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Foreign adoptions subject of study funded by federal government

Canadian couples who have adopted children from other countries are being sought for a study funded by Health and Welfare Canada.

Anne Westhues, a professor of social work at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ont., and a colleague have received a \$43,237 grant to conduct research on intercountry adoptions.

The project has been prompted by concern for the interests of the estimated 5,000 children adopted from outside Canada and a feeling that this country should be able to give an account to their home countries.

"It's a concern about what our policy should be," Westhues said. "Is intercountry adoption something we should promote? If we should, what should we do differently?"

Together with Joyce Cohen, a professor of social work at the University of Toronto, Westhues will try to locate couples who have adopted children, now age 12 and up, from other countries. They will be looking for families in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia.

The two professors hope to identify at least 250 families to determine the feasibility of a more intensive, three-year study involving interviews with the children, their adoptive parents and any adopted or biological siblings.

One of the difficulties the professors face is that there is no central registry for foreign adoptions. Westhues said children can be adopted through the National Adoption Desk of Health and Welfare Canada, through private organizations or by a couple completing arrangements in the child's home country.

Westhues and Cohen have worked together on research about the adoption of children with special needs. As well, Westhues is currently evaluating Ontario's adoption disclosure register for the Ministry of Community and Social Services .