



Analyzing the Challenges of Selection, Training, and Supervision in Child Adoption from the Perspective of Parents: A Qualitative Study

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Introduction

The Law on the Support of Orphans, enacted in March 1974, authorized adoption in Iran, establishing it as a multifaceted and sensitive process encompassing psychological, sociological, and legal aspects, distinguished by significant emotive, social, and psychological dimensions (Shams, 2024). Adoptive parents face challenges and opportunities that significantly impact their well-being and that of the adopted child. The key determinant of successful adoption is the unity, cohesion, and dedication of couples throughout the process, from the initial decision to adopt to the child's integration into and eventual departure from the family system (Hosseinali Beiki & Esmaeili, 2019). Custody and guardianship are essential family matters that demand significant commitment in child upbringing (Lapidus, 2023), prompting the development of custody laws worldwide to emphasize their importance (Heshmati et al., 2024). Preparing mothers for adoption is vital, as children's emotional and behavioral issues can lead to parental dissatisfaction, particularly among mothers. Access to parental resources, mental health education, and counseling services constitutes reliable measures to alleviate custody-related conflicts (Gorla et al., 2023). The conduct of adopted children is influenced by the negative behavioral history of their adoptive parents (Hogan et al., 2023). In Iran, over 2,000 children each year are placed into care systems, such as residential institutions and orphanages, due to neglect, abuse, the death of parents, or divorce leading to the loss of guardianship (Annual Report of the Welfare Organization, 2017). Conversely, families, frequently experiencing infertility, pursue adoption as a means to attain parenthood, thereby serving as a pathway for both infertile couples and children lacking parental care (Howe & Weber, 2023). Parenting styles, which embody parental attitudes and regulations, are essential; however, adoptive parents may lack the necessary knowledge and skills to adequately address their children's requirements (Fisher, 2015). Adaptation issues and insufficient parental skills serve as stress-inducing factors post-adoption, potentially leading to adoption failure or dissolution (Steinberg et al., 2023). Parenting styles play a crucial role in influencing the psychological and spiritual growth of children (Hutauruk & Yusnadi, 2023). Thus, assessment and training procedures are crucial for the selection of suitable parents by relevant authorities and for establishing a supportive and nurturing environment for the child. Adoption is a legal procedure that establishes a parent-child relationship, not based on biological ties but on emotional and social bonds, between deserted or maltreated children and their adoptive parents, in accordance with Law 2013 (Shams, 2024). This relationship, established through judicial rulings, encompasses responsibilities of care, upbringing, support, and respect, akin to those of biological parents, with the child required to show appropriate deference to the guardian (Adoption Regulation, 2006). Research emphasizes the complex challenges associated with adoption, encompassing psychological, emotional, and social factors such as anxiety, tension, and societal pressures, all of which can negatively affect family dynamics.

and parent-child adjustment (Folei et al., 2017; Brodzinsky et al., 2022).

Methodology

This study utilized a conventional qualitative content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to investigate adoptive mothers' perspectives and assessments of the challenges encountered during the adoption process. Participants were mothers who legally adopted through State Welfare Organization between 2015 and 2025, with at least six months post-adoption; initial purposive sampling was conducted in Tehran, followed by maximum variation sampling from other provinces. Data from 11 online semi-structured interviews, each approximately one hour in duration, were collected until reaching theoretical saturation (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2018). Analysis was conducted in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic method. Validation comprised coder re-evaluation, participant confirmation, independent qualitative expert review under confidentiality, and supervision by a specialist professor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Babbie, 2013). Ethical principles like confidentiality were upheld.

Findings

Based on qualitative interviews with Iranian adoptive mothers, the challenges associated with adoption were organized into six primary themes accompanied by twelve sub-themes. Procedural challenges involve a corrosive cycle of extended bureaucracy, delays, and administrative tasks that diminish motivation and trust, often resulting in withdrawal following infertility struggles (e.g., frequent follow-ups; Participants 4, 11). Ambiguity results from insufficient information regarding the child's details (such as gender, health, and background), while fragmentary disclosures by experts (for example, genetic risks without explanation) exacerbate anxiety and increase the potential for incompatibility (Participant 2). Inappropriate familiarization slope refers to a precipitous transfer of the child within a single session, lacking a gradual bonding process and thereby intensifying attachment issues (Participant 8). Selection challenges encompass unreliable indicators like persistence assessments, priorities related to infertility, gender, and age, which contribute to inequity and extended waiting periods (Participant 4). The selection process is inadequate in scope due to the absence of thorough field evaluations, superficial assessments, potential for dishonest responses, and ineffectual counseling that overlooks spousal harmony, thereby risking familial imbalance (Participants 2, 10). Ethical violations involve judgmental interactions, negative portrayals of adoption, and delays intended to assess resilience, thereby eliciting feelings of humiliation (Participant 5). Educational challenges underscore pre-adoption deficiencies: superficial, non-targeted content disconnected from trauma-related needs, accompanied by limited guidance that encourages self-directed learning (Participants 7, 5). Post-adoption education is completely discontinued, leaving families without access to mentoring or courses, thereby relying on inadequate self-help and increasing the risk of maladaptation (Participants 5, 10). Monitoring challenges include the lack of post-adoption oversight: absence of psychological assessments, surveillance limited to checklists, neglect of concealed abuses, and the exacerbation of issues; implementation of proactive protocols is essential for prevention (Participant 8). General challenges include limited networking opportunities: the absence of age-based groups, experience-sharing platforms, or peer connections, which sustains social isolation; mothers recommend specialist-led sessions (Participants 1, 6, 7). The consequences of inefficiency encompass pre-adoption negative emotions such as perceived injustice arising from misaligned priorities, despair resulting from delays, as well as stress and burnout that may lead to dropouts or feelings of remorse (Participants 3, 9). Post-adoption tangible outcomes: separation due to unpreparedness, dissolution resulting from unaddressed issues, psychological damage to parents and children (such as depression and trauma), and social isolation that disrupts lives (Participants 8, 10). These findings highlight fundamental deficiencies in support, transparency, and continuity, jeopardizing family stability.

Conclusion

This phenomenological investigation examined the experiences of adoptive mothers to improve family assessment and training procedures, thereby facilitating better child adaptation. Adoption, as a multifaceted legal institution encompassing significant emotional, social, and psychological aspects, necessitates a comprehensive and well-organized framework to promote the well-being of both parent and child. Bureaucratic delays and regulatory uncertainties generated frustration, prompting some parents to contemplate withdrawing their applications (Liang et al., 2024). Negative emotions frequently originate from unprofessional and unethical conduct by experts, which is perceived as discouraging adoption and neglecting human dignity, consistent with the findings of Ghaffari et al. (2023). This establishes a dual responsibility for mothers, who, after undergoing infertility treatments and societal pressures, encounter discouragement from professionals, which diminishes their confidence and impacts future relationships with their children. Ethical principles, including non-maleficence and confidentiality, are essential; however, certain experts have breached these standards by disclosing private information or fostering unwarranted concerns regarding child health. Positive expert interactions promote satisfaction and resilience, as emphasized by Heshmati et al. (2024), underscoring the significance of supportive environments for family resilience. Insufficient training and information compelled mothers to turn to external resources, such as independent study or online communities, highlighting a deficiency in formal support systems (Hartinger-Saunders et al., 2019). Informal support networks, such as peer groups, play a crucial role in exchanging experiences, alleviating feelings of isolation, and promoting realistic expectations, as evidenced by McKay & Ross (2010) and Dans & Farmer (2014). The study emphasizes the importance of implementing comprehensive, customized training programs, ethical and supportive assessment procedures, and continuous post-adoption support to effectively address psychological, emotional, and social challenges. Improved coordination, clear regulations, and professional counseling are essential to improving family outcomes and facilitating successful child integration, thereby reducing the risks of adoption breakdown and psychological harm.

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