

THE EXPERIANCES OF ADOPTIVE PARENTS WITH DOMESTIC ADOPTION

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## **Abstract**

This study was conducted to explore the experiences of Ethiopian adoptive families who have adopted a child (children) domestically from Kibebe Tsehay orphanage. Descriptive qualitative design was used to explore their world from own point of view. Eight adoptive parents including single mothers took part in the study and In-depth interview was used as a major tool. This study was conducted with a hope that it will serve as a tool for prospective adoptive parents, adoption service providers, social workers, other researchers and policy makers.

The finding of the study indicated that adoptive parents mainly consider adoption due to infertility reasons and to give a permanent loving home for a child in need mostly driven by religious and moral convictions. It also revealed that the journey to adoption involves a lot of preparations and commitments. The study also indicated that all adoptive parents are not open about the adoption mainly with a need to protect their adopted children from isolation and stigma. Most families are by their own without any post adoption support system, networks or professional aid to deal with issues of adoption. Most of them don't see themselves very equipped to stand the societal pressure.

Furthermore, this study had also shown that there is a lot to be done on public awareness and advocacy on the matter. It also tried to light up the way on how to better encourage other prospective adoptive parents to consider adoption and how more orphaned and vulnerable children can benefit through the miracles of adoption.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

This chapter includes an introductory part, statement of the problem, research questions, Research objectives and significance of the study.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Adoption is a childcare and protection measure that enables an unaccompanied child to benefit from a substitute and permanent family care. The practice of adoption can mainly be sub divided into domestic and Inter country adoption (MOWCYA, 2009).

According to the guideline inter-country adoption is an adoption that involves a change in the child's habitual country of residence, whatever the nationality of the adopting parents. It also includes an adoption that involves parents of a nationality other than that of the child, whether or not they reside and continue to reside in the child's habitual country of residence, whereas, domestic adoption is an adoption that involves adoptive parents and a child of the same nationality and the same Country of residence (MOWCYA, 2009).

According to the Convention of the Rights of the Child (art. 21), as well as to the UN Declaration on the Protection and Welfare of Children (art. 17) and the Hague Adoption Convention (Preamble and art. 4), international adoption should be considered as an option if other arrangements (with priority to kin and adoptive families) cannot satisfactorily be arranged for the child in her or his country of origin (principle of subsidiary between national and international adoption) (Buck, 2011).

Choosing adoption as a means of forming a family is a decision that affects the whole family and is a life time commitment. It is possible to say that the practice of

adoption in Ethiopia was introduced by the Oromo ethnic group, as usually termed as guddid ffacha, and to lesser extent by other tribes of the country such as Amhara, Kambatta, Sidama, Zay, etc ( Desalegn, 2006).

The Addis Ababa bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs office (BOWCYA) office had placed two hundred sixty four children from Kibebe Tsehay orphanage for domestic adoption since 2010.

The focus of this thesis revolves around the experience of Ethiopian adoptive families who have considered adoption as means of family formation.

Formal Domestic adoption in Ethiopia is a new phenomena and the number of children placed through domestic adoption over the past few years may seem like a drop of water in the sea. It will be worth exploring what triggered the choice of these parents, their journey to making the adoption a reality, society's perception about their choice, what challenges they have faced prior and post adoption period, what measures were taken to ease the challenges so far, any anticipated challenges and plans of tackling them in the future and any available support systems in this regard. Furthermore, this study will try to rule out any attribute contributing to the low rate of OVC served through this child alternative measure.

Ethiopian children being formally and legally adopted by Ethiopian adoptive parents is relatively a newly emerging issue. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Ethiopian child welfare guideline clearly state that domestic adoption serves the child's best interest than other alternatives like institutional care or inter country adoption.

Accordingly, domestic adoption offers a child an opportunity to be raised in a familial setting of his/her culture and origin.

There are a number of researches done worldwide about adoption. Unfortunately, I never came across with researches directly dealing with the experience of Adoptive families adopting a child domestically. Therefore, this research will try to explore adoptive families experience and their challenges as being pioneers for the in racial (domestic) adoption.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The main reason for Ethiopians adopting a child domestically is yet uncovered. Researches done in other countries have shown Infertility is the main reason parents seek to adopt children they are not related to. A study conducted by Berry shows this accounted for 80% of unrelated infant adoptions and half of adoptions through foster care (Berry, 1996.p: 166).

Other reasons people adopt children are numerous although not well documented. These may include wanting to cement a new family following divorce or death of one parent, compassion motivated by religious or philosophical conviction, to avoid contributing to overpopulation out of the belief that it is more responsible to care for otherwise parent-less children than to reproduce, to ensure that inheritable diseases (e.g., Tay-Sachs disease) are not passed on, and health concerns relating to pregnancy and childbirth ( US Center for disease control, 2008,P:8).

In 2007, it was estimated that there were a total of 4,885,337 orphans aged 0-17 years of which 744,100 were AIDS orphans in Ethiopia (CSA – Welfare Monitoring Survey, 2007). Among this huge number of orphans only few hundreds of them were served through domestic adoption and the reason being is not yet researched.

The reason behind and motivations for considering adoption may vary. The literature reviews by Shapiro, Shapiro, and Paret (2001) and Gunnar, Bruce, and Grotevant (2000) as cited by Heather, 2012 illustrate the extreme and varied emotions parents experience through the adoption process. Parents' emotions, as well as the child's, can be intense and fluctuating (Heather, 2012).

Worthy of noting, it was easier for parents who adopted internationally to find support groups than it was for parents who adopted domestically (McKay & Ross, 2010). In addition, parents are often not prepared because information about their adoptive child is minimal, filled with holes, or because the parents lack sufficient pre-adoption education (Gunnar, Bruce, & Grotevant, 2000).

While there are parent support networks and groups for adoptive parents, many parents still do not feel they have enough post-adoption support (Gunnar et al ). The research focusing on children who have been adopted from institutions emphasizes the detrimental effects institutionalization has on children. It also draws further attention to the challenges that arise for the parents of these adopted children. The challenges adoptive parents face included: behavioral and emotional problems, attachment issues, and cognitive challenges, history of sexual abuse, issues surrounding personal and racial

identity, changes in the family dynamic, and reunion with biological parents (Shapiro, Shapiro, & Paret, 2001).

According to McKay and Ross qualitative study exploring adoptive parents' experience, parents reported facing challenges such as, isolation and fear, parenting related obstacles, lack of support (McKay & Ross 2010, p. 606). More specifically, parents reported that they felt increased responsibility because they were raising another person's child. Parents also held unrealistic expectations and feared their child would be taken away if they made any mistakes (McKay & Ross).

Additionally, parents reported that they felt they were less prepared, and had less experience, as the order of events in having a child via adoption is different than the order of even of having a child biologically (McKay & Ross, 2010).

It is important to learn about and understand not only the children, but the parents. Adoptive parents often enter adoption with an idealistic expectation that can be overcome by the reality of a deprived child who is not ready to accept them (Shapiro, Shapiro, & Paret, 2001).

The limited number of researches done on adoptive parents experience indicates that there are a number of challenges parents face throughout the whole process since adoption is lifelong commitment.

I never came across with researches exploring adoptive families' experience with domestic adoption in Ethiopia and this is the rational for conducting the study. The purpose of this study is to uncover the experience of these adoptive families in Ethiopia and to gain a better understanding about their challenges and what measures were taken

to overcome those. Furthermore, this study will try exploring the proposed way outs for dealing with these challenges from the adoptive parent's point of view.

### **Research Objective**

The general objective of the research is to explore Ethiopian adoptive families' experience who considered adopting a child domestically.

#### **The specific objective includes;**

1. To identify Motivation behind Ethiopian adoptive families for choosing to adopt a child domestically.
2. To explore their journey of becoming an adoptive parent
3. To identify their challenges during and after the adoption process was complete.
4. To see if there are any networks or support systems available for adoptive families

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the motivation behind considering adoption as a means of family formation?
2. How is the journey to being adoptive parent look like?
3. What were/are the major challenges encountered by domestic adoptive parents?
4. What networks and support systems do domestic adoptive parents have?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study focuses on exploring Ethiopian adoptive families' experience who considered adopting a child domestically. Their experience will be worth exploring for many reasons. For one thing, their experiences could inspire other prospective adoptive

families planning to consider domestic adoption as a means of building a family. Furthermore, it will be helpful for social workers and other professionals working with children and adoption to better address the needs of these families, to advocate for them and to design a need based post adoption support systems for these families.

Additionally, since the MOWCYA and BOWCYA are highly encouraging domestic adoption in recent years, this study will light up ways on how to better advocate for domestic adoption and what important elements to incorporate within the advocacy. Most importantly, this study can be used to better assist adoptive parents and to build reliable support systems for adoptive families which will encourage other adoptive families to consider domestic adoption. This will intern increase the number of OVC served in domestic adoption.

The study will also spark a light for professionals and policy makers to be more considerate to the challenges of adoptive parents with regards to domestic adoption.

This study will also fill the knowledge gap of Ethiopian domestic adoptive parent's experience with domestic adoption.

## **Chapter Two: LITRETURE REVIEW**

This chapter mainly deals with local adoption and adoptive parenthood. It will start by a generic definition of adoption as a means of family formation then specifically will talk about domestic adoption as one of child welfare alternative services and International as well as legal frame works for domestic adoption will be outlined. Facts and figures about OVC and number of children served through domestic adoption in Addis Ababa will be presented. Lastly, impacts of adoption on adoptive parents, public perception about adoption and theoretical orientation informing this study will be discussed.

Both published and unpublished literatures are incorporated in the review. Finding literatures about local adoption and about the experiences of adoptive parents who considered local adoption as a means of building family in Ethiopia was a great challenge of the review. Most of the facts presented in this section regarding adoption and experiences of adoptive families are very generic and are experiences of other countries due to lack of available literatures addressing the matter. This area is not yet well explored as formal domestic adoption in Ethiopia is a recent or emerging phenomenon.

### **Adoption as a means of family formation**

Unlike guardianship or other systems designed for the care of the young, adoption is intended to effect a permanent change in status and as such requires societal recognition, either through legal or religious sanction. Adoption creates a family that, in important ways, differs from the traditional biologically related nuclear family (Miall and March, 2005).

Adoptive parenthood, like other types of parenthood, can bring tremendous joy -- and a sizable amount of stress. There are emotional ups and downs that adoptive parents may experience as they approach the decision to adopt, during the adoptive process, and, most importantly, after the adoption. While every adoption is unique and every parent has different feelings and experiences, there are some general themes that emerge regarding adoptive parents' emotional responses (Vandivere, S., Malm, K., & Radel, L. 2009) as cited by Child Information gate way.

### **Domestic adoption as one of Alternative child care service**

The importance and expansion of adoption services as one alternative form of care is necessary as a lot of children are left to fend for themselves owing to the dire poverty and the spread of HIV pandemic in the country..... Local adoption seems largely neglected or utterly out of the focus of attention of many adoption service provider organizations (Alternative Child Care Guideline, 2009). The general objective of adoption is providing an orphaned and destitute child a chance to grow up in a familial environment along with parental care and emotional bond while his/her basic needs are also addressed at the same time as further stated in the guide line.

The guideline also insists child care institution and adoption service providers (ASPs) to advocate for local adoption and to sensitize the public regarding the issue.

According to the alternative child care guideline designed by the Ministry of Women, children and Youth affair (MOWCYA) office in the year 2009 prospective adoptive parents should fulfill the following major criteria in order to be considered eligible for perusing domestic adoption.

- Ethiopian by nationality
- At least, twenty five years of age and at most 60 years of age (when Adoption is made by two spouses, it is sufficient for one of them to be of twenty five and above years of age);
- Able to produce a document from a relevant authority certifying that he/she has an income that is sufficient to raise the child;
- Able to produce a document from a relevant authority certifying that he/she is free from any incurable and/or contagious disease and mental health problem;
- Able to produce a document from a relevant authority certifying that he/she is free from any criminal activities;
- Able to produce a marriage certificate or prove otherwise if the potential adoptive parent is married or is living with a partner as per legally recognized relation;
- Able to produce the consent of the applicant's spouse to adopt the child, in cases when the applicant is married or living in a legally Recognized bondage.

### **International and legal frame work for Domestic Adoption**

According to the Convention of the Rights of the Child (art. 21), as well as to the UN Declaration on the Protection and Welfare of Children (art. 17) and the Hague Adoption Convention (Preamble and art. 4), international adoption should be considered as an option if other arrangements (with priority to kin and adoptive families) cannot satisfactorily be arranged for the child in her or his country of origin (Buck, 2011).

Ethiopia has not yet signed and acceded to the Hague convention yet. As an initial step towards building a ‘Hague friendly’ or Hague aligned system. Prior areas of reform include: 1.revision and adoption of necessary laws 2. Development of service and accreditation standards and 3.Establishment of an independent central authority to oversee alternative child care programs (UNICEF, 2014). The agreement of adoption shall be made between the adopter and the guardian of the adopted child (Revised family code of Ethiopia, 2000) (Art190).

Article (195) of the revised family code talks about the irrevocability of adoption once it is signed and approved by the court. Unless, the adopter, instead of looking after the adopted handles him as a slave, or in conditions resembling slavery, or makes him engage in immoral acts for his gain, or handles him in any other manner that is detrimental to his future, the court may revoke the adoption (Revised family code of FDRE, 2000)

### **Facts and figures with regards to OVC and Domestic Adoption**

According to Addis Ababa city Women, Children and youth affair bureau there are nearly 5 million orphan and vulnerable children in Ethiopia and Addis Ababa alone comprises about 100,000 orphan and venerable children. Data from the BOWCYA and the orphanage show that formal placemat of OVC to domestic adoption boosted in the past 5 years and reached its pick in 20 14 where 115 children were placed for local adoption. Since 2010 two hundred sixty four children were placed for local adoption in Addis Ababa. As per the annual reports the placement was 14 children in the year 2010, followed by 19 children in the year 2011, then 44 children in 2012, 72 was in 2013 and

115 children in the year 2014. There is high number of OVC and high concentration of child care institutions in Addis Ababa .Studies show that most of the 100,000 OVC in Addis are not born in the city rather came from other regions of the country mainly from Oromiya , Amhara and SNNPR.

According to an assessment done by BOWCYAO there are 35 private and 3 government orphanages in Addis Ababa. Statistics from the office shows that only 3 of the private orphanages had placed children not more than 10 for domestic adoption in the last 5 years. The three government orphanages operating in Addis Ababa are Kibebe tsehay, Ketchene Medhane alem and Kolfe. Kolefe is a home for male children and Kechene for female children who are older than eight years of age.

According to the key informant of the orphanage, Kibebe Tsehy is an institution for younger children from age 0 to 8 of both sexes.The orphanage was established in 1957EC since laureate Haddis Alemayehu had given his residence for the municipality of Addis Ababa during that time to be a home for orphans. The orphanage has the maximum capacity of serving 150 children at a time. Since the age preference of adoptive parents is mostly infants or children from1 year to 4years Kebebe Tsehay had become a leading orphanage in placing children for domestic adoption in Addis Ababa.

### **Impact of (Adoptive) Parenting**

As Child Welfare Information Gateway puts it, adoptive parents come to the adoption decision for many different reasons. Some adopt because of infertility, and adoption is their alternative way to grow their family; others adopt in order to add to their family, to help a specific child, or for social justice reasons. It also describes how parents who consider adoption because of infertility have already experienced loss and disappointment because of

the inability to have a biological child and may have already weathered an emotional roller coaster (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010).

As the article further describes it the adoption process is also a challenging phase for adoptive parents as it involves a long wait and unpredictable outcomes (Child Welfare information Gateway, 2010).

Some new adopters find that infertility issues resurface briefly when their new child arrives, so that they feel some (usually temporary) sadness that this child is not connected to them genetically. Other adoptive parents are overwhelmed by feelings of sadness for the losses experienced by their child's birth family and find it difficult to allow themselves to feel joy rooted in another's grief. Still others find it difficult to let themselves fall unconditionally into love with a child during any period of time when a birthparent's decision may be revoked (Johnston, 2008.P:2).

For many adoptive parents, completing the adoption matching and placement process means that the most difficult phase is behind them. Most adoptive children settle in with their new family, and research shows that the great majority of adoptive parents are satisfied with their decision to adopt (Vandivere, S., Malm, K., & Radel, L., 2009) as cited by Child Welfare Information Gate way.

According to Child Welfare Information Gateway, (2010) settling into parenthood or the "post adoption period" can present its own difficulties for parents. In some cases,

adoption-related issues arise long after the adoption, and parents may be unprepared for the lifelong process of adoption. Some parental stressors are the same types of challenges that all families--biological and adoptive--face; however, there are other potential stressors unique to adoption, and adoptive parents may want to familiarize themselves with the possibilities (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010). "Post adoption depression syndrome," or PADS, may occur within a few weeks of the adoption finalization (Foli's, 2009).

The realities of parenthood, including the tedium, lack of sleep (for parents of infants or children with behavioral or sleep issues), attachment issues, and the weight of parental responsibilities can be overwhelming and may make them question their parenting capabilities (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010).

Adoption is a life event that changes the identity of the parties as well as the identity of the involved families. Sometimes, adoptive parents are slow to adjust to their new identity, or they wonder what expectations accompany the new identity. Identifying as a parent of a particular child may be a more gradual process for some parents. For some parents, there is a pivotal moment when they first feel like a parent (e.g., the first visit to the doctor, school registration, and the first time the child says and means "Mama" (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010).

The community inflicts trauma onto the parents or family by lack of acceptance of the boundaries built to protect the child from emotional trauma, insistent questioning of the child's story, or negative or abusive verbiage to or about the parents and family to others, "there is a loss of privacy" (Foli & Thompson).

As the article from child welfare information Gateway (2010) concludes it Adoption is a lifelong commitment, and adoption-related issues may arise at any point in parents' or their child's lifetime. A willingness to learn about the issues and to be open to seeking support if necessary can help to ensure that parents and children experience happy and healthy family lives.

### **Public Perception about adoption**

In western culture many see that the common image of a family being that of a heterosexual couples with biological children. This idea places alternative family forms outside the norm. As a consequence, research indicates, disparaging views of adoptive families exist, along with doubts concerning the strength of their family bonds (Wegar, 2000, pp 363-370).

Also another research conducted by Evan Donaldson institute provided further evidence on the stigma. Nearly one third of the surveyed population believed adoptees are less well adjusted. In contrast, the same study indicated that adoptive parents were viewed favorably (Evan Donaldson institute, 2002, P: 38)

### **Theoretical orientation**

This study is based on the theoretical assumption of psychosocial theory. This theory mainly focuses on the critical relationships between persons and their significant environment and the interaction between the two. It is most useful in cases where the goal is to help people both to understand issues of personality and how these effects are affected by societal realities, and to seek solutions in both the person and the environment. (Brantford, 2015) In similar way this study tries to explore adoptive parents

experience and their challenges from within themselves and from their interaction with the society as well.

This theory informs the research in such a way that Adoption and adopting a child is not only the issue of the adoptive parents. The issue is not something that stands by itself it is highly affected by the significant others. The environment and the society where adopted children are being raised matters. It is again important for parents to explore their inner self, perceptions and own personality. Since it will help how their personality and perception affects the society and is also intern affected by the society. Considering both the societal perception and parents' personality and way of seeing things will be crucial in order to come up with an integrated solution.

## **Chapter Three: RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is devoted for in-depth exploration of the research design chosen, sampling technique used, Study Sight chosen, Study Participants, Data Collection Tool used, data collection procedures employed, ethical issues considered, the data analysis procedure and the limitations this study have.

### **Research Design**

Qualitative inquiry is richly descriptive and uses words rather than numbers to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon. Qualitative study attempts to understand and make sense of phenomena from the participant's perspective (Merriam, 2002, PP: 4-5).

Qualitative research design would be most appropriate for this particular study since this research tries to uncover the adoptive families experience during the adoption process and after the process is finalized and as it also tries to delineate any anticipated challenge in the future.

According to Merriam(2002) there are eight most commonly used approaches of qualitative research; namely, basic interpretative, phenomenology, grounded theory, case study, ethnography, phenomenology, narrative analysis, critical ,postmodern -post cultural. Among these approaches narrative analysis is chosen for it better suits the purpose of this study.

Narrative analysis use interviews and sometimes documents or observations to “follow participants down their trails” (Riessman 2008, p: 24). Adoptive families’

narrations about their overall experience were analyzed by coding and categorizing and make sense of their responses. Narrative analysis seeks to put together the “big picture” about experiences or events as the participants understand them (Riessman 2008, p: 24).

### **Study Site**

The study site is Addis Ababa and the Kibebe Tsehay Orphanage located at 6 Kilo around the Afencho Ber area.

There are 35 private and 3 government orphanages in Addis Ababa. Kibebe Tsehay is government orphanage administered by the Addis Ababa BOWCYA office. This orphanage was able to place nearly 300 children for domestic adoption in the past four years. Whereas the other remaining orphanages altogether only placed children not more than 10 for domestic adoption over the years.

The Addis Ababa city women children and youth affair office is primarily responsible government body for overseeing the domestic adoption placement in Addis Ababa in collaboration with both government and private orphanages.

According to BOWCYA Kibebe Tsehay had placed a very significant number of children through local adoption in the past five years compared to other government and private orphanages operating in the city.

This significant number of placement was the rationale behind choosing Kibebe Tsehay orphanage anticipating for ample number and verity of adoptive families who would take part in the study.

## **Study Participants**

Participants of this study were Ethiopian adoptive parent(s) who adopted a child /children / domestically from Kibebe Tsehay orphanage at least before a year and those who are residents in Addis Ababa city and who are willing and available to participate in the study. Assuming a year will be a reasonable amount of time for parents to experience at least some post adoption challenges.

Any adoptive parent/parents who adopted a child domestically through Kibebe Tsehay orphanage before a year or more and who is willing to take part in this study was considered to be eligible. Both couples and single mothers took part in the study. Adoptive parent or parents who finalized the adoption process less than a year ago or prospective adoptive parent(s) who are on the way of completing the process were not included in this study as they are assumed to be less experienced or have not yet experienced the impacts of adoptive parenting.

## **Sampling Technique**

Samples for this study were recruited with the help of BOWCYA office and the Kibebe Tsehay orphanage. After a brief explanation of the purpose of the study The BOWCYA helped with identifying an orphanage that had placed a significant number of children through domestic adoption in the past five years, which was Kibebe Tsehay. In turn, the orphanage helped the researcher track down these adoptive families. This was the great challenge for both the researcher and the orphanage as most of adoptive families didn't even want to be contacted by the orphanage after the process was finalized. Due to the fact that most adoptive parents want to keep the matter strictly confidential.

Convincing these families to come forward and share their experiences was a great challenge.

Purposeful sampling was used for this study. Initially adoptive parents who can be potential respondents were purposefully chosen. Initial Telephone contact by the orphanage was made with these parents about the research. Those who were willing for further contact by the researcher and those who were willing to share their personal details to the researcher were listed out. After viewing their personal profile like; marital status and availability of own biological children samples were again purposefully chosen to make sure all the possible categories were included. These categories include; Single moms, couple adopters, adopters with and without own biological children. Then further contact was made by the researcher to these parents via telephone and emails. After several efforts, lobbying and explanation of the purpose of the study some decided to take part in the study and while others didn't. The unit of analysis for this particular study was individual families.

## **Sample Size**

. . . There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and Resources as well as data saturation (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, (2013).

There is no easy answer to the question as to how many participants are required for a qualitative study. It really does depend on the study. Generally speaking, there will be both theoretical and practical considerations. Theoretically, optimal numbers will be determined by the research topic and question—what you are wanting to find out, from whom, and the likely variability of experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Darlington and Scott, 2002).

As many qualitative researchers and writes argue there is no hard and fast rule as to how many samples would be taken for a qualitative study. Therefore, purpose of the study, time, resource, data saturation and interest to participate were the determinant factor for the sample size taken for this study.

For this study a total of ten respondents were interviewed. These include eight adoptive parents and two coordinators both from the Addis Ababa BWCYA office and the orphanage were interviewed. Since the goal of the research is not generalization rather transferability of the data. Transferability refers to the extent to which findings from one sample can inform our understanding of another sample (Shenton, 2004). Generalizability is the extent to which the results from one sample can be applied to an entire population (Polit & Hungler, 1991) as cited by ( Jen H. Dolan, 2012, P:82)

Two single moms, three couples who have children and three parents who have no biological children were included in the interview. These samples were purposely chosen to have the full picture of adoptive families experience from different angles. To explore their world as adopters due to infertility reasons on one hand and adopters from religious and other moral convictions on the other hand.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Prior to meeting the researcher, prospective participants were contacted by the orphanage manager and were briefed about the purpose of the research. Those respondents who had showed certain level of interest to take part in the study were forwarded to the researcher. These prospective respondents were debriefed about the purpose of the research. They were also informed about data collection procedure, ethical issues, the use of tape recorder and about their right to terminate the interview at any time. Prospective participants who indicated they would like to proceed were then asked to sign an informed consent. Informants were then asked to pick a time and place that is most convenient for them. Time and venue for the interview was then set up according to their preference. Interviews were conducted at respondents' offices/place work and at their residence. Conducting the interviews at their residence was a bounce for the researcher as there was a chance for observing child-parent relationships at a natural setting.

Most researchers go into in-depth interviews with some kind of interview guide or list of topics to cover at some stage during the interview. This can serve as a useful reminder of core aspects of the research question to be asked about. In-depth interviews should, if at all possible, be taped (Darlington and Scott, 2002).

Establishing a good rapport with the respondents prior to conducting the interview is also very important. A good relationship must be established to get most out of the interview with the adoptive parents. All the interviews were tape recorded. Each interview lasted from 45 minutes to 1 hour.

The development of trust between researcher and participant is an essential part of the research process. Participants in a research project share about personal, and perhaps traumatic, experiences that requires a great deal of trust—trust that the researcher will listen, will treat participants fairly, will respect their limits about what they want to say, and will deal with the data fairly (Darlington and Scott, 2002).

Good relationships with respondents were established right from the initial contact. I was very flexible with schedules and very tolerant with multiple cancelations of appointments, delayed responses for texts and emails. I have tried to be more understanding of their busy schedules and commitments. I was always grateful for their time.

Understanding the significance of past or current experiences lends itself to methods such as in-depth interviewing in which trust and rapport are essential if an individual is to share thoughts and feelings (Darlington and Scott, 2002)

A good rapport was also revealed by creating a very friendly and natural setting. Instead of directly proceeding with the interview I start with random day to day conversation. If the interview took place at their residence I start by socializing with the children and both the parents. Prior to beginning the interview I thank them for their time, talk about me a little bit and my experience with adoption. I also inform them how I truly

appreciate their deeds and that there is a lot I want to learn from their experience. I once again assure them that every information will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. As I always place the recorder centered to me and my respondent the interview seem like a normal conversation rather than an interview. After, wrapping up the interview we normally had friendly conversations and most ask me about other adoptive parents I interviewed and usually show me videos and pictures of their children if not met physically.

### **Data Collection Tool**

The major data collection tool for this study was an in –depth interview as this study tends to explore adoptive parents entire journey. With an intention of exploring their experiences before and after the adoption process was finalized. In addition to the interview observations and report reviews were incorporated.

The process of telling their stories about the past in the present, and particularly in the interview context, will itself impact on participants’ subsequent organization and understanding of their experience (Kleinman, as cited by scott 1988).

Clearly, an interview is much more than just a tool, like a drill to screw deeper into the discursive structures that frame the worlds of ‘subjects’ (Somekh and Lewin,2005,P:20)

In-depth interviewing is the most commonly used data collection approach in qualitative research. The in-depth interview takes seriously the notion that people are experts of their own experience and so best able to report how they experienced a particular event or phenomenon. (Darlington and Scott, 2002)

In-depth interview was the most appropriate data collection approach for this particular study since it will help meet the research purpose and best answers the research questions which are in-depth exploration of adoptive parents experience with domestic adoption as they narrate it.

### **Ethical Consideration**

As a result of its focus on people, ethical issues are centrally important in social science research. Knowledge confers power, so in collecting data researchers need to be guided by principles of respect for persons and obtaining informed consent (Somekh and Lewin, 2005, P:20).

Ethical practice is often defined as ‘doing no harm’ and conducting a research that benefits participants in positive ways (Somekh and Lewin, 2005).Accordingly, while conducting this research core Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity were give due attention.

After having a full understanding about the purpose of the study and willingness to take part in the study all respondents signed an informed consent. They were also assured that they can withdraw from participating in the study any time even after signing an informed consent.

Confidentiality and anonymity includes developing data collection and storage systems in which it is not possible to identify the research subjects (Darlington and Scott, 2002).

All possible efforts were made to insure confidentiality and anonymity of adoptive parents both at data collection and analysis stages. For those respondents who wanted to remain anonymous identifying items such as names and places were changed or not even mentioned in certain scenarios. To reduce the risk of recognition, data will be presented in disaggregated way that is presenting responses of adoptive parents during the interview under theme-based headings.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

In qualitative research data analysis is simultaneous with data collection. Simultaneous data collection and analyses allows the researcher to make adjustments along the way, even to the point of redirecting data collection, and to test emerging concepts, themes and categories against subsequent data (Merriam, 2002,p:14)

The analysis began with transcribing and translating all the interviews word by word. Then the transcriptions were categorized using the thematic areas of the research. This patterns and themes were given names (codes) and were refined and adjusted as the analysis proceeds.

Coding in qualitative research is an integral part of the analysis, involving sifting through the data, making sense of it and categorizing it in various ways (Darlington and Scott, 2002).

### **Validity, credibility and Trustworthiness**

Purposeful Sampling as a strategy adds credibility to a sample when the potential purposeful sample is larger than one can handle. This type of sampling, it uses small sample sizes, thus the goal is credibility, not representativeness or the ability to generalize (Darlington and Scott, 2002).

The purposeful selection of the samples ensured the trustworthiness of the research. Since the samples represent all the possible categories of respondents that should be included in the study.

Research validity is also concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to a wider population (Merriam, 2002)

Even though, each adoptive parent can have their unique stories to tell about their experience as adoptive parents. Their overall experience of these adoptive parents can be the realities of other families who didn't participate in the study although there could be subjectivity at certain instances.

### **Limitations of the study**

As most qualitative studies the major limitation of this study is not being able to draw generalizations. Since only a little number of adoptive families were interviewed.

Not all adoptive parents who adopted a child domestically were contacted for various reasons. The ones contacted were those who were assumed to be positive and open about the adoption at least anonymously and those who were traceable from the contact information on their file. Thus these samples may not be the true representation of all adoptive families as each family may have their own unique experiences.

Furthermore, only one spouse of the five couples were interviewed and their perceptions and point of views cannot be a true representations of their spouse who didn't take part in the study.

In addition, I was not able to find researches directly dealing with the Ethiopian adoptive families' experience. Hence, it was not possible to draw any comparisons with any prior researches in this area.

### **Personal motivation for conducting the research**

I had the pleasure of working with children who were orphaned and vulnerable. I used to work for a program of an organization mainly dealing with inters country adoption. I was always drawn into how these American adoptive families are loving and caring for these children. I have been observing the love, passion and commitments they have for these children who are of different race and color. I had been observing this as I continued to work with this organization for more than 4 years.

Over the years I always question myself if Ethiopian families can be as loving and committed to the children who are orphaned and vulnerable like those foreigners. I always ask if there were such families in Ethiopia who have a heart for caring for these children as others did. With this curiosity I have further researched for if there were really this kind of parents in reality and when I learned there are few hundreds of them I was really thrilled and wanted to further investigate their motivations, challenges and experiences along the way. I hoped their kind deeds and experiences will inspire others to open up their hearts and homes for those children in need.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

This chapter deals with the major findings of the study gathered from all the respondents. As it is stated in the methodology part of this study eight adoptive parents and two key informants were interviewed. The findings will be presented in line with the research questions, what this study originally intended to find out.

In this chapter demographic information about adoptive parents, background information about their children, motivation behind considering adoption, the journey of becoming an adoptive parent, Major challenges, any available network and support systems for adoptive families are explored in depth.

In order to minimize the risk of recognition data will be presented in disaggregated way, under theme-based headings. All possible effort has been made to avoid mention of Specific name of places, occupation, place of work and other personal and unique elements to ensure anonymity.

## Demographic Information

Table 4.1 outlines demographic information of adoptive parents obtained during the interview and Table 4.2 Illustrates background information of adoptees and biological children.

Marital Status	Age	Occupation /Source of income	Level of education	Religion
Married (Adoptive parent 1)	42/40	Works for an NGO /House wife	BA/Diploma	Catholic Christians
Single (Adoptive parent 2)	51	House rental	Diploma	Orthodox Christian
Single (Adoptive parent 3)	42	Employee in an international organization	MA	Orthodox Christian
Married (Adoptive parent 4)	45/32	Business owner/works for an NGO	MA/MA	Protestant Christian
Married (Adoptive parent 5)	32/37	Instructor/self employed	2nd MA/Diploma	Protestant Christian
Married (Adoptive parent 6)	38/30	Work for an International organization/ House wife	MA/High school complete	Protestant Christian
Married (Adoptive parent 7)	55/54	Civil servants	MA/BA	Protestant Christian
Widowed (Adoptive parent 8)	47	Pension	High school complete	Muslim

Table 4.1 Demographic information of adoptive parents

Two of the respondents are single mothers (never married), one of the respondents is widowed and the rest five are married. Their age ranges from thirty two to fifty five. Employment/income wise; two parents work for NGOs, two parents work for international organization, One parent is self employed, One is a collage instructor, One of the parent is a business owner, one of the mother relays on pension of her deceased husband, one of the other mother earns her living from hose rental and two of the parents

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Child's Current Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age at adoption</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Child's Background</b>
A. Parent 1	1 year and 8 months	Female	3 months	Adopted Child	Abandoned child
A. Parent 2	3 years and 3 months	Female	2 months	Adopted Child	Abandoned child
A. Parent 3	2 years and 8 months	Female	2 months	Adopted Child	Abandoned child
	2 years and 10 months	Male	3 months	Adopted Child	Abandoned child
A. Parent 4	14 years	Male	NA	Biological child	NA
	3 years and 6 months	Female	2 months	Adopted Child	Abandoned child
A. Parent 5	11 years	Male	NA	Biological child	NA
	6 years	Female	NA	Biological child	NA
	3 years and 6 months	Male	7 months	Adopted Child	Abandoned child

are civil servants. Two of the adoptive mothers are house wives. Among the 13 adoptive parents including their spouses six of them have Masters Degree; three have diploma and two of them have completed high school. Among the five couples four of the couples are Christian Protestants and one of the couples are catholic Christians. Both the single moms are orthodox Christians while one adoptive mom is a Muslim.

A. Parent 6	2 years and 4 months	Female	2 month and 15 days	Adopted Child	Abandoned child
A. Parent 7	27 years	Male	NA	Biological child	NA
	25 years	Male	NA	Biological child	NA
	13 years	Female	NA	Biological child	NA
	3 Years	Male	6 month	Adopted Child	Abandoned child
A. Parent 8	Deceased	Female	NA	Biological child	NA
	4 years and 2 months	Female	7 month	Adopted Child	Abandoned child

Table 4.2 Demographic information of adoptee's and biological children

Three of the couples have biological children and their age ranges from 6-27. The current age of the adoptees ranges from 1 year and 8 month to 3 years and a half. Among the nine adoptees six of them are female while 3 are male. All of the adoptive parents have adopted one child except for one of the single mothers who had adopted two children, one male and one female. All of the adoptees are abandoned children and their age at adoption ranges from 2 – 7 months.

### **Motivation behind considering adoption as a means of family formation**

Among the five couples 3 of them considered adoption purely for infertility reasons. Among these couples 2 of them never had children and one of the couple had one child but was never able to give birth to another child. These adoptive parents went through different medical procedures, went to different churches hopping for miracles and tried several other things to get a child for many years from (7-15 years) and eventually considered adoption. Adoptive parent 6 stated:

Infertility occurred on my wife's side. I personally believe that life is full of options. So we chose to have a child this way because the other way didn't work out.

The remaining two couples have their own biological children and infertility was not the issue here. Their motivation to adopt was purely religious and moral convictions. This was what adoptive parent 5 shared with me:

Our case is kind of special. I used to volunteer for the orphanage (Kibebe Tsehay) with missionaries that came from abroad. I didn't have any idea about the orphanage until I went there with these missionaries. I and my husband have always thought about adopting a child. Even before we were married. But we never thought this was the right time. Since I was back to school doing my masters at the moment and we were not financially strong. But our hearts were heavy for those children I see being abandoned everyday. I remember when our son was brought to the orphanage he had a strong bond with one of the missionaries and he looks much alike with our son. This was what caught our attention. Then we talked about it and prayed. The timing was also ideal. We didn't want our children to know about the adoption because we thought it will affect their bonding. At the time they were 3 and 7 and it was perfect. Otherwise we had to wait until they became older and leave the house. We knew we can't wait that long so we decided to take him home as soon as possible.

For both of the single moms specially (2 and 3) adoption had always been what they have been thinking about at the back of their head.

I had always the desire to adopt children. Even if I had a child of my own I still wanted to adopt one child as a permanent contribution. Later in my life when I knew I don't want to get married and I can't have a child of my own I decided to adopt two children. Although I had to wait for few years until I can settle few things like having my own house. (Adoptive Mother 3)

The other single mom said: I have always wanted to have a child or even a child that is not my own. A child who is in need as I also came from broken home. As the years go by and as I know I can't give birth anymore I considered adoption. (Adoptive Mother 2)

Adoptive parent 8 never had a child after her daughter was deceased. She tried having a child for several years but it was not possible. Raising somebody's child never crossed her mind until one day old women at the mosque made her hold an infant baby and never came back. She shared her experience as:

At the moment I didn't know what to do. We looked for the women everywhere in the mosque but she was not found. Then I decided to take the baby home but my husband was against the idea so we reported to the police and the child was taken to the orphanage. I wanted to raise the child and I had to convince my husband to share my idea. After two months of wait I was informed the police were not able to find the birth family. Then I proceeded with the formal adoption process. This was how Allah gave me a child.

## **The journey of Becoming an Adoptive parent**

### **The thought process**

For all of the adoptive parents deciding to adopt a child was not spontaneous. They had spent several years thinking about it, trying other options, battling with themselves, convincing their spouses', waiting for the right moment and getting prepared. Except for the one mother who decided to adopt just because somebody left abandoning a child to her. Adoptive parent 6 told me:

I thought about it for many years nearly for 7 years and we have been married for 9 years. I didn't want to go through any medical procedures anymore. Over the years I brought up the issue several times and my wife resisted me the whole time because she haven't gave up and she still wanted us to try. I had to wait until she was finally convinced. That was possible through the word of God. I reminded her that we became a child of God through adoption. I was finally successful.”

### **Learning about domestic adoption and the service providers**

All of the adoptive parents learned about the existence of formal domestic adoption in different ways.

Adoptive parent 5 reported she learned about domestic due to her work exposure and due to the chance she got to volunteer at the orphanage and the orphanage director advised her to start the process from Addis Ababa BOWCYA office.

Adoptive parent 4 reported his exposure with foreigners adopting a child internationally due to the business he runs and that led them learn about domestic adoption. He found out about the service providers due to his friend request who wants to adopt and who lives abroad.

Adoptive parent 3 knew about formal domestic adoption due to her educational background. She had visited few orphanages before learning the process must start from Addis Ababa BOWCYA office. My other respondent told me he learned about it because of his friend who adopted domestically.

Adoptive parent 7 reported domestic adoption was not a new concept for him as the organization he works for closely works with child welfare program. One of the adoptive mothers learned about it from the police.

For adoptive parents 1 and 2 learning about the formal ways of domestic adoption and the service providers was not an easy task. They were successful after several efforts and various visits at different orphanages and hospitals.

None of the adoptive parents learned about the system or the service providers because it was readily available. Most of them learned about it after making several efforts and few of them were lucky enough to have the connection or prior exposures.

## **Criteria and procedure**

All adoptive parents had to fulfill all the criteria stated on the child alternative guideline. Which includes Marriage license or certificate of being unmarried, Medical certificate for both parents, police clearance, income statement showing they earn minimum of 3000 birr per month, proof that they are residents in Addis, support letter from Idir or Kebele and application showing their child preference with the signature of both spouses or the mother (if she is single). Prospective Adoptive parent's (PAPs) age must be within the range of 25-60.

Unless they qualify the criteria we won't send them to Kibebe Tsehay. Once they are done with all the required paper work they will be sent to Kibebe tsehay and will be assigned to a child as per their preference otherwise they will be registered on the waiting list. Once they are matched with a child the case will be taken to the court. We sign the contract of adoption with PAPS and appear at the court on behalf of the child. The child will be under the custody of the orphanage for 2 months until the police report indicating the birth family are not found and until the case is approved by the court. PAPs can visit their child at the orphanage and start creating attachments. Says the key informant from BOWCYA office.

According to BOWCYA office and the orphanage the whole adoption process takes 3-5 months. For three of the adoptive parents the process took 3 months, one parent reported it took her 4 months, it took 2 months for the other two parents. The longest it took was 6 month and a year by two of the remaining parents.

The time frame for finalizing the process varies. The variations are mainly due to: the matching process, compiling all the paper works, birth mother being found and other external factor.

Regarding the adoption process two parents commented it is tiresome and discouraging the other six felt all the criteria and procedures were necessary. Among the six parents two of them (Adoptive parent 4 and 5) suggested homes study and training prior to adoption should be set as criteria. Adoptive parent 4 said:

From the children aspect I don't think the criteria is sufficient. Home study should also be required. Adoptive parent's background living standard and conditions should be explored in depth. Taking training should also be set as one criterion.

Adoptive mother 5 also shares this idea but have doubts. She said:

I think home study and trainings should be included as a requirement but am afraid if those be discouragements for adoptive families. I know home study takes about 6 month for Inter county adoption. Because coming forward and considering adoption with all the societal pressure is very challenging by itself and I fear this may be an additional challenge.

Adoptive parent 7 suggested the minimum income statement parents are required to present should be revised as the money value is not the same every year. Adoptive parent 2 has a commented on the medical requirements that states adoptive families must be free from any communicable disease. She said:

I think some of the criteria are unfair as it stigmatized individuals living with HIV/AIDS. I wonder why they are not allowed to adopt while they have the heart and the potential.

Key informants from the BOWCYA office and the orphanage also indicated that home studies should be included as a criterion for adopting a child domestically and pre adoption trainings.

### **Child Preference**

None of the adoptive parents adopted a disabled child or a child with special needs. All the parents adopted healthy children. Adoptive parent 5 reported her adopted son was healthy but severely malnourished at the time he was adopted. Adoptive parent 5 and Adoptive parent 7 adopted male children. Adoptive parent 3 adopted one male and one female child. Adoptive parent 8 didn't have any gender preference. The remaining 4 parents preferred baby girls and they were assigned accordingly. Adoptive parent 5 initially wanted to adopt a girl but ended by adopting a boy. She describes the scenario as:

Initially we wanted a girl because we think girls are more vulnerable. But we liked our son the moment we saw him and we picked him.

The Age preference ranged from 2 month- 1 year. R3 wanted her adopted children who were exactly the same age or at least closer so as to raise them as twins. She had to wait for 2 more month until she was matched with a baby girl according to the age preference.

In addition to the age and sex preferences R1, R2 and R3 had a specific preference regarding color, they wanted the skin tone of their adopted children to resemble theirs. Regarding child preferences, parents who preferred a child with a skin color similar to theirs was with an intension of avoiding unnecessary questions regarding the child is there's and also to avoid the same question from the adopted child until the right time comes. Most parents preferred an infant child hoping the bonding will be much easier during that age and with a desire to raise the child in own way starting from the very beginning. Except for one parent the others don't have a specific reason for wanting a female child they 'just wanted' a baby girl. But this one parent said she wanted a girl because she thinks girls are more vulnerable in many ways than boys.

Regarding the child preferences the key informants stated:

Adoptive parents generally are very picky regarding child preference. Age wise, sex wise, and even have a color preference. They want an absolutely normal and healthy child but they should be very considerate as these children are abandoned and under institutional care.

### **Meeting with the child for the first time**

All parents explained meeting their children for the first time was an exciting experience. Adoptive parent 1 describes the moment as: We fall in love with our child the moment we saw her.

Adoptive parent 3 added:

I loved them and couldn't wait until I take them home. We were able to bond right away. They started to recognize me just after few visits; both of them want to be held. All the children are adorable; you want to take them all you know.”

For Adoptive parent 6 felt their parental responsibility at the first moment they saw their child.

I rushed into the orphanage the moment I got a phone call from the manager. It was me who saw her for the first time. I liked her very much. The next day I came with my wife. Our daughter was not well dressed up and a child sleeping next to her was assigned to Canadian families and she was well dressed. My wife felt so sad ....that our child is with torn out clothes so we went right away to buy her clothes.

## **Preparation and Adjustments**

### **Pre adoption training**

None of the adoptive parents received pre adoption trainings. However, Adoptive father 4 reported taking a 10 credit hour training online a year after the adoption process was finalized. This family had a dual citizenship and had to adopt their child again internationally so she can also have a dual citizenship. Taking a training was mandatory to finalize the inter country adoption.

We took the training a year after and we were able to learn so many things that we were not aware at first. The training include issues like; what is adoption, the mechanics of adoption, what is the child background and relationships with prior

care givers, what are the challenges, how to create a bond, the journey of attachment, how to compile the story of the child, when and how to inform the child about adoption and other related issues. The training was very crucial.

All parents stated a need for trainings prior to adopting a child. They expressed a need for trainings on basics of adoption, the Ethiopian legal frame work for domestic adoption, how to handle social pressures, how to tell a child about adoption, how to do it, when is the right time to do it, how to educate children about being a single mother (for single mothers).

Despite the fact that all parents haven't taken any training prior to becoming an adoptive parent they see themselves very well prepared in various areas. Adoptive parent 3 describes the preparation as:

I was well prepared psychologically after a great challenge. The first challenge was when I decided I didn't want to be married and the second one was when I decided to adopt children. These things are not easily acceptable in our community and culture. Since I passed through all these challenges I finally see myself as well prepared.

Adoptive parent 4 added:

We were well prepared. We were praying about it. We were also well prepared emotionally as well as materially.

Adoptive parent 1 reported his wife has to leave her work in order to become a full time mom and care for their daughter. One other adoptive family (R5) had to also make similar arrangements.

My husband was about to start his own business when we were about to bring our son home but he had to hold it because we believed at least one of us should be around the house quite often. Therefore, my husband had to be a part timer. We also had done similar adjustments for the other children as well.

Apart from all these preparations four of my respondents had to change their place of residence because of the adoption. All of them wanted to move to new neighborhoods where no one knows about their back history and the adoption. As they describe it, they have done this to protect their children. Adoptive parent 1 describes the scenario like this:

The original plan was to move to our new house with our child but the processes was prolonged and we had to bring our child after we moved it and there was no other way of explain the situation to our neighbors except telling them that we have adopted her.

The other three parents had also to do similar things....moving in to new houses and to new neighborhoods. Adoptive parent 3 describes her experience like this;

I didn't want to move to my new place until I bring them home. Three days after I brought them to my previous residence we moved into the new neighborhood.”

## **Informing others**

All adoptive parents had to pass the process of telling others about the adoption. These people include close and extended family members, friends, neighbors, previous or current coworkers and people from the church. For some parents it went smoothly. Adoptive parent 2 and Adoptive parent 8 reported informing family and friend about the adoption and they took it very well. Adoptive parent 7 doesn't recall experiencing any challenge in this regard. As he described it, it was because the act is very common in the Oromo culture. Although, this was not what the other parents experienced. Informing others was a bit challenging for the other parents.

Adoptive parent 1 said:

My sister and her husband were not really happy about it at first. Most people who knew us and our situation were eventually very happy because we brought her into our life.

Adoptive parent 3 had a big challenge informing her family about the adoption. She said:

All my friends are very supportive and love my children. There was a big challenge with informing family members. Not being married is a challenge and I was at least expected to give birth to children if I don't wish to get married. But I didn't see the point of giving birth if I am not married. For me giving birth and adopting a child was the same thing. It was a very tough moment at the beginning. I even went to the extent of avoiding family members who were against my decision. But the moment

they saw the children they regretted for not being supportive in the beginning.

Adoptive parent 4 added:

Immediate family members and friends were informed. They freaked out because having own child is a paramount thing in our society. For them our decision was shocking.

The other two parents had to inform people around them because there was no other option. Adoptive parent 6 also talks about how some people and family members see the act only as a generosity:

Most of my coworkers, people from our church, our friends, family members and our previous neighbors knew about the adoption. My coworkers know because initially I had to speak with few of them regarding the process. We were very reserved and didn't want everybody to know in order to protect our daughter. As you know our society is very rough. I am a very reserved person regardless our culture and that helped me a lot. Most people consider our act as very generous. My family still considers the adoption as a generous act and hope that God will give me a child. But I know that God already gave me a child he may bless me with more children but he already did bless me with a child.

Adoptive parent 5 added:

My best friend knows about it because we are so close and there was no way I could have hide it from her. Also my co-workers from my previous office know

because there was a letter I needed showing my income. I was forced to disclose it for these people. Only my brother knows because he lives with us. We don't have other extended family members. And those we have are not informed because they don't live close to where we are and we don't see each other very often. We had that advantage. And from our church only our pastor knows.

Three of the respondents have biological children. Two of the adoptive parents (Adoptive parent 4 and 7) had informed their biological children about the adoption. The other couple (Adoptive parent 5) who also had biological children chooses only to tell their children about having another sibling and not an adopted sibling assuming that will affect their bonding. Adoptive parent 5 explains how it happened:

We used the two month time to prepare our children that God is going to give us a baby boy. My daughter didn't understand very well because she was only 3. My son was excited because he wanted a brother and he was convinced very easily.”

### **Major Challenge's adoptive parents face**

All adoptive parents faced different challenges during pre and post adoption periods. Some of the challenges were unique to individual parents and some were shared by few or all of the parents.

### **Pre adoption challenges**

Two of the adoptive parents reported that police found the birth mother of their child and as they described the experience as very shocking and left them with many

uncertainties at least for some time. Both of these parents shared their experience in such a way.

While I was only left with few days to take my child home I was informed that the police found the birth mother. I was really shocked at that moment as I didn't know what this means and what the consequences are. I had already started bonding with my child, as I was visiting her at the orphanage very frequently. The mother was arrested and she refused to give her child for domestic adoption. I didn't understand the whole process, why she is given a chance to consent on the child's upbringing. For me this woman is a criminal, she had put the life of a child in danger. She had almost killed her child and I really don't see the point why she is given an option about her child's future of whether she will be given for local or inter country adoption. She was given about two weeks to think over it and decide. After a week I was told that she had given her consent to give her child for domestic adoption. (Adoptive parent 2)

Learning that the birth mother was found was very shocking. We were informed by the orphanage before completing the process that 5% of birth moms who abandoned their children will be most likely found by the police. That worried my wife from the very beginning. We were advised to be re assigned but we refused we wanted to withdraw instead since we had already formed attachment with our daughter. Then we have learned that she was arrested and she didn't want to raise her child anyway. But we had this fear. What if she show up on our door step one day and asked for her child. Even though we know that once the adoption contract is approved by the court it is irrevocable the idea still scares us. But the adoption

was process was finalized after the birth mother consented on the adoption and gave the guardianship to kibebe Tsehay to give the child for adoption.(Adoptive parent 4)

Four of the respondents reported that prolonged and tiresome adoption process was their challenge. Adoptive parent 3 explains the scenario as: The process was long and tiresome. She said:

The back and forth was very challenging. I don't feel some of the service providers especially at the lower level are efficient. I always had to dig out what is required and I was not told most times. I even remember saying 'I could have just taken two orphans from the street ,I am just doing this to go under the formal procedure hoping others could get accustomed to it as well.' There are no clear directions as such specially at the Kebele level. They don't inform you where to go, what is needed or how certain things can be obtained. They usually tell you that at the last minute. It was very difficult for me to go out of the office several times to finalize the process. You are not as such given the right directions, as to how long the process normally takes and what the requirements are. This is not something you should find out by yourself, you have to be informed.

This was what adoptive parent 5 shared with me regarding her challenge of pre adoption period. She said:

We were emotionally unstable. We had a fear if we were denied to the chance to parent him because we were so connected already. We know

that won't happen but we were scared until we brought him home.

Appearing at court was an overwhelming experience.

Social pressures and lack of recognition and support were/are the one of the major challenge faced by adoptive parent. Adoptive parent 4 stated:

Our main challenge at first was being open about the adoption because adoption is considered as a taboo in our culture. The other main challenge was Lack of support about the adoption from family members. They didn't even want to consider our daughter as our child. Some family members wanted us to drop the idea of adoption and to try having our own child because we already have one. Also on our side, we had issues with emotional and psychological readiness but we were able to overcome that gradually.

Adoptive parent 6 added: It was our culture. We Ethiopians socialize a lot and we do not have a private space. Everybody wants to involve in your life. Except some of my family members most were not supportive. But even wanted me to get divorced and give birth rather than adopting a child. And some consider it as a charity activity.

## **Post Adoption Issues and challenges**

### **Transition**

Most parents reported their children had a smooth transition. Few parents reported some transitional issues. These were not getting used to the new surrounding, problem with diet and some health illness that occurred right after the child was placed and even latter.

Adoptive parent 2 reported her daughter having a serious fungal infection. The child was on different medications. The adoptive mother reported this is something she is struggling with. Adoptive mother 3 added:

My son used to be sick a lot and had lost his immunity. I had to take to take him to a hospital several times. He also had a severe rash on his body. He was not in a good condition. It was challenging to restore his health.

Adoptive parent 5 reported having similar issues with her son. She also shared her son having slight developmental delays and crying a lot for no reason at all. She said:

The transition was a little rough in the first 3/4 weeks. My son had a persistent bacterial infection and he used to be very sick. He used to cry a lot for no reason at all. He won't stop no matter what we do. He didn't want to be left alone. He had a serious fear of abandonment. He doesn't want the light to be off. I think it could be because he was abandoned when he was 5/6 months old he may also have formed an attachment with prior care givers. He still sleeps with us. Unlike our other children who start sleeping in their own room when they start going to school. We also had a challenge when he start going to school it took him a while to get used to the new environment. Since he was severely malnourished he had slight delays achieving some developmental milestones. He was also on high calorie diet for 1 year because of the malnourishment. But currently he is a well adjusted child.

## **Post placement reports**

According to the key informants post placement reports along with pictures should be sent to BOWCYA and the orphanage after 6 month the child is adopted and every year until he/she is 18 years old. They also indicated this reports should be compiled by professional social workers. They also suggest reports to written after a brief visit of the child at the adoptive parent's home. They also added that this may discourage many adoptive parents as most of them want to keep the matter privately.

All of the adoptive parents reported that they don't send the reports regularly and as per the agreement. The main reason for not doing so is being busy in life. The other reason for most of the parents is they don't want any reminders of the fact that their child adopted. Adoptive parent 5 said:

We did try to submit report at first but we didn't remain loyal. It's good to send the report and stay connected but we hate any reminders, that our child is from the orphanage and he was abandoned. I just want my son to be my son not my adopted son.

Adoptive parent 1, 6 and adoptive parent 3 indicated that filling out the form and attaching some pictures is not sufficient to show the child's progress and well being.

They suggested home visits by professionals. Adoptive mother 3 further stated:

If anyone from the orphanage want to come and visit how the children are doing I want them to came like a visiting friend or relative not as a case worker or a social worker. Not in a formal way.

## **Dealing with questions about Adoption**

It was really surprising how adoptive parents usually had to deal with random questions even from random strangers. Some of the questions shared were: “I don’t remember your wife being pregnant”, “your child doesn’t totally look like you or your spouse”, “is that your child? When was he born?” This was also our challenge. Adoptive parent 3 shared one of her experiences as:

Oh you will be surprised of what random questions you will be asked from different people. One time I remember there was a celebration of Meskel in our neighborhood and one woman asked me ‘who are these kids?’ I told her my children. She was then like, ‘oh really? They don't look like you.’ I answered yes, they are my adopted children. Then she asked me, ‘why? What about your own children?’ Currently, my children may not pay attention to this kind of remarks because they are not matured enough, this happened a year ago. But this won't be the case after some years. There are even people who leave such a ridiculous remark after visiting them ‘Ahh how I wish they were her real children!’”

Adoptive parent 4 also added: Our society is very crude and it very challenging to raise an adopted child in such a society. They ask random questions carelessly like; where did this child come from? How? He/she doesn't look like you .we don't remember your wife being pregnant and so on. I have learned from the training being open about the adoption is the best way to deal with it. I have no problem telling others about my child being adopted. Then the conversation turns around and people start appreciating me.

Adoptive parent 5 and 6 reported they were lucky in this regard.

I don't anticipate this challenge because he somehow looks alike with my older son.

They have this rough resemblance.(Adoptive mother 5)

luckily our daughter somehow resembles my wife so we haven't faced any challenge in this regard so far; (Adoptive father 6)

### **Informing the child about adoption**

All adoptive parents reported they will be telling their child he/she is adopted at some point. Although, they are not really sure how and when exactly to do it but anticipate to do it at certain age. Adoptive parent 1 said:

We are planning on informing our child about the adoption. But we don't know when and how to do it. We want to consult professionals when the time comes. We pray that she will accept us as her parents.

Adoptive parent 2 wants to do it before anybody does. But not sure exactly when and how to do it. She said:

She will hear it anyway even if I don't inform her and I don't want that to happen, I don't want her to hate me. I think she will take it very well if she hears it from me. I am not sure when exactly but most likely when she is a teenager. I haven't really thought about how and when to do it. I am planning to get advice from the orphanage manger.

Adoptive mother 3 explains why it's important to tell her children about adoption.

She stated:

I haven't decided as to how and when to tell them. I will have to tell them for two basic reasons. One is because they should know the fact. I don't want the information to leak. I want to tell them before any body does that. We Ethiopians have a difficult culture with regards to this. As a pre caution I am planning to terminate my contract with their nanny who knew them from the orphanage, when they start going to school next year and when they start asking questions. I may even move to another neighborhood if there are potential treats. I am this determined. My other reason for telling them is because I want them to do the same for others in the future.

Adoptive parent 4 states how they are going to make use out of the training they took. He still feels they need more training in the area. He said:

It is something the child should grow up knowing about, otherwise when the child is told or finds out at certain point it would be very painful. We plan telling her when she is at least 5-6 years old. That time she will be able to speak and understand things at certain level. We will educate her about the adoption gradually. We even want to take more courses on that. On the previous training it is advised to do it at the age of 3/4. In play form. There is no formula as to how to do it. Certain reaction may lead to certain approaches.”

Adoptive parent 5 and 6 talk about the time they anticipate telling the child about the adoption respectively.

They said:

We know that we should tell him at some point. I don't know when and how to do it. Since we are not hiding anything from him. There won't be anything he wants to seek out. Since he is an abandoned child. We won't tell him at the age that compromises his self image. May be when he is 18 or 21.”

We plan on telling her when she is matured enough. Probably when she is 14/15. We are planning to leave country after few years. We believe she will take it very well because she will be raised out of Ethiopia.

“At first we didn't want to know anything about her but after we took the training we learned it is very

Adoptive parent 7 and 8 haven't really thought about the issue deeply they roughly estimated that they will be telling their child about the adoption when they are 18.

All the children were found abandoned. The adoptive parents have no information regarding birth families except adoptive parent 4 who only tried to gather few information. Not being able to share any information about birth family is what makes adoptive families worried whenever they think about informing the child about the adoption. On the other hand they feel somehow secured for not having information about birth families.

Only Adoptive parent 4 told me he has a picture of the birthmother and few information. He stated:

important therefore we went to the police station and gathered documentation about her and the imprisonment. The imprisonment was for 9 months. We also know the area where she lives. Additionally, we have her picture taken while she was out from prison to appear at the court.”

### **Sharing Experiences**

All adoptive parents have shared their experience of being an adoptive parent in one way or the other. They have shared their experiences with family members, friends, co workers and for others who are interested to know. Most of them still want to do that and help other prospective adoptive parents who are dealing back and forth with the decision to adopt. They are willing to also do that in the future but anonymously. None of the adoptive parents want to do that in public or on the media.

Adoptive parent 3 said:

Yes I have shared my experience for many of my friends. I have told them about the beauty of adoption. Having a child is having what you want. We wanted a child and we got one through the miracle of adoption. I had a family member who was not able to give birth. He asked me if there is a medicinal procedure I am aware of instead I advised him to consider adoption. Six months later he contacted me again and I gave him all the information. After another 4 months he told me they have decided to adopt and they finally did. I have many friends who have challenge of bearing their own child and I usually tell them that this is also a good alternative. We even assist nether prospective adoptive parents who are on the process of adoption to take the online training we had by sharing our user name and password.

This was what adoptive parent 5 and 6 shared:

Yes, I know one women who was trying to have a child for 14 years but afraid of adoption who

lives abroad. Her great fear was doubts that she would love the child as her own. I and my husband met her through other people. We have shared our experiences with her and made her visit the orphanage she seemed very motivated although we don't know what happened after wards.”

(Adoptive parent 5)

Yes, we have assisted two of my coworkers who wanted to adopt because of infertility reasons. They came to our home and saw our daughter. Both of them finally adopted a child. One of them even adopted an older child who was 6. We counsel people who are interested in adoption. I think we are good at it.” (Adoptive parent6)

### **Networks and Post-adoption support Systems**

All the adoptive parents and the key informants stated that there are no formal network and support systems special set up for adoptive parents.

None of them have contact with other adoptive families except for Adoptive parent 4 who are in touch with parents who adopted children internationally. Regardless this fact all parents but one believe it would be great to share experience with others of the same page. All agree with the importance of networking but only as long as it doesn't involve the children. Most parents shared how they don't want to tag or label their children as 'adopted'. Adoptive mother 5 also suggested it would be more useful for those who especially adopted older children. Adoptive mother 3 also talked about her need to meeting with other single moms but not only adoptive mothers to learn their experiences of dealing questions like “who is my father?” or “when I can meet him?”

Adoptive parent 6 has a different view with this regard. He said:

One time I tried to find one adoptive mom, I tried to call her but I was not able to reach her. But I didn't put that much effort on it. I never felt I should. I don't think it is relevant for me. This thing is

important for those people who need to support each other. I don't want to feel different I just want to feel I am a normal parent.

Even though, formal support systems doesn't exist for adoptive families .All adoptive families reported they are eventually getting support and acceptance from some family members, neighbors, coworkers and others. But it was such a long way to get their acceptance.

Adoptive mother 3 reported she was even offered a maternity leave from her office when she brought her children home. Since then people from the office have been very supportive.

Taking care of their children when they were not around, eventually accepting the adopted child as member of the family, giving them emotional support, buying gifts for their child were all considered to be good gestures and supports in the eyes of adoptive families.

Adoptive parent 3 talks about how it is important for her children to have social supports and links. She said:

Since I am a single mom, I am the sole bread winner and I have to stay healthy. After I have adopted my children I am very much concerned about my wellbeing, I drive carefully and I also try to maintain my social links. I want my children to have a strong social tie with my close and extended family members and also with my friends. I anticipate this to be their protection. I want them to get better education and I also want them to be independent. As long as I am with them I want them to be well equipped and secured because you never know. I think they should be independent even if am not around and was also the reason for adopting two.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

After a thorough review of literature I was able to realize that there is a gap in literature of my area of interest. I was not able realize that there is lack literatures directly dealing with Adoptive families over all experience with regards to formally adopting a child domestically. Being able to find comparisons with prior researches was a great challenge encountered. Even though, adoption is a universal term; the practice, the experience and the challenge associated with it highly vary contextually. Lack of researches done in Ethiopia made the checking for contrasts and consistencies a challenge.

This study also aims at bridging the knowledge gap in the area. Major finding of this study will be discussed in this chapter in line with the research questions.

### **Motivation behind considering adoption**

According to a survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2012), wanting to provide a permanent home for a child in need, a desire to expand ones family, inability to have a biological child, wanting a sibling for another child, and having previously adopted the child's sibling are the most commonly reported reasons for motivations to adopt a child. Additional but less common reasons for adoption could be, being related to the child prior to the adoption, having already formed a bond with or loved the child, loving children in general, and helping a child avoid foster care.

Consistent with this finding and other journal of adoption by child welfare information gate way(2010) motivations for adopting a child reveled in the current study were; infertility, wanting to provide a child in need (derived by religious or moral convictions), desire to create a family and having already formed a bond with a child. Most adoptive families participated in this study were motivated to consider adoption by one or more of the reasons stated above.

## **The Journey to being adoptive parent**

Adoptive parents who took part in the study shared about their long journey to become an adoptive parent. For most of them the road was quite tough and bumpy. Their journey included making the final decision to adopt a child, convincing a spouse, gathering information about the system and the service providers, fulfilling the criteria, passing through all the procedures, finding and meeting the child, making changes and adjustments, waiting and finally bringing the child home. The journey also involves emotional up and down and lots of uncertainties.

This was consistent with another research conducted by Vandivere, Malam & Radel (2009). Even though, all parents may have a unique experience or journey, this research indicated that adoptive parents in other countries also go through emotional up and downs as they approach the decision to adopt, during the process and also after the adoption.

In past times there was the hunt for a child to meet the families need. The more recent thought being proposed is, “Find a family to meet the child’s needs” (Levy & Orlans 2014).

The finding of the current study was contrary to the recent thought of finding a family to meet the child’s needs (Levy & Orlans 2014) the current domestic adoption in Ethiopia is finding children for the families needs. As the study revealed none of the adoptive parents adopted a disabled child or a child with special needs. The finding of this study indicated that healthy infant girls who were abandoned are highly preferred for domestic adoption. All parents were assigned to a child as per their preference.

First time meetings with the child are joyous occasions. After so much longing, work, and struggle, this final moment is climactic (Jean Nelson-Erichsen and Heino R. Erichsen, 2000). The same was true for all adoptive parents who took part in the study. Meeting a child for the first time had been an exciting experience.

Parents are often not prepared because information about their adoptive child is minimal, filled with holes, or because the parents lack sufficient pre-adoption education (Gunnar, Bruce, & Grotevant, 2000). Consistent with this the current study also revealed that parents feel less equipped to face the challenges of adoption. This is mainly due to no opportunity to pre adoption trainings and very minimal information about the child's history. According to the finding of this study, the issue is amplified on Ethiopian domestic adoptive parents since they all adopted an abandoned child with almost no information about the child's background or birth families. The study also pointed out that this is one of the biggest challenge adoptive parents anticipate facing through the course of adoption. Not clearly knowing as to when and how to inform their child worries them. In addition to that lack of knowledge about birth families background and inability to answer any question to their child with that regard is also their fear. This was the area where most adoptive parents pointed out the need for professional help and assistance in forms of counseling/consultation or trainings.

For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, societal expectations of 'parenting' consisted of rearing one's own biological child. Adoptions were generally closed or "confidential" in nature and characterized by secrecy. These more secretive and closed adoption practices were conceived to protect all three parties of the adoption triad – birth parents, adoptive parents, and the child (Silverstein & Demick, P: 112, 1994).

This idea contradicts with the Ethiopian old culture of carrying for children who are not own biological children. But consistent to the research with Selverstein and Demick the current study also revealed that most 'modern' parents who adopted a child formally from the orphanage were not open about the adoption. Those who were informed are only immediate family members or others who had to know about the adoption for different reasons; they were forced to tell them. It was something they want to keep private. This study further revealed that this is because of a great societal pressure and because having own

biological children is believed to be paramount in the Ethiopian society. Parents went to the extent of relocating to a different neighborhood in order to protect their children from stigma.

Also another research conducted by Evan Donaldson institute provided further evidence on the stigma. Nearly one third of the surveyed population believed adoptees are less well adjusted. In contrast, the same study indicated that adoptive parents were viewed favorably (Evan Donaldson institute, 2002, P: 38). The current study also revealed that the stigma and pressure is high on the adopted children than the parents. Most parents live with the fear of stigma and labels the society will tag on their adopted children. On the other hand the adoptive parents are considered to be generous and lucky for having the courage to raise a child they are not related to.

Confidential adoptions were thought to ensure birth parents' rights of privacy, shielding unwed mothers from the stigma of "illegitimacy". These practices also were believed to protect adopted children from social ridicule and to shelter adoptive parents from the humiliation of their infertility (Bussiere,P: 22,1998).

The study revealed that all children assigned to domestic adoption are children found abandoned. Also, most of the children in the orphanage are found abandoned. There is no research done as to why mothers abandon their children. There could be several factors. Most unwed mothers don't want to go through all the process of relinquishment to avoid being ostracized by the society. Instead, they are forced to abandon their child hoping for the better.

## **Major Challenges faced and Post adoption Issues**

### **Challenges**

Consistent with the qualitative study conducted by McKay & Ross (2010) where, Parents having unrealistic expectations and feared their child would be taken away if they made any mistakes or if something goes wrong (McKay & Ross). This finding also revealed that most parents have fears and uncertainties of losing the child when the birth mother was found or simply fear anticipating something will go wrong. Most parents get shocked when the birth mother is identified because they have this unrealistic expectation of her showing up at their door step one day claiming her child. Even when they know that adoption decision is irrevocable ones approved by court.

Social pressures and lack of recognition and support were/are one of the major challenges faced by adoptive parents. Recognition and acceptance from close family members about the adoption was not something that came over night for adoptive parents. People started respecting and accepting their decisions gradually. This was consistent with a research conducted by Gallinger.

Many of the participants stated that their families and communities were surprised and concerned when they first learned about the adoption. Nevertheless, participants reported that after completing the adoption, the majority of individuals came to accept their family's decision to adopt a child. (Gallinger,P:26,2012).

Similarly the research conducted by McKay and Ross (2010) also raveled that lack support by others were the main challenge and obstacle for adoptive parents. The current study also raveled that Ethiopian domestic adoptive parents have to deal with a similar challenge.

### **Post adoption issues**

A research by Shapiro, Shapiro, & Paret which focus on children who have been adopted from

institutions emphasizes the detrimental effects institutionalization has on children. It also draws further attention to the challenges that arise for the parents of these adopted children. The challenges adoptive parents face included: behavioral and emotional problems, attachment issues, and cognitive challenges, history of sexual abuse, issues surrounding personal and racial identity, changes in the family dynamic, and reunion with biological parents (Shapiro, Shapiro, & Paret, 2001).

Similarly, being institutionalized had some effects on the children and domestic adoptive parents also needed to deal with such challenges. Although, the effect of being institutionalized is also revealed in this study the effects are somehow different in the current study. Mostly because the children are adopted at infancy the amount of time spent at the orphanage were minimal. The issues revealed by the current study include not being able to form secure attachments, malnourishment which intern causing some developmental delays, persistent illnesses and low immunity resulted from unbalanced diet and compromised quality of care in the institution.

In western culture many see that the common image of a family being that of a heterosexual couples with biological children. This idea places alternative family forms outside the norm. As a consequence, research indicates, disparaging views of adoptive families exist, along with doubts concerning the strength of their family bonds (Wegar, 2000).

Consistent to the finding of the research conducted by (Wagar,2000) public perception of adoption in Ethiopia is also similar or even worse. Adoptive families had to deal with random questions regarding the adoption and the adopted child from here and there even from strangers unless the child looks like somebody in the family. Families constantly worry about these random comments as it may alert their children question about adoption on the wrong time.

## **Networks and support Systems**

Post-adoption supports include an array of services and other assistance that families may receive after adopting a child. Supports specific to adoption include meeting with agency staff, child and parent adoption support groups, parent training, and web-based resources. Financial supports available specifically for children adopted from foster care include monthly adoption subsidy payments and health insurance coverage. (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services – Washington, 2012)

Unlike the experience of other countries this study indicated that there are no formal post adoption network and support systems specially set up for adoptive families in Ethiopia. Almost all parents want to network with other adoptive parents and share their experience as long as it doesn't involve the children. The study noted the importance of networking. Although, with the current situation at hand forming this network is very unlikely since most adoptive parents want to keep the matter strictly confidential.

Even though, formal support systems doesn't exist for adoptive families .All adoptive families are eventually getting support and acceptance from some family members, neighbors, coworkers and others. But it was such a long way to get their acceptance.

Other researchers like McKay & Ross describe how families can benefit a lot from networking with other families and receiving post adoption services and supports. Consistent with the finding of this research they also stated these services are most of the time accessible for inter country adoption and not for domestic adoption (McKay & Ross, 2010).

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

### Conclusion

This study tried to spark a light on Ethiopian adoptive parents overall experience who adopted a child /children/ domestically. Eight adoptive parents who adopted a child through a government orphanage, kibebe Tsehay at least two years ago participated in the study. I am thankful for each one of the parents who shared their experiences with me without any reservation and beyond my expectation. It was impossible to put every detail thing they have share with me but I have tried my best not to miss out what is relevant for the study. All possible effort was done to capture their experience from different angles. I was also very curious to know what their world looked like from their own point of view and truly there was so much to learn.

Their motivation behind considering adoption were, mainly infertility and a desire to provide a permanent loving home for a child in need driven by religious and moral convictions. For whatever motivation they considered adoption all adoptive parents still need to be appreciated and encouraged for coming all the way, for being bold enough to face all the discouragements and negativities, for being committed parents who are willing to go the extra mile for their children and for being the ice breakers. Every effort should be made to encourage these and other prospective adoptive parents who are also considering adopting a child or children domestically. The Process should be well facilitated; parents shouldn't be discouraged because there is a lot of back and forth involved. Parents should get recognitions. They don't have to hide neither should they live with fear and uncertainties. They should feel welcomed in the society.

A lot have been said how domestic adoption is a much better resort than either institutional care or inter country adoption. Since, it gives children a chance to be raised in a familial setting knowing their culture and norms. Obviously, little was done on public awareness. All adoptive parents also agreed that there is a lot

to be worked on public awareness regarding domestic adoption. Simply promoting domestic adoption on the media is worthless because people want to see the lived experience. Adoptive parents can't actually come forward to media or public and share their experience about adoption because there is a great social pressure from the society. Social pressure is the result of lack of knowledge that a real family can be formed through the miracle of adoption.

Public should know that there are about 5 million OVC in Ethiopia and 100,000 of them in Addis Ababa only. Adoptive families feel that People should know that children are being abandoned every day and live in an orphanage is a very unfavorable condition without the love and care they deserve. It should also come to light that government considers domestic adoption as one of welfare alternative measures for OVC and that it is legally facilitated. The Public should be highly sensitized with these issues.

All adoptive parents agree that the stigma on adoption should be stopped at some point because it is not fair and it is not right. The society should accept adopted children as we have accepted them. We should work on integration and advocacy not only for other people to consider adoption but also for the society to accept adopted children in a similar way they accept biological children. People should not be ignorant and point out that a child is adopted in every social events or occasions. The current societal attitude is discouraging parents from considering adoption. Because many people are not on board when it comes to adoption.

### **Implication of the study**

The study has implications of social work practice, on child welfare policy and further researches on the area.

### **Implication on Social work practice**

The study has various implications for social work. Domestic adoption is considered to be a better resort for OVCs but it is a less promoted and encouraged practice. Although the number of children placed for inter country adoption has dramatically declined in the past few years and the number of child placed for domestic adoption have shown progress the numbers are not still comparable. This shows that there is clearly a lot to be done in the area. Furthermore finding of the study show that, even though there are 35 private orphanages in Addis Ababa only finger counted children are placed for domestic adoption over the years. Kibebe Tsehay is the leading government orphanage working actively on domestic adoption. This study has come up with some indications social work practice can aid for the development of the service and for more children to benefit from the outcomes.

### **Trainings**

The study clearly shows there is a visible gap in this regard. Adoptive parents got through all the adoption process and take the adopted child home without any prior training taken on the matter. The study also indicated that parents face a great challenge both during pre and post adoption periods. Most of the challenges they face and the uncertainties they live with are resulted from lack of knowledge and expertise in the area. Trainings specifically about adoptive parenting should be rendered for prospective adoptive parents.

### **Counseling / consultations**

The study showed that there are no prior or post counseling services rendered for adoptive parents or for prospective adoptive parents. None of the participants mentioned any thing about receiving such services but they indicated their need for professional consultations and guidance at some point. Since adoption is a lifelong commitment a need for counseling and consultations may arise at any point of their path. Therefore,

these services should be readily available for adoptive/prospective adoptive parents.

Free telephone line only dedicated to give information and consultations could be of a great help since parents in need of help can get the services without the need of showing up and anonymously.

### **Advocacy**

Domestic adoption is now said to be one of the better resorts for OVC and its also showing a promising progress. If promoted and advocated many children could benefit and find a permanent loving home.

Adoptive parents' voice should be heard. They should get the entire acceptance they need from the community. The study indicated that adoptive parents need the public to be supporting and understanding. The public should also be trained and educated domestic adoption is one of the alternative child care services and that it is formally facilitated by the government. People should also be informed that adoption is a choice and adoptive parents choose to build their family through adoption and this should be acknowledged and respected. Stake holders should work together with Medias and religious organizations to advocate for adoption and adoptive parents.

### **Network and support groups**

The study indicated there are no network and support systems for adoptive families. Almost all parents want to network with other adoptive families and share their experiences. Forums and platforms should be facilitated for adoptive families to share their experiences and support each other. Here also social workers can play a great role.

### **Services**

Home studies and post placement reports are important components when thinking about adoption. Home studies show the overall readiness and commitment of adoptive parents to parent a child. Post placement reports are also essential for evaluating the progress and wellbeing of adapted children. The study

indicated that home studies were never set as a requirement and post placement reports are not consistently sent and are compiled by the families themselves.

Social workers should take the responsibility in doing assessments and compile home studies along with responsible government bodies. They should also assist adoptive parents work on post placement reports and train them about the relevance.

### **Implication for further Researches**

This study tried to spark a light on the overall experience of adoptive families who adopted a child/domestically. The process, the journey and the challenges of adoption were glanced. The limited number of research in the area indicates that there are still uncharted areas with regard to the practice of Ethiopian domestic adoption.

Other areas like what is behind the child preference of adoptive families. Why male children, school age children, older children and children with special needs and disabilities are not preferred for adoption. It would be helpful to design evidence based trainings for prospective adoptive parent to widen their child preferences at least a little bit and also help these children have a loving home out of the institution.

On the other, the reason behind birth mothers abandoning their children under difficult circumstances is also an issue that needs to be researched. This will intern help to design evidence based interventions to prevent children from being abandoned.

So much have been said and assumed about public perception and knowledge about adoption but knowledge and awareness level of the public is also something that needs to be researched.

## **Implication for social Policy**

Ethiopia had signed and ratified various international child right conventions. The Alternative child care guideline was also issued in 2009. Since then a lot of effort have been exerted to promote domestic adoption. The number of children placed for domestic adoption is showing a significant progress. Currently, there are adoptive parents on waiting list waiting to be matched to a child and that is a promising progress.

Apart from this efforts policy makers should be more considerate on how to better encourage adoption , adoptive families and adoption service providers. The guideline has stated adoption service providers/Adoption agencies/ to promote and place children for domestic adoption but it seems that they are currently only engaged with inter country adoption. Effort should be made to ensure domestic adoption is being facilitated by private adoption service providers as well.

Foster family is also stated as one of the child welfare services but there is only a beginning to the practice. Government should also put emphasis to promoting foster families and encourage the practice. Since many researches indicate that most foster families end up adopting the child.

Although, there will be no point of promoting adoption if children are still being abandoned at the other side. The finding of this study indicated that abandoned children will latter have to deal with unresolved issues of who they are because there was no record regarding the birth families. The gap in policy, laws and procedures should be bridged to minimize the number of children being abandoned. Ways should be paved for mothers who are incapable of raising their children to relinquish them than abandoning them. Not encouraging them in a way to place their children in orphanages but helping them have the option and also making sure they are really incapable of raising the child.

Finally; Orphanages, adoption service providers, religious institutions, social workers and other stake holders

should also work in collaboration to prevent children from abandonment and to find permanent home for those who are under institutional care.

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## **Informed consent for Adoptive parents**

My name is Simegn Petros, and I am a post graduate student at Addis Ababa University School of Social Work. I am conducting a qualitative study on the experience of Adoptive parents who adopted a child (children) domestically. I am conducting this study for partial fulfillment of my Master's degree in Social Work.

The purpose of this study is explore Ethiopian adoptive parents' experiences, adopting a child domestically and more importantly what were/are their challenges, support systems and possible coping mechanisms .

You have been invited to take part in this study because you have adopted a child /children through domestic adoption. If you decide to take part in this study your participation will involve an in-depth interview about your overall experience of being an adoptive parent. Either you or your spouse can be interviewed. The interview will be tape recorded and it will approximately take 45 minutes to an hour.

The information you disclose to me is strictly confidential. It will not be passed to any third party nor shall it be used for purposes other than this research. Your name shall not appear in any documentation upon which this interview is based.

There is no direct benefit for participating in this study except knowing your participation and the information you provide will be vital to social workers, policy makers , child care institutions other researchers and other prospective adoptive parents who are wanting to open their homes and hearts for children in need just like you did. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose not to answer certain questions or withdraw from the interview anytime.

By signing below you will be indicating that you have read and understood the above Information and you are interested in participating in this study.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **In-depth Interview Guide for Adoptive Parents**

### **Research Objectives**

- To identify Motivation behind Ethiopian adoptive families for choosing to adopt a child domestically.
- To explore their journey of becoming an adoptive parent
- To identify their challenges during and after the adoption process was complete.
- To see if there are any networks or support systems for adoptive families

**Key Themes:** Motivations to adopt, Journey to adoption, major challenges faced (Pre and post adoption), networks, Support systems, suggestions on how to serve more OVC through domestic adoption

### **Setting up the interview**

- Ensure the location of interview is private and cannot be over heard
- Ensure the interview time and place is convenient for the participant
- Self introduction, brief explanation of the purpose of the study and why their participation is important
- Administer informed consent

### **Background information**

- Marital status
- Age ,religion, level of education completed (of both spouses if married)
- Occupation of both spouses if married
- Number of biological children( if any), age, sex
- Number of adopted children, current age
- Age at adoption and sex? Month and year of adoption
- Was your adopted child relinquished or abandoned?
- Did he/she had any special need or needed special medical attention?

- Did you get a child reference based on your preferences?
- Where you allowed to specify any child preferences

### **Motivation behind considering adoption**

1. Can you begin by telling me a little bit about your motivation behind the decision to adopt?
2. How long have you thought about the issue? (When did you first decide to adopt?)
3. Who brought up the issue first? You or your spouse?
4. If the idea was only yours or your spouse what were the things that convinced you to consider adoption or to reach to an agreement?

### **Challenges encountered during the adoption process**

1. How did you first learn about Ethiopian domestic adoption?
2. How did you become aware of the service providers?  
(What was the process like? (Probes: paper works needed? the procedures you had to go through or criteria's you had to fulfill? How long it took)
3. What do you think about the criteria? Are they good enough? Why or why not?
4. Have you received any kind of training or counseling services prior to the adoption?
5. What were the main challenges you have encountered during the adoption process?  
(Long wait or long process, unpredictable outcome, child assignment without preference)
6. What did you feel when you meet your child for the first time?
7. Did you get to visit your child at the orphanage while the process was on going? What was it like?

## **Challenges arising after the adoption process is finalized and coping mechanisms**

1. How well was your family prepared to welcome the new child into the family?  
(Probes: things you were willing to change, accommodation, life style, informing other siblings about the adoption)
2. Where there things you were less prepared at?
3. How did you manage to fill the gaps?
4. How was the transition? Rough/smooth? (Why rough/smooth?)
5. What mechanisms were used to ease the transition?
6. Generally speaking, what were the major challenges encountered after the child was brought home?  
(challenges that were not mentioned before)
7. How did you overcome those? What were your coping mechanisms?
8. After the adoption was finalized are there any follow up reports you are required to send to the Orphanage or BOWCYA office?
9. Have you thought about how to inform your child he/she was adopted? Or this is something you won't be considering?  
  
(Probes: when do you think will be the right time? How did you plan to do it?)
10. How well do you see yourself prepared to answer questions from your child about the adoption? (about birth family background, reasons for relinquishment or being placed in the orphanage, your reason for considering adoption)
11. Do you know anything about your child's biological parents that you can share with your child?
12. Do you anticipate any challenges that may arrive in the long run?
13. How do you plan dealing with these challenges?

### **Networks or support systems**

1. Were any of your friends or extended family members or neighbors were informed about the adoption?  
(Why and why not?)  
(Probe: for their reaction)
2. Were you prepared on how to inform or deal with any question with regards to the adoption with family members and friends?
3. If this issue was already dealt with, how did it go?  
(Probes: was this challenging in any way? How did you overcome challenge?)
4. If friends, neighbors and family members know about the adoption is there anything they support you with?
5. Do you know any adoptive families? Is there any way you support each other with? Do you think it is a good idea to meet with other adoptive parents?
6. Are there any kinds of services set up for adoptive parents? (If yes describe what kind)
7. Have you ever shared your experience as an adoptive parent in any way?  
(Probes: Public gatherings or events, church, social medias, blogs)
8. Do you have any intentions doing so in the future? (Probe: in what way?)
9. What kind of services do suggest to be set up for adoptive parents?
10. Do you have any suggestion as to how other parents will be encouraged considering domestic adoption?
11. Is there anything we haven't talked about or is there anything you would like to add?

**Thank you for your time!**

## **Interview guide for key informant in BOWCYA office**

1. How many OVC are there in Addis Ababa currently?
2. How many orphanages operate in Addis currently( both government and private)
3. When did formal placement of ovc for domestic adoption started?
4. How many children are served by domestic adoption since then?
5. How many orphanages are placing children for local adoption in Addis Ababa?
6. Comparing Addis Ababa with other regions, who is currently placing a very significant number of OVC to domestic adoption?
7. Comparing domestic adoption with other forms of child care alternative services, which one serves more ovc?
8. If fewer children are served what do you think is the reason?
9. What is the role of BOWCYA office in relation to domestic adoption?
10. Which children are usually referred to domestic adoption (relinquished or abandoned?)
11. What is the most common age and sex of children who are referred to local adoption?
12. What criteria are set to be met by the prospective adoptive families?
13. What is the overall procedure to finalize the process?  
(paper works, court hearings, other procedures, trainings , counseling, home studies )
14. What are the challenges faced until the adoption process is finalized?  
(faced by both the orphanage and adoptive parents)
15. After the process is finalized, do adoptive parents submit post placement reports or any other follow up reports?
16. What are the typical adoptive families?(Age, occupation, living standard, single/couple, have children/don't have children)

17. What are the most common reasons /motivations of adoptive families for considering domestic adoption?
18. What are the main challenges faced while rendering the services?
19. What is the most common challenges adoptive families face during the adoption process?
20. What challenges do adoptive parents report after the process is finalized?
21. Where do adoptive families usually seek for help?  
  
(Probe for any kind of service, networks or support systems, also probe for any support from family or friends )
22. From your experience working with Ethiopian adoptive parents what kind of services do you suggest they should get? Or any support they should get to prepare them more?
23. Do you have any suggestion for any intervention to promote domestic adoption or to encourage others to consider domestic adoption?
24. Currently, are there any strategies set by the government to encourage domestic adoption?
25. Is there anything we haven't talk about or is there anything you would like to add?

## **Interview guide for key informant in Kibebe Tsehay orphanage**

1. When did the orphanage start operating in Addis Ababa?
2. What services are rendered by the orphanage?
3. How many OVC are there in Addis Ababa currently?
4. When did it start placing children for local adoption?
5. Is Kibebe tsehay the only orphanage placing children for local adoption in Addis Ababa?
6. How many children are placed for local adoption so far from the orphanage?
7. What other alternative child care services are considered by the orphanage?
8. Comparing domestic adoption with other forms of child care alternative services, which one serves more ovc?
9. If fewer children are served what do you think is the reason?
10. Which children are usually referred to domestic adoption (relinquished or abandoned?)
11. What is the most common age and sex of children who are referred to local adoption?
12. What criteria are set to be met by the prospective adoptive families?
13. What is the overall procedure to finalize the process?  
(paper works, court hearings, other procedures, trainings , counseling, home studies )
14. What are the challenges faced until the adoption process is finalized?  
(faced by both the orphanage and adoptive parents)
15. After the process is finalized, do adoptive parents submit post placement reports or any other follow up reports?
16. What are the typical adoptive families?  
(Age, occupation, living standard, single/couple, have children/don't have children)

17. What are the most common reasons /motivations of adoptive families for considering domestic adoption?
18. What are the main challenges faced by the orphanage while rendering the services?
19. What is the most common challenges adoptive families face during the adoption process?
20. What challenges do adoptive parents report after the process is finalized?
21. Where do adoptive families usually seek for help?  
  
(Probe for any kind of service, networks or support systems, also probe for any support from family or friends)
22. From your experience working with Ethiopian adoptive parents what kind of services do you suggest they should get?
23. Do you have any suggestion for any intervention to promote domestic adoption or to encourage others to consider domestic adoption?
24. Is there anything we haven't talk about or is there anything you would like to add?

**Thank you for your time!**

**Declaration**

I, Simegn Petros, hereby confirm that this thesis in the title “Adoptive Families’ all over experience with Domestic Adoption in Addis Ababa” is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university, and all sources of material used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_