



Forced adoption doesn't seem to be a practice many are familiar with, but there seems to be growing concern around children being removed from parents for reasons such as 'future psychological or emotional harm' under section 31 of the Children Act 1989.

It's a term many parents find difficult to argue with as its name suggests the challenges parents face in disproving an event that may not take place in the future.

The assessment of harm, both psychological and emotional is based on historical findings of the parent(s) that indicate a more than likely chance that harm will indeed come to the child. In order to protect the child and prevent that from happening, children are removed from the home or from hospital shortly after birth and adopted.

The argument has been made that children who are raised in homes where there is domestic violence are seldom given up for adoption or indeed placed in foster care. The mother (normally the victim of violence in the home) when able to seek assistance and flee from the abuser, is given support for both herself and her children to give them some semblance of a normal life and a good chance of starting over.

Arguments have been made that if women who are in violent relationships and have children who have witnessed their mother being beaten, would this not constitute psychological or emotional harm? Would a child under these circumstances not be a candidate for adoption as opposed to a child yet to experience psychological or emotional harm?

It is an interesting question and a fair point.

The suspicion around social workers only wanting to 'take children away' has been a perception that has been present from time immemorial, but is that really the case?

Most certainly some PR needs to be done around this perception but what exactly?

Is there no way that early intervention can be given to parents to support them in being the kind of parents that would be able to bring a child into this world and keep it? Can emotional and psychological support be offered before a child is conceived? Are potential parents made aware that they run the risk of having their child adopted because they pose a risk or danger to their child psychologically or emotionally?

There are many questions that forced adoption raises, and some of the most pressing questions being:

- a. Are we doing all that we can do to keep children in families in environments that are safe and where they can thrive?
- b. Is the adoption the last resort or a convenient first option?

The needs of the child must undoubtedly come first and that's the more reason for social workers and parents, with the assistance of other organisations to work together to give parents the support they need and ongoing care where required.