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INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION: PARENT PERSPECTIVES

Hope College: Dr. Deborah Sturtevant, Samantha Hartman, & Joy Hartman

ABSTRACT

International adoption is one aspect of care for orphans and vulnerable children, of which we have much interest following the Milk & Medicine Evaluation and personal adoptive experience. Using a snowball method of sampling, twelve interviews of parents who have adopted internationally from seven countries were conducted. This research is exploratory to learn more about the perspective of adoptive parents concerning pre-adoption, the adoption process, and post-adoption – three categories that frame the thematic outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of the literature was micro-level psychological aspects of international adoption, not disregarding the intersecting factors of historical policy, economics, and ethics. Two main categories are 1. Trauma & Attachment, and 2. Adjustment. Trauma is anything that is deeply distressing to an individual. It might be physical, psychological, or both.¹ “Attachment is a term used to refer to close, enduring, emotionally based interpersonal relationships...a continuum, with securely attached children at one end, completely unattached children at the other, and the vast majority somewhere in between.”⁴ Children who have experienced trauma have brains that function in survival mode due to their early conditioning. They are not yet neurologically prepared to thrive in a safe environment, which is why safe family, care, and learning environments can be difficult to adjust to.¹ This study gleaned the literature’s insight into micro-level psychological aspects of international adoption, which we developed our protocol upon.

METHODS

The participants were selected using a Snowball Sampling Collection. Twelve interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed. Seven countries were represented. The qualitative data was analyzed by means of Open Coding, derived from Grounded Theory.



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RESULTS

PRE-ADOPTION	Motivation to Adopt Initial Concerns & Fears Resources Choosing International Adoption Extended Family & Other Networks
ADOPTION PROCESS	Social Workers/Agency/Government Involvement Process Details Perspectives on the Process Resilience
POST-ADOPTION	Family Adjustment Adopted Child Adjustment Greatest Joys & Hardships Child Acceptance of Adoptive Parents Identification with Home Culture Post-Adoption Support Resilience

CONCLUSIONS

Following immersion in this qualitative data, it seems to suggest a need for additional studies, including topics such as ethics in international adoption, grief and loss in the adoption triad, and openness vs. closeness in adoption cases. The hope of this study is that it would validate both streamlined and unique experiences, of exposing and consolidating thematic outcomes, and of offering resources and further research to assist families in navigating all aspects of international adoption.

“Children that become mine are going to have unique and specific needs that are even unique to general and normal issues that come with adoption. My children won’t be textbooks, because they’re children...be aware of the lifetime commitment that it is to pursue understanding the specific and unique needs of your child with the cognition and thought of knowing that you don’t know what actually happened to them. You have part of the story...you have to understand there’s a lot of grace for a parent that takes in a child who is not of their own flesh and makes him/her flesh.”⁹

