010 Adoption Act, a team of social workers in the Adoption Board had primary responsibility for all family adoption applications. Since the 2010 Act, all adoption applications are now managed by TUSLA and a small no of adoption agencies. In TUSLA, social work practice in the field of adoption and that in the field of fostering are still generally carried out by different teams (O'Brien and Palmer, 2015).

Looking to the future, training, supervision and resource allocation will be major challenges at an agency level. Experienced adoption, foster care and child placement social workers should play a key role, within their organisations, in the expansion of adoption services in the future, but an audit of baseline resource requirements will need to be made.

Decision-Making

The adoption process places a heavy responsibility on agencies, their social workers and decision-makers. Their work and decisions can profoundly affect the lives of those involved in adoption. It is important therefore that the decision-making process is soundly constructed, with appropriate delegation of responsibility, with balances and checks, and an appeals system, as necessary.

Ideological and Value positions

Social workers will now need to reflect on their value system and be open to examining how their ideological positions might shape their positioning, re: adoption as an option for children in the care system. They also need to be mindful that adoption has been marginalized in the legislative, political and practice fields for many years. To date, social workers have had limited experience of seriously considering adoption in care planning and decision-making, largely as the test for abandonment under the 1988 Act was so high or the children were not eligible for adoption due to the marital status of birth parents. In order to be alert to the forthcoming changes in child welfare, social workers need to be mindful of the impact that changes may have on their professional identity and practice development. At the core of this, must be movement towards a practice, which genuinely reflects the ethical obligations of social work (McCaughren & Ní Raghallaigh, 2015), but the context in which this practice occurs is in itself complex and contested. Such considerations will pose extensive challenges but also provide opportunities for social work (O'Brien and Cregan, 2015).

Staffing the Service

Financial Planning for Adoptive Services

The budget costs of the expanded adoption services will need to be worked out in light of the projected service level demands, the staffing arrangements and other costs arising in the context of the revised organisational structure. It is likely that if adoption is moved more centre stage, the government will come under increased pressure from advocacy groups and professional bodies to honour those affected by past adoption practices. This can be achieved by government and agencies addressing deficits in the search and reunion legislation and services, while also providing support services to the newer cohorts of people and children involved in adoption. There are many examples of good international service delivery that can be drawn on here in Ireland. We do not need to reinvent the wheel.

Service Delivery Deliberations

At this point there are a number of unresolved issues that need detailed consideration within the framework of the forthcoming Adoption Bill. A number are posed here:

- What are the staffing implications for taking on the domestic adoption role? How will this service fit with other related services?

- Should all children who are proposed for adoption have their own social worker assigned to protect their interests and to act for them throughout the adoption process?
- What are the staffing implications in ensuring that the different parties in adoption are given an individual worker to safeguard their interests? (To ensure that conflicts of interests are avoided and to provide for better negotiated solutions if required).
- Given the long time frame between making a decision to pursue adoption at care planning stage and the judicial adjudication of the application for adoption, there is a need to support birth parents and continue to manage contact, etc. Should the birth family have a social worker appointed to them in their own right? Should this be an agency social worker or should they be appointed from another agency? How will a potential conflict of interest between the agency position (advocating for the adoption) and the social workers (advocating against it) be dealt with?
- What is the implication for assessment practices? How will the foster, adoption, foster to adoption and concurrent assessments be carried out?
- Is it possible that inter-agency training programmes could be offered to maximise use of resources, to address the needs of adoption applicants in the different strands? (This would avoid lengthy waiting periods). Most importantly what are the resource implications for case committees who will be charged with overseeing practices and will be key to decision-making in respect of the children and the families?

Last and not least, what are the training implications for judges and social workers and how will the increased legislative costs to be managed? If adoption is to become a core element of the child welfare system, the judicial processes will increase and lessons learnt from exchanges between the judicial and child protection system will be key to future deliberations.

Conclusion

Social work stands at an important juncture in respect of adoption and the care system. This article sets out some of the complexities involved and the issues that require consideration. Social workers must play a pivotal role in the debates that need to occur if the best interest of children and families are upheld. We must not wait for the debates to happen, but instead be at the forefront in creating them. As a profession, a key challenge going forward for the profession is to provide opportunities for social work to reflect on the place of values, ethics and how ideological positions in respect of adoption as part of the child welfare and protection system are shaped and are being shaped by social workers and other forces. We are lucky, here in Ireland, that there is a large cohort of social workers in the field of adoption and foster care. Up until this point, service delivery models have kept these two groups apart. The time has now come for these two groups to come together to share their wisdom,



deliberate the issues and to join with their colleagues in child welfare and protection. Reframing adoption law, policy and practice requires the benefit of the knowledge, skills and value base of social workers.

Bibliography

- Adoption Act (1952)* Republic of Ireland. [Last accessed 17 December 2015] available at <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie>
- Adoption Act (1998)* Republic of Ireland, [last accessed 9 January, 2016] available at <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie>
- Adoption Act (2010)* Republic of Ireland, [last accessed 5 January 2016] available at <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie>
- Adoption Bill (2012)*, Heads of Bill [last accessed 10 December 2015] available at <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/GeneralSchemeAdoptionBill19thSept12.pdf>
- Adoption Authority of Ireland. (2015a) Personal email communication with authors.
- Adoption Authority of Ireland. (2015b) Personal telephone communication with authors.
- Adoption Authority of Ireland. (2014) *Annual Report*, [last accessed 10 September 2015] available at <http://www.aai.gov.ie/index.php/publications.html>
- Collins, M.E. et al. (2008) 'The Permanence of Family Ties: Implications for Youth Transitioning from Foster Care' in *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, Vol.78 No 1, (54-62).
- Considine, M and Dukelow F. (2009) *Irish Social Policy. A Critical Introduction*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan.
- Farren, G. (1998) *From Condemnation to Celebration: The Story of Cherish 1972-1997*. Dublin: Public Communications Centre.
- Goulding, J. (1998) *The Light in the Window*, Dublin: Poolbeg Press.
- Kelly, R. (2005) *Motherhood Silenced: The Experience of Natural Mothers on Adoption Reunion*, Liffey Press: Dublin.
- Kirton, D. (2013) 'Kinship by Design in England: Reconfiguring Adoption from Blair to the Coalition' in *Child and Family Social Work*, Vol.18, No 1, (97-106).
- Lind, C and McDonald, I. (2003) 'Current Developments' in *Journal of Social Welfare & Family Law*. Vol. 25 No 2, (173-187).
- Maguire, M. (2002) 'Foreign Adoptions and the Evolution of Irish Adoption Policy, 1945-52', *Journal of Social History*, 36 (2), (387- 404).
- Maguire Pavao, J. (2005) *The Family of Adoption*, Beacon Press: Boston.
- Mallon, G and McCartt Hess, P. (2005) 'Introduction' in (eds) Mallon and Hess, *Child Welfare for the 21st Century*, Columbia University Press: New York.
- McCarthy, D.M. (2015) *Exploring Social Workers' Opinion of Adoption from the Foster Care System in Ireland*. Bachelor of Social Work Thesis, UCC, Cork.

- McCaughren, S. (2010) *A Study of Open Adoption in Ireland through the Narratives of Adoptive Parents*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. University College Cork.
- McCaughren, S and Ní Raghallaigh, M. (2015) 'Adoption in Ireland: Exploring the Changing Context' in Christie, A, Featherstone, B, Quin S, and Walsh, T, (Eds). *Social Work in Ireland: Changes and Continuities*, Palgrave Macmillan: London.
- McMahon, A. (2012) 'Children's referendum passed amid low turnout' in *The Irish Times* (Dublin, 11 Nov).
- Milotte, M. (2012) *Banished Babies: The Secret History of Ireland's Baby Export Business*, 2nd Ed. New Island, Dublin.
- O'Brien, V. (2013) 'Social Networking, Adoption and Search and Reunion' in *Irish Social Worker*, Spring 2013, (21-28).
- O'Brien, V. (2013b) Adopt an Open Approach to Historic Secret. *The Sunday Times*, 17th Nov. (p 17) Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10197/5256>
- O'Brien, V. and Conway, E. (2004) *Guide for Practitioners – A Standardized Framework for Domestic Adoption Preparation, Assessment and Decision-making Procedures*, Irish Adoption Board, Dublin.
- O'Brien, V. & Cregan, M (2015) 'Fostering the future: A change agenda in the provision of alternative care'. In Christie, A and Quin, S and Walsh, P. (Eds) *Social Work in Ireland*, London: Palgrave.
- O'Brien, V and Palmer A. (2015) 'Adoption and the Irish care System: Context and Drivers for Change?' in *Irish Journal of Family Law*, Vol.18, No 3, (52-59).
- O'Brien, V and Richardson, V. (1998) *Towards a Standardised Framework for Inter-Country Adoption Assessment Procedures: A Study of Assessment Procedures in Inter-Country Adoption in Ireland*, Government Publications: Dublin.
- O'Carroll, E. (2002) *Traditional Adoption in Ireland*, Unpublished Thesis for Masters in Social Work. National University of Ireland, Dublin.
- O'Halloran, K. (2010) *Adoption Law and Practice*, 2nd Edn, Round Hall, Dublin.
- O' Halloran, K. (2009) 'The Politics of Adoption' International perspectives on law, policy and practice. 2nd Edn, Springer, Brisbane.
- Palmer, A. (2015). *The Implications of the Adoption Amendment Bill, 2012, for Social Work Practice*. Unpublished research study in part fulfilment of the PhD Social Policy Programme, University College Dublin, Dublin.
- Parkinson, P. (2003) 'Child protection, permanency planning and children's right to family life' in *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family*, Vol. 17 No 2, (147-172).
- Sanchez, R.M. (2004) 'Youth Perspectives on Permanency' *California Permanency for Youth Project*, San Francisco, California.
- Shannon, G. (2010) *Adoption Law*, Roundhall, Dublin.
- Ryan Report. (2009) '*Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, Implementation Plan*, Department of Health and Children, Dublin
- Selman, P. (2006). 'Trends in Intercountry Adoption 1998 - 2004: Analysis of Data from 22 Receiving States', *Journal of International Population Research*, Vol. 23 No 2, (183-204).
- Smith, J. (2005) *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*, Manchester, Manchester University Press