



Exploring the Lived Experiences of Parents Who Have Adopted a Child

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Introduction

There are thousands of children within the United States needing and waiting to be adopted into a permanent family

- The older a child is adopted, the more likely they are to have experienced trauma and abuse
- Adoptive parents often receive pre and post adoption support services and education to navigate common issues
- Few studies explore parent's experiences surrounding their adoption and the services they received
- Project Aim:** better understand parent's perspectives of their experience and if services received were helpful
- Supporting Theories:** Trauma Informed Care

Methods

- Research Design**
 - One-time interview lasting 45-60 minutes
 - Discussed topics by asking open-ended questions related to adoption
- Research Location:** Alabama Pre and Post Connections (APAC) at Children's Aid Society of Alabama
- Inclusion Criteria**
 - have or are currently receiving services from APAC, have adopted a child, and primary language is English
- Exclusion Criteria**
 - have not adopted a child, have not received APAC services, primary language is not English
- Demographics:** (see Table 1)
- 3 total participants
 - 5 children yielded from participants

Results

Table 1. Descriptions of Participants

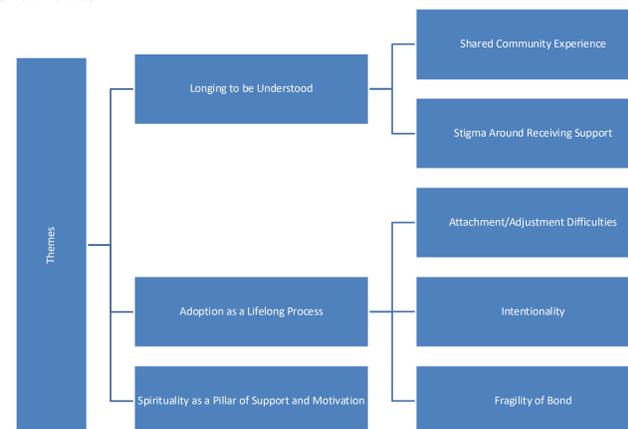
Participant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Years since Adoption Finalization	Age of Adopted children	Gender	Ethnicity
J1/ Jane	39	F	W	Married	10 months	5	M	W
K1/ Kelly	52	F	W	Divorced	6 years; 12 years	12; 18	M; M	B; H
L1/ Linda	52	F	W	Married	11 years	17; 18	M; M	W; W

Abbreviations: B, Black; F, Female; H, Hispanic; M, Male; W, Non-Hispanic White.

Results Continued

- Three main themes emerged from the interviews:
 - (1) Longing to be understood (subthemes: shared community experience; stigma around receiving support)
 - (2) Adoption as a lifelong process (subthemes: attachment and adjustment difficulties; intentionality; fragility of the bond)
 - (3) Spirituality as a pillar of support and motivation.

Figure 1. Themes



Discussion

- Across all interviews, parents reflected that they often felt misunderstood by and isolated from others in their support system
- Connections with others in similar circumstances made parents feel seen and heard
- The path to adoption is long and takes much preparation, even before the child is placed in the home
- Parents expressed the need for increased pre and post-adoption support
 - Parents have had great, positive experiences with current APAC support
- Stigma around wanting or needing support was noted
- Parents described adoption as a lifelong process
- Issues in attachment, maladaptive behavior, and emotional regulation were the hardest for parents to navigate
- Parents also spoke of the difficulties when their child did not meet their expectations or acted differently than they anticipated
- Play-based activities and intentional time were beneficial for parent-child bonding
- Even with progress, bonding is still fragile
- Spirituality was a motivating and supporting factor in the parent's adoption experience

Discussion continued

- Implications for Practice:**
 - Importance of context and personal factors
 - Role of OT in emotional regulation and maladaptive behaviors
- Limitations:**
 - Small sample size
 - Female-only respondents
 - Lacked spousal responses
 - Utilized a one-time interview
- Future Research and Direction**
 - Employ studies with larger sample sizes and diverse participants
 - Identify specific occupational therapy interventions that address emotional regulation and maladaptive behavior
 - Develop new adoption related educational resources for parents

Conclusion

- There is a need to expand current adoption support practices
- Occupational therapy practitioners have a role in supporting these families and it is within their scope of practice

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