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Mother calls for apology on forced adoptions



| Veronica Smith said she was "made to feel dirty"

Marcella Whittingdale **Rosie Blunt**
BBC News, South East BBC News, South East

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A woman who was forced to give up her baby in the 1960s is calling on the government to make an official apology.

Veronica Smith from Seaford, East Sussex, spent just eight days with her daughter before she was taken away.

About 185,000 women in England and Wales were taken to hostels when pregnant and coerced into giving up their babies in the 50s, 60s and 70s.

The government has acknowledged that this was "wrong and should not have happened".

Ms Smith said she could not remember much about the birth of her daughter due to the trauma.

"I don't remember feeding her or anything - it's just a blank," the former nurse said.

Nearly 60 years on, she is now in contact with her daughter.

'Your baby will be better off'

Karen Constantine, deputy leader of the Labour group at Kent County Council (KCC), is supporting the call for a government apology.

In 1978, she fell pregnant at the age of 15 and was sent to a mother and baby home.

"I was told your baby will be better off. Your baby will have a better life. It will be properly looked after," she said on BBC Politics South East.



KAREN CONSTANTINE

| Karen Constantine said she felt "very bonded" with her baby while pregnant

Ms Constantine said it was only her "enduring stubborn streak" that allowed her to keep her child.

However, she said those women who were coerced into giving up their babies were "taking the burden of shame to their grave".

An apology from government would "set the record straight," said Ms Constantine, adding that it was "the biggest scandal in the country".



KAREN CONSTANTINE

| Karen Constantine is now writing a book about mothers who were forced to give up their children

The Welsh, Scottish and Irish governments have all apologised for forced adoptions.

A 2022 inquiry by the Joint Committee on Human Rights said the UK government had failed to "acknowledge the reality of what was done to these mothers and their children" and said there "continued to be a lack of adequate support".

It added the government of the time should have done more to ensure mothers and babies stayed together.

"It was the state that was ultimately responsible for the actions and omissions within the adoption system that led to a failure to protect women and babies," it said.

A government statement said: "We agree with the committee's findings that the treatment during this period of many unmarried parents, especially women, was wrong and should not have happened.

"We are sorry to all those affected by historic adoption practices. We are sorry on behalf of society for what happened.

"Whilst we cannot undo the past, lessons of the time have been learned and have led to significant changes to legislation and practice."

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