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## EDITORIAL

### Biological fathers, adoptive fathers: Greater visibility than in the past?

Whether one focuses on biological fathers or on adoptive fathers, the attention that is granted to each of them throughout the adoption process and beyond still poses a challenge. Invisible for a long time, biological fathers only started to exist in the adoption system a long time after biological mothers were integrated into the now well-known adoptive triangle. Indeed, for many years, all the attention focused on the construction of the adoptive family, thereby only leaving little space – if any at all – to the child's past. Whilst some time was necessary to develop an interest in the biological mothers' experience, the fate of the fathers has required even more time, as highlighted by Gary Clapton (see p. 7).

#### The long absence of the fathers' point of view

The articles presented below (see pp. 7, 8 and 10) all agree on at least one issue: it is always afterwards that one remembers that a child is born from a mother and a father, and that the latter has a right to be heard, understood and supported in the child's care process. Why has this point of view – indeed different from that of the mother, but nonetheless essential – been neglected for so long? Would this stem from the fact that, as from the child's birth, the father and the mother may not be on an equal footing? Whilst it is possible to be certain about a child's biological mother, doubts may arise as to the position of the father: has he been told of the

child's existence by the mother? Has he chosen, or been able to choose, to be present by the mother's side? If, in due course, he has not initiated steps towards a declaration of paternity, will he be absent from his child's life forever? Does the non-registration of the father on the child's birth certificate not jeopardise the child's opportunity to find his father in the future? The ascertainment of paternity is therefore, as from birth, more unpredictable and subject to various factors, which are sometimes independent of the father's wish. The persistence, in many cultures and societies, of a concept that expects the mother to be the primary person in charge of the education and well-being of children, plays a significant role in the place that is granted to fathers. These concepts influence, consciously or unconsciously, those professionals in charge of adoption and child protection issues. Conversely, in cases of out-of-wedlock births, Norwegian law, for example, requires social services to undertake those steps that are necessary to determine the father's identity in all cases (*Children Act 1981*).

#### Towards a change?

However, developments are noticeable. Based on the evidence of the personal accounts shared in this Monthly Review, thoughts and actions have been and are gradually being raised in favour of fathers: biological fathers, to whom the floor has finally been given through several



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studies focusing on their point of view and on the impact that the separation and adoption may have had on their life and on that of the child (see p. 7); adolescent fathers, who have been invisible for a long time, and who are the focus of a special programme that has been developed in Peru (see p. 8); and adoptive fathers, amongst whom some have called for the implementation of new forms of support in the exercise of their adoptive fatherhood (see p. 10). To provide the fathers with a place also requires a change in perception amongst some professionals, which will only be possible with the development of publications that address this issue, as well as with training

materials, of which examples will be offered in our Documentation Appendix (attached to this Monthly Review).

**A better understanding of the fathers' experience, and the promotion of the consideration of their role and their needs, remain a challenge. The ISS/IRC opens its Monthly Review to your reactions and experiences on this issue, the visibility of which deserves further strengthening.**

The ISS/IRC team  
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