An assessment of the major criteria used in the selection of adoptive applicants among a sample of Ontario's Children's Aid Societies.

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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE MAJOR CRITERIA USED IN THE
SELECTION OF ADOPTIVE APPLICANTS AMONG A SAMPLE
OF ONTARIO'S CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

by

C Robert J. Wade

A Thesis
submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the School of Social Work
in Partial Fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Master of Social Work at
the University of Windsor

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1988
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ABSTRACT

This exploratory-descriptive study assessed criteria used by senior adoption workers in Ontario's Children's Aid Societies to select adoptive applicants. Data were gathered by means of a mailed, self-administered questionnaire. The sample (n=34) responded to questions in the areas of general background (socio-demographics), agency adoption activities, the assessment of adoptive applicants, agency policies and procedures pertaining to adoption and waiting list information.

Analyses revealed the following major findings: 1) the socio-demographic profile of the sample was generally similar to other studies reported in the literature; 2) adoption activities which included homestudies and placements were related to both agency size and need; 3) specific factors were universally perceived to be most important in the assessment of adoptive applicants, whereas the majority of the remaining factors deemed to be of lesser importance illustrated much within group variability of response; 4) most agencies had some form of written policies and procedures with respect to adoption, however, lacked such policies and procedures regarding maintaining contact with adoptive applicants on the waiting list; 5) waiting lists were lengthy and adoptive applicants had to
wait several years to adopt infants (4.2 on the average); and, 6) applicants waiting to be home-studied required more extensive follow-up services according to the respondents.

Recommendations are directed toward further research in order to develop better and more standardized instruments to assess adoptive applicants. As well, specialized training for adoption workers is recommended to assure that adoptive applicants are assessed with more consistency. Further, more attention should be provided to those applicants waiting to adopt as they may be an untapped resource for existing agency needs. Finally, public education and awareness programs are required to realistically inform the adopting population as to those adoption possibilities available (specifically, special needs children and sibling groups).
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INTRODUCTION

The emotional suffering involved in a couple's inability to have their own children is traumatic for most persons who have experienced this problem (Goffman, 1963; Miall, 1986). Such suffering and anxiety may be manifested in a loss of purpose or meaning, a loss of hope for the future, a loss of sexual identity, and a loss of immortality (Ralph, 1977). Recent evidence regarding this phenomenon has indicated that one marriage in ten remains involuntarily childless (Hepworth, 1980). Ironically, there are presently thousands of children in Canada who are not living with their biological parents for one reason or another. For example, during 1976-77 there were 6,985 children under the age of eighteen in the province of Ontario, who had been voluntarily or involuntarily permanently relinquished to the various Children's Aid Societies (C.A.S.'s) as their biological parents were unable to provide adequate care (Hepworth, 1980).

The annual rate of birth is one way of predicting the availability of eligible infants for adoption. Of the 479,000 infants born in Canada during 1959, 20,000 were born out of wedlock (Hepworth, 1980). Since that time, the number of births declined to 370,000 in 1970, however, the out of wedlock births increased to 35,600. Consistent with
these statistics, there were 12,800 adoptions in 1959, and 20,500 in 1970. Therefore, as the birth rate increased, the number of actual children available for adoption increased. During the 1960's, the province of Ontario transacted 64,309 adoptions, however, that number declined to 52,360 in the 1970's (Ministry of Community and Social Services [COMSOC], 1985).

As these statistics indicate, after 1970, there were fewer infants available for adoption as a result of both the declining birth rates, as well as an increase in government sponsored social welfare programs designed to assist single parents. Further, the stigma of adopting an illegitimate child seemed to be decreasing over time and birth control measures became more socially acceptable and widely practiced (Sources, 1980). This trend held for the 1970s and as a result, Canadian births decreased in 1976 to 350,000 and adoptions declined to 16,000. As the number of available children decreased over time, government agencies have become more stringent in their selection of perspective adoptive applicants.

Although the birth rate has continued to decline over the past decade, there is still a demand by childless couples to adopt. With fewer babies available, today's adopting parents must be prepared to adopt special needs
and older children (Sachdev, 1980). As well, during the early 1970s, couples waited less than two years to adopt an infant, whereas by the 1980s, waiting periods in many instances were in excess of five years. Consequently, the C.A.S.'s of Ontario, the main agencies responsible for adoption, select who they deem to be the most appropriate parental applicants. The criteria used to assess these applicants assists the C.A.S. in the process of determining whether or not an applicant is eligible to adopt a child.

Those workers designated by C.A.S.'s to select suitable adoptive applicants have a most difficult task. Such crucial decisions affect the lives of children, the adoptive applicants, the status of C.A.S.'s and the adoption worker's professional integrity (Bradley, 1966). The issue of what constitutes a good parent has been discussed for several years (Fanshel, 1962). Agencies have long been concerned with the development and utilization of criteria to evaluate one's capacity for parenthood (Shapiro, 1956).

In response to such concerns, guidelines for the assessment of adoptive applicants were developed by the Child Welfare League of America [CWLA] originally in 1959 and were revised in 1978. However, it is unknown to what extent these factors are utilized in today's adoption practices. That is, these factors may no longer be
reflective of present trends in adoption. For example, C.A.S.\'s have few infants available to adopt presently, however, they do have several children with special needs that could be adopted. In this regard, an important concern is to investigate whether or not factors used to assess adoptive applicants are consistent across C.A.S.\'s in Ontario.

**Statement of Purpose**

The availability of infants to adopt has decreased significantly over the past decade. However, the demand to adopt infants has continued to exist. Therefore, it would seem important to select those adoptive applicants who are most amply suited to adopt. In order to select those best suited, it is relevant to assess the existing criteria used by adoption service workers in C.A.S.\'s to evaluate applicants. Such an assessment may assist future adoption service workers in their evaluation of applicants.

There have been few systematic studies conducted which examine the criteria used in the selection of adoptive parents by human service agencies in general. The few known studies have focused on identifying the various selection criteria utilized, however, they have made no effort to systematically explain these criteria (Brieland, 1959; Bradley, 1966; CWLA, 1978). For example, in
reviewing this literature, it was found that the variables income, age, health, religion and marital status are universally used in the selection process of adoptive applicants by most adoption agencies in North America.

To date, there has been no known study designed to investigate the selection criteria utilized by Ontario C.A.S.'s for adoptive parents. Further, there has been no attempt to systematically categorize, weight, rank or prioritize such criteria according to their importance or use.

The purpose of this study is to examine how adoption workers assess applicants during the homestudy process. This exploratory-descriptive study will attempt to determine how applicants are evaluated during the homestudy process, assess agency policies and procedures regarding adoption, and determine issues related to applicants on the list awaiting a homestudy. More specifically, the emphasis of this study is to determine: 1) the various criteria used to assess adoptive applicants; and, 2) how these criteria are weighted in the selection of adoptive applicants.

Rationale for study. There are several reasons why this subject seems relevant for study. First, this is a timely issue. Since the 1970s, the number of infants available for adoption has decreased significantly, in
relation to the demand for adoption. As a result, an examination of the criteria used for adoption may help adoptive parents in knowing what criteria such agencies use for selection purposes.

As previously indicated, some studies have implied that age, marital status, religion, income and others are the primary criteria in selecting adoptive parents. This study will attempt to determine the importance of these factors among others in this selection process. Thus, this study may have policy/planning implications. For example, if important criteria for selection are identified, there may be implications for standardized policies and procedures across the province of Ontario for all C.A.S.‘s.

Finally, this study will attempt to contribute to the paucity of literature relating to the assessment of adoptive applicants, the nature of adoption service workers, policies and procedures regarding adoption and issues pertaining to those applicants waiting to adopt. More specifically, it will draw attention to the limited data and information regarding the selection of adoptive parents in North America and hope to contribute to it.

The Concepts

Adoption generally refers to receiving a child as one's own (COMSOC, 1973). It is foremost a legal and then a
familial and social process which establishes and nurtures a parent-child relationship on a permanent basis. It is designed to protect the rights of the natural parents, the child and adopting parents (Bala and Clarke, 1981). Adoption is mandated through court orders and focuses on the legal relationships of parent and child who were not previously related by blood. Furthermore, through adoption, the legal rights and obligations are terminated between child and his biological parents (Bala and Clarke, 1981). The Ontario government has legally mandated C.A.S.'s to provide adoption services for the province of Ontario. Potential adoptive applicants seeking adoption information through C.A.S.'s are required, therefore, to make all inquiries at the C.A.S. responsible for their geographic jurisdiction.

The adoptive applicant refers to any adult over the age of eighteen interested in the adoption of a child (COMSOC, 1985). The adult becomes an adoptive applicant when this expressed desire to adopt is officially registered by the respective C.A.S. contacted by the adult. For example, adoptive applicants encompass both single adults and adult couples applying to a C.A.S. in Ontario to adopt a child.

The adoption homestudy is a process which occurs between the adoptive applicant and an adoption service worker at the C.A.S. whereby both "become acquainted" with
each other over a period of time (COMSOC, 1985). A homestudy consists of three to six interviews conducted over a two to three month period by the adoption service worker at both the applicant's home and the C.A.S. with the family jointly and individually. The homestudy involves a comprehensive process whereby an adoption service worker assesses several factors to determine if the applicant is eligible to adopt a particular child/children. For example, during the homestudy process, factors including character references, personal health, family income, marital relationship, personality, etc., assist the adoption service worker to complete a detailed written assessment as to whether or not the applicants are eligible to adopt a child (COMSOC, 1985).

The adoptive criteria used by adoption service workers refers to those areas and factors used to assess an applicant's suitability to adopt. The Ministry of Community and Social Services (1983, 1985) and the Child Welfare League of America (1978) have provided recommended guidelines for assessing adoptive criteria that adoption workers should consider when assessing applicants. These criteria provide basic identifying information and a descriptive account of the applicants which is detailed enough to determine whether or not the applicant should be considered for the placement of a child. Included in such
descriptions are criteria which are both socio-demographic in nature which encompass the applicant's age, marital status, income, education, religion, etc., as well as agency specific information which include the applicant's problem-solving ability, acceptance of individual differences, character references, communication skills, motivation to adopt and numerous others.

For the purpose of this study, the waiting list refers to a formal list of eligible adoptive applicants compiled by the C.A.S. who are awaiting a homestudy to be commenced by an adoption service worker. Those applicants to be homestudied are usually chronologically ordered. These applicants have little or no contact with the C.A.S. until they are homestudied. Generally, those applicants on the waiting list have provided the C.A.S. with identifying information and the type of children they prefer to adopt.
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Adoption practices have changed greatly over the past several centuries. In general, the focus has shifted from supplying children to parents, to finding the best parents available to meet the needs of the child. At the time of the Industrial Revolution, in Europe, adoption practices were exploitive of children, whereas today the emphasis is placed on the child's need for a permanent home with nurturing parents (Pinchbeck and Hewitt, 1969). In this regard, over the last twenty years, adoption philosophies, practices, policies and procedures which have been developed centre on the child rather than the parent. In addition, the method whereby parents are chosen for children has attracted considerable attention.

In order to enhance an understanding of the criteria used to assess applicants for adoption workers, the literature will be reviewed according to three main sections: 1) the history of adoption practices including trends and issues; 2) the selection criteria used to assess adoptive applicants including measurements; and, 3) waiting list information.
The History of Adoption Practices

The earliest recorded adoption was the story of the birth of Sargon I, who founded Babylon in the second century (Shapiro, 1956). At the time, adoption provided a family with an heir and satisfied the unfulfilled maternal needs of childless women. Later, the Romans adopted children in order to ensure the continuity of political power in families (Infausto, 1969). In this tradition, the inheritance rights of such children were created under civil laws and subsequently developed in countries such as Napoleonic France (Coștin, 1973).

Prior to the sixteenth century, illegitimate childbirth was widely accepted throughout Europe, and children born out of wedlock had the same privileges as those who were born from a marriage (Pinchbeck and Hewitt, 1969). The Elizabethan poor laws of 1576 marked a noted change in moral and religious attitudes, as well as social and economic values of persons in the British empire. During that era, English law required that all "dependent" children would be apprenticed, indentured or placed in orphan shelters or workhouses until adulthood (Pink, 1974; Ferguson, 1963). Thus, illegitimate children were viewed as public property and cheap labour, who were available for any persons who chose to claim them. Bartering children as
chattels became a popular practice during this era. Further, forcing children to learn trades which would allow them to be self-supporting was discouraged, and the consensus was that this time period generally exploited children in a form of slavery (Ferguson, 1963). Despite such injustices, these practices were prevalent for the next three centuries in Britain and many European countries.

With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, a changing economy was accompanied by a changing social order and greater social consciousness, which generally led to escalating awareness as to the interdependence of the individuals and their relationship to the state (Fink, 1974). This twentieth century era was highlighted by the first adoption statutes in England's history (Kirk, 1981). Similarly, adoption practices in North America reflected those rooted in the changing English common law. As a result, illegitimate or orphaned children in England and North America were "gathered up" in cities and towns and transported to families in rural areas. Thus, it was not out of the ordinary to find such children abandoned upon the completion of harvest (Infausto, 1969).

The feudal traditions of England were explicit in that the rights and properties of a parent were allowed to pass only to biological children born within a marriage
(Klibanoff, 1973). The importance placed on blood lineage was a primary reason that English law failed to initiate a formal process of adoption at this time (Klibanoff, 1973). Contrary to the Roman culture, the English had no religious motives for perpetuating the family, thus, there was no consideration for a family's economic and social interests to be preserved through adoption.

Philanthropists of the time were instrumental in calling attention to the exploitation of children and they felt that indentured children should be treated equally to natural children (Kadushin, 1980). The first legislation related to adoption in Ontario, or for that matter in Canada, was The Orphans Act of 1799. This law was derived from the English apprenticeship system (e.g. training children for factory work or trades), and prevailed throughout the nineteenth century in Canada. The focus of this act was on the guardian and not the apprentice (Splane, 1965). Although not specifically related to adoption, national legislation introduced in 1826 in Upper Canada indicated that the previous focus pertaining to children overall was shifting to the protection of children. As a result of these changing perspectives, J. J. Kelso in 1891, founded the first C.A.S. in Toronto, Ontario to protect and preserve the rights of children (Marcus, 1979). In this regard, future adoption trends and
legislation began to reflect the rights of children in Canada.

During the 1920's, formal adoption legislation was introduced in both England and North America. Contrary to previous legislation, these laws were the first attempts at standardizing adoption practices and classifying the rights and responsibilities within the adoptive relationship for such children. For example, adoption practices in North America evolved (from 1920 to 1960) from an emphasis on supplying children to adoptive applicants, to a concern and understanding of the child's need to be raised in a setting which promoted "healthy family functioning" (Lawder et al., 1969).

This shift in emphasis had a profound impact on the adoption practices of today. For example, the provision of the "appropriate home" for an adoptive child is of paramount importance in any adoption consideration in North America. Further, the pre-adoptive child has rights to quality of care and permanency, and that permanency is best achieved through the endorsement of a family unit that has been produced through the non-traditional biological means (e.g. adoptive and foster parents) (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies [O.A.C.A.S.], 1970).

Adoption today, although resting on such simple principles, has become a rather complex social and legal
process, which involves interaction and decision-making by social service agency personnel, lawyers, teachers, neighbours, judges and legislators. It has been a slow process to develop legislation which protects the best interests of children; and in this regard, trends in adoption practices have changed significantly over the last twenty years, more so than at any other period in history. Specifically, increased abortions and a declining birth rate have been two significant influences on recent adoption practices which were previously noted. Further, our society's acceptance of the illegitimate child and the government's attempt to financially provide for single parents has had a significant impact on children who are available for adoption (e.g., there are fewer children available for adoption) (Hepworth, 1980). It seems important to discuss further the trends in adoption over these last twenty years and the issues that are presently of paramount importance for adoption workers, adoptive applicants and potential adoptees.

The pre 1970 adoption trends. During the pre 1970 era, C.A.S.'s in Ontario experienced a steady increase in adoption activity. There were more than sufficient infants available for applicants seeking adoption of infants. This increase was related to several factors, which included the
C.A.S.'s efforts to remove the stigma associated with adoption, changes in legislation, a formal organization to facilitate the placement of children needing homes and others. This flourish of adoption activity decreased by the late 1960s primarily due to the widespread use of effective birth control, legalized abortion and the trend of single mothers to keep their illegitimate children with the aid of government financial assistance. As a result, the numbers of infants available to adopt decreased significantly.

The first adoption that was recorded in Ontario occurred during July of 1921, one of 66 that took place that year. Adoption in the 1930's continued to be an infrequent and somewhat unusual occurrence in the province of Ontario. Adoptions which occurred in the 1960s and were completed through the C.A.S.'s increased by 5% annually, reaching 6,884 in 1967 (O.A.C.A.S., 1968).

The factors which had influenced this moderate increase in adoptions included: 1) C.A.S.'s promoted the idea that it was socially acceptable to adopt children; 2) time limitations in the legislation regarding C.A.S.'s were changed (e.g. children could remain with the C.A.S. for a maximum of two years, and then would return to their biological parent or become eligible for adoption); 3) the Adoption Resource Exchange, developed in 1954, coordinated
efforts to mobilize children needing homes with adoptive applicants from anywhere else in the province of Ontario;  
4) C.A.S.'s began to utilize the media to search for adoptive applicants for difficult to place children; and,  
5) inter-racial adoption campaigns were launched to seek placements for non-caucasian children. In regard to these changes, it was not surprising that such efforts escalated the adoption statistics in the province, ultimately resulting in 9,000 children being placed through the C.A.S.'s in 1969. At this time, adoption was viewed as an important and acceptable way to have a family, and prior to 1970, C.A.S.'s were able to successfully provide adoptive applicants with the children they desired (COMSOC, 1973).  

Additional social changes that independently affected the overall birth rate and the number of adoptions were prevalent by the end of the 1960's. For example, there existed a decreased number of women of child bearing age and an increased and widespread use of effective birth control measures in Canada. In this regard, one of the most significant factors was the legalization of therapeutic abortions during the late 1960s and early 1970s. As a result, such changes impacted significantly on adoption services, policies and practices in the seventies and eighties.
Post 1970 adoption trends. The post 1970 era of adoption practices in Ontario have been highlighted by a major decrease in the number of infants available yet the demand for infants has remained high. As a result, adoptive applicants are required to wait much longer periods to adopt infants. In this regard, some adoptive applicants have become frustrated with the C.A.S.'s inability to provide infants and have sought alternatives through private agencies with varying degrees of success. Some medical and technological advances have provided previously childless couples with infants, however, many still remain childless. Present practices of C.A.S.'s have shifted from a focus of predominantly infant placements to a major emphasis on seeking placements for older and special needs children.

Adoption is no longer viewed as primarily an expectation for childless couples but more so an expectation to finding families for children who need them (Hartman, 1979). Although philosophies and adoption practices have changed, there continues to be an emphasis on creating the optimal family rather than meeting the specific needs of children placed for adoption (Hartman, 1979). Contrary to the 1960s, when infants who were born out-of-wedlock tended to exceed the number of adoption applicants, the present reality is that the number of applicants far exceeds the
number of infants available (Paul Daignault, personal communication, January, 1987).

In addition to the previously cited factors affecting the number of infants available for adoption, there have been some recent medical and technological advances in the treatment of infertility. More specifically, fertility drugs, artificial insemination, in-vitro fertilization, surrogate parenting and surgical procedures have provided successful results to many previously childless couples. Such alternatives are encouraging to couples unable to conceive, particularly when infants available to adopt are scarce.

In 1969, 4669 infants were given up for adoption in Ontario, however, three years later in 1972, only 2000 infants were given up for adoption (O.A.C.A.S., 1973). As a result, suitable applicants are no longer guaranteed an infant when they request one. During the 1970s, only one family in three applying for adoption in Ontario were able to adopt an infant. Today, only one couple in ten who apply are likely to receive an infant (COMSOC, 1983). Further, the waiting period to adopt infants has increased significantly from the 1960s (i.e. from under two years) to in excess of seven years in some C.A.S.'s in Ontario (Paul Daignault, personal communication, January, 1987). Waiting lists for private fee-for-service agencies have been
reported to be shorter, varying from one to two years, based on the availability of infants (Lorraine Murphy, personal communication, April, 1987).

C.A.S. adoptive placements continued to decrease in the 1970s. For example, Blake (1976) found that placements decreased from 162 in 1970, to 57 in 1975 in the C.A.S. of Durham County (the Oshawa vicinity). These findings were similar to trends noted throughout the province in other C.A.S.'s. Adoption placements at the Roman Catholic C.A.S. of Essex County (the Windsor vicinity) decreased from 46 in 1977, to 19 in 1983. Related to these trends, C.A.S.'s in Ontario have developed revised policies, procedures and philosophies about the whole notion of adoption. These agencies have generally made it clear that their primary role is to find applicants suitable to meet the needs of the children who are available to adopt.

The Child and Family Services Act of 1984 and the subsequent Ministry of Community and Social Services (1985) adoption guidelines and standards, strongly advocate for the placement of all children who are available for adoption. In this context, the Ontario government provides subsidies to adoptive applicants who are willing to provide for certain special needs children. Presently, although agencies no longer require new applicants to adopt healthy infants, they do require applicants for special needs
children and sibling groups.

Throughout the mid 1970s and into the 1980s the number of adoption placements in C.A.S.'s decreased, as the result of the unavailability of infants for adoptive applicants. Following this decrease, the staff complements of C.A.S.'s in Ontario, specifically pertaining to adoption were reduced. For example, the staff complement at the Oshawa C.A.S. decreased from 6 to 4.5 between 1970 and 1975 (Blake, 1976). Further, the major role of the adoption worker had shifted from primarily the recruitment of adoptive applicants for infants, to the recruitment of applicants for older and special needs children.

Finally, as the number of children available to adopt decreased, the selection of the best possible applicant seems relevant for further discussion. C.A.S.'s and the government have developed guidelines for determining eligibility and suitability of adoptive applicants. Foremost, these requirements must be in accordance with The Ontario Human Rights Code of 1982. As well, a greater emphasis has developed in the selection processes in terms of matching of child and applicants, thus criteria used by adoption workers to assess applicants remains important in this process. More specifically, this process encompasses a comprehensive assessment of the adoptive applicant's ability to parent. This assessment, referred to as a
homestudy, used by adoption workers to assess adoptive applicants includes individual, family and agency-based criteria, and is ultimately used to determine whether or not the adoptive applicant will be chosen for a specific child.

**Selection Criteria Used to Assess Adoptive Applicants**

The success of family functioning usually depends upon the abilities to interact positively within the family unit. In order to determine the extent of positive family functioning, it is necessary to assess various interpersonal factors. For example, communication skills, attitudes, motivations and problem-resolution techniques are usually considered when assessing family functioning in this regard. Such assessment factors are often used to determine whether or not a family is capable of providing for an additional member. It is important to note that any professional's ability to assess the capabilities of a family is contingent upon the ability of the professional who does the assessment, and also the availability of valid and reliable instrumentation used to measure such factors.

These factors as a whole, relate to the achieved level of maturity of the perspective applicants and, therefore, are amenable to the applicant's insight and education/training (COMSOC, 1983). Such factors are also indicative
of overall family functioning and the applicant's capacity to assume parenting roles and responsibilities. While adoption service workers have tended to place significance on these factors, they tend to be rather subjective when compared with individually-based criteria previously identified. More specifically, information gathered by the adoption service worker is less factual and open to the interpretation of the assessor, than are individually based criteria. For example, the age of applicant is not subject to interpretation, whereas their motivation to adopt may vary according to the assessment of the respective adoption worker.

It has been reported that couples applying to adopt have been approved by one agency and rejected by another (Brown and Brieland, 1975). As well, it is possible that an applicant may be accepted by one worker in an agency and rejected by another worker in the same agency. Further, the adoptive applicant's selection of a particular agency may ultimately determine whether or not the applicant is accepted or not. In this regard, worker characteristics or preferences may be related to acceptance or rejection of adoptive applicants (Brown and Brieland, 1975). The task of the adoption service worker, to assess adoptive applicants, particularly within the realm of such varied and subjective factors is most formidable.
In regard to the issue of motivation, positive motivation to adopt includes the basic love of children and betterment of the family unit (COMSOC, 1983). Motivational assessment usually focuses on the open or closed mindedness of the applicant to discuss various issues (e.g., motivation to adopt, childlessness and infertility), rather than responses to specific questions in the assessment. The focus of such motivational assessments is to basically determine whether the desire to adopt is parent-centered or child-centered. Assessment methods of motivation have been quite subjective to date and acknowledged more rigorous objective methods need to be sought (Davis and Bouck, 1955). Although the motivation to adopt remains difficult to assess thoroughly, researchers agree that this is a major factor required in any assessment of adoptive applicants (Brown, 1951; Aronson, 1955; Bradley, 1966; Ripple, 1968; Maidman, 1984; COMSOC, 1983, 1985).

Within the context of the motivation issue exists the couple's attitude toward infertility, if applicable. For example, an infertility report should not be used to screen adoptive applicants, however, it is useful to initiate discussion on the applicant's feelings about infertility, and in turn, such factors may have a bearing on the couple's capacity for parenthood (Brown, 1951; Aronson,
1955; Brieland, 1959; Bradley, 1966; CWLA, 1978; COMSOC, 1983, Costin, 1984). A somewhat opposing view suggests that infertility has nothing to do with an applicant's ability to parent (Fellner, 1966). Further to discussions of the infertility issue, it is not uncommon for some agencies to request actual proof of infertility (COMSOC, 1983). This proof arises from the belief that the unexpected birth of a child after adoption may cause a high level of stress within the family unit (COMSOC, 1983). Furthermore, some evidence exists which suggests that a completed adoption increases the likelihood of conception (Katz et al., 1985). It is important to note that the adoption service worker and applicant understands that infertility may represent feelings of loss of meaning, fulfillment, self regard, sexual identity, immortality and, thus must be discussed accordingly (Ralph, 1977).

Present adoption practices in the province of Ontario reflect the right of the individual to know of his/her genealogical past, and the importance of adoptive parents to openly and comfortably 'tell' or discuss the adoption with the adoptee. In this regard, present legislation permits agencies to disclose to adoptees non-identifying information, however, new legislation will permit agencies to disclose all identifying information under certain conditions which has interesting implications (The Child
and Family Services Act, 1984). For example, past practices permitted the disclosure of such information as age, personality and physical descriptions of the biological parents, etc., whereas future practices will provide the names and addresses of the biological parents to the adoptees under certain conditions. Therefore, it is necessary that adoptive applicants be assessed according to their ability to understand the importance of sharing the circumstances of the adoption with the child during his/her developing years (CWLA, 1978; COMSOC, 1983; Sobol and Cardiff, 1983).

In addition, the adoptive applicants will be assessed regarding their capacity to share the adoption with close friends and relatives. The importance of assessing the applicant's ability to openly discuss the adoption has not been disputed in the literature, however, the method of assessing this issue has been challenged (Davis and Bouck, 1955; Kirk, 1959; Fanshel, 1962). More specifically, present assessment techniques regarding such factors are limited and rely on the adoption service worker's ability to make accurate discriminations between the various applicants.

Current policies and practices have placed much importance on the emotional climate of the perspective adoptive home (CWLA, 1978; COMSOC, 1983; Hoffman-Riem,
1986). For example, communication skills, problem-solving abilities and family stability are such factors which refer to the emotional milieu of the adoptive home. Further, the family’s ability to recognize and resolve problems requires comprehensive assessment, as well as the family’s acceptance of individual differences and flexibility to accept an additional member to the family. Also, adoption service workers must acquire information relating to the applicant’s preferences and expectations regarding the adoption of a child. Once again, the information gathered is based on the individual adoption worker’s impression of the applicant and is open to much interpretation (Davis and Bouck, 1955).

Positive communication, good personal adjustment and positive relationships within the family have also been identified as important factors essential for adoptive applicants to promote familial growth and development (Brown, 1951; Bradley, 1966; Ripple, 1968; Costin, 1984). It is recommended that the emotional climate be satisfying to both parents and children (CWLA, 1978). However, a dilemma remains in that these factors seem relevant, but the actual assessment may or may not be reliable. For example, family relationships and communication skills are assessed by observing the family in an artificial manner, and stability may be ascertained by the number of years a
family has been together. As one may surmise, there is no research that specifies the number of years necessary to ensure family stability, however, many agencies arbitrarily prefer the minimum length of a relationship be two years (COMSOC, 1983). Other researchers have found that adoption service workers prefer marriages of approximately 3-7 years (Brieland, 1966; Goodacre, 1966; Costin, 1984). Once again, policies, practices and worker preferences vary accordingly consistent with previous research findings in this area (Bradley, 1966; Brown and Brieland, 1975).

Although it is illegal to discriminate against applicants who wish to retain full-time employment after adoption, many agencies have informal policies relating to an at home requirement of at least one parent for a specified period after the adoption of an infant (P. Daignault, personal communication, April 1987). For example, such agencies prefer or require a parent, usually the mother, to remain at home for 4 to 6 months after an infant has been placed for adoption. Therefore, it would seem that such policies reflect the apparent necessity of a parent to be with the adoptee during the adjustment period.

The previously mentioned factors represent an overview of the criteria that adoption workers consider when assessing the suitability of applicants seeking adoption. In some instances, the major categories presented are
subdivided into more specific criteria, however, for purposes of this study the primary areas used to assess adoptive applicants have been highlighted (e.g. family communication encompasses husband-wife, parent-child and sibling patterns). Previous researchers have emphasized problems regarding methods to measure such criteria, and recommend that more rigorous methodologies be sought (Davis and Bouck, 1955; Fanshel, 1962). In this regard, some social service organizations have attempted to provide guidelines to assess adoptive applicants that reflect emerging social trends, but have failed to address many of the aforementioned problems (CWLA, 1978; COMSOC, 1983).

The basis for adoption policies and practices for the 1980s has been established, and there exists an increased recognition of the rights of relinquishing parents, adoptee, and adopters. As well, there has been an increased dissemination of family planning information and progress in medical technology to correct many reproductive difficulties thought otherwise impossible to correct. The current trend in this regard is to preserve the child's biological roots. Some research has shown that there is a decrease in the number of healthy Caucasian infants available for adoption and a trend for unmarried mothers to keep their babies. For example, in 1968, 30.1% of Canadian unwed mothers kept their children and in 1977, 88.3% of
unwed mothers kept their children (COMSOC, 1983). Furthermore, the increase in private adoption activity is concurrent with a decrease in adoption activity in C.A.S.'s. For example, between 1972 and 1978 adoptions in C.A.S.'s decreased by one half from 3,375 to 1,514 while private adoptions doubled from 344 to 666 (COMSOC, 1983).

Assessment of Adoptive Applicants

The importance of how criteria are used to measure or assess adoptive applicants cannot be overemphasized, as the methods used to assess adoptive applicants ultimately determined whether or not a child will be received. To date, such criteria have been rather vague and as indicated, subject to the interpretation of the adoption service worker. Previously conducted investigations have illustrated such concerns, but minimal progress has been made to refine the available measuring instruments that are used by adoption service workers (Davis and Bouck, 1955; Fanshel, 1962; Bradley, 1966).

There has been no known attempt to determine whether or not any relationship exists between the adoption service worker and the type of applicant selected. For example, an adoption service worker's experience, educational background etc., may influence the decision to accept or reject an applicant. Some supporting evidence has revealed
that adoption service workers and their respective agencies were not consistent in their ratings as to the suitability of adoptive applicants (Brieland, 1959; Bradley, 1966; Brown and Brieland, 1975). Furthermore, adoption service workers-profiled were found to be around 41 years old, with a median length of employment of 8.5 years, 50% had M.S.W. degrees, and they generally lacked training in adoption (Bradley, 1966).

Fanshel (1962) reported that there exists three major tasks facing the adoption service worker: 1) the need for conceptual clarity; 2) the development of appropriate research designs; and, 3) problems related to the development of reliable and valid measurements. In regard to the conceptual clarity issue, the goals of adoptive research need precise definition and direction. For example, some areas of concern exist when adoptive children are compared with natural children. Thus, the task of the adoption service worker is formidable as attempts are made to predict future outcomes while relying on the verbal responses of the applicants. In this regard, it may be worthwhile to spend time preparing adoptive applicants to receive children, rather than attempting to develop a predictive instrument (Fanshel, 1962).

Regarding appropriate research designs, Fanshel (1962) suggests that researchers utilize the variability within
adoptive families as comparison groups, rather than children of natural families. Thus, in order to assess positive factors associated with adoption success, it seems logical to compare adoption successes with adoption failures. More specifically, some studies have examined various factors which appear to be prevalent in adoption success or failure (e.g. socio-economic status, matching physical resemblance, applicant's flexibility and openness to "tell" the child of the adoption) (Wolins, 1959; Maas, 1960; Kadushin, 1966; Ripple, 1968; Zwimpfer, 1983).

One major task of most research investigations (in this context) is selecting the appropriate instrument in order to measure the phenomenon to be studied. Adoption researchers have struggled for years to develop a reliable and valid measurement to assess adoptive applicants with limited success. Rather than to continue with this uncertainty and exacerbate this phenomenon, it has been suggested that instruments of proven reliability and validity from other sources be utilized (Fanshel, 1962). For example, inventories and scales exist related to what constitutes an emotionally healthy family, an index of marital integration and operational measures of identity, the index of marital satisfaction and the index of family relations (Pollak, 1957; Farber, 1957; Bieri and Lobeck, 1959; Hudson and Glisson, 1976).
Waiting Lists

Presently, the research pertaining to those applicants awaiting a homestudy remains quite sparse. In general, the number of applicants waiting to adopt infants is related to the availability of such infants. With the decreasing availability of infants however, several prospective adoptive applicants will never have the opportunity to adopt. Even during the 1950s, only 1 out of 10 applicants was likely to receive an infant (Brown, 1951). Furthermore, this ratio continued to increase disproportionately as the number of infants available for adoption decreased. Despite this reality, applicants continue to apply to C.A.S.'s for usually healthy Caucasian infants.

As a result of these difficulties, applicants are presently choosing private agencies, due to their shorter waiting periods, less bureaucratic "red tape" and the greater availability of infants through private resources (COMSOC, 1983). Furthermore, unwed mothers wishing to relinquish their babies find that private agencies are more responsive to individual needs. For example, private agencies eliminate the need for foster care and are not stringent about involving the biological father in this process.

Presently, thousands of applicants in Ontario are
waiting to adopt infants from C.A.S.'s for periods of up to 8 years. By comparison, there has been a dramatic increase in the length of waiting period that existed in the 1950s which ranged from 3 to 24 months (Brieland, 1959). As well, it was determined that long waiting periods lead to a decrease in motivation and an increase in anxiety of the applicants. It has been shown that those applicants waiting for long time periods are likely to become frustrated with the host agency and anxious when a child is eventually placed for adoption (Brieland, 1959). Other studies reported that applicants who wait for agency service for prolonged periods of time tend to withdraw, thus potentially depriving the agency of a valuable resource (Shireman, 1970; Soothill and Derbyshire, 1981).

Finally, services to this client group appears to be a neglected and forgotten area of social service research.

Summary

The previous literature review highlighted the history of adoption, including Canadian and specifically Ontario trends and issues pre and post 1970, and selection criteria used to assess adoptive applicants. The historical examination of adoption practices revealed two predominant themes which were: 1) that supplying children to persons who requested them, tended to be parent centred and
exploitive in nature; and, 2) that adoption practices changed significantly with the emerging rights of children during the 1900s.

In regard to these changes to adoption practices in the 1900s, the child for the first time in history became the focus of the adoption process. More specifically, adoption practices had shifted from being parent centred to child centred. Foremost, the rights and needs of the child were of paramount importance in selecting adoptive parents. Consistent within both eras, adoption practices varied directly with the social, political, religious, economic and legal influences of the time.

During the 1970s, the number of infants available for adoption in Canada and Ontario began to decline significantly. Factors associated with this decline were: 1) the legalization of abortion; 2) the effective and widespread use of birth control; 3) the trend of single mothers to keep their babies; and, 4) government programs to assist single mothers. Despite the decrease of available infants to adopt, the demand for children continues to remain high for couples seeking adoption. Furthermore, it was shown that many children (e.g. special needs and older) are available for adoption.

An examination of the criteria used to assess prospective adoptive applicants revealed two types of
factors used which are: 1) socio-demographic characteristics of the applicants; and, 2) characteristics related to the dynamics of family functioning. These factors were shown to be somewhat helpful in the assessment of adoptive applicants, however, they have some inherent difficulties. More specifically, many of the factors used to assess adoptive applicants are based on the subjective interpretation of the individual adoption worker. Thus, the assessment of the adoptive applicant may vary across adoption workers or agencies.

Furthermore, it was deemed that there existed a lack of valid and reliable instruments to measure the various assessment factors. From an applicant's perspective, the factors assessed by some adoption workers may render an applicant inappropriate however, another adoption worker may find the same applicant a suitable candidate. Therefore, it seems necessary through further study to develop valid and reliable methods of assessing adoptive applicants.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This exploratory-descriptive study represents the first known attempt to systematically assess, and to assign weight and priority to factors used by adoption service workers to select adoptive applicants. Furthermore, there are no known studies which have explored the existence of C.A.S.'s policies, procedures and issues pertaining to those waiting to be assessed. In addition to assessing these factors, other variables will be examined which pertain to adoption waiting lists, policies, procedures and practices as they relate to various adoption activities. Rather than formulating formal hypotheses and given the study design, a number of research questions will be posed. These questions provide a framework for the ensuing method and data analyses. They also attempt to reflect on the variables, which have been derived from the review of the literature.

1. What are the socio-demographic characteristics of adoption workers in Ontario's C.A.S.'s?

2. What activities are adoption workers involved with presently in C.A.S.'s?

3. What factors are used and considered more important during the assessment of adoptive applicants?
4. What are some of the "ideal" characteristics of adoptive applicants?

5. What policies and procedures exist regarding adoption at C.A.S.'s?

6. What are some of the current trends in existence pertaining to applicants waiting to be homestudied?

These research questions have been designed to gather information on adoption activities and practices at C.A.S.'s in the Province of Ontario.
METHOD

The Setting and Population

All of the C.A.S.'s in the province of Ontario provided the setting for this study. These agencies vary in size according to the geographic populations served and are located throughout the province in Metropolitan, urban and rural areas (see Figure 1). Furthermore, there exists more than one C.A.S. in three specific geographic areas (e.g. Hamilton, Toronto, Windsor). The number of social workers (including adoption workers) employed at these C.A.S.'s ranges from less than 10 to more than 200 serving populations of less than 25,000 to over 1.2 million. More specifically, the population of children in these areas ranges from approximately 5,000 to over 244,000. The annual budgets of these agencies ranges from less than $500,000 to over 50 million dollars per year. Of the 51 agencies in the province of Ontario, one is Jewish, three are Roman Catholic and 47 are non-denominational.

The population sampled for this study was composed of the senior adoption workers from each of the 51 C.A.S.'s in the province of Ontario, as each C.A.S. is legally mandated to provide adoption services in a designated geographical area.

All C.A.S.'s have social workers with various training
Figure 1. C.A.S.'s located in the Province of Ontario as of 1986-87.

Note. (*) C.A.S. locations
and education designated to provide adoption services. Most agencies have social workers who specialize in adoption services. The number of adoption workers at each C.A.S. is contingent upon the population served and the agency demands for adoption services. As a result, the staff complement of adoption workers in these C.A.S.'s ranges from one part-time position in an agency to nine full-time positions. Each agency was asked to have their senior adoption worker participate in the study for ensuring some degree of consistency in the respondents. The agencies themselves determined who this person was.

The Procedure

A pre-tested questionnaire and the human subject consent form (see Appendix A) were mailed to the senior adoption worker in each of the 51 C.A.S.'s who comprised the study population (N = 51). Attached cover letters to the local director and adoption supervisor, which were to be forwarded to the senior adoption worker (see Appendix B) outlined the study purpose, and assurances of confidentiality. A stamped self-addressed envelope (with the return address of the Roman Catholic Children's Aid Society for the City of Windsor and County of Essex) was mailed with each questionnaire. All of the questionnaires were mailed out on April 24, 1987. On May 23, 1987 a
follow-up letter (see Appendix C) was sent to those C.A.S. ' s who had not responded by that time. The final questionnaire included in this study was received on July 20, 1987.

The Questionnaire

The questions asked on the survey instrument were developed from four sources. Some instruments used in other similar studies were adapted for use in the questionnaire (Brieland, 1959; Bradley, 1966; Brown and Brieland, 1975). Second, a Ministerial guideline for assessment of applications in private adoption was used to develop other parts of the instrument (COMSOC, 1983). Third, other questions were derived from similar criteria developed to assist adoption workers in the assessment of applicants in the U.S.A. (CWLA, 1978). The final source of information used in the survey instrument was developed by the researcher and his supervisor at the School of Social Work, Dr. M. J. Holosko, and, Paul Daignault of the Roman Catholic Children's Aid Society for the City of Windsor and the County of Essex.

The instrument sought to include a variety of questions on a variety of factors. More specifically, various studies, publications and Ministerial guidelines have emphasized the necessity of including various factors while
assessing the suitability of adoptive applicants (Brieland, 1959; Bradley, 1966; CWLA, 1978; COMSOC, 1983). In this regard, it has been previously discussed that instrument limitations exist, however, generally the survey method using multiple factor assessment has proven to be somewhat reliable regarding the assessment of adoption applicant suitability.

To thoroughly determine the validity of the instrument used it would be necessary to assess and compare those traits of selected applicants who are deemed as successful versus those selected applicants who are unsuccessful as adoptive parents. The validity of instruments used to date (to assess the suitability of adoptive applicants) has been suspect given the relatively high rate of adoption breakdowns (Fanshel, 1962; Bradley, 1966). The survey instrument used in this study provides a representative indication of those variables deemed necessary to assess the concept of applicant suitability, thus demonstrating a degree of content validity.

The questionnaire had four sections, which consisted of mainly closed ended or fixed choice questions. The sections were as follows:
1. **General Background Information About the Respondent and Agency:**
   i) demographic variables - age, sex, marital status;  
   ii) education, number of adopted children, length of employment, adoption experience;  
   iii) agency needs regarding adoptive applicants;  
   iv) respondent's adoption training;  
   v) total staff complement, total number of social work staff, total number of adoption workers;  
   vi) previously adopted admissions to care;  
   vii) respondent and total agency statistics on homestudies and adoption placement types.

2. **Assessing Adoptive Applicants:**
   i) a 19 item inventory was developed which included various factors used to assess adoptive applicants. It was scored on a five point interval scale where "1" = not important and "5" = extremely important;  
   ii) an additional 15 questions focused on the preferences of adoption workers in various areas used to assess adoptive applicants, exclusive from the 19 item inventory.

Two tests of reliability were conducted on the assessment factors (the 19 item inventory). One was an internal consistency reliability test which determined the Cronbach Alpha (α). This test yielded an alpha of .80 (n=34). The second reliability test was a Cuttman split-half where the assessment factors were split, and every other item was placed in one of two separate groups,
then summed and correlated. This yielded an $r$ of .71 ($n=34$). These statistics revealed that the assessment factors had a moderate to high degree of internal consistency for subsequent analyses.

3. **Policies and Procedures Regarding Adoption:** A checklist was used to determine the existence and agency status of various policies and procedures in the following areas: i) adoption; ii) selection of adoptive applicants from the waiting list; iii) factors used in assessing the suitability of adoptive applicants; iv) maintaining periodic agency contact with adoptive applicants on the waiting list; and, v) the training of adoptive applicants selected for homestudy.

4. **Waiting List Information:** i) respondents were asked to indicate how many adoptive applicants were on the waiting list, the waiting time prior to homestudy and after homestudy until adoption; ii) procedures and services available to adoptive applicants prior to homestudy; iii) procedures regarding the selection of applicants from the waiting list; iv) adoptive applicant's interest in becoming foster parents; and, v) the agency's provision of post-adoption services.

*Pre-testing of the questionnaire.* The questionnaire, in a less refined form, was pre-tested on four individuals who had past adoption experience in C.A.S.'s in the Windsor
area on April 7, 1987. These questionnaires were returned between April 8-15, 1987 with detailed written comments and suggestions regarding many items on the instrument. These issues were further discussed and reviewed with the participants when the questionnaire was returned.

The participants completed the questionnaire on the average in 28 minutes. The shortest completion time was 15 minutes and the longest was 55. The information gathered from the results of the pre-test proved invaluable and led to the refinement of the questionnaire to its final form.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion of data* are presented in the following sub-sections: 1) socio-demographic and background data; 2) agency related information; 3) assessment of criteria for adoption data; 4) policy and procedure information; 5) waiting list data and other information; and, 6) other statistical analyses.

I Socio-Demographic and Background Data

Of the 34 senior adoption service workers who comprised the sample, 88.2% were female and 11.8% male. Their ages ranged from 26 to 62 years. The mean age was 42.2 years and the most frequently reported ages were 35 and 36 years. Within the sample, 76.5% were married, 11.8% were single, 8.8% were divorced and 2.9% were separated.

*All data analyses were programmed through the University of Windsor Computer Centre using the IBM 4381. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences-X (SPSS-X, 1984) was utilized for all analyses. Missing data were excluded from the analyses, and were adjusted accordingly in the respective tables.
The education backgrounds of the respondents ranged from high school to a M.S.W. degree. The majority of the senior adoption service workers possessed B.S.W.'s (32.4%), followed by M.S.W.'s (26.5%) and then B.A.'s (23.5%). The remainder of the sample consisted of one Honours B.A., two Nursing Certificates and one Social Service Certificate.

Only 8.8% of the respondents had adopted children of their own. Of these, two workers had adopted one child and the third had adopted two children. Table 1 illustrates the number of years of employment at the Agency and adoption experience as reported by the C.A.S. adoption workers.

As indicated in Table 1, the amount of time employed and adoption experience was diverse and ranged from approximately 1 to 31 years and less than a year to 25 years, respectively. As well, 79.4% of the n had more than five years of work experience at their respective agencies. Similarly, 63.6% of these respondents had in excess of five years total experience in adoption. Furthermore, 52.9% had in excess of five years experience at their current agency (the one they were presently employed in).
Table 1

Number of Years of Employment at Agency and Adoption Experience as Reported by C.A.S. Adoption Workers (n=33-34)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment/Experience</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Mean (X)</th>
<th>S.D. *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. At present agency</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Successive time in adoption services with present agency</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Total experience in adoption services at all agencies</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. (*) S.D. = Standard deviation

It was also found that senior adoption workers possessing B.A.'s were employed at their present agencies on the average for 10.8 years, whereas B.S.W.'s and M.S.W.'s were similarly employed for 9.3 years and 7.6 years, respectively. Also, senior adoption workers possessing B.A.'s were successively employed in adoption services at their present agencies on the average of 6.8 years, whereas B.S.W.'s and M.S.W.'s were employed 6.3 and 5.6 years, respectively. The average experience in adoption services at all agencies for senior adoption workers was 7.5 years for B.A.'s, 7.0 years for B.S.W.'s and 6.8 years for M.S.W.'s.
With respect to adoption training, 29 out of 32 senior adoption workers indicated that workshops and conferences were a major part of their professional training. Specifically, training experiences included: 1) child welfare training; 2) university courses; 3) Nova University training; 4) adoption resource exchange conferences; 5) Foster/Adoption Systems Training; 6) reading; 7) supervision; 8) from other adoption workers; and, 9) college courses. Thirty-two of the 33 senior adoption workers in this sample reported that some form of adoption training had also been received.

Further, 25 out of 33 senior adoption workers received such training during 1986. Of those, 50% or 12 senior adoption workers had participated in adoption resource exchange conferences in 1986. Other workshop or conferences were attended by 10 senior adoption workers in 1986. Additional training consisted of: 1) child welfare training; 2) international and North American conferences on adoption; 3) in service training; and 4) peer sessions.

When further queried as to how individual workers were trained for their existing adoption positions, the most frequent response (84%) was by the previous workers or peers. Further, 12% of the senior adoption workers indicated that no specific training was provided for their position.
Discussion of socio-demographic and background data.

With respect to age, sex, and educational backgrounds, this sample is similar to a sample of adoption workers studied by Bradley (1966). More specifically, the mean age of adoption workers was 42.2 years whereas the Bradley study revealed a mean age of 41 years. Similarly, the majority of adoption workers tended to be females (in both studies). This finding was not surprising as females tend to dominate human service delivery at an approximate ratio 7:1 in the field.

Further, social work educational backgrounds were prevalent in both samples. It was somewhat surprising that the Bradley (1966) study of some twenty years ago, included a majority of individuals with master's degrees whereas in this study, only 26.5% or 9 possessed master's degrees. This finding may be attributed to the fact that this study included only senior adoption workers, and many of these workers had extensive child welfare experience and had never received a formal social work education.

As well, this study revealed a much higher percentage of adoption workers that were married (76.5% vs. 50%). Again, this may be attributed to the fact that these were senior adoption workers whereas the Bradley (1966) study sampled all adoption caseworkers in a specific area. In any event, the finding was somewhat surprising as the mean
age of the adoption workers was similar in both samples.

Another indication of the extensive experience of this study's sample was that the average experience in adoption services exceeded the findings of the Bradley study almost threfold (8.8 years vs. 3 years). Once again, this study utilized a sample of senior adoption workers with more experience and this may also have reflected the fact that younger workers are taken in to such positions at a younger age.

This study also revealed a diversified range of training experiences by adoption workers whereas previous research (Bradley, 1966; Brown and Brieland, 1975) found training for assessing adoptive applicants was generally lacking. Upon further examination of these data, it was determined that although training experiences were numerous and diverse, many of the adoption workers perceived this training as quite general. That is, that although many training experiences were reported, few if any, were related specifically to assessing the suitability of adoptive applicants. This finding was similar to findings of previous studies.

Interestingly, it seems that adoption training experiences have improved over the last twenty years, however, due to changing trends in adoption services, such training may not be totally relevant to current needs.
More specifically, the need for specialized training related to the current trends in the adoption field supersedes the existing quantity of training that is available to adoption workers at C.A.S.'s.

Based on an analyses of these socio-demographic and background data it seems safe to speculate that characteristics of the sample in this study may be generalizable to other adoption worker populations. This number of senior adoption workers had the following characteristics: 1) considerable experience in adoption; 2) had B.S.W.'s or M.S.W.'s; 3) were female; 4) were married; and, 5) had a variety of adoption training experiences. Further, senior adoption workers tended to view "on the job training" as the most prevalent training experience and little if any training specific to adoption was received prior to becoming an adoption worker.

II - Agency Related Information

Data related to personnel complements within the reported sample of C.A.S.'s in the province are indicated in Table 2. Specifically, the personnel complements which included all professional, clerical and support staff averaged 81 however, 50% of the sample had staffs numbering less than 36 persons. Further, a few C.A.S.'s with a large number of personnel tended to inflate the reported mean.
Table 2

Number of Professional, Clerical, Support and Adoption Personnel Within C.A.S.'s in Ontario (n=31-33)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Personnel</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Average per Agency (X)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Total personnel complement (clerical, professional and support)</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>81.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Total social work staff</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Total adoption workers</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. (i) Full-time adoption workers</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Part-time adoption workers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Similarly, social work positions averaged 44 per agency, however, half of the sample had fewer than 19 social work positions. Once again, a few agencies with social work positions over 200 workers tended to inflate the reported mean.

Generally, adoption staff complements within the study sample consisted of various combinations of both part and full-time workers. More specifically, 55.9% of the sample had a staff complement of one full-time adoption worker. Further, only three C.A.S.'s in the sample had an adoption staff complement which exceeded three full-time positions. Fifty percent of the sample had between one and eight part-time adoption positions per agency. As well, 10 respondents reported no full-time adoption positions and the remaining 22 C.A.S.'s indicated that between 1-9 full-time positions existed at their respective agencies. Of those C.A.S.'s, 13 reported to have only one full-time adoption position. Typically, adoption personnel per agency consisted of a single full-time position and a number of part-time positions depending on the individual agency.

Data related to adoption activities which included homestudies and placements are provided in Table 3. Twenty-six senior adoption workers reported that they completed 198 homestudies during 1986. Further, these
Table 3

Adoption Activities Including Homestudies and Placements Conducted in C.A.S.'s in Ontario in 1986 (n=26-30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adoption Activities</th>
<th>Adoption Worker Completed</th>
<th>Agency* Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Number of homestudies</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Homestudies approved</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Homestudies not approved</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Children placed (under 18)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sibling groups placed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Infants placed (under one year)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. (*) Agency completed - refers to the total of combined activities of all adoption workers within an agency.
adoption workers approved 92.4% of the homestudies and did not approve 13 homestudies. With regard to the number of adoption activities by the agencies (adoption workers) comprising the study sample, 541 homestudies were completed. Also, of these completed homestudies, 87.4% were approved whereas 59 homestudies were not approved.

With respect to placement activities, 27 senior adoption workers placed 215 children with adoptive parents during 1986. As well, 29 sibling groups were placed with adoptive parents. More specifically, eight senior adoption workers did not place any sibling groups, whereas 10 workers placed one sibling group, 5 workers placed two sibling groups and the other 3 workers placed three sibling groups. The majority of these sibling group placements were completed in the three larger C.A.S.\'s. In regard to infant placements, 27 senior adoption workers reported that 102 infants were placed during 1986. Infant placements represented 47.4% of the total placements among the senior adoption workers.

Of the 34 C.A.S.\'s participating in the study, 29 reported to have placed 510 children during 1986. It was noteworthy that two of these C.A.S.\'s placed 29.8% or 152 children whereas 15 C.A.S.\'s of considerably smaller size placed only 98 children in 1986. As well, 28 C.A.S.\'s reported to have placed 62 sibling groups collectively in
1986. Furthermore, 224 infants were reported to have been placed collectively by the C.A.S.'s participating in the sample, which represents 43.9% of all placements.

Data related to the number of children available versus those adopted in special group categories at C.A.S.'s during 1986 are presented in Table 4.

Of the 34 respondents, 82.4% indicated an agency need for applicants to adopt special needs children. Further, 22 respondents reported that there were 263 special needs children available for adoption. As well, 23 C.A.S.'s reported that 223 special needs children were placed during 1986. Of these special needs children, four agencies placed over 50% of them.

Similarly, of the 34 respondents, 79.4% indicated an agency need for applicants to adopt children over five years of age. When further queried, 22 respondents revealed that 162 children over five years of age were available to adoptive parents during 1986. Of these, 112 were adopted during 1986. These data suggest that approximately 24.6% of the children over age five available to adoptive parents in 1986 were unable to be adopted at the time of study.

In regard to applicants to adopt sibling groups, 79.4% of the 34 respondents indicated that such a need existed. A total of 59 sibling groups as reported by 23 respondents
Table 4

Number of Children Available versus Adopted in Special Group Categories at C.A.S.'s during 1986 (n=22-24)

<p>| Children in Special Group Categories | Children Available | | | Children Adopted | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>(per agency)</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>(per agency)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Special needs children</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Children over five</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sibling groups</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
were available to adoptive applicants. Similarly, 50 sibling groups were adopted during 1986. Of these sibling groups, 3 out of 24 respondents placed 56% of the sibling groups in 1986.

When respondents were queried as to whether or not any previously adopted children were admitted to the care of their agency in 1986, it was found that 78.8% (n=24) of the respondents indicated that some previously adopted children had been admitted to care. Further, it was reported that 60 children who were previously adopted were admitted to care by 25 agencies. Such admissions ranged between 1-21 (X=6.6, S.D.=8.0) per agency. As well, these admissions were reported to have been from 57 adoptive families (X=5.7, S.D.=7.4).

In addition, it was found that 33 C.A.S.'s had a total of 48 single person adoptive applicants during 1986. Single person adoptive applicants ranged between 0-11 (X=1.45, S.D.=2.1) per agency. Sixty percent of these single parent adoptive applicants originated from six agencies. Further, it was found that only six agencies placed a total of 10 children with single parents during 1986. The maximum number of children placed with single parent adoptive applicants per agency equalled two.
Discussion of agency related information. Upon a first analysis of the data related to agency information, a typical organizational reality appeared to exist within this sample. More specifically, it was assumed that large agencies had larger adoption personnel complements which placed more children in special needs and sibling group categories compared to smaller agencies, and this was the case for the most part. Further, adoption complements at C.A.S.śs varied significantly depending on their budgets and populations served. As well, agency size seemed directly related to the child populations served. Similarly, adoption departments appeared to vary directly to the population served. It was noteworthy that a few large agencies significantly inflated the mean number of staff positions per agency and adoption activities.

However, upon a closer examination of the data a somewhat surprising finding was revealed. Specifically, the previous linear thinking in reality had been somewhat misleading because in actuality some small agencies had adoption personnel complements and adoption activities which exceeded those of some of the larger agencies. In this regard, the size of an adoption department and the number of adoption activities per agency varies with individual agency needs and does not necessarily reflect the number of workers required to perform the required
tasks. Further, this finding would tend to support the fact that individual C.A.S.'s operate in a fairly independent and autonomous manner.

In regard to homestudies approved, it was surprising that 84.4% of all homestudies conducted in 1986 were approved. By contrast, Bradley (1966) found that only 54% of the couples (U.S.A.) homestudied were approved in her study. This discrepancy may be explained by a number of reasons. One may be the fact that many agencies prior to the homestudy process hold information meetings which may screen some of those applicants from further study who may not have been approved.

The findings related to placement activities (Table 4) revealed that infant placements comprised less that 50% of the total adoption placements. This was not unusual considering the lack of infants available for placement and the trend toward placing more special needs children. Further, the data appears to reflect a trend of a decreasing number of infants being placed through C.A.S.'s. More specifically, the O.A.C.A.S. (1973) reported that in 1972, a total of 2000 infants were adopted whereas this sample revealed that only 224 infants were adopted. Although this sample did not include all C.A.S.'s it seems to reflect the decreasing current trend.

As well, the data suggested an increased activity level
In Table 5, a cutting point of $\bar{x} \geq 3$ was used to determine which factors were considered of greater importance. The most important factor revealed by the data ("acceptance of individual differences") illustrated that 76.5% of the sample or 26 senior adoption workers indicated this factor to be "extremely important". Of the five most important factors revealed by the data (in Table 5) over 67.5% viewed such factors to be "extremely important". With one exception, all ratings of these factors were either "very important" or "extremely important".

Of the remaining four "important" factors, responses varied from "somewhat important" to "extremely important". Over 70% of the respondents viewed such factors as either "important", "very important" or "extremely important".

Regarding factors (in Table 5) considered to be of lesser importance in assessing adoptive applicants ($\bar{x} < 3$), responses varied considerably with most of the factors in this lesser importance grouping. For example, "a safe and healthy neighbourhood" was viewed by three adoption workers as "not important" whereas two adoption workers viewed this factor to be "extremely important". Similar findings were revealed for the factors of "cultural similarities" and the "applicants location not being released to the natural parents". Furthermore, when all these factors were
Table 5

The Ranked Mean Scores as Reported by Adoption Workers of the Degree of Importance of Factors Used in Assessing Adoptive Applicants (n=34)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Factors</th>
<th>Degrees of Importance*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean (X)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Acceptance of individual differences</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Openness &quot;to tell&quot; of adoption</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Communication skills of applicants</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Family stability in general</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Problem-solving abilities of applicants</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The applicants' motivation to adopt</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. A safe and healthy residence</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The applicants' character references</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Racial similarities</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Leisure time activities of applicants</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Applicants location not disclosed to natural parents</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Cultural similarities</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. A safe and healthy neighbourhood</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Religion</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Religious commitment</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Distance to parks and recreation</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Distance to schools</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Matching physical resemblance</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Distance to public transportation</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *The Importance score on the Assessment factors ranged from '1=not important' to '5=extremely important'.

in the placement of special needs children. This trend seemed related to the present C.A.S. commitment to attempt to place all children available for adoption.

Based on an analysis of these data, one may speculate that characteristics of this sample may be generalizable to other agencies involved in adoption activities. As well, agencies participating in this sample vary significantly with respect to personnel complements and adoption activities seemingly related to the apparent needs of the respective agency. Furthermore, adoption workers approved a high percentage of homestudies conducted in this sample. Also, consistent with present trends, infant placements at C.A.S.'s were decreasing with greater efforts focussed on the placement of special needs children.

III Assessment of Criteria for Adoption Data

The following sub-section is divided into two parts which include: 1) selected assessment factor ratings; and 2) additional assessment factors and related information.

Selected assessment factor ratings. Nineteen factors were scrutinized to assess the suitability of adoptive applicants and were scored from "1=not important" to "5=extremely important". The mean scores of these assessment factors ranked in descending order are reported
analysed collectively it was revealed that there was virtually no difference in the cumulative mean responses for the "not important" rating and the "important" rating. Specifically, the cumulative mean responses for the "not important" rating was 94 as compared to 93 for the "important" rating.

Conversely, there was some agreement with respect to the factors "proximal distances to school and public transportation" and "matching physical resemblance between applicant and child", as 68% of the respondents did not consider these factors to be "important".

Additional assessment factors and related information. A total of 85.3% of the sample indicated that "communications" could be "somewhat" assessed during a homestudy, whereas the remainder (14.7%) indicated that "communications" could be assessed "without question".

It was also found that 50% of the sample had no preference regarding "family composition" with regard to the placement of infants with adoptive families. Another finding was that 20.6% of the sample preferred to place infants with families, who had no other children. Further, the sample reported that the "preferred mode of behavioral control for children" should be "flexible".

When the sample was queried as to the "preferred
employment status of mothers seeking infant adoptions", it was found that 50% indicated that it did not matter. Upon further investigation, it was revealed that 34.4% of the respondents preferred that the mother "not be employed".

Further, 100% of the sample indicated that the "preferred placement of children" was with applicants, who were married. It was also found that the "biological family plays a significant role in the selection of the placement for an infant with adoptive parents". For example, the majority of respondents (55%) indicated that the biological family was involved "most of the time" in placements. Further, 11.8% of the respondents involved the biological parents "all of the time" in such placements.

Results varied regarding whether or not "applicants had a good record with the police" and "whether or not verification of such information existed". More specifically, 20.6% of the sample reported that this was conducted "none of the time" and 64.7% reported "all of the time".

Additional factors used in the assessment of adoptive applicants in C.A.S.'s during 1986 are indicated in relative percentages in Table 6.

Upon examination of the data with respect to whether or not "families with children were given the same consideration of childless couples to adopt", it was found
Table 6

Additional Factors Used in the Assessment of Adoptive Applicants in C.A.S.'s in 1986 (n=19-34)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional Factors Used in the Assessment of Adoptive Applicants</th>
<th>Number of Times Used by Workers (f)</th>
<th>Relative Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Proof of physical and mental health</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>96.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Families with natural or adopted children considered equally to childless couples</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>81.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Existence of at home requirement</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>73.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Fertility testing verified</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>68.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Fertility testing a prerequisite to the adoption of infants</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Residency requirement (e.g. to live in area for specified period)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
that three respondents indicated that families with children were not considered for infants. Other differences reported were: 1) the requests of the biological parents were to be considered; and, 2) infants would not be placed if more than two children were already in the family unit.

Respondents were asked, based on their experiences, to indicate the "ideal characteristics of adoptive applicants" in various areas, which are traditionally considered by adoption workers while assessing adoptive applicants. These data are reported in Table 7.

Further data analyses revealed that the most frequent age for females to adopt infants was 30 years of age (8 respondents), whereas 7 respondents reported that 33 years of age was the most ideal for males to adopt infants. In regard to "ideal ages for males to adopt infants", 50% of the respondents perceived the ideal range to be between 28-32 years of age, whereas the remainder perceived the ideal range to be between 33-38 years of age. Similarly, with respect to females, 45.4% of the respondents viewed the ideal range to be between 28-31 years of age whereas, the remainder perceived the 32-35 age range to be the "ideal for females to adopt infants".

With respect to "ideal ages for males and females to adopt older children", it was found that 33.3% of the
Table 7

The Perceived Ideal Characteristics of Adoptive Applicants as Reported by Adoption Workers (n=22-27)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideal Characteristics</th>
<th>Range High</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Mean (x̄)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Age for females to adopt infants</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Age for males to adopt infants</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Age for females to adopt older children</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Age for males to adopt older children</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Preferred length of applicant's marriage</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Minimal length of applicant's marriage</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
respondents viewed 35 years of age to be the most ideal for females, whereas 28.6% of the respondents viewed 35 years of age to be the most ideal for males. The remaining respondents were generally divided equally within the reported age ranges for both males and females to adopt older children. More specifically, responses varied significantly and equally amongst the reported age ranges for males and females to adopt older children.

Respondents were asked to indicate the "preferred length of an applicant's marriage" and the "minimal length of the applicants marriage". Responses varied quite significantly regarding their preferences. More specifically, the data revealed the following regarding the applicants' preferred length of marriage: 1) 26.1% preferred 2 years of marriage; 2) 21.7% preferred 3 years of marriage; 3) 17.4% preferred 4 years of marriage; 4) 26.1% preferred 5 years of marriage; and, 5) 4.3% preferred marriages of 7 and 8 years duration respectively. Furthermore, the data revealed the following with respect to the "minimal length of an applicant's marriage": 1) 3.7% reported 0 years; 2) 11.1% reported 1 year; 3) 48.1% reported 2 years; and, 4) 37% reported 3 years.

Additional data not revealed in Table 7 related to "the ideal levels of education for male and female adoptive applicants", "size of adoptive applicant's family" and
"minimal total family income for the adoptive applicants". The number of respondents in these areas varied significantly ($n=7-17$). Out of 17 respondents, 76.5% perceived the "ideal level of education for females adopting" to be at least grade twelve. The remaining respondents perceived the "ideal level of education for females adopting" to exist from grade eight to grade thirteen, depending on the respondent. Furthermore, 68.8% ($n=16$) perceived the "ideal level of education for males to adopt" to be at least grade twelve. The remaining responses varied between grade eight and grade thirteen, depending on the respondent.

With respect to the "size of the adoptive applicant's family" the data revealed the following: 1) 42.9% perceived the ideal size to be three members; 2) 42.9% perceived the ideal size to be four members; and, 3) 14.3% perceived the ideal size to be five family members. In addition, it was found that the "minimal total family income for adoptive applicants" was perceived to range between ten and thirty thousand dollars, depending on the respondent ($n=9$). Further analyses revealed an average income of $24,300 dollars as the "minimal amount of total family income" for adoptive applicants. Also, the majority of the respondents (66.6%) perceived the "minimal total family income" for adoptive applicants to be 25 thousand dollars or more.
Discussion of assessment criteria. In reviewing the data from Table 5, it seemed that for the most part, adoption workers perceived certain factors as being important in the assessment of adoptive applicants. Previous researchers (Brown, 1951; Aronson, 1955; Brieland, 1959; Bradley, 1966; CWLA, 1978; COMSOC, 1983; Costin, 1984) have indicated that similar factors were relevant in the assessment of adoptive applicants. However, previous studies made no attempt to determine the relative importance of such factors used to assess adoptive applicants. Moreover, in this study, those areas agreed upon universally as being "important" included: 1) "acceptance of individual differences"; 2) "openness to tell of adoption"; 3) "communication skills of applicants"; 4) "family stability in general"; 5) "problem-solving abilities of the applicants"; and, 6) "the applicant's motivation to adopt". It was not surprising, given the consistently high importance rankings in these areas that there existed little variability in these responses.

However, when the data regarding the remaining factors was examined, one was reminded of the great within group variability, as some adoption workers viewed certain factors as "important" while others viewed such factors as "not important". Despite arguments such as individual worker autonomy, adoption population characteristics and
regional differences that may account for discrepancies, these data suggest the need for adoption workers to be more consistent in rendering such important professional opinions. Further, it was interesting to note that those factors perceived to be the most difficult to assess by previous researchers (Davis & Bouck, 1955; Fanshel, 1962; Bradley, 1966) were found to be factors which received the highest importance rankings in this study. Again, this finding reiterated the importance of consistency in the assessment of adoptive applicants.

As well, although speculative, the tremendous within group variability regarding certain factors used to assess adoptive applicants may explain why some applicants were approved by some adoption workers and not approved by others. This premise would be consistent with the findings of Brown and Brieland (1975), who indicated that the same adoptive applicants approved by one adoption worker were not approved by another. As well, an applicant might be accepted at one agency and rejected at another. Moreover, these differences may be related to the specific training received by the individual adoption worker, which was found to be quite diversified in the present study.

Generally, findings regarding "additional assessment factors and related information" were not surprising. Most of these findings were consistent with those of previous
researchers (Brieland, 1966; Goodacre, 1966; Costin, 1984). For example, with regard to length of marriage, this study found that the preferred period was 2-8 years, whereas a previous researcher (Bradley, 1966) found 3-7 years to be the preferred length of the adoptive applicant's marriage. There still remains a wide variation in preference as to marital duration among those who are selecting adoptive applicants. It was interesting to note, as revealed in Table 6, that a "residency requirement" was not deemed as a factor of "importance", when selecting adoptive applicants, given the autonomous nature of agencies. This may be explained by the fact that all agencies are committed to the placement of all available children with adoptive applicants, irrespective of their community roots.

Further examples of similar within group variability include the following factors: 1) "a good record with the police and verification of such"; 2) "role of the biological parent in placement"; 3) "age of males and females to adopt"; 4) "size of the adoptive applicant's family"; 5) "employment status of the mother"; and, 6) "family composition". Once again, such findings suggest the need for adoption workers to be more consistent in their considerations of factors used to assess the suitability of adoptive applicants.
Conversely, the data revealed consistency of response regarding the following factors: 1) "communication assessment"; 2) "marital status"; 3) "proof of physical and mental health"; 4) "similar consideration, irrespective of present family composition"; and, 5) "the existence of an "at home" requirement".

When respondents were queried as to ideal characteristics of adoptive applicants (see Table 7), there was a similar varied response rate, depending on the characteristics questioned. Narrative comments made on the questionnaire might explain why some characteristics solicited a low response rate. More specifically, respondents commented that ideal characteristics were not relevant in the selecting of adoptive applicants, as each placement was unique depending on the individual needs of the child and not the applicant. Furthermore, consistent with previous studies (Bradley, 1966; Brown & Brieland, 1975), it was found that various characteristics of adoptive applicants were contingent upon the preferences of individual adoption workers. For example, the ideal age for males and females to adopt may depend on the individual preference of the adoption worker. As well, other factors such as stability and maturity may be considered, when assessing the age of the applicants.

Based on the analyses of these assessment criteria
data, it would seem possible to speculate that characteristics of this sample may be generalizeable to other agencies involved in adoption placements. Generally, it was found that a few specific factors used to assess adoptive applicants were viewed by all adoption workers to be "important", whereas most other factors revealed much within group variability ranging from "not important" to "extremely important". Also, this variability of response was found to exist frequently in those additional areas used to assess adoptive applicants. In this regard, it would seem that such differences may be related to the individual adoption worker's background and their respective training experiences. As previously discussed, this lack of consistency provokes many questions, as to those factors used to assess adoptive applicants.

IV Policy and Procedure Information

The extent of policy and procedural development regarding adoption, as reported by the study sample is revealed in Table 8.

It was found that 93.9% of the respondents indicated the existence of "written" or "written and board approved" policies and procedures regarding adoption. The data also revealed that only two respondents indicated that there were no "written" policies and procedures on adoption
Table 8
C.A.S. Policies and Procedures Regarding Adoption as Reported by the Study Sample (n=31-33)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent of Policy and Procedure</th>
<th>Percentage of Agencies Having Such Policies and Procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regarding Adoption (n=33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written board approved</td>
<td>84.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwritten</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No policy and procedure</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
within their respective agencies.

With respect to policies and procedures regarding the selection of applicants from the waiting list, the data revealed that 97% of the agencies had some form of such policies and procedures. However, it was found that only 53.2% of these agencies had formal "written board approved" or "written" policies and procedures regarding the selection of applicants from the waiting list.

Policy and procedures pertaining to factors used to assess adoptive applicants was found to be quite extensive. More specifically, 81.8% of the respondents reported the existence of formal "written board approved" or "written" policies and procedures regarding factors used to assess adoptive applicants.

With respect to policies and procedures regarding maintaining agency contact with those applicants on the waiting list, it was found that only 29.1% of the respondents had "written board approved" or "written" policies and procedures. Furthermore, 71% of the respondents reported no formal policies and procedures regarding maintaining agency contact with those applicants on the waiting list.

In regard to the training of adoptive applicants, it was found that the majority of the respondents (56.3%) had
no formal "written" or no policies and procedures. Furthermore, the other respondents (43.7%) reported that their agencies had either "written board approved" or "written" policies and procedures regarding the training of adoptive applicants.

**Discussion of policy and procedure information.** The overall picture with respect to the extent of policy and procedure development pertaining to adoption as revealed by these data indicated the extensive existence of "written board approved" policies and procedures with respect to adoption. However, such overwhelming approval was not the rule, particularly when more specific areas of policy and procedure development were perused.

It was not surprising that a majority of the respondents indicated the existence of "written board approved" policies and procedures regarding adoption, given C.A.S.'s are mandated under The Child and Family Services Act (1984) to provide adoption services to the public of the province of Ontario. Similarly, it was not surprising that the majority of the respondents reported the existence of policies and procedures used to assess adoptive applicants. In this regard, extensive guidelines have existed regarding factors to be considered to assess adoptive applicants (CWLA, 1978; COMSOC, 1983, 1985) for
several years.

As well, the lack of "written" policies and procedures regarding the selection of applicants from the waiting list and maintaining contact with those on the waiting list may be related to current trends in the adoption field. That is, prior to the mid 1970s, agencies were not confronted with lengthy waiting lists, therefore, such issues have only recently become relevant. Although speculative, this deficit of policy and procedure in these areas may be attributed to either a lack of recognition of these issues as problematic, and/or a low priority ranking compared to other issues in the adoption field.

Also, the training of adoptive applicants has recently become more apparent due to the increased numbers of special needs children available to applicants. In this regard, agencies are actively seeking applicants who may be interested in adopting special needs children. As the training of adoptive applicants was a relatively current issue in the adoption field, it was not surprising at the lack of policy and procedure development revealed in these data.

Based on these results, it would seem that these findings could be generalizeable to other C.A.S.'s in Ontario. Furthermore, there appears to exist extensive "written board approved" or "written" policies and
procedures regarding adoption and factors used to assess adoptive applicants in the majority of C.A.S.'s included in this sample. Contrastingly, it would appear that formal "written board approved" or "written" policies and procedures regarding selection of applicants from the waiting list, maintaining agency contact with those on the waiting list and the training of adoptive applicants were limited amongst the C.A.S.'s participating in this study.

V Waiting List Data and Other Information

Table 9 illustrates the number of years adoptive applicants were on the waiting list.

In addition to these data (in Table 9), 54.5% of the respondents waited five or more years to be homestudied. Eight of the respondents reported that waits of five years were typical at their agencies prior to homestudy. Further, 39.4% of the respondents reported waiting three years or less prior to homestudy.

Only 41.4% of the sample reported that applicants who adopted infants in 1986 waited an average of four years or less, whereas 21.7% of the respondents reported that applicants waited in excess of five years to adopt. Further, the most frequent length of time waiting to adopt infants was 4.5 years (as reported by six respondents).

As well, it was found that the average time spent
Table 9

Number of Years on the Waiting List for Adoptive Applicants as Reported by the Study Sample of C.A.S. Adoption Workers (n=29-33)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Wait</th>
<th>Number of Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Longest wait for an applicant to be homestudied</td>
<td>9 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Average wait of those adopting infants in 1986</td>
<td>8 1.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Average wait to adopt infants after completion of homestudy</td>
<td>6 .41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
waiting to adopt infants after the completion of the homestudy varied extensively amongst the respondents. The majority of the respondents (58.1%) reported this time to be two years or less, whereas only 12.9% of the respondents indicated waits of four years or more to adopt infants after the completion of the homestudy. The most frequent waiting periods (as reported by five respondents each) were 1.5 years and 2 years, respectively.

As well, the data revealed that 2314 (X=72.3, S.D.=72.4) adoptive applicants awaited homestudies. Applicants on the waiting list ranged between 0-300. In this regard, 50% of the respondents reported waiting lists ranging from 0-38 applicants, whereas the remaining respondents reported waiting lists ranging from 50-300 applicants.

With respect to agencies accepting applications to adopt "healthy Caucasian" infants, it was found that 73.5% of the respondents continued to accept such applications. As well, 70.6% of the respondents reported that their agencies hold group information meetings for new adoption inquiries, prior to the acceptance of a formal application. Further, 69.7% of the respondents indicated that eligible applicants prior to the acceptance of a formal application were interviewed by an adoption worker.

Table 10 provides additional information regarding
Table 10

Additional Information Regarding Those Adoptive Applicants on the Waiting List as Reported by the Study Sample of C.A.S. Adoption Workers (n=32-33)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional Information Regarding those Applicants on the Waiting List</th>
<th>Number of Times Used by Workers (f)</th>
<th>Relative Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Interest in fostering is asked prior to adoption</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>78.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Follow-up exists with those applicants waiting to be homestudied</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>60.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Contact prior to homestudy exists when initiated by the applicant</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Those waiting to be homestudied are provided adequate follow-up services</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The selection of an applicant from the waiting list is based on date of application</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
those adoptive applicants on the waiting lists of C.A.S.'s that participated in this study.

As reflected from the data in Table 10, the majority of agencies in this sample asked if adoptive applicants were interested in becoming foster parents, prior to adoption.

When respondents were queried as to follow-up services for those applicants waiting to be homestudied, it was found upon further examination of the data that such follow-up included the following: 1) telephone contacts; 2) yearly group meetings; 3) newsletters; 4) group preparation; 5) referrals to support group; 6) client requested to follow-up every six months; 7) provision of reading materials; 8) update meetings; 9) visual presentation at the agency; and, 10) adoption training prior to homestudy. Out of these various follow-up options, only telephone contacts and newsletters were reported with any degree of frequency. More specifically, 45% of the respondents indicated that telephone contacts were the major form of follow-up whereas, 20% stated that newsletters were used to follow-up with those applicants waiting to be homestudied.

Those respondents (62.5%) who stated that their agencies did not provide adequate follow-up services to applicants waiting to be homestudied suggested that the following services would be important to consider: 1)
newsletters every six months; 2) telephone contacts; 3) quarterly updates; 4) informed after three years regarding the likelihood to adopt; 5) an initial interview; 6) workshops; and, 7) support groups. Of these suggestions, 73.7% of the respondents indicated that some form of newsletter be given to those on the waiting list on an ongoing basis.

A large majority of the respondents (93.8%) indicated a variety of factors to consider when selecting applicants from the waiting list to be homestudied. These factors included: 1) flexibility of acceptance; 2) age of applicants; 3) race of applicants; 4) location of applicants; 5) needs of children available; 6) age of child desired; 7) type of child requested; 8) international adoption; 9) ages of children in family; 10) religion; 11) child care experiences; 12) applicant's decision to wait for a period of time; and, 13) fostering with a view to adopt. Out of these factors, the most prevalent response was the flexibility of acceptance consideration as reported by 73.3% of the study sample. Other factors which received more than token recognition included: 1) needs of children available (20% of the respondents; and, 2) age of child desired (16.6% of the respondents).

When queried, 79.4% of the respondents indicated that their agencies provided post-adoption counselling.
services. With respect to these post-adoption counselling services, it was found that 80% of the respondents indicated that such services were available from an adoption service worker. As well, it was revealed that 46.4% of the respondents indicated that such post-adoption services included a re-admission to care by the adoption service worker. Also, 60.6% of the respondents indicated that their agencies provided group training for adoptive applicants for special needs children.

Discussion of waiting list data and other information. With respect to waiting periods to adopt infants, it was not surprising that adoptive applicants averaged over four years. Comparatively, Brieland (1959) found that applicants during the 1950s waited 3-24 months to adopt infants. The present findings are consistent with the trend that the number of infants available for adoption is decreasing and waiting periods at C.A.S.'s are increasing. As we previously mentioned, unwed mothers are keeping their children and others are choosing private agencies to arrange adoptions.

Further, it was not surprising that variations existed with respect to the length of the waiting and the average length of wait to adopt. These findings may be attributed to the size of the agency involved and individually based.
C.A.S. policies and procedures pertaining to the waiting list. More specifically, some agencies are no longer taking applications to adopt healthy Caucasian infants. As well, some agencies have a list of adoptive applicants and another list of those waiting for placement. Further, the data revealed that an average ($\bar{x}$) of 72.3 applicants per agency were waiting to be homestudied. In this regard, a few of the larger agencies with rather lengthy waiting lists inflated significantly the number of applicants waiting to be homestudied.

In reviewing the findings related to follow-up services for adoptive applicants waiting to be homestudied, it was found that adoption service workers suggested that additional services were required. This finding was expected as the literature thus far has not addressed the waiting list issue and C.A.S.'s have only begun to recognize this area as a service issue.

From the analyses of the waiting list data and other information, it would seem that such findings would be generalizable to other C.A.S.'s with applicants waiting to adopt. Finally, waiting periods to adopt infants are lengthy. As well, it was found that agencies suggested additional follow-up services to those applicants waiting to be homestudied.
VI Other Statistical Analyses

Following the analyses of the descriptive data, specific trends in these data were used to assess relationships between variables which could be statistically tested. Three tests were used to scrutinize the data at this level to determine the strength of association between variables. These tests were: 1) the Pearson Product Moment (PPM) correlation coefficient (r); 2) chi-square ($\chi^2$); and, 3) Fisher's exact test ($\chi$). Significant variables from the socio-demographics, agency related information, assessment criteria, policy and procedure, and waiting list sections were correlated with each other. Although many variables were tested, only those that provided meaningful and significant results will be outlined.

Relationship between size of agency and other variables. Figure 2 schematically depicts the associations between agency size and other variables. The study findings show that the larger the total staff of an agency the larger the adoption staff of the agency ($r=.86, p<.05, n=28$). The size of the adoption staff correlated significantly with the number of children available to adopt in the following categories: 1) special needs ($r=.89, p<.05, n=19$); and, 2) children over five years
Figure 2. Relationship between the size of agency and other selected and significant variables.
\( r = .66, \ p < .05, \ n = 19 \) indicating that the larger the adoption staff the more children available to adopt in those categories. As well, the larger an agency's staff, the more children were adopted in the following categories:

1) children over five years \( (r = .58, \ p < .05, \ n = 21) \); and,

2) sibling groups \( (r = .68, \ p < .05, \ n = 23) \). Furthermore, significant correlations existed between the number of children available in the various categories with the number of children adopted in those categories.

Specifically, the more children available in each category resulted in more children being adopted in each category.

The findings of the correlations between these variables were as follows: 1) special needs available with special needs adopted \( (r = .85, \ p < .05, \ n = 22) \); 2) children over five years available with children over five years adopted \( (r = .65, \ p < .05, \ n = 21) \); and, 3) sibling groups available with sibling groups adopted \( (r = .63, \ p < .05, \ n = 23) \).

Relationship between age of adoption worker and other variables. These relationships are schematically represented in Figure 3. Significant correlations were found to exist between the age of adoption workers and the variables: 1) "distance to parks and recreation"; 2) "matching physical resemblance"; 3) "problem solving abilities"; and, 4) "the age of males to adopt". The
Figure 3. Relationship between the age of adoption worker and other selected variables.
findings of the correlations between these variables were as follows: 1) "age of adoption workers with distance to parks and recreation" \( (r = .41, p < .05, n = 33) \); 2) "age of adoption workers with matching physical resemblance" \( (r = .28, p < .05, n = 33) \); 3) "age of adoption workers with problem solving abilities" \( (r = .29, p < .05, n = 33) \); and, 4) "age of adoption workers with age of males to adopt" \( (r = .46, p < .05, n = 22) \). These findings suggested that the older the adoption worker, the more important were the above variables with respect to the assessment of adoptive applicants.

**Relationship between adoption experience and other variables.** Figure 4 depicts these relationships schematically. Significant correlations existed between adoption experience and the following variables: 1) "leisure time activities"; 2) "age of females to adopt older children"; and, 3) "age of males to adopt older children". The findings of the correlations between these variables were: 1) "adoption experience with leisure time activities" \( (r = .36, p < .05, n = 33) \); 2) "adoption experience with age of females to adopt older children" \( (r = .35, p < .10, n = 21) \); and, 3) "adoption experience with age of males to adopt older children" \( (r = .34, p < .10, n = 21) \). These associations indicated that the longer an adoption worker
Figure 4. Relationship between adoption worker experience and other variables.

Adoption worker experience

Leisure time activities

Age of females to adopt older children

Age of males to adopt older children
was in the field the greater the importance of such variables. Also, it was indicated that the greater the amount of experience of the adoption worker, the older the applicant (male or female) to adopt older children. As well, it appears that the longer period of time in adoption services, the more likely "fertility testing will be checked by a medical note, certificate or telephone call" (Fisher's Exact Test, $p < .05, n=18$).

**Relationship between level of education and matching physical resemblance.** Findings of the study indicated that level of education correlated with matching physical resemblance ($x^2 = 5.95$, 2 d.f., $p < .05$, $n=20$). This association indicated that B.S.W.'s found the factor of matching physical resemblance of greater importance than did the M.S.W.'s.

**Discussion of these variable relationships.** As was expected, the findings revealed that large agencies have more adoption staff and more children available to be placed. As well, these larger agencies place more children. It was not surprising that there was no relationship between the size of the agency and the availability of sibling groups giving the small number of sibling groups reported to be available for adoption.
From the findings, it is apparent that specific variables correlated significantly with the age of the adoption worker in this study. More specifically, the older the respondent, the more importance was placed on the following variables: 1) "distance to parks and recreation"; 2) "matching physical resemblance"; 3) "problem solving abilities"; and, 4) "age of males to adopt". Although speculative, one could surmise that with maturity (age) those factors become more relevant to the adoption worker.

The above findings illustrated significant relationships on the amount of adoption experience with respect to "leisure time activities", "age of females to adopt older children" and "age of males to adopt older children". This was not surprising, given those factors are age related. More specifically, one may deduce from this study that as age and experience increases, the sensitivity to those factors increases and subsequently was considered to be of greater importance. A somewhat surprising relationship associated with adoption experience was the "validation of fertility testing", which was interpreted as the longer time in adoption services, the more likely that validation of fertility testing would be requested. A possible explanation of this finding might be related to age. In this regard, one might speculate that
older and experienced workers are more cautious, therefore more likely to request "validation of fertility testing". Also, it may be related to whether or not the agency has an existing policy on the "validation of fertility testing".

Given such findings, it may be important to some adoptive applicants to avoid older and experienced adoption workers. More specifically, this study suggests that the assessment of adoptive applicants with respect to the above mentioned factors is influenced by the age and experience of the adoption worker. Based on these data, it is unknown whether or not the assessment of these factors significantly influence the outcome of the adoption homestudy. However, it would certainly seem worthy of further investigation to clarify this issue, given the importance of such assessments to both adoptive applicants and adoptees.

Given the finding that "matching physical resemblance with adoptive applicants" was relatively unimportant in the selection process, it was somewhat surprising that B.S.W.'s found this factor to be of more importance than M.S.W.'s. Although speculative, it may be with increased formal education, the respondents viewed this factor to be of lesser importance. It is important to note that the primary focus of placement is meeting the needs of the child. "Matching physical resemblance" becomes of minor
significance when there are numerous special needs children available for adoption with few applicants.

Based on the findings from other statistical analyses, one might make the following observations: 1) large agencies have large adoption staffs with more children available to adopt and more adoptions completed compared to smaller agencies; 2) the more adoption experience of the respondents, the more important were "leisure time activities", and "ages of males and females to adopt older children"; 3) the older the adoption worker the more important were the factors regarding "distance to parks and recreation", "matching physical resemblance", "problem solving abilities" and "age of males to adopt" in the assessment of adoptive applicants.
CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions will be discussed according to: 1) conclusions related to the literature review; 2) conclusions related to the research questions; 3) other significant findings; 4) limitations of the study; and, 5) recommendations.

Conclusions Related to the Literature

The literature review (pp. 10-36) was divided into three main sections - the history of adoption practices, selection criteria used to assess adoptive applicants, and waiting lists. A discussion of each section follows.

The history of adoption practices. The literature on adoption prior to the twentieth century focused on the supply of children to secure heirs for childless couples and to provide labour during harvest. At the turn of the century this focus changed to the protection of children consistent with the development of the C.A.S. in Ontario. Adoption services were originally designed to meet the needs of children. Thus, the focus had shifted from supply to serving the best interests of children.

Prior to the 1970’s, adoption activities flourished in North America. Population increases, legislative changes,
the development of adoption resource exchanges and the availability of infants for adoption lead to this increase in adoption activity. However, during the 1970's, birth rates decreased and unwed mothers found it socially and financially feasible to keep their children. As a result, the number of infants available for adoption decreased dramatically and adoption activities shifted to the placement of special needs children. As well, waiting lists began to develop for the adoption of infants.

**Selection criteria used to assess adoptive applicants.**

Several factors considered useful in assessing adoptive applicant's were cited in the literature (CWLA, 1978; COMSOC, 1983). Although some attempts have been made to explain what these factors encompassed, there is much controversy over the objective measurement of these factors. Further, the literature demonstrated a lack of consistency in the assessment of adoptive applicants (i.e., some applicants were accepted by some adoption workers and rejected by others). The literature recommended that more objective measures be developed in order to assess such criteria, and that existing measurement assessments be utilized.

This study is the first known research that
systematically attempted to assess factors considered relevant in determining applicant suitability to adopt in Ontario's C.A.S.'s. This study also attempted to weigh and prioritize such criteria. As well, this study is the first known research that assessed whether or not C.A.S. policies and procedures reflected current trends in adoption practices.

Waiting lists. There has been no other published research study known to this author that specifically explored issues pertaining to those applicants waiting to adopt. To date, existing research found that waiting lists to adopt are growing and the length of time waiting to adopt has increased. Further, the research indicated that applicants who traditionally sought adoption services from C.A.S.'s were presently seeking services privately. Finally, some research indicated that applicants who waited for prolonged periods to adopt became frustrated with the host agency and became anxious when a child was eventually placed. Others may simply become disinterested and withdraw from the waiting list.
Conclusions Related to the Research Questions

The research questions (pp. 37-38) provided a conceptual and methodological framework for this study. The following general conclusions are derived from the data related to these questions.

1. The demographic characteristics of the sample were generalizeable. It was found that respondents (adoptive workers) were generally female, married, possessed B.S.W.'s or M.S.W.'s, were experienced in adoption services, averaged (x) 42 years of age and had received some form of adoption training. These characteristics were similar to those found by Bradley (1966).

2. The sample of adoption workers were involved in conducting homestudies, placing infants, special needs children and sibling groups.

3. The sample perceived that the following factors were viewed as the most important in the assessment of adoptive applicants: 1) acceptance of individual differences; 2) openness to tell of the adoption; 3) communication skills; 4) family stability; 5) problem-solving abilities; and, 6) the applicant's motivation to adopt.

4. The findings of this study revealed that adoption workers generally did not perceive the existence of an ideal set of characteristics of adoptive applicants with
respect to age, education, marriage length, family size and family income. However, some ideal parameters were reported for education, age, and marriage length. Additional narrative comments revealed that applicants were selected to meet the needs of a particular child, therefore, ideal characteristics in a general sense do not really exist.

5. The sample revealed that the majority of the host agencies had some form of written policies and procedures with respect to adoption, selection of applicants from the waiting list and factors used to assess adoptive applicants. Further, a minority of agencies had written policies and procedures with respect to maintaining contact with those on the waiting list and the training of adoptive applicants.

6. The findings also revealed that agencies had long waiting lists to adopt infants and that applicants waited several years to adopt infants. These findings were similar to current trends in adoption policies in C.A.S.'s. As well, this sample revealed that adoptive applicants on the waiting list required more follow-up services on a continuing and ongoing basis.
Conclusions from Other Significant Findings

Data analyses from the various sub-sections which included socio-demographic, agency related, assessment criteria, policy and procedure and waiting list information revealed these additional conclusions:

1. Agencies with large staff complements had more adoption workers who, subsequently had more children available for adoption (see Figure 2). Further, these agencies placed more children on the whole than did smaller agencies.

2. Infant placements comprised less than 50% of the total placements within the agencies sampled.

3. Adoption workers approved 92.4% of the homestudies conducted within the sample.

4. Although most adoption workers received some form of adoption training, this training was extremely diverse. Further, most adoption workers were trained by the previous worker on the job.

5. A large majority (70%) of the agencies in the sample had adoption staffs of less than 3 workers.

6. Those factors perceived to be most important in the assessment of adoptive applicants were universally agreed to be important by all respondents, whereas those factors viewed to be of lesser importance illustrated significant within group variability of response.
With regard to significant statistical correlations between tested variables, two main conclusions may be drawn. First, it appeared that the older the adoption worker the more important such factors as distance to parks and recreation, matching physical resemblance, problem-solving abilities and age of males to adopt were perceived to be. Second, it appeared that adoption workers who had more experience perceived leisure time activities and the age of male and female applicants to be more important in the assessment of adoptive applicants than did workers who had less total years experience in the adoption field.

Finally, thousands of couples are anxiously waiting to adopt infants to fulfill an emptiness in their lives. Unfortunately, the demand far exceeds the availability and unless alternatives are considered many couples are likely to remain childless. Given this reality, it would seem extremely important to accurately assess those applicants seeking adoption in order that the most appropriate applicants be secured.

In this regard, previous researchers (Bradley, 1966; Brown and Brieland, 1975) found that some differences exist between adoption workers regarding the approval or rejection of adoptive applicants. The present study was able to identify specifically some of these differences between adoption workers with respect to certain factors
utilized to assess adoptive applicants. This finding would seem to be of special interest to those applicants who were not approved by their adoption worker. Moreover, it would seem reasonable to conclude that another adoption worker might render a different decision.

Furthermore, the findings of this study revealed that adoption workers received diversified and non-specific training. Based on this, it would seem reasonable to suggest that specific training for adoption workers may be one way to increase the consistency of decision-making between adoption workers with respect to the assessment of adoptive applicants. Finally, any methods available that may enhance the reliability and validity of an assessment device should be utilized and more thoroughly investigated, if necessary.

Limitations

There are inherent problems with all social science research which have implications for this study. One relates to the accuracy of information from the respondents themselves which must be taken into account. This is particularly relevant in this study where several of the factors used to assess adoptive applicants were not clearly defined. In short, respondents may have interpreted such factors to mean something different than that which was
intended. Thus, importance ratings may have been subsequently affected for certain factors due to various interpretations.

The instrument used in this study to assess factors related to the selection of adoptive applicants had not been empirically tested for reliability and validity. This instrument seemed to be acceptable in this study, however, future scrutiny is required. As well, the lack of comparative samples made it difficult to substantiate the findings which would have provided more credence to the data in the present study.

Another methodological concern relates to the sample used in this study. The sample consisted of "senior" adoption workers in C.A.S.'s in Ontario. Thus, it is uncertain as to whether or not the findings are generalizeable to adoption workers in general at all C.A.S.'s. As well, all information from the respondents was weighted equally. Given the large discrepancy in the size of agencies, it may have been incorrect to weight responses equally. Also, these findings may be limited to C.A.S.'s versus private agencies.

The sample size was another limitation in this study. For instance, a larger sample may have produced other significant data which was overlooked by this study. Moreover, a larger sample may have resulted in sub-groups
which were large enough to be statistically significant or to have warranted further follow-up.

The variables used to assess adoptive applicants in this study were also quite complex. More specifically, several factors may be utilized in the consideration of a single variable. Therefore, it is unknown as to what factors are considered more relevant in the selection of adoptive applicants for particular variables.

Another shortcoming of the instrument used in this study to assess adoptive applicants was its restrictive nature. More specifically, respondents were not allowed the opportunity to provide their opinions on what they perceived was important to consider in the assessment of adoptive applicants. Questions tended to be fixed response in nature, which did not allow for the respondent's opinion in many situations. By restricting such responses, it is possible that factors of other importance may have been ignored in this study. Although factors used in this study were gleaned from reliable sources and the literature, it would be presumptuous to conclude the list to be exhaustive.

Finally, as this study is exploratory-descriptive in design, it was difficult not to accumulate an abundance of nominal level data. However, it is important to note that nominal level data is subjected to minimal statistical
analyses which detracts from its ultimate value. Thus, this data may have been supplemented with additional qualitative data in some instances. Future instrument development and refinement may include more opinion-type questions and more qualitative types of responses.

Recommendations

Additional research should be undertaken to corroborate this study's findings and to build upon the existing knowledge base. In this regard, the weighting of criteria used to assess adoptive applicants may assist adoption workers in selecting the most appropriate applicants for adoption. As well, further studies or replications could address the reliability and validity concerns of the instrumentation previously presented. Further, a comparative study of adoption workers in private agencies might prove helpful to ascertain whether or not these findings could be generalizeable to all adoption workers.

As this study and others have suggested, there is a need for the development of standardized and easily administered scales to assess adoptive applicants. Moreover, adoption workers need to utilize those instruments which have already been developed in order to accurately assess family functioning.

With regard to current adoption practices in C.A.S.'s
in Ontario, the following deficits in service delivery were identified by this study: training; follow-up services to those on the waiting list; and, policy and procedural development with respect to those on the waiting list.

As this study indicated, the quality of training related to adoption seems to be the issue, not the quantity of training. There appears to be no standardized comprehensive training package available for adoption workers in Ontario. Specific training at C.A.S.'s exists in other areas (e.g. abuse, adolescents, foster parents); however, presently no such training exists for adoption workers. Further, the standardization of training might result in fewer adoption breakdowns and fewer disturbed children, as has been suggested in the literature (Cohen & Westhues, 1988). As well, more comprehensive training may help identify those factors considered to be the most important in assessing adoptive applicants.

This was the first research undertaken related to current issues pertaining to those applicants waiting to adopt through C.A.S.'s. Foremost, this research suggests there is a need for more substantial follow-up with applicants on the waiting list. More specifically, applicants should receive newsletters or communication from the host agency periodically for update purposes. As many applicants wait for years to adopt, it is suggested that
April 25, 1987

Dear Local Director:

Please find enclosed a self-explanatory package of materials regarding my research undertaking entitled, "Survey of the Assessment of Adoptive Applicants". Would you kindly give this information to your adoption supervisor for distribution and completion?

Your co-operation in this matter is greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Robert J. Wade

Encl.

Robert J. Wade
M.S.W. Student
APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

SURVEY OF THE ASSESSMENT OF ADOPTIVE APPLICANTS

I, the undersigned, understand that the purpose of this research being conducted is to collect data and information about how Adoption Workers assess adoptive applicants during the homestudy process.

I understand that the information collected from me will only be used as a part of a larger amount of similar information provided by other equally anonymous individuals and reported in group numerical or statistical form only. Thus, confidentiality will be safeguarded.

I agree to voluntarily participate in the study by completing the attached questionnaire and returning it to the investigator no later than three (3) weeks after receiving it.

I understand that this survey is a research undertaking being supervised through the School of Social Work and the School of Graduate Studies at The University of Windsor.

DATE ___________________________ SIGNATURE ___________________________

NAME (PRINT) ___________________________

AGENCY ___________________________

** Please check (✓) if you wish to receive a copy of the results ( ).

** Please note that this sheet will be detached from the rest of the questionnaire upon receipt of the information.
* The purpose of this study is to examine a variety of factors used by adoption workers to assess applicants during the homestudy process.

* Please try to complete all of the questions to the best of your ability.

* The information will be held in STRICTEST CONFIDENCE and will be analyzed in group data form only.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION.

(A) GENERAL BACKGROUND

Please circle the appropriate response or fill in the blank.

(1) Year you were born ____________

(2) Sex - 1 = Male  2 = Female

(3) Marital Status - 1 = Single  2 = Married  3 = Divorced  4 = Widowed  5 = Common Law  6 = Separated

(4) Indicate the highest level of formal education received ________________________

(5) Do you have any adopted children? 1 = Yes  0 = No. If "yes", how many? (actual no.)

(6) How long have you been employed at this Agency? _______ years _______ months

(7) What is the total amount of successive time for one period you have been in Adoption Services at this Agency? _______ years _______ months

(8) What is the total length of time you have been involved in working in Adoption Services? _______ years _______ months

(9) Does your Agency need applicants to adopt children with special needs? (e.g. include all children exclusive of healthy caucasian infants under one year) 1 = Yes  0 = No

If "yes", how many special needs children were:

(a) available to adoptive parents during 1986 ____________

(b) adopted by parents during 1986 ____________

(10) Does your Agency need applicants to adopt children over five years of age? 1 = Yes  0 = No

If "yes", how many older children were:

(a) available to adoptive parents during 1986 ____________

(b) adopted by parents during 1986 ____________

(11) Does your Agency need applicants to adopt sibling groups? 1 = Yes  0 = No

If "yes", how many sibling groups were:

(a) available to adoptive parents during 1986 ____________

(b) adopted by parents during 1986 ____________
(12) Have you ever received any training in Adoption?  
I = Yes  0 = No  
If "yes", what form(s) did it take? ________________________________________________________________________

(13) Did you receive any training in Adoption during 1986?  
I = Yes  0 = No  
If "yes", what form(s) did it take? ________________________________________________________________________

(14) How were you trained for this Adoption position? ________________________________________________________________________

(15) What was the total staff complement of Adoption Workers in your Agency during 1986?  
(a) How many of these positions were part-time? ____________
(b) How many of these positions were full-time? ____________

(16) How many professional, clerical, and support staff positions existed in your Agency during 1986?  
____________________________________________________________________

(17) How many Social Work positions existed in your Agency during 1986?  
____________________________________________________________________

(18) To your knowledge, were any previously adopted children admitted to the care of your Agency in 1986?  
I = Yes  0 = No  
If "yes",  
(a) how many children? ________ (actual no.)
(b) from how many adoptive families? ________ (actual no.)

(19) During 1986  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Homestudies</th>
<th>Actual Number Completed</th>
<th>By Yourself</th>
<th>By Your Agency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Homestudies Approved</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homestudies Not Approved</td>
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(20) During 1986  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children under age 18 (including infants)</th>
<th>Actual Number Placed with Adoptive Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completed by Yourself</td>
<td>Completed by Your Agency</td>
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<td>-----------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infants under One Year</td>
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</table>
(B) ASSESSING ADOPTIVE APPLICANTS

The following are a list of factors used in assessing adoptive applicants. Please rate the degree of importance for each one on the scale from 1 to 5 for each of the factors listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Extremely Important</th>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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For example: Family stability in general.

(1) A safe and healthy neighbourhood.

(2) A safe and healthy residence.

(3) Leisure time activities of the applicants.

(4) Proximal distance to public transportation.

(5) Proximal distance to schools.

(6) Proximal distance to parks and recreation facilities.

(7) Racial similarities between applicants and child.

(8) Cultural similarities between applicants and child.

(9) The applicants' character references.

(10) Religion (e.g. matching applicants and children).

(11) Religious commitment of the applicants.

(12) Matching physical resemblance between applicants and child.

(13) Problem solving abilities of applicants.

(14) Family stability in general.

(15) Communication skills of applicants.

(16) Openness and comfortableness of applicants to "tell child" of the adoption.

(17) Ensurance that the applicants live in a location in which the child cannot be identified by the natural parents.

(18) The applicants' motivation to adopt.

(19) The applicants' acceptance of individual differences.

Please circle the one indicating your main preference.

(20) Do you really think you can assess communications accurately during a homestudy?

1 = Yes, without question
2 = to some extent
3 = not really

(21) Based on your experience, the preferred placement of children is with applicants who are:

1 = Single
2 = Married
3 = Divorced
4 = Common Law

(22) The biological family plays a significant role in the selection of the placement for an infant with adoptive parents:

1 = none of the time
2 = some of the time
3 = most of the time
4 = all of the time

(23) Applicants are required to have a good record with the police and this information is checked:

1 = none of the time
2 = some of the time
3 = most of the time
4 = all of the time
(24) When placing infants with adoptive families, the preference is with families who have:

1 = other infants  
2 = other children  
3 = no other infants

4 = no other children  
5 = other adoptive children  
6 = no preference regarding family makeup

(25) Based on your experience, the adoptive applicants' mode of behavioural control for children should be:

1 = strict  
2 = flexible  
3 = laissez-faire

4 = other (specify)

(26) Based on your experience, the ideal placement for infants is with mothers who are:

1 = employed part-time  
2 = employed full-time  
3 = not employed

4 = employment is not considered important.

(27) Adoptive applicants should reside for a period of time (at least one year) within the geographic area served by the Agency.  
1 = Yes 0 = No

(28) Applicants should provide proof of physical and mental health in order to undertake the responsibility of parenthood.  
1 = Yes 0 = No

(29) Does your Agency have an "at home" requirement for adoptive parents? (e.g., an adoptive parent is required to be at home with an infant full-time for six months)  
1 = Yes 0 = No

If "yes", what is that requirement?

(30) Is fertility testing a prerequisite for applicants seeking to adopt infants?  
1 = Yes 0 = No

If "yes", is this checked out by a medical note, certificate or phone call?  
1 = Yes 0 = No

(31) Do you feel that families with natural or adopted children are provided with the same consideration as childless couples who wish to adopt?  
1 = Yes 0 = No

If "no", how are they different?

(32) What was the total number of single person adoptive applicants your Agency had in 1986?  
_________

(33) How many children were adopted by single parents during 1986 in your Agency?  
(actual number)

(34) Based on your experience in Adoption Services what is:

(a) the ideal age for females to adopt infants (0 - 1 year)  
years to years

(b) the ideal age for males to adopt infants (0 - 1 year)  
years to years

(c) the ideal age for females to adopt older children (over five years)  
years to years

(d) the ideal age for males to adopt older children (over five years)  
years to years

(e) the ideal level of education for female adoptive applicants  
degree or grade level

(f) the ideal level of education for male adoptive applicants  
degree or grade level
(g) the preferred length of the applicants' marriage.  

(h) the minimal length of the applicants' marriage.  

(i) the ideal size of the adoptive applicants' family, including themselves.  

(j) the minimal total family income for the adoptive applicants.  

(C) POLICIES AND PROCEDURES REGARDING ADOPTION

Please check (✓) where applicable.

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(D) WAITING LIST INFORMATION

The following questions are designed to collect information about the waiting list of applicants to be homestudied in your Agency.

1. How many applicants do you have waiting for a homestudy by your Agency? (actual number) ____________

2. How many years has the longest applicant been waiting for a homestudy? ____________ years

3. Of the families in your Agency’s jurisdiction who adopted infants in 1986, what was the average length of time on your waiting list? ____________ years

4. What is the average length of time to wait to adopt an infant, after the homestudy has been completed? ____________ months ____________ years

5. Are you taking applications to adopt healthy caucasian infants presently? 1 = Yes 0 = No

6. Does your Agency provide group training for applicants for special needs children? 1 = Yes 0 = No

7. Does your Agency hold group information meetings for new adoption inquiries, prior to accepting formal application? 1 = Yes 0 = No

8. Are eligible applicants, prior to the acceptance of formal application, interviewed by an Adoption worker? 1 = Yes 0 = No

9. Does contact prior to homestudy exist only when initiated by the applicant? 1 = Yes 0 = No

10. Does your Agency have any follow-up with those applicants waiting to be homestudied?

If “yes”, what forms(s) might this take? (a) ____________ (b) ____________ (c) ____________

11. In your opinion, are applicants waiting to be homestudied provided adequate follow-up services by your Agency? 1 = Yes 0 = No

If “no”, what additional service(s) would you think are important? ____________

12. Does your Agency ask adoptive applicants if they are interested in becoming foster parents, prior to adoption? 1 = Yes 0 = No

13. Is the selection of applicants from the waiting list for homestudy solely based on the date of application? 1 = Yes 0 = No

If “no”, what other factors do you consider when selecting from the waiting list?

(a) ____________ (b) ____________ (c) ____________ (d) ____________

14. Does your Agency provide post-adoption counselling services? 1 = Yes 0 = No

(a) If “yes”, are these services available from the Adoption Service worker? 1 = Yes 0 = No

(b) Would these post-adoption services include re-admission to care by the Adoption Service worker? 1 = Yes 0 = No
Thank you very much for your co-operation. If you would like to make any further comments about this questionnaire or anything else, please do so in the space above. When you have finished, please return the questionnaire in the enclosed envelop.

April, 1987
APPENDIX B

COVER LETTERS
April 25, 1967

Dear Local Director:

Please find enclosed a self-explanatory package of materials regarding my research undertaking entitled, "Survey of the Assessment of Adoptive Applicants". Would you kindly give this information to your adoption supervisor for distribution and completion?

Your co-operation in this matter is greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

RJW:ms
Encl.

Robert J. Wade
M.S.W. Student
April 24, 1987

ATTENTION: Senior Adoption Worker

Dear Supervisor of Adoption Services:

I am a graduate student at The University of Windsor conducting a thesis in the Master of Social Work Program. I am currently on an administrative placement in the Foster Care and Adoption Department at The Roman Catholic Children's Aid Society for the County of Essex in Windsor, Ontario.

The purpose of this study is to examine how Adoption Workers assess applicants during the homestudy process. The major issues being studied relate to how applicants are evaluated during the homestudy process, Agency policies and procedures regarding adoption, and the applicants on the list awaiting homestudy. This study will contribute to a distinct research void in this area.

I am requesting that the Senior Adoption Worker in your Agency respond to the enclosed questionnaire. Their participation is requested because of their experience, knowledge and expertise they possess in the adoption field. Could you please ask them to help me in this matter by completing the enclosed questionnaire, which takes approximately thirty minutes to complete and returning it in the enclosed stamped envelop.

I assure you that all information will be treated with the strictest confidence in accordance with the protocols safeguarding human subject research. No individual will be singularly identified in the reporting of the findings, as all information will be analyzed in group data form only.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me through The School of Social Work at The University of Windsor at (519) 253-4243 or at The Roman Catholic Children's Aid Society for the County of Essex at (519) 256-4521. Your anticipated co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Robert J. Wade
M.S.W. Student

/cg
Attachments
APPENDIX C

FOLLOW-UP LETTER
May 20, 1987

ATTENTION: Senior Adoption Worker

Dear Local Director:

On April 24, 1987 a package of materials entitled, "Survey of the Assessment of Adoptive Applicants" was forwarded to your Agency. This is a reminder to return the questionnaire as soon as possible. If you have returned the questionnaire, please disregard this request.

I have been employed with the C.A.S. for eleven years. I realize work demands are heavy, however, I would ask that you take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire to the best of your ability to assist me in my research undertaking. Your input is needed as it is viewed to be an integral part of the total study. Once again, your participation is greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Robert J. Wade

Robert J. Wade
M.S.W. Student
REFERENCES


Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. (1968). Brief on adoption and foster care to the minister's advisory committee on foster care and adoption, 1-8.


VITA AUCTORIS

Robert J. Wade was born in Brockville, Ontario on March 9, 1951. In Brockville, he attended elementary school, and graduated from Thousand Islands Secondary School in 1971. He received an Honours Bachelor of Arts majoring in Psychology from the University of Western Ontario, in London in 1975. Following a five year employment period, as a caseworker with the Children's Aid Society in Brockville between 1976 and 1981, he returned to school, graduating with a B.S.W. from the University of Windsor in 1982. After graduation he returned to the Brockville C.A.S. and was a supervisor in the family services department until 1986.