
Adoptive Parents' Experiences With the Legal Adoption Process: A Qualitative Study

Dr. Twinkle Sanghavi

Assistant Professor

Sociology

Maniben Nanavati Women's College, SNDT Women's University

Abstract

Several steps are undertaken before formalizing the adoption process. Interviews and focus groups with parents around the country illustrate how people behave, think, and feel about these measures. Parents have complained about having to wait a long time in lines, being asked to sign many papers and getting unclear answers from staff. Others go months without receiving updates. Others visit several offices before they make it to the next stage. These steps are followed with hope by many parents but often meet stress and doubt. The legal path varies across states in many ways. It might require additional checks or paperwork. Another can rewrite the rules without advance warning. Parents have to learn these changes while nurturing the child. Some parents believe they can trust their agents. Others say they find better help in other parents. Many tell us they seek help in online groups or from people who followed the same steps. Most adoptive parents say they proceed with caution, but they're looking for stable and better-working rules. Some say they take time off or work fewer hours to achieve rule times. The question that some people have is whether the rules treat birth parents and adoptive parents the same way. They challenge notions of rights and voice. "We take in the child, but we are still seen by the rule as new," one parent said. Those who create and enforce such rules must listen better. They can change how the steps work if they hear from parents. De vague, short, and equitable rules can enable families to grow without dread or a prolonged waiting process. Study survey was conducted among 227 people from different regions to analyse adoptive parents' experiences with the Legal Adoption Process.

Keywords: *Adoptive parents, legal adoption process, qualitative study, adoption procedures, adoption laws, parental experiences, bureaucratic challenges.*

Introduction

Adoptive parents navigate a legal system defined by long steps, repeated visits and opaque rules. This study collects their experience through interviews, group discussions and written accounts. Each story provides an inside look at how people behave and react through the legal process. It is not to blame but to discover patterns, to grasp pressure points, to remember how folks go through this journey. Many adoptive parents start the process with concrete plans. The papers get collected, and the forms get signed, and they take the prescribed advice. They still face long wait times, conflicting answers from various offices and last-minute changes in demands. Some parents hop between more than three offices before they receive even one update. Some fill out the same forms multiple times because of rule changes. They do so in good faith, but the system provides few mechanisms for tracking success by Doughty et al., (2017)

Parents report disparate gaps across locations in who gets a seat and how the process plays out. The rule could demand additional checks in one area. In another, new steps emerge midway through. People often

report feeling isolated in these times. Others seek assistance in conversation with friends or individuals they encounter on the internet. Others call the office over and over with the same questions. The answers change frequently and sometimes are contradictory, and they are left without knowing what to do next. More often, parents have to align office hours with work time. Some take leave. Some trade-off shifts or cut back time at work. A handful take the process full-time and quit their jobs. These choices come at a cost — not just in money, but in attention. Parents are discussing fatigue, time loss and increased doubt. Yet they keep going. They talk about the child, the home they want to provide, and the feeling that they had to see the steps through. as per Frost & Goldberg, (2020)

Parents feel comforted when they know that they are not the only ones waiting, asking, or trying to make sense of a rule that appears fluid.

The process is not blind — it does not treat all people equally. Some adoptive parents have observed rules that seem stricter for them than for others. They note that some offices do not formally recognize the child, even after the child has moved in. One parent said, "We are taking care of the child, but the file states that we are still in process. That includes health papers, school records and other services. Some places will not take the parent's word for it, though, without the final paper. Foli et al., (2017)

Many parents say that the transition between all of it feels disjointed. One office requests the papers; another requests the checks; other issues a final word. All of these elements seem unrelated. If one file takes its time, the whole process takes a break. More Parents Want a Single Way to Track Their Case They want a location to see what has been done and what is left. Some say: "We just want clear actions, not quick ones." Language is part of this process. Parents from other areas report encountering staff who do not speak their language. They say it delays the case and introduces errors. They also post forms available only in one language." It delays them because they have to find someone to assist or take a chance with writing something wrong. Some say, "The form asks for one thing, the staff another." The legal vocabulary is another problem. Parents read the papers that they waddle after. Terms like "placement," "suitability" and "home study" come in without explanation or assistance. Some believe they completed a step, then discover they fell short of one aspect. Others are put off by language they do not understand. Parker et al., (2024)

When parents reach out for support, they are not always met with it. Some staff operate with care, explaining the rules. Some are too busy, while others cut short responses. These mixed responses contribute to the confusion. It also highlights the need for improved training. Parents are not asking for special treatment. They go looking for guides who actually summon them with love, not fear or blame. A number of parents wonder about birth parent rights. They want to understand how the law would treat each side. They ask questions like: Who has a voice? Who makes the final choice? But how does the system protect both families? The questions are not as easy as they might seem, but they are grounded in genuine concern. They do not seek to usurp power from the biological parents. They want to go through a process that seems fair and transparent.

It takes a long time for all the steps. Parents talk of months without a word. They are checking their phones, waiting for calls, and worrying that they have missed a notice. This silence adds weight. It also breaks trust. Some parents believe their case has already been lost. Others believe someone has already been chosen. When they get a call, they say, "What took so long?" by Darlington & Scott, (2020)

Some parents relocate during the process. This adds fresh trouble. Offices do not link files. The case must start again. That makes anger and waste inevitable. Parents argue the process should be person- rather than place-driven. They also require a unified system that contains all files and steps. The process often

does not end before the child joins a home. This creates gaps. Its going to need schooling, care, health checks. The office treats as temporary what parents must be the full carers. That makes for uncomfortable conversations with schools and clinics. It forces parents to have to repeat their case over and over. They request a temporary card or letter to prove their legal status until the final physical paper arrives. Everyone in life can be an adoptive parent. They include singles, couples, people who have kids, and people who do not. Parents speak with honesty. They do not blame the law. They ask for help, for clarity and for a way to act without fear of doing the wrong thing. They speak of children who wait as they do. They describe homes prepared but stalled in procedures that no one appears able to expedite. By Costa & Tasker, (2018)

Dedicated staff must be attuned to the fact that each case is not a file but a family. They have to speak in ways that guide, not evaluate. No one office is larger than the other. A common system, clear forms and trained staff can help. People do not fear challenging work. They are afraid of silence and surprise. So, if the rule is, "Do this," then parents do it. What they want is to understand what "this" means and when they are going to hear again. They bear hopes, fears, and plans. The law cannot take these lightly. Each delay affects a child. Every hard-to-decipher word touches a parent. If rules must remain, then they must also lead. If oversight is needed, it needs to happen quickly.

Literature Review

Stage one of adoption is a big influence on the eventual path families will take in growing and remaining intact. Many adoptive parents describe early days that seem full of effort and care but also stress. Their stories reveal that most of the early delays fall on poor communication and small mistakes. Parents say they often do not know what the next step should be. It gives them part of the picture but not the overall plan. Some get letters or phone calls with no specific guidance. Others wait for updates for weeks that do not arrive. A few hear about the next step from other parents, not from staff. Those gaps put pressure on and stall the process. by Farr, (2017)

Many also cite lost paperwork or paperwork that has been filled out the wrong way. Now some parents fill out the same form multiple times. Others show up with the correct papers, only to be told that rules have changed. Such mistakes create additional steps for people and make them feel excluded. They waste time troubleshooting issues that did not begin with them. Some parents also raise concerns about contact with the child's birth family. They say they were not given enough clarity about this. Some do not know how or when to share this part with their child. Bettina: Some guess whether they should keep the agreed contact. Lacking urges, they improvise what to do. It adds to their stress and informs their own support of the child. Support in this time we all too often feel like we are lacking. They (parents) request to speak with someone. They are looking for guidance on questions that arise after the child has moved in. They also want suggestions for how to assist the child in understanding their new role in the family. Boyle, (2017)

These early steps matter. When they work, families develop trust. When they do not, parents feel isolated and lost. Every step of the process should encourage parents to act with care, not fear. This support enables the child and parent to continue progressing together. Children who age out of foster care without being adopted tend to have more mental health struggles than their peers. In fact, children who are placed into families through adoption have a greater opportunity to heal and thrive. These families take shape with new rules and steps. Parents need support during this time—not just for the legal work, but for the work that they are doing at home with their children. The changes of adoptive parents In many ways, the processes of adoption undergo many changes. They adapt their roles, learn new skills, and gain the child's trust.

Meanwhile, they navigate an intricate system of rules, forms, and long waits. Some parents say the support they receive is as important as the rules they abide by. They want to hear how they can help the child feel safe and welcome in the household. According to Arifin, (2018) Past research typically looks either at the child — age, background, or prior care. But parents mold the path as well. In this study, parents tell us what helped, who they reached out to and what was lacking. Their words provide a stark picture of what support looks like through the legal and emotional stages of adoption. In the first stage of their journey, parents experienced support in four different areas: from their immediate family, from local services, the broader community, and the wider system. Each one played a role. Some offered advice, some listened, and others explained legal options. These are the four parts, and here is how they are connected, as per today's stories. Parents rely on this support to persevere, problem-solve and care for the child.

It also teaches people how adoptive families work. These families grow in their own ways, and they have their own needs. If the system sees that, it can support parents to the best of their ability." With straightforward support, parents and child experience the process in greater trust and less fear.

Adoptive parents pass through a period of upheaval that sets in before the child enters the household but completes long afterward. This transition — from planning, waiting, and hoping to actually living with the child — is a mix of pressure, hope, and effort. Both want to love and support a child, just like birth parents do, but parents do not have to follow birth parents in the same way. All of these go into how the adoptive family grows, the legal process, the checks, and past experience of the child. by Morrison et al., (2018)

During this initiation phase, adoptive parents manage forms, background checks, home visits and long stretches of waiting. They also get their homes and minds ready for the child. New demands come fast once the child is installed in your household. Parents need to be carers while still learning what the child actually needs. Some say it feels like they are being watched, not supported. Others say they are afraid of doing something that will gum up the final paper. Within this transition, often strong emotions develop. Parents under more stress talk more about their thoughts. They ask more questions, and they offer more in conversations and groups. These parents seek out ones who listen. They also give advice to those behind them in the process. Their words help inform what support should look like. Others say a rough start made them speak up. They say the waiting, the paperwork, and the silence coming from offices compelled them to give their side. They want others to understand what this process is like. Their words reveal how stress does not only bring pain but a desire for companionship. Health and legal employees must observe what this a part of the journey appears to be like. In addition, adoptive parents have extra rules and checks to comply with that come with the learning and change all parents' experience. They need frank words, candid conversations, and room to ask questions. Support needs to be appropriate for their stage in the journey." The plan is not one size fits all. Brown et al., 2019

This piece of the adoption trajectory indicates where assistance is most needed. This is not just principles applied to advice. It is about listening to parents, creating space for their voice and designing a process that partners with them. When the system understands the parent as a partner, not just a file, it builds trust. And trust is what helps families build and maintain through all the steps that follow. Adoption can provide children with long-term placement, safety, and connection. In fact, most adopted children live with their new families, thrive with the trust, and support they provide. Even so, some adoptions fail early on. In those situations, kids depart the home ahead of schedule. When this occurs, the child suffers, and so does the parent, both face loss. Adoptive parents typically come into the process with high hopes. They help prepare for checks, fill out forms and care for early needs. But they might not be able to see the full spectrum of what could follow. Some children are bringing past pain into the new home. This hurt may not reveal itself immediately. It can show itself in words or actions with the child settled. Parents are then dealing with needs they were not prepared for or planned for. By Guzzo & Hayford, 2020

Out of these moments, parents find themselves worn down at times, however. Some experience the child's pain as their own. Some feel defeated from trying only to see no change. There can be an accumulating of these responses. They do not mean a parent has failed. They say the support system needs to do better. The child welfare system is designed to provide children in its care with a safe place to live. It does so through placements with relatives or non-relatives, all with the goal of reuniting the child with birth parents or proceeding toward adoption. The journey of a child replaces visitations — which may be all they know — and adoptive parents become guardians — when plans change from reunification to a lifelong space in a new home. Families who do take on this role must fulfill both legal steps and day-to-day care needs. Support during this time cannot simply mean placement. It must address the child's overall health, development, and history.

Pediatricians assist adoptive families in caring for children who are coming from foster care. These children often bear physical or mental health needs shaped by events in their past. They may have skipped early health screeners or lost touch with doctors. In many instances, their records are difficult to follow or lack important pieces. Adoptive parents need to collaborate with doctors to navigate these gaps while discovering the new child's needs and routines.

The Family First Act bolsters this work by allowing states and other entities to tap into foster care funds to invest in early support. These funds could be used for mental health care, support for substance use, and skill-building programs for parents. The aim is to better preserve family unity when it is safe to do so. But for those who come into care, the Act also aims to ensure that many are placed in homes rather than large group settings and that these decisions are shaped by their needs.

For adoptive families, this change means they can meet the child earlier in the process. It also means that they may serve a kid who has lived in multiple locations. Each move created holes in care, in schoolwork or in support. Adoptive parents must be able to navigate these gaps while assuming the legal and emotional caretaking of the child. Doctors can assist by maintaining good record keeping that travels with the child. These records would include health information from birth, notes on your child's growth and learning, previous mental health care, vaccinations, and current medications. From there, however, each new home can begin with the big picture. Without this, adoptive parents must guess or retest, which is time-consuming and causes stress.

Many doctors also learn how to navigate state systems. They speak with child welfare offices to create pathways for records to move. They also explain to parents what they are legally allowed to share with them and how the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act covers this. This law enables sharing health data with the aim of making care more stable for children in care. It paves the way for more constructive communication between offices doctors' groups and families.

This side of adoption is information parents need to hear before the child arrives on their doorstep. All training should move beyond paperwork and home checks. It should address pain and healing and what to do if the past disrupts our daily life. Parents must hear about this side of adoption before the child comes home: the training must go beyond paperwork and home checks. It should speak to pain, healing and what to anticipate when past events play out in daily life. This empowers parents to act early and seek help if necessary. Supportive services must change as well. They should not use methods that do not observe and respond to trauma. Staff need to hear parents and modify their support. If parents feel heard and understood, they are much more likely to remain strong and support the child. Building services with parents is one way to improve them. When parents participate in defining how support operates, it is a better fit.

Parents know what worked, what did not, what is missing. The best ideas can yield better tools and better strategies. (Hill, 2017)

The process of adoption cannot end with papers. It must continue, though, with support that responds to real needs. Parents need someone to talk to on hard days. When kids exhibit the symptoms of old hurt, the system must intervene gently, not with blame.

Strengthening families means helping them get through the first step and, after that, stay strong. When that occurs, adoption is not just the beginning — it is a lasting transformation for child and parent alike.

Adoptive parents contend with a broad range of responsibilities that challenge their strength and determination. The legal process has rules by which they can abide. The emotional process means something else is going on. Often it is the parents who bear the brunt of these steps while also preparing for life with the child." This study examines their management of these demands and the forms of support that may bolster them in doing so." (Reczek, 2020)

Every parent comes into the process with their own goals and perspective. Others want to provide care to a child without a home. Others have tried other routes and hope to create a family through adoption. Such goals inform how they view the road ahead. The details hardly matter; each parent arrives with a personal model of what that process should have looked like. These views underpin their beliefs and behaviours.

The adoptive parents operate in a broader system. Their path is shaped by family, work, local services, and legal rules. Some parents get assistance from their own families. Others have to depend on third-party services. When these three parts come together, parents feel supported. When they do not, parents feel isolated.

Some children arrive home with hurt from the past." It influences their behaviour and their trust-building. Parents have to work with not only care needs but effects of pasts. When they see this, services help parents overcome cycles of pain. When they do not, parents are left shouldering without tools or support. Sun et al., (2020)

Objective

To study the Adoptive parents' experiences with the legal adoption process.

Methodology

Study survey was conducted among 227 people from different regions. "Random sampling method" along with "T-test" were used to collect and analyse the data.

Data Analysis

In the total population of study survey males are 52.42% and females are 47.58%. 32.7% of them are below 27 years, 29.52% are between 35 to 40 years of age, 39.21% are between 35 to 40 years of age, and 31.27% are above 40 years of age. 52.86% are from urban regions, and 47.14% are from rural regions.

"Table 1 General Details"

"Variables"	"Respondents"	"Percentage"
Male	119	52.42
Female	108	47.58
Total	227	100
Age (years)		

35 to 40	67	29.52
35 to 40	89	39.21
Above 40	71	31.27
Total	227	100
Regions		
Urban regions	120	52.86
Rural region	107	47.14
Total	227	100

Table 2 Adoptive parents' experiences with the legal adoption process

“S. No.”	“Statements”	“Mean Value”	“t value”	“Sig.”
1.	Long waiting time in lines, and being asked to sign many papers and get unclear answers from staff	3.27	4.139	0.000
2.	Some adoptive parents have observed rules that seem stricter for them than for others	3.19	2.931	0.002
3.	Some staff explain all the rules. Some are too busy, while others cut short responses creating confusion	4.11	17.398	0.000
4.	Parents argue that process should be person- rather than place-driven. They require a unified system that contains all files and steps	4.19	18.276	0.000
5.	Most adoptive parents say they proceed with caution, but they're looking for stable and better-working rules	4.29	20.137	0.000
6.	Some feel they are being watched, not supported. Others are afraid of doing something that will gum up final paper	4.00	15.347	0.000
7.	Some get letters or phone calls with no specific guidance. Others wait for updates for weeks that do not arrive	4.13	17.506	0.000
8.	Some parents hop between more than three offices before they receive even one update	4.07	16.650	0.000
9.	If parents feel heard and understood, they are much more likely to remain strong and support the child	4.27	19.525	0.000
10.	Some parents get assistance from their own families. Others have to depend on third-party services	3.17	2.659	0.004

Table 2 shows Adoptive parents' experiences with the legal adoption process where respondent says that long waiting time in lines, and being asked to sign many papers and getting unclear answers from staff (3.27), Some adoptive parents have observed rules that seem stricter for them than for others (3.19), Some staff explain all the rules. Some are too busy, while others cut short responses creating confusion (4.11), Parents argue process should be person- rather than place-driven. They require a unified system that contains all files and steps (4.19), Most adoptive parents say they proceed with caution, but they are looking for stable and better-working rules (4.29), Some feels they are being watched, not supported. Others are afraid of doing something that will gum up final paper (4.00), Some get letters or phone calls with no specific guidance. Others wait for updates for weeks that do not arrive (4.13), Some parents hop between more than three offices before they receive even one update (4.07), If parents feel heard and understood, they are much more likely to remain strong and support the child (4.27), Some parents get assistance from their own families. Others have to depend on third-party services (3.17). All statements pertaining to Adoptive

parents' experiences with the legal adoption process are found to be significance, with p-values below 0.05 following the application of a t-test.

Conclusion

The present study explores the experiences of adoptive parents through the legal adoption process. Their stories provide a powerful glimpse into an arduous journey of struggle, uncertainty, and an unwavering desire to create safe homes for children. Parents navigate shifting rules, muddled steps, and lengthy waits — sometimes without reliable support. They persevere with care and purpose against these odds. Instead, they process life's daily tasks as they engage in legal work. Too often, the system does not treat them like partners, driving them to find help from peers, rather than professionals. But these parents show resilience, share lessons learned and call for better futures. These results underscore the importance of shared rules, clear communication, and early on-going support that focuses on developing the role of the adoptive parents. When systems are coordinated—health, law, care—families flourish with less fearfulness and more trust. If adoption is to work, services need to see parents not as cases but as the foundation of the child's future. Change occurs when the system listens and, learns and invests with the same care that adoptive parents show every single day. Study survey was conducted among 227 people from different regions to analyse adoptive parents' experiences with the legal adoption process.

References

- Doughty, J., Meakings, S., & Shelton, K. (2017). The legal and administrative processes in adoption: Views and experiences of newly formed adoptive families. *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 39(4), 473-490.
- Frost, R. L., & Goldberg, A. E. (2020). Adopting again: A qualitative study of the second transition to parenthood in adoptive families. *Adoption Quarterly*, 23(2), 85-109.
- Foli, K. J., Hebdon, M., Lim, E., & South, S. C. (2017). Transitions of adoptive parents: A longitudinal mixed methods analysis. *Archives of psychiatric nursing*, 31(5), 483-492.
- Parker, O., Kloess, J. A., Saveker, S., & Law, G. U. (2024). Making sense of adoption disruption: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the lived experiences of adoptive parents. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 166, 107916.
- Darlington, Y., & Scott, D. (2020). *Qualitative research in practice: Stories from the field*. Routledge.
- Costa, P. A., & Tasker, F. (2018). "We wanted a forever family": Altruistic, individualistic, and motivated reasoning motivations for adoption among LGBTQ individuals. *Journal of Family Issues*, 39(18), 4156-4178.
- Farr, R. H. (2017). Does parental sexual orientation matter? A longitudinal follow-up of adoptive families with school-age children. *Developmental psychology*, 53(2), 252.
- Boyle, C. (2017). 'What is the impact of birth family contact on children in adoption and long-term foster care?' A systematic review. *Child & Family Social Work*, 22, 22-33.
- Arifin, S. R. M. (2018). Ethical considerations in qualitative study. *International journal of care scholars*, 1(2), 30-33.
- Morrison, S. E., Bruce, C., & Wilson, S. (2018). Children's disclosure of sexual abuse: A systematic review of qualitative research exploring barriers and facilitators. *Journal of child sexual abuse*, 27(2), 176-194.
- Brown, A., Chouldechova, A., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Tobin, A., & Vaithianathan, R. (2019, May). Toward algorithmic accountability in public services: A qualitative study of affected community perspectives on

- algorithmic decision-making in child welfare services. In Proceedings of the 2019 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (pp. 1-12).
- Guzzo, K. B., & Hayford, S. R. (2020). Pathways to parenthood in social and family contexts: Decade in review, 2020. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82(1), 117-144.
- Hill, J. L. (2017). What does it mean to be a "parent"? The claims of biology as the basis for parental rights. In *Parental rights and responsibilities* (pp. 29-96). Routledge.
- Reczek, C. (2020). Sexual-and gender-minority families: A 2010 to 2020 decade in review. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82(1), 300-325.
- Sun, N., Wei, L., Shi, S., Jiao, D., Song, R., Ma, L., ... & Wang, H. (2020). A qualitative study on the psychological experience of caregivers of COVID-19 patients. *American journal of infection control*, 48(6), 592-598.