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Care-leavers and their children placed for adoption

Abstract

Young people in and leaving state care are more likely than the general population to become parents at a young age. Relatively little is known about the experiences and progress of care leaver parents and their children, but emerging evidence suggests an increased risk of intergenerational state intervention. Drawing on data from the XXX, this paper examines the prevalence and profiles of care leavers amongst birth parents whose children were placed for adoption. Findings showed that more than a quarter (27%) of birth mothers and a fifth (19%) of birth fathers with children placed for adoption were themselves care leavers. There were no significant differences between care leaver and non-care leaver birth parents in terms of involvement in crime or substance misuse, but carer leaver birth parents were distinguishable from other birth parents by their own experiences of abuse and neglect. Care leaver birth mothers were also more likely than their non-care leaver counterparts to have diagnosed mental health problems and were less likely to appeal the adoption plan. The profiles of children placed for adoption between care leaver and non-care leaver birth parents were similar. The findings presented in this paper strengthen the moral imperative to address the over-representation of care leavers amongst birth parents whose children are placed for adoption. There is an urgent need to revise how children and young people in state care are prepared for parenthood and supported as parents.

Keywords: adverse childhood experiences; care-leavers; adoption; state care; early parenthood; outcomes

1. Introduction

Evidence suggests that young people in and leaving state care are more likely than the general population to become parents at a young age (Svoboda et al 2012). Whilst often based on non-representative samples of varying size, the findings from studies in the UK and elsewhere that focus on pregnancy and parenthood whilst in care, and/or the initial years after leaving care, remain consistent. (Biehal and Wade, 1996; Cashmore and Paxman, 1996; Dixon et al., 2006; del Valle et al., 2008; Vinnerljung and Sallnas, 2008; Roca et al., 2009; Oshima et al., 2013; Craine et al., 2013; King et al., 2014; Courtney et al., 2011).

There is less consensus as to why young people with experience of state care are more likely than their peers to enter parenthood early. It may be a positive choice for some, who consider it an opportunity imbued with stability, purpose and love (Cashmore and Paxman, 2007; Haydon, 2003; Roca et al, 2009). However, the higher incidence of early pregnancy and parenthood has also been related to experiences during and prior to being cared for by the state. For example, an analysis of adolescent births in California showed that 9.7% of parents had previously spent time in foster care, but 44.9% of the total sample had been reported as victims of abuse in the preceding decade (Putnam-Hornstein et al., 2013). In this way, the care system may be a protective factor for some young people (Dworsky & Courtney, 2010), a suggestion supported by findings of a US study which noted a 'graded relationship' between length of time in foster care and birth rate, in which girls were more likely to give birth the less time they had been in care (King et al. 2014). Yet in contrast, structured interviews with 325 US care leavers, showed few factors were significant and "simply being in the foster care system is a significant risk factor for pregnancy in and of itself." (Oshima, Narendorf, and McMillen, 2013: 1763).

Adding to the complexity, the type of placement experienced by a young person has been highlighted as an important consideration, with higher incidences of pregnancy associated with kinship care and residential care (Sakai, Lin, and Flores 2011, Svoboda et al 2012). Likewise, Wade (2008) found parents leaving state care in England were more likely than their non-parenting counterparts to have experienced placement instability, been involved in offending and substance misuse, or run away frequently whilst looked after.

The evidence base is also under-developed in relation to what happens after young people who have been looked after by the state become parents. This includes the outcomes for young people who enter parenthood whilst in or officially leaving state care, as well as for those who become parents at a later age. Bublitz et al (2014) investigated the relationship between maternal childhood experience of adoption or foster care and pre-term birth. Mothers with prior experience of state care were found to be four times as likely to give birth prematurely (prior to 37 weeks gestation). Whilst acknowledging the need for further research, the authors surmise that the findings may be related to difficulties with biopsychosocial regulation resulting from separation or trauma. In addition, findings from the Millennium Cohort Study suggest that women with experience of care can "carry social disadvantage into motherhood", and are more likely to have a baby of low birth weight, be a single parent and experience symptoms of depression (Botchway et al. 2015:1).

Third sector organisations in Wales have collectively released a statement of concern in respect of discrimination and support available to parents in and leaving left state care (Voices from Care, NYAS, Family Rights Group, Tros Gynnal Plant 2016). The disparity between the support needs of care-experienced parents and the available support provision has been noted (Rutman et al. 2002) as has a dearth of evidence capable of informing the development of effective interventions for this population (Fallon and Broadhurst 2015). Such factors are compounded by research findings related to the relationships between professionals and parents

with experience of state care. For example, Rutman et al (2002) highlighted the potential for professionals to perceive intergenerational cycles of care as 'inevitable' while Chase et al (2006) found parents felt unhelpfully monitored rather than supported.

The inter-generational continuity of state intervention within families has attracted some research interest (Bartlett and Easterbrooks 2012, Putnam-Horstein et al. 2013, Dworsky 2015). In his review of the literature, Mendes' (2009) noted that studies often made only fleeting references to rates of child protection intervention and results were frequently based on small sample sizes. Nevertheless, he concluded that "care leavers who became teenage parents are more likely than the general population to come to the attention of child protection authorities" (2009:14). In 2015, the Centre for Social Justice submitted freedom of information requests to local authorities in England. They highlighted a "worrying number of care leavers' children … being taken into care" with "at least one in 10 young care leavers aged 16-21 … hav[ing] had a child taken into care in the last year" (2015: 72). Such concern is supported by evidence from a longitudinal study of young people leaving care across three US states in which 10% of mothers, identified at age 21, reported as living apart from at least one biological child (Courtney et al. 2007). This figure increased to 17% by age 23/24 (Courtney et al. 2009), and to 19% by age 25/26 (Courtney et al. 2011). Similarly, findings from a large cohort study in the US (742 care leaver parents aged between 20 and 49) revealed that 9% reported having a child in foster care, compared to a foster care rate of 1.1% in the general population (Foster Jackson, Beadnell and Pecora 2015). Broadhurst and Mason (2013) have also raised concern about the over-representation of care-experienced parents in their English sample of women who have been subject to repeat care proceedings. Yet despite these insights, significant gaps in knowledge remain in respect of the outcomes for families where one or both parents has experience of state care. This includes a lack of evidence about the numbers of parents who retain care of their children and parent autonomously or with voluntary support, and the

numbers who are subject to compulsory state intervention, including those who have children who become 'looked after' and those whose children go on to be adopted. Adoption is a particularly salient consideration, given that the intervention permanently severs the legal ties between a child and their birth family.

1.2 Adoption outcomes for children born to care leavers in Wales

The paper draws on data from the XXX to establish how many of the children placed for adoption in the study time period had birth parents who were care leavers. Birth mothers and fathers were identified as care leavers if they were recorded as 'looked after' as they turned sixteen in the Child Assessment Reports for Adoption (CARA) (see Strengths and Limitations for further discussion). The profiles of birth parents identified as care leavers (hereto referred to as care leaver parents) were compared with those of other birth parents, and the profiles of children born to care leaver parents were compared with those of other children placed for adoption. The purpose of this analysis was to see what, if any, insights the data provides in terms of the needs of care leaver parents and their children, social work practice for this group and / or the impact of state care.

2. Method

2.1 Sample

The data derives from the XXX, a national research study that used a mixed-methods approach to examine the characteristics and experiences of a sample of children recently placed for adoption in Wales, to consider the early support needs of adoptive families into which these children were placed, and to better understand what helps these families to flourish. Detailed information about this mixed methods study can be found elsewhere (XXX).

2.2 Ethical considerations

Ethical permission for the XXX was granted by the XXX. The university is registered with the Information Commissioner as a Data Controller, to process personal data for research purposes. In addition, permission from the Welsh Government was obtained to access the local authority data. Senior Adoption managers were also consulted and their approval obtained. A multi-disciplinary advisory group for the study provided valuable guidance for developing best practice with respect to the ethics pertaining to safeguarding and data protection.

2.3 Retrieval of social work records

The sample comprised the records of all children placed for adoption by every local authority (LA) in Wales between 01 July 2014 and 31 July 2015. Three hundred and seventy four CARA records were reviewed. The template for the CARA was developed by BAAF Cymru, in response to the Adoption Agencies (Wales) Regulations (2005), which set out the information that local authorities must include when reporting on children put forward for adoption. More than 250 discrete pieces of information were sought from each CARA record. The CARAs report on children's experiences and needs within the domains of health, education, emotional / behavioural development, self-care skills, identity, family and social presentation. They also provide a record of the characteristics and experiences of the children's birth parents, the given reasons children were placed for adoption and the actions taken by the LA. CARAs are completed by social workers, who record information based on their work with the birth parents, contact with foster carers, liaison with other professionals (such as police, health visitors and medical officers) and reviews of historical social services records. Under the Adoption Agencies (Wales) Regulations 2005, adoptive parents should be provided with the CARA when matched with a child, so that they have detailed information about the child and their pre adoption experiences.

About two-thirds of the CARAs reviewed were in electronic format, whilst the remainder were reviewed from a hard copy of the report. The researchers worked on site at the LA offices, and to avoid errors in copying, entered data directly into an SPSS database. More than 250 discrete pieces of information were sought from each CARA record. As well as providing valuable information about the characteristics, needs and experiences of all children placed for adoption by every LA in Wales over a 13 month period, the information extracted from the CARAs was also used to check the extent to which the children in those adoptive families who participated in other strands of the study (the questionnaires and interview work), were representative of all children placed for adoption in Wales during the study period. The CARA data forms the basis for the present study.

2.4 Measures

A number of theoretically meaningful adverse childhood and adult experiences were included as part of the analysis to examine potential associations between care leaver status and the profile of birth parents.

Children's characteristics were coded as 'yes'/present (1) and 'no'/absent (0). These included developmental delay (not achieved developmental milestones within the normal age range in one or more domains: physical, language, cognitive, social and emotional); attachment difficulties (concerns recorded by child social worker regarding the child's attachment behaviour), learning difficulties and low birth weight (below 2.5kg).

Parents' childhood experiences of physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect were coded as present (1) or absent (0) using the CARA. Birth mother's experience of domestic violence was coded as present (1) or absent (0) as was each parent's experience of mental illness. The inclusion of the variable for 'mental illness' was not straightforward. It was not always possible to discern from the CARAs whether or not birth parents had a clinical diagnosis for symptoms of anxiety and/or depression. Very many birth mothers (and some

fathers) were simply described in the CARA as depressed or anxious, others were not described in this way but were reported to be taking prescribed anti-anxiety or anti-depressant medication. The ambiguity around whether or not a personality disorder should be classed as a mental illness (Kendell, 2002), further complicated identification of the variable parameters. We initially created a broad yes/no variable for either birth parent having ***any*** reported mental health problem or personality disorder. The vast majority of parents coded positively for this variable. Due to the ambiguity in confirming a diagnosis of anxiety and/or depression and because of the very many parents who were identified with a mental health problem of any nature when anxiety/depressive conditions were included, a second yes/no variable was created for either birth parent having a diagnosed mental illness or personality disorder (excluding anxiety and/or depression). It was this second variable that was used in the analysis.

A parental decision to appeal the order to place for adoption was recorded as 'Yes' (1) or 'No' (0). Social workers would sometimes record suspected childhood abuse, domestic violence, and mental illness as 'suspected'. We ran analyses including these cases as a 'yes'/'present' and then excluded them to provide a more stringent test of association. Unless otherwise stated, we treated suspected cases as a 'yes'/'present' because of the challenges for social workers of evidencing notoriously under-reported domestic events (including parent-to-child and inter-adult violence/abuse) in the absence of a police record.

Regular meetings were held between the researchers reviewing the case files to maintain a common understanding of, and consistent approach to coding. The parameters of most variables were unambiguous. Those that had the potential to be coded more subjectively (for example, attachment difficulties) were thoroughly discussed. It was agreed that team members would not make judgements about the existence of factors, based on an interpretation of what a social work report might suggest. Variables were recorded as present only when they were explicitly documented.

2.5 Statistical analysis

T-test and chi-square analysis was conducted using SPSS Version 20.0 (IBBM Corp, 2011).

3. Results

Of the 374 social work (Child Adoption Records; CARA) files reviewed for Welsh children placed for adoption during the study period, the care history for 356 birth mothers and 240 birth fathers was recorded. Of these, 27% (n=96) of birth mothers and 19% (n=45) of birth fathers were identified as care leavers. Both birth parents were recorded as care leavers for twenty three children, representing 6% of the reviewed child adoption records. Six birth mothers who were care leavers and 14 birth mothers who were not carer leavers, were under the age of 18 when their child was born. There were no children born to mothers in care and under the age of 16. Table 1 presents the frequencies and percentages by care leaver status for the primary study variables.

3.1 Child characteristics

Just over half (n=205; 55%) of children in the study were male; the majority were white British (n=358; 96%). Most children had no recorded religious orientation; those that did were mainly identified as Christian. English was the first language for nearly all the children in the study(N=XX). The majority of children had been removed from their birth parent/s just the once, but a small number (n=28, 8%) had experienced more than one care episode, by having been removed, returned home then removed again. In these instances the date of the child's last entry to care was used for calculation purposes. The average age of children on entry into care was one year and two months (range 0 months to 6½ years). Just over two fifths (n=153; 41%) of the children entered care at, or shortly after birth (within four weeks), whilst just 5% did so after the age of four (n=20). A third (n=122; 33%) of all children in the sample were placed for adoption as part of a sibling group. The average (mean) number of days between

entry into care and adoptive placement was 528 days; the median was 434 days (range 129 to 2662 days).

3.2 Birth parent characteristics and experiences

Table 2 presents the results of *t*-test comparisons of care leavers compared to non-care leavers. There was no difference between the care leaver and non-care leaver group in age when the child placed for adoption was born. For fathers, but not mothers, the time the child spent with the parent before entering care was shorter for care leavers compared to non-care leavers (see Table 2). No association was identified between fathers' care leaver status and employment status or receipt of benefits. An association was identified between mothers' care leaver status and unemployment (χ^2=9.23, p<.05; care leavers 84.4% unemployed, non-care leavers 90.7% unemployed) but not with the receipt of benefits (χ^2 = 2.86, p>.05; care leavers 75% in receipt, non-care leavers 91% in receipt). No association was found between fathers' care leaver status and unemployment (χ^2 =4.50) or receipt of benefits (χ^2 =1.98).

Associations were identified between care leaver status and birth parent experiences of childhood abuse and exposure to violence, including childhood physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, exposure to domestic violence in childhood (mothers only) and neglect (see Table 3). The odds ratios indicated that birth mothers who were care leavers were two to five times more likely to have experienced childhood abuse and neglect while birth fathers who were care leavers were three to seven times more likely to have experienced these indices of childhood adversity. There was a relationship between a record of mothers' mental illness and care leaver status but not for fathers. No relationship was found between mothers and fathers' care leaver status and involvement in crime, substance misuse or alcohol abuse.

Table 3 shows that no relationship was identified between social worker records regarding child characteristics (low birth weight, learning difficulties, developmental concerns, and attachment difficulties) and birth parent care leaver status, although cell sizes were too

small to generate some estimates.

Of nine mothers who were recorded in the Child Adoption Record as having voluntarily relinquished their children adoption with no social services involvement, three were care leavers. An association was identified between birth mother care leaver status and a parent appealing the decision to place the child for adoption, whereby the frequency of appeals was lower for care leavers. Although cell sizes were too small to make this estimation for fathers, an equivalent percentage of parents appealed the decision in each group (i.e. 9% of parents where mother was a care leaver mothers and 9% of parents where father was identified as a care leaver appealed compared with 20% and 18% of non-care leaver birth mothers and birth fathers, respectively).

4. Discussion

The aim of this paper was to make a contribution to the under-developed evidence base relating to the experiences of care leavers who become parents. The findings provide valuable insights into the characteristics and needs of care leaver parents whose children are placed for adoption, and raise important questions about social work practice in respect of this group. The findings in this paper provide some validation for concerns raised by third sector organisations in Wales regarding the negative trajectories for care leavers as they transition to parenthood (Voices from Care, NYAS, FRG, Tros Gynnal Plant 2016). With less than 1% of children in state care in Wales at any given period (Welsh Government 2016), it is concerning that care leavers represented over a quarter of birth mothers and almost a fifth of birth fathers within the sample of birth parents whose children were being adopted.

Comparisons of birth parent profiles revealed that carer leavers were distinguishable from other birth parents by their own childhood experiences of abuse and neglect. This was perhaps is to be expected considering the need for care leaver parents to have been looked after

the state. In addition, care leaver birth mothers were statistically more likely to suffer from mental illness. Aside from these factors, the profiles of care leaver and non-care leaver birth parents and their children were largely comparable. Evidence suggests that young people in and leaving state care are more likely than the general population to experience early parenthood, and endure poorer outcomes in areas such as health and well-being, homelessness, involvement in the criminal justice system and education, training and employment (e.g. Svoboda et al. 2012; Courtney and Dworsky 2006; Courtney et al. 2011; Dixon et al. 2004; Mannay et al. 2015, Stein and Munro 2008, Ministry of Justice 2012). However, the findings of this study showed care leaver parents to be of similar age to other birth parents and no more likely to have problematic behaviours in respect of substance misuse, alcohol dependency or criminal behaviour. Analysis of educational achievement, employment and receipt of welfare benefits also indicated few associations. Similarly, children born to care leaver parents were no more likely than other children within the cohort to have been subject to abuse or neglect. The groups also appeared comparable in respect of birth weight, learning difficulties, development concerns and recorded attachment difficulties.

Such comparability is likely explained by the sample characteristics. All parents had experienced the permanent removal of a child into care and subsequently being placed for adoption. As such, the sample comprises parents with the most extreme and intractable difficulties and sizable proportions of mothers and fathers from both care leaver and non-care leaver groups were recorded as having problematic behaviours or difficulties, such as substance misuse, involvement in criminal activity, mental illness and unemployment. Considered in this way, the analysis did not find care leaver parents to be more vulnerable when compared to the group of vulnerable parents, who were not care leavers. Notably, two thirds (67%) of birth mothers in the total sample had been known to Children's Services when younger. Some of these mothers, although not in care as they turned the age of sixteen, had a history of being

looked after by the state in earlier childhood. Similarly, while prevalence of abuse or neglect and exposure to domestic violence was high for all children within the cohort, as a group, children born to care leaver parents did not present as statistically more likely to have had suffered such experiences or have difficulties in respect of learning and attachment (pre-adoptive placement).

The comparable characteristics of birth parents and children placed for adoption suggests some parity in social work practice. With the exception of mental ill health for care leaver birth mothers, care leaver parents did not present as having more or less needs in relation to other birth parents and the findings of this study did not uncover significant practice differences in relation to age of removal of children from care leavers or age at adoption. This provides some evidence to dispel concerns regarding the potential for social workers to discriminate against care leavers on the basis of care history. Yet despite this positive inference, some additional information is noteworthy and warrants further investigation. Among the 96 women care leavers, the CARA records suggest that for about a third of the mothers (n=19) the adoption was in respect of their first child; of which over half of the children were placed at birth (58%). For non-care leaver birth parents, it was their first child for 51 of the 278 mothers (18%). This disparity raises questions about the support and opportunities provided to care leavers when they experience parenthood. With the state as parent, it is of concern that sizeable proportions of care leaver mothers are considered incapable as new parents. This may reflect inadequate preparatory and supportive measures in respect of parenthood for care leavers or may be indicative of findings by Rutman et al. (2002) which suggest professionals' can perceive intergenerational cycles of state care as 'inevitable'. In addition, it is noteworthy that non-care leaver mothers were statistically more likely to appeal the adoption orders than care leaver mothers. This may indicate that care leaver parents were more accepting of their inability to maintain care for their children and / or more likely to agree that adoption offered the best

outcome for their children. Alternatively, care leaver parents may have limited resources to secure the necessary legal support to oppose local authority plans. Qualitative research also highlights the potential for care leaver parents to have fractious relationships with social workers and to feel powerless against the 'system' (Rutman et al. 2002; Chase et al. 2006; Roberts 2016). As such, care leaver parents may have been less likely to appeal the adoption orders because they perceived their actions as futile and/or may have lacked the necessary psychological and practical resources to pursue an appeal. Viewed in this way, continued attention is needed regarding the relationship care leavers have with the state as parent, as well as examinations of social work practice with care leaver parents.

5. Strengths and Limitations

A strength of the data presented in this analysis was the use of information derived from Child Adoption Records completed by social work professionals. Social workers complete these records, making reference to several sources of information, including official documentation (e.g. police incident data). This adds to our confidence that the information is evidence based and less prone to problems of recall or rater bias. However, the possibility of recording imprecise or incomplete information is acknowledged. Quinton (2012) and Farmer and Dance (2015) observe the potential for missing or inaccurate information within case file records, which rely on social workers making sense of complex information that may not be within their field of expertise. This is particularly pertinent in respect of our efforts to identify birth parents who were care leavers. In our study, there were instances of missing data, particularly for birth fathers' care histories (36% missing). It should be noted that our approach to defining birth parents as care leavers (birth parents recorded as 'looked after' as they turned sixteen) was an attempt to make positive use of the data we had available and provide some meaningful comparison. However it is recognised that the findings would have been strengthened had there been greater consistency in reporting birth parents' care histories and

legal status. Moreover, 'care leaver' is a generic term and it is acknowledged that experiences prior and during state care, as well as the age of entry and length of stay, will likely be highly variable. Therefore, future studies would benefit from more nuanced consideration of individual care histories.

Finally, adoption was the outcome experienced by all children within the sample. As such, the analysis can only make a contribution to what is known about a particular sub-set of care leaver parents: parents whose child goes on to be adopted. In addition, data analysis was constrained by the relatively small sample size available across a large number of study variables. Process-oriented research is required that better reflects the temporal ordering of events and complex multivariate nature of the relationship between birth parent histories and outcomes for children later removed into state care.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, proponents of adoption may argue that regardless of parents' care histories, for families with significant and entrenched needs, adoption provides children with the best chance of permanence and stability. It is not the intent of this paper to debate the merits of adoption for children or to make suggestions about which families, in which circumstances, adoption or family support is appropriate. The vulnerabilities and challenges facing birth parents within this sample, including those who were care leavers and those who were not, is acknowledged. Nevertheless, it is of concern that sizable proportions of parents within this study, subject to the most drastic form of state intervention in respect of family life, had themselves been parented by the state. During their childhoods, they were visible to professionals; their vulnerabilities, histories and needs were known. Yet it would appear there were missed opportunities whilst in state care and/or during the process of leaving care, to positively influence the trajectories of these individuals. The outcomes for care leavers in this study suggest that state care was ineffective in supporting young people to overcome

difficulties or to help break cycles of family separation. We argue that there is a moral imperative to seek to address these poor outcomes for care leaver parents and an urgent need to revise how children and young people in state care are both prepared for future parenthood and supported as parents.

Aside from adoption, the Welsh Government has made explicit its policy commitment to reduce the number of children in state care (Welsh Government 2015, Drakeford 2015). Our findings suggest that care leavers would be a key group to target as part of an effort to break the intergenerational cycle of state care. The children of care leaver mothers suffering from mental illness appear particularly vulnerable to care proceedings that culminate in adoption.

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Table 1: Descriptive statistics for study variables by care leaver status of birth parents.

	Birth mother				Birth father			
	Care leaver		Non-care leaver		Care leaver		Non-care leaver	
	N	*%*	N	*%*	N	*%*	N	*%*
Parent characteristics and experiences of adversity								
1. Childhood physical abuse	46	*47.9*	76	*30.6*	19	*54.3*	47	*25.8*
2. Childhood emotional abuse	42	*52.6*	60	*24.3*	13	*35.1*	26	*14.4*
3. Childhood sexual abuse	31	*32.3*	48	*19.8*	8	*22.9*	10	*5.5*
4. Childhood neglect	61	*74.4*	81	*32.9*	23	*63.9*	35	*19.0*
5. Childhood experience of domestic violence	40	*48.8*	88	*36.1*	13	*37.1*	58	*32.0*
6. Learning difficulties	35	*41.2*	73	*31.9*	24	*66.7*	38	*23.2*
7. Adult mental illness	50	*54.9*	105	*42.0*	15	*39.5*	72	*39.3*
8. Adult substance abuse	37	*40.7*	97	*39.6*	16	*44.4*	88	*48.4*
9. Adult alcohol abuse	29	*33.0*	72	*30.4*	9	*25.7*	121	*65.4*
10. Criminal justice involvement	33	*36.3*	73	*29.2*	32	*72.7*	57	*33.5*
Offspring characteristics								
11. Developmental delay	15	*16*	48	*18.5*	11	*24.4*	37	*19.2*
12. Attachment concerns identified by child social worker	11	*11.5*	46	*17.8*	8	*18.2*	33	*16.9*
13. Learning difficulties	2	*7.4*	7	*7.1*	2	*16.7*	7	*9.9*
14. Low birth weight (<2.5kg).	10	*12.7*	22	*9.9*	4	*10.8*	20	*12.0*
15. Parental appeal of adoption decision	7	*9*	39	*20*	3	*9*	26	*18*

Table 2: Results of *t*-test comparisons of birth parents based on care leaver status.

	Care Leavers			Non care leavers					
	Mean	*SD*	N	Mean	*SD*	N	95% CI for Mean Difference	*t*	*df*
Mean age of parent when child was born	25.46	*10.83*	95	25.68	*6.25*	256	-2.05, 1.62	-0.230	349
Mean age of parent when child was placed in care	25.57	*5.88*	94	26.81	*6.29*	256	-2.70, 0.23	-1.658	348
Years spent with parent before entering care (birth mother)	.79	*1.34*	95	.84	*1.28*	258	-0.36, 0.25	-0.357	351
Years spent with parent before entering care (birth father)	.61	*.92*	44	.93	*1.36*	195	-0.74, 0.11	-1.455*	237

Note: * $p < .05$.

Table 3: The associations between birth parent care leaver status with their characteristics and those of their child placed for adoption.

	Birth mother			Birth father		
	χ_1^2	Odds Ratio	*p*-value	χ_1^2	Odds Ratio	*p*-valu
Childhood physical abuse	14.644*	2.667	.000	11.775*	3.528	.001
Childhood emotional abuse	19.296*	3.143	.000	16.308*	4.513	.000
Childhood sexual abuse	16.432*	2.859	.000	16.831*	5.380	.000
Childhood neglect	37.486*	5.275	.000	28.842*	6.981	.000
Childhood experience of domestic violence	4.056*	1.677	.044	0.251	1.212	.601
Learning difficulties	2.578	1.519	.108	29.252*	7.737	.000
Adult mental illness	4.509*	0.594	.034	0.105	0.886	.745
Adult substance misuse	0.073	1.069	.787	0.371	0.800	0.54
Adult alcohol abuse	0.578	1.222	.447	1.193	0.635	0.27
Criminal justice involvement	1.554	1.380	.213	0.859	1.410	0.35
Developmental delay	0.257	1.179	.257	0.744	0.713	0.38
Attachment concerns	1.955	1.648	.162	0.073	1.102	0.78
Learning difficulties	/	/	/	/	/	/
Low birth weight (<2.5kg).	0.430	1.304	.512	/	/	/
Parental appeal of adoption order	4.360*	0.412	.037	/	/	/

Note: *= $p < .05$. [/] = X^2 not calculated because fewer than 5 cases in at least one cell.