

ADOPTION AS INTERVENTION, INTERVENTION IN ADOPTION

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Adoption occupies a very special position among child protection alternatives, due mainly to its irreversible nature and to the radical changes it entails in both personal and family circumstances. This article offers an overview of adoption in Spain, discussing some of the most relevant statistical data and analyzing in detail some of the interventions carried out by psychology professionals working in this field. The paper concludes with a brief consideration of psychological research on adoption in Spain.

Keywords: adoption, inter-country adoption, home assessment, post-adoption

La adopción es una alternativa que ocupa un muy especial lugar entre las alternativas del sistema de protección de infancia, debido a su carácter irrevocable y al radical cambio de situación personal y familiar que implica. En este artículo se ofrece una panorámica de la adopción en España, comentándose los datos estadísticos más destacados y analizando con detalle algunas de las intervenciones que los profesionales de la psicología que trabajan en este campo llevan a cabo. El texto concluye con una breve aproximación a la situación de la investigación psicológica sobre adopción en España.

Palabras clave: adopción, adopción internacional, valoración de idoneidad, post-adopción.

As it became clear from one of the previous articles, adoption is the most extreme measure that can be taken within the alternatives for the protection of children in situations of risk, abuse or neglect. This is so for two basic reasons, which are not found in the case of other child protection measures:

- On the one hand, because adoption represents a radical change to the previous legal situation of all those involved. Legally, those who were parents cease to be so, those who did not have a child now have one, and the main protagonist, the adopted child, ceases to be the child of the former and becomes the child of the latter.
- On the other, due its irrevocable nature. With all other child protection measures it is possible to reverse the process or change the situation, so that, for example, a family can be on a family preservation programme and then cease to be on it, a child can be in temporary foster care which then becomes permanent, or in residential care and then be taken in by a family. But adoption is irreversible. Indeed, it is legally as irreversible as biological filiation, given that there are no differences between the two types of filiation with regard to rights and obligations.

The adoption of minors by people who are not biologically related to them is by no means a recent

phenomenon. It is found in all historical eras (its regulation is engraved on the basalt slab of the Code of Hammurabi, from around 1750 BC) and all cultures (Bowie, 2004), and is indeed very common in animals, occurring in 120 species of mammals and over 150 of birds (Avital, Jablonka & Lachmann, 1998). The presence of adoption in mythology (Sargon in the culture of Mesopotamia, Moses in Hebrew culture, Aedipus in that of Greece, Romulus and Remus in that of Rome) and in literature (Perdita in Shakespeare, Oliver Twist in Dickens, Quasimodo in Victor Hugo) is testimony to its existence in all places and times, and to its ability to excite the imagination.

But while it is not new, there is no doubt that in recent years the adoption of children has increased enormously, both in scale and in visibility. According to the estimation of Palacios and Brodzinsky (2005), each year in the Western world there are between 120,000 and 150,000 adoptions, which gives an idea of the quantitative proportions of the phenomenon. And associated with each and every one of these adoptions there are a large number of professional interventions carried out by the public authorities responsible for child protection, by the court (adoption is not an administrative decision but a judicial one), and by those involved in the diverse professional activities specifically generated by the adoption process.

In this article we first analyze the Spanish statistics from recent years in the field of adoption. Secondly, we

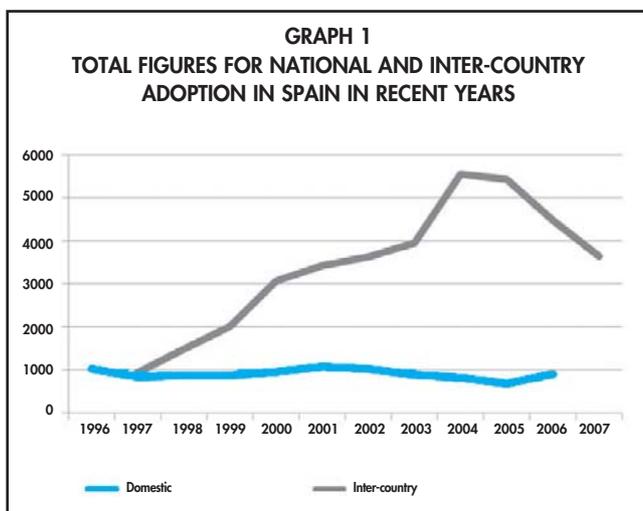
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examine some of the most relevant professional interventions related to this child protection measure. And finally, we offer a brief overview of research on adoption in the Spanish context.

THE DATA, BEHIND THE DATA AND BEYOND THE DATA

Adoption can be national or inter-country, depending whether the child adopted is of Spanish nationality or is from abroad. Whilst the former type of adoption has existed for centuries, the latter is of much more recent appearance, having been legally regulated in Spain only in 1996, with an extension and updating of the legislation in the Law on Inter-country Adoption of 2007. Recent statistics reveal two clear facts: on the one hand, that national adoption figures have remained stable, with between 800 and 1000 cases per year; and on the other, that since the 1996 legislation, inter-country adoption has increased to an extraordinary extent in Spain; thus, according to Selman (in press), between 1998 and 2004 inter-country adoptions in Spain rose by 273%. Indeed, despite the relative recency of the phenomenon here, compared to some European countries which had been adopting internationally for some decades, Spain –true to its typical tendency of arriving late, but running to catch up– has quickly succeeded in matching countries such as Norway and Sweden as a world leader in the proportion of children adopted from abroad per 1000 live births. Graph 1 clearly shows the stability of national adoption in recent years, together with the spectacular increase in inter-country cases. It is worth examining some of the factors behind the figures displayed in this graph.

Insert Graph 1 approximately here



First of all, we might consider the reasons for the flat profile of national adoption compared to the steep curve of inter-country adoption. Things are not like this in all countries –in the United Kingdom, for example, national adoption is clearly predominant, inter-country adoption being very uncommon. Of the many reasons for Spain’s peculiar profile, three seem to us particularly relevant. First, prospective adopters’ fear of the legal complications associated with national adoption. Although such cases are absolutely exceptional, considerable media attention is given to judicial decisions ordering the interruption of pre-adoptive foster placements after several years of cohabitation by a prospective adoptee and the family who intended to adopt him or her. By comparison, inter-country adoption seems much more protected against such unpleasant developments, since it is still much less likely that anyone will appear to claim back the child, and even if they did, there would be practically no probability of this affecting an already-completed adoption.

Second, there is the fact that, unlike what traditionally occurred (in times when there was an abundance of babies voluntarily relinquished or abandoned), national adoption much more often concerns children who are somewhat older, or who are waiting to be adopted with siblings, or who have some relevant problem... or indeed who present all of these features at the same time. Since the majority of those who adopt do so after failed attempts at biological conception –either natural or assisted–, their expectations usually involve certain characteristics (in relation to age and the absence of problems) as close as possible to those a hypothetical biological child would have. It is such expectations that lead many prospective adopters to look abroad, in the hope of finding a child as young as possible, ideally a baby without particular problems.

Finally, the third reason we might consider in relation to the profile of adoptions in Spain is the conformist attitude of the public authorities, both central and regional, responsible for child protection. These agencies are far more concerned with responding to the demand than with channelling it, and much more interested in the comings and goings of inter-country adoption than in trying to reduce the scandalous Spanish figures for residential care, a part of which could be the object of national adoption if efforts were made in this direction and the necessary resources invested (the rest should be the object of other child protection measures in primarily family-based contexts).

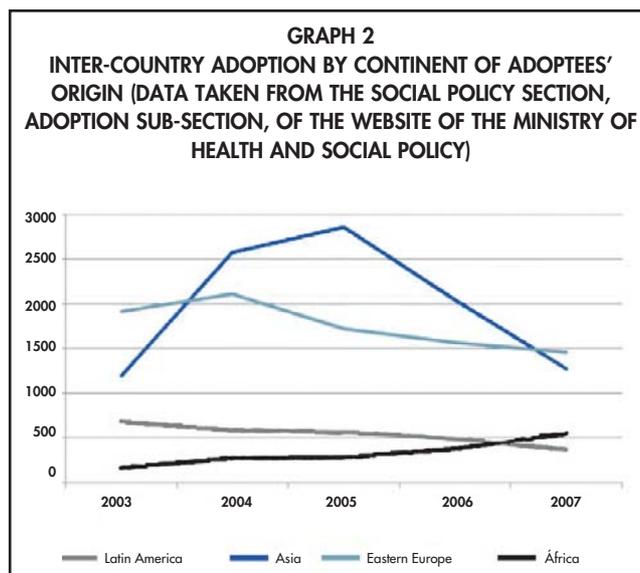
But while Graph 1 shows the total figures for inter-country adoption, it does not reflect its distribution by geographical region of child's origin. When inter-country adoption first "took off" in Spain, many prospective adopters looked to Latin America, as a kind of natural target in view of linguistic, cultural and even ethnic proximity. However, partly because it soon became evident that adoption in these countries involved many of the drawbacks associated with national adoption, interest in looking west waned, the focus moving to the east, so that adoptions in Eastern Europe and Asia began to constitute the majority. Graph 2 shows the evolution of the data by continent of children's origin. In 2005, of the 2854 adoptions from Asia, 2753 took place in China (most of the rest occurring in India and Nepal). Of the 1727 adoptions in 2005 made in Eastern Europe, 1262 took place in Russia (the rest mainly in the Ukraine). Of the 564 cases in 2005 from Latin America, 240 were from Colombia (most of the remainder in Bolivia and Peru). Finally, of the 278 adoptions in 2005 from Africa, 227 occurred in Ethiopia (the rest predominantly in Madagascar).

The decrease observed in Graph 1 in total inter-country adoption figures after 2005 is complemented by the data from this second graph, which shows that this decrease affects all the regions of origin except Africa, whose figures doubled between 2005 (278 adoptions) and 2007 (545 adoptions). What lies behind the downward trend in the overall figures (a tendency that not only affects Spain) is not so much a fall in applications for adoption, as a contraction in the supply of adoptions on the part of the countries of origin, or a change in the profiles of internationally adoptable children. This is the case, for example, of China, where the figures fell from 2753 adoptions in 2005 to 1059 in 2007. Apart from the fact that China has imposed restrictions that did not apply previously (for example, not accepting single-parent adoptions, demanding a certain academic and economic level, excluding people with certain age or health profiles), the official explanation is that there has been an increase in national adoption, though it is difficult to know whether such an increase has actually occurred or if this claim simply forms part of the general patriotic facelift which coincided with China's hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games. The other case, where it is not so much a decrease in the number of adoptions theoretically possible but rather a change in the profile of the boys and girls available, is illustrated by that of the Ukraine, whose

authorities are surprised at Spanish applicants who still aspire to adopt Ukrainian babies when they have been reminding us for some time that those actually adoptable internationally are aged at least 5 or 6. Furthermore, both Spain and other European countries have ceased to adopt in countries where it was typical to adopt young babies, but in which the guarantees in the declaration of adoptability or other procedures were often highly dubious.

On the other hand, inter-country adoption involves not only adopted children, but also those who adopt, with regard to whom, for reasons of space, we shall highlight here just three aspects in relation to their characteristics. First, that infertility is the motivating factor for adoption in around three quarters of applicants, even though the percentage of those who have adopted after having their own children has increased in recent years. Second, that approximately double the proportion of single parents is found among those who adopt than in the general population. And third, that the majority profile in inter-country adoption is that of persons with high educational level, in contrast to the case of national adoption, where adopters are a better and more proportional reflection of the diversity of the general Spanish population.

To end this section, and in relation to national adoption, it should be stressed that it is far less visible than inter-country adoption, to the extent that, if one were to go on what is talked about, on the legislation passed and on what is published, the external observer might think that to adopt in Spain were to adopt internationally. One might ask oneself, for example, if the most pressing need



at this time was a specific law on inter-country adoption, such as that approved in 2007, or rather a broader and more ambitious law embracing the child protection system as a whole, and including among its priority aims an increase in the amount and quality of family preservation, of foster care placements, and of national adoptions, with a decisive and substantial reduction in residential care placements. But in the institutional organization of child welfare policy, it is as though inter-country adoption occupied the privileged position of the aristocracy and residential care that of the proletariat, with national adoption and kinship care to be found in some imaginary space not far above residential care in the hierarchy of urgency and priority.

PROFESSIONAL INTERVENTIONS IN ADOPTION

In the past, professional intervention in adoption was not a complicated business. There was an abundance of adoptable babies, typically as a result of relinquishment or abandonment by those who could not (poverty in already large families), did not want to (unwanted pregnancies, illegitimate children) or were not socially permitted to (single mothers) keep their offspring. In most cases they were babies without particular health or other problems (and the present author still recalls how the files of some children who were older or with special needs were stamped "unsuitable for adoption"). As regards the prospective adopters, they were married couples with fertility problems. In the majority of cases, professional intervention consisted basically in assessing the suitability of these couples and assigning the adoptable babies to the appropriate couples, subsequently carrying out some basic follow-up to check that all was progressing in an adequate fashion.

Things have changed a great deal in recent years. On the one hand, the profile of adoptable minors has become increasingly complex with regard to age (babies now being in a minority), characteristics (frequent presence of siblings, special needs of some kind) and country of origin (national adoption, inter-country adoption). There are no longer children considered "unsuitable for adoption", though it is certainly more difficult to find families for some than for others. On the other hand, the profile of adoptive parents has also become more and more complex: although couples with fertility problems continue to be in the majority, there are also, as we mentioned above, people without a partner, couples who already have children (biological or adoptive), and indeed, since

the legislation of 2005, same-sex couples. Inter-country adoption has complicated matters, because while national adoption is governed only by Spanish laws, in the inter-country case those of the child's country of origin also come into play. Moreover, many countries require follow-up for a certain time after the adoption. And finally, it is not uncommon for adoptive parents or adopted children to seek help to resolve some problem or cope with some difficulty, thus extending the need for professional intervention way beyond the moment of formalization of the adoption.

While professional intervention traditionally revolved around suitability assessment and assignment of children to families, the modern, more complex panorama of adoption has extended the list of professional activities:

- Provision of information prior to the decision
- Preparation for adoption
- Assessment of suitability
- Matching children and families
- Follow-up after the adoption
- Post-adoption support

All of these activities must be carried out by professionals. And in the Spain of recent years it is not only the profiles of adopters and adopted children that have changed, but also that of the professionals who intervene in relation to them. In many countries, all such interventions are carried out by professionals from the social work sector. In Spain, on the other hand, they are shared between social workers and psychologists, giving the latter a high profile in this area, as indeed they have throughout the child protection system.

Before the advent of inter-country adoption, professionals intervening in this area worked for public agencies with responsibility for child protection (since the 1987 reform, they have worked for the regional authorities charged with the handling of such matters), and were often professionals familiar with the child protection system. But the boom in inter-country adoption referred to above overwhelmed the system, and it became necessary to improvise professionals for responding to the soaring demand, bringing people in from outside (i.e., from the private sector) who were not always well acquainted with the child protection system.

Today, professionals work in the child protection services of public authorities, or for one of the over 40 collaborating agencies accredited for mediating in inter-country adoption (*Entidades Colaboradoras de Adopción Internacional* or ECAs); they may also work occasionally



in the area of adoption in accordance with agreements between regional authorities and the professional associations of social workers and psychologists (in a so-called TIPAI, an arrangement for professional intervention in inter-country adoption in which professionals from outside the system, after no more than a brief training course, participate in suitability assessment work).

For reasons of space it is not possible here to go into detail about professional intervention in relation to all the activities listed above, but we shall consider three of the most important of them: preparation for adoption, assessment of suitability and post-adoption support.

Preparation for adoption

In the mid-1990s, commissioned by the relevant department of the Andalusian regional government (*Junta de Andalucía*), we carried out a study on adoption in Andalusia (at that time, almost exclusively national adoption). The results of that study showed that some of the difficulties experienced by many families derived from a lack of even the most basic preparation for adoption. In the light of these findings, the same regional government asked us to design and implement a preparation for adoption programme (Palacios et al., 1999, 2006). Those participating in the design of the programme were Y. Sánchez Sandoval and E. León, of the University of Seville, together with Pere Amorós and Jesús Fuertes, who had previously been responsible for the creation of the foster care training programme referred to in a previous article in this special issue. Since its introduction in Andalusia in 1999, the programme has been used, partially or in its entirety, by thousands of families both there and in other regions of Spain. Beginning with Andalusia, training is now mandatory in many regions as part of the process leading to adoption.

In the version used in Andalusia, the training programme comes in two versions, one for national adoption and the other for inter-country adoption. Each training group is made up of around 15 people (typically, 6 or 7 couples and 2 or 3 single-parent applicants), the sessions being coordinated by two professionals (normally one social worker and one psychologist). These sessions are based around group activities, with a strong emphasis on participation, free expression about one's experiences and open discussion. Each session includes testimonies from adopters or adoptees recorded on video which are relevant to the topic being worked on in that session. These topics are none other than the basic ones

involved in the adoption process: the motivations for adopting, the profiles and characteristics of those hoping to be adopted, preparation for arrival and how to facilitate adaptation, analysis of common problems and the most appropriate parenting responses to cope with them, talking to children about their adoption and dealing with their search for their origins, and the special characteristics of adoptions involving older children, pairs or groups of siblings or those with special needs.

Although many applicants begin the preparation somewhat reluctantly (seeing it more as an obstacle than as a help), a clear majority of them are satisfied with the programme –and not only because of what they learn and discuss in the sessions, but also because it provides an opportunity to establish lasting social networks with other participants.

In cases of inter-country adoption, ECAs usually complement this preparation with preparation activities more oriented to the specific country in question, training that helps adopters to prepare for their trip, for their stay and for all the legal and administrative procedures that will be necessary in the country where the adoption is to take place.

Assessment of suitability

Suitability assessment is one of the few requirements stipulated in the Spanish legislation on adoption, and this is undoubtedly the reason why it has been such a priority in professional interventions in this area of child protection. Typically, it has been an area of professional activity lacking any type of protocol of its own, so that each regional authority (and sometimes each professional) has interpreted the concept of suitability in its (or his/her) own way, and has substantiated the assessment in different forms, though given the presence of professionals from psychology and from social work, there are usually interviews and psychological appraisals, on the one hand, and home visits, on the other. In the wake of the reforms referred to previously, in 1999 the regional government of Andalusia (*Junta de Andalucía*) published some criteria for suitability assessment that have been a source of inspiration for many professionals.

At the request of the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs (as it was then called), in 2005, together with Y. Sánchez Sandoval, the present author carried out an analysis of the technical criteria employed in all Spain's Autonomous Regions in relation to the assessment of suitability, the assignment of children to families, and



post-adoption follow-up. The examination of professional practice revealed that suitability assessment was the “star feature” of professional intervention, the other activities being much less clearly defined –and even less subject to any kind of protocol. And with suitability assessment, certain topics were debated at considerable length (Should the maximum age difference between adoptive parents and adoptees be 42 years or 45 years? How should the age of a couple be determined?), whilst in the discussion of many other issues, undoubtedly of greater substance and significance, far less of professionals’ energy and time were invested. Also, the concept of suitability applied by each professional varied considerably –at least in its emphasis on one aspect or another–, though there were certainly some basic shared elements. And this problem was accentuated when it became necessary to “import” into the area of adoption professionals from psychology and social work whose professional experience was in other contexts.

As a result of the conclusions of the 2005 study, the Ministry itself commissioned the creation of a manual of technical criteria in relation to suitability assessment, the matching of children and families, and post-adoption follow-up (Palacios, 2009). Drawn up with the participation of professionals from the adoption services of the different regions, the basic tenets of the model are clear: all professional interventions in adoption should address, on the one hand, the needs of the adopted children, and on the other, the capacities of adults considered necessary for responding to these needs. Thus, training for adoption and suitability assessment should focus on stimulating these capacities (training) or determining their presence (assessment) in relation to these needs. In the matching of children and families it should be attempted to ensure as far as possible that each child goes to a family with the capacity to respond appropriately to his or her specific needs, since a particular family may be perfectly adequate to take responsibility for the upbringing of one particular child, but not another one. Post-adoption follow-up would consist in analyzing the extent to which the child’s needs are being adequately met, and in determining whether it is possible to increase adults’ capacities for providing an adequate response.

The proposal contained in the manual referred to above incorporates protocols for the assessment of suitability in both psychological and social aspects. For all the basic elements relevant within the needs-capacities logic, it

includes indications on how to proceed to assessment, as well as an analysis of favourable indicators and risk indicators. The manual includes specific guidelines for the assessment of both same-sex and single-parent applicants. Finally, the fact that all the professional interventions proposed (not only suitability assessment) are subject to the needs-capacities logic, makes it possible to overcome another defect endemic to professional intervention in adoption, concerning the lack of connection between the different professional activities. This shortcoming has been accentuated in the wake of the multiplication of both activities and professionals, leading to adoption professionals being described by some commentators as a “disorganized army” (Palacios, in press).

Post-adoption services

As analyzed elsewhere (Palacios, 2007), both adopters and adopted children have many needs after adoption has taken place. The problems most commonly found are related to legal aspects, health, development, behaviour, difficulties in relation to attachment, aspects related to loss, communication about adoption, and adoptees seeking their origins. Whilst legal issues are obviously dealt with by lawyers, and health matters by paediatricians, psychology professionals play an important role with regard to all the other aspects, some of which also involve the intervention of professional social workers (e.g., some aspects of children’s search for their origins).

Adoptive parents frequently seek help from clinical psychologists (e.g., in relation to attachment difficulties) or educational psychologists (e.g., with regard to learning difficulties). Moreover, post-adoption services are gradually being introduced in different regions throughout Spain, staffed by both psychology and social work professionals (and sometimes also social educators and legal professionals), though it does not seem unreasonable to claim that the role of psychology professionals is predominant in this context.

The work done in the post-adoption service of the Andalusian regional government provides a good illustration of professional activity in all such agencies. According to the data provided by this service (personal communication, 2008), the professional activities that take place within it fall into three basic categories: family counselling and guidance, psychotherapy, and mediation in seeking origins. At least in the experience of this



particular service, the daily workload in each category is fairly similar, so that each type of activity would account for approximately one third of the service's total output.

Many adoptive families need specific guidance at some time. Up to now, in Spain, whilst pre-adoption training is in group format, post-adoption training is individual (something that will surely change in future, since the advantages of group training prior to the adoption are equally applicable after all the legal proceedings have been completed and there begin to emerge issues related to adaptation, the many and varied needs of children, and so on). How should one react to a child who turns inwards on him/herself and appears impenetrable to communication or the expression of affect? How should one transmit specific information about the past that can be particularly painful to receive? How does one deal with rivalry between the biological child and the adopted child? For providing the best possible response to these and many other similar questions, some adopters may seek the opinion of a professional.

Proportionally, fewer families require therapeutic interventions than require counselling and guidance (though, obviously, the former type of work takes longer than the latter). Although the patients in therapeutic interventions may be one of the adoptive parents or the adoptee, it is very common for this type of intervention to involve the family and relational system, since even if the issue has a personal basis (e.g., difficulties for accepting the loss of the family of origin on the part of the adoptee), it frequently has repercussions for the family system as a whole and for the relationships between its members, particularly in the area of affect. It therefore becomes more important for the professionals carrying out the therapy to have adequate knowledge of both clinical psychology and the psychology of adoption, as not only the type but also the meaning of certain symptoms (and consequently the therapeutic approach required) may vary considerably.

Finally, the third category covers the professional activity related to the search for origins. Of the approximately 100 such cases reported in the post-adoption service of Andalusia in 2007, the majority of professional interventions had to do with the response to the search for information by adoptees. Given that inter-country adoptees are almost all still quite young, the vast majority of cases apply to national adoption, though it will not be long before the same types of request begin coming from those adopted internationally. Mention of the search for

origins tends to conjure up the idea of attempts to make face-to-face contact with the object of the quest, but in fact what the majority of people want –at least initially– is information. Given that it is an official service, professionals working in the post-adoption sector can gain access to files that are legally unavailable to third parties, which makes them crucial agents for all those involved in adoption processes who wish to know about people that are important to them. It may be an adoptee who wants to know about his or her biological siblings who have not been adopted, or have been adopted by other families. It may be an adoptee who wants to know about the circumstances of his/her adoption. It may be a biological mother who wants to know about the child she gave up for adoption. As mentioned above, the majority of consultations related to the search for origins had to do with seeking information. Moreover, the post-adoption service served in other cases as a vehicle for the exchange of information (e.g., between an adopted child and his or her grandparents, or vice versa). And finally, in some other cases, the post-adoption service was involved in direct contact between adoptees and members of their original family (especially siblings, but also grandparents or parents).

RESEARCH ON ADOPTION IN SPAIN

A great deal has been written since the publication of the pioneering work by Amorós in 1987, which analyzed adaptation to adoption in children according to whether they had been adopted by their pre-adoptive foster parents or by persons previously unknown to them. A few years later this work was replicated in Mallorca by March (1993). There is still relatively little Spanish research on adoption, and it has not been carried out only in the field of psychology, given that there are also contributions (some of them still in progress), to which we shall not refer here, from the fields of paediatrics, psychiatry, anthropology and sociology. Since mentioning specific studies would run the dual risk of unintended omissions and of providing a mere unconnected list, the analysis in terms of university research groups with well established publication records would appear not only less risky, but also more likely to give the reader as general an overview as is possible in a short space.

As regards both temporal stability and productivity, we can identify at least four groups which, from within Psychology, have been working for some time on issues related to adoption, and which have published extensively



in the field. These groups are located at the universities of Barcelona, Málaga, Pontificia de Comillas (Madrid), and Seville. Without pretending to be exhaustive, and rather to give an idea of their basic concerns, we shall summarize the most important research lines of each of them, as well as considering some representative publications.

At the University of Barcelona, M. Freixa and her team have focused on issues related to methodology, such as the use of instruments for assessing family climate or for interviewing those applying to adopt. More recently, they have explored the family behaviour of adult women who were adopted. Some relevant publications include those of Bonvehi et al. (1996) and Freixa et al. (1996), on the first two issues mentioned, and Negre et al. (2007) on the third. Moreover, in 2007 Freixa coordinated a special issue of the journal *Anuario de Psicología* on the subject of post-adoption.

The group at the University of Málaga has as its principal researcher M.J. Fuentes, and has worked on both foster care (referred to in a previous article in this special issue) and adoption. As far as adoption is concerned, without doubt the most distinctive feature of this group is its interest in the adaptation process of older children and adolescents to their adoptive families. In relation to this type of adoption, the Málaga group has explored aspects such as affective relations, parenting styles, conflict resolution and behavioural problems of adopted children. Publications emerging from this group include Fuentes et al. (2004) on behavioural problems, Bernedo et al. (2005) on the perception of the degree of conflict in relations, and Bernedo et al. (2007) on the perception of socialization strategies in adoptive and non-adoptive families.

The group at the Universidad Pontificia de Comillas (Madrid) is led by A. Berástegui, and its work concerns, on the one hand, disrupted adoptions, (i.e., adoptions that have evolved negatively, to such an extent that adoptive parents and adoptees separate), and on the other, different aspects of adopter-adoptee relations, particularly family adaptation after adoption and communication with adopted children about their adoption. Relevant publications by this group would be: Berástegui (2003), on disrupted adoptions in the Madrid region; Berástegui (2005), on family adaptation after an inter-country adoption; and Berástegui and Gómez (2007), on identity and communication about origins. Moreover, since 2008 Berástegui has been coordinating

a thematic network throughout Spain devoted to multidisciplinary work on the integration and well-being of those adopted internationally.

Finally, the group at the University of Seville has as its principal researcher the author of the present article. The main research topics have been the comparison between (national) adopted and non-adopted children and the state of internationally adopted children on their arrival and their subsequent development. Moreover, under way at the time of writing is an R+D project on attachment and social competence in the transition from vulnerability to protection (particularly to adoption). The work by Palacios et al. (1996) describes the research carried out in Andalusia on the first of these topics, and mentioned earlier; Palacios et al. (2007) reports on the studies of inter-country adoption carried out in different regions at the request of, on the one hand, the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, and on the other, the Social Services Department of the Castilla y León regional government (*Junta de Castilla y León*). As far as the work in progress is concerned, this has given rise to the study by Palacios et al. (in press).

Naturally, and as already mentioned, research on adoption in Spain is not limited to either the names or the studies cited, many other researchers having made highly valuable contributions (to cite just one example, the work of González and her team on homoparental adoption, a representation of which is González and López, 2008). Moreover, the body of relevant published work is not restricted to academic research, since there are also publications of a journalistic type and including personal testimonies from adoptive parents and adoptees (e.g., Miró, 2003); others from a more professional perspective, such as that of Mirabet and Ricart (2005) on diverse aspects related to attachment, parenting, schooling and adolescence, or the issue of *Monografías de psiquiatría* devoted to "adoption and psycho(patho)logy", coordinated by Pedreira in 2008; and finally, other publications aimed at offering guidance for prospective adopters (such as the books by Barajas et al., 2001, by Palacios et al., 2003, or by Agintzari, 2005) or providing specific materials for the task of helping adoptees to make sense of their own history and identity (Berástegui & Gómez, 2008).

In sum, the present article represents an effort to highlight the importance of adoption in the Spanish child protection system, its quantitative ups and downs (particularly with regard to inter-country adoption), the

professional interventions in which psychology professionals play such a relevant role, and the psychological research activity in Spain in relation to this child protection measure. While it is true that the world of adoption has benefited from the active participation of psychologists and our many and varied activities in that world, it is no less true that for many of us, adoption has opened up fascinating territory for our professional practice and development.

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