

Program Transcript

Pain of Australia's Forced Adoption Policy – BBC News

Duncan Kennedy BBC News.

Duncan Kennedy: These women have suffered a lifetime of crushing pain. Still aching to be with the babies who were taken from them at birth up to forty years ago. Monica Jones's story is among the most heartbreaking, losing two babies to forced adoption. As an unmarried teenager in the nineteen sixties, she was subject to overwhelming pressure and shame to give up her son and daughter to meet the demand for adopted babies. Unknown to her and thousands of others the hospital records were stamped UB-minus shorthand for Unmarried Baby for Adoption.

Monica Jones: I always felt worse than a murderer because I believed for thirty years that I just dumped my kids, my babies. Just ... I could have been a good mother to them. You know, I've been a good mother to the two children I raised, I could have been a good mother to the two that I lost.

(Black and white documentary)

Commentator:last year it arranged 355 adoptions.

Duncan Kennedy: TV documentaries from the time picked up on the massive scale of adoptions but hospitals systematically hid the methods they used to coerce mothers into giving up their babies.
(Back to old documentary)

Interviewer: Do you think you are going to regret it later?

Pregnant Girl: I hope not anyhow, something I will just have to find out.

Duncan Kennedy: No-one quite knows the full extent of these forced adoptions but it's widely believed that around 300,000 women had their babies taken in this way over three long, painful decades.

This woman was one of those social workers who applied the pressure on the pregnant teenagers. She doesn't want to be identified but admits it was oppressive and illegal.

Social Worker: I was encouraged to be fairly coercive and to my shame I sometimes was. They were just seen as a nuisance, troublemakers, time wasters, just you know, sign your paperwork, have your baby and go - let's get the system rolling.

Duncan Kennedy: Maureen Melville was another of those subject to that unbearable pressure to give up her baby, she remains bitter.

Maureen Melville: They took all our babies - how dare they take our babies and just say they are born unto adopted parents.

Duncan Kennedy: Generations of women were punished for having sex outside of marriage and have spent their lives recoiling from its cruel consequences.

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