

# POST-ADOPTION EXPERIENCES OF ADOPTIVE PARENTS IN MASERU, LESOTHO

By

'Malefa Christinah Semakela

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# CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this dissertation has been read and supervised as having met the requirements of the Faculty of Social Sciences, National University of Lesotho, for the award of the Degree of Master of Social Work.

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Principal Supervisor

.....

Head of Department

.....

External Examiner

## DECLARATION

I, Malefa Christinah Semakela declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being submitted for Master's Degree in the field of Social Work in the Faculty of Social Sciences, National University of Lesotho, Maseru, Lesotho. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other university.

SIGNATURE:.....

DATE:.....

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## **ABSTRACT**

The general objective of this study was to explore the adoptive parents' experiences of post-adoption in Maseru, Lesotho. The study was conducted in Maseru as most of the adoptive parents reside there, using semi structured interviews.

A qualitative, interpretative phenomenological study was undertaken with ten participants of adoptive couples, five females and five males from Maseru District. The participants were between the 31 and 62 years with different careers. Participants were selected using purposive snowball sampling techniques, while data was collected using semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis.

The study findings revealed that psychologically the adoptive parents are fulfilled and satisfied by their post adoption experience. Even though, they are fearful of the society that might disclose their adoptive child status before them they are seen to be emotionally stable in their adoption journey. Adoptive parents are also emotionally drained from the parenting roles that they assume, their priorities change. Socially, society is not judging the adoptive parents rather supporting them in everything, this they attribute to the changing parenting paradigm that the society is accommodating of step parenthood, so adoption is not seen as a taboo anymore in contrast they are hailed as brave for breaking the patriarchal norms.

Financially, the adoptive parents are experiencing the financial challenges just as any other parent would, but when they are in the financial breakdown most people think their problem is self-brought so they are sometimes resistant to help them. Similar to the common belief that adoption is for the rich people, adoptive parents report that adoption is quite expensive, require saving especially because the processes are not times for proper budgeting. Furthermore, in attachment, the study revealed that the adoptive parents are attaching well to their children and mostly secure styles are formed in the process. It is the adoption disclosure that is worrying as post placement coaching is not sufficient to equip them with enough skills to do it, as such they resort to shunning the topic.

Consequently, the study recommendations include need for more adoption information dissemination, reduction of adoption cost, post placement services and a need for further intensive research.

**Key Words:** *Adoption, Adoptive parents, Adopted child, Post adoption, Attachment*

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

UNICEF	United Nation Children Emergency Fund
MOSD	Ministry of Social Development
USA	United States of America
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

In colonial times, adoption was reserved only for white people (Maqutu 2005). Recently a larger population of Basotho are still not clear about legal adoption. Previously, adoption was neither legal nor institutionalized and regulated but just a common unwritten practice where children lived with other people, mostly relatives. Most children that were adopted were subjected to child labour and abuse (Herrmann and Kasper 1992). Recently the adoption process is being regulated, which dictates that adoptive parent must be eligible to a certain criterion before they qualify to adopt. Even those that are aware of it, erroneously presume it's for the rich, educated, and urban people. Infertility has also brought about a paradigm shift where a lot of people now see adoption as a viable option.

Most studies focus on the experience of children, leaving a data gap of little to no research being done on the experience of adoptive parents globally and Lesotho is not different from the rest of the world. The inclination is that adoptive parents are adults who are capacitated enough to cope with the implications of post adoption. However, Thabane (2015) asserts that adoption is a two-way approach where both the child and the parents should be working together to make a success of it. She also notes that focusing only on the child does not suffice. In the case of Lesotho, where adoption is still considered to be a new phenomenon, the study is worth being undertaken to explore the adoptive parents' experiences of post-adoption, where children have been adopted using legal procedures and frameworks that are provided for by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD). Preliminary research I have undertaken points an increase in the rate of adoption in Lesotho. The prospective adoptive parents opt for the legal mechanism instituted by the Government of Lesotho through Ministry of Social Development instead of traditional method of staying with non-biological child illegally. Adoption is a confidential and controlled process thus it is difficult to get statistical information from the MoSD to

ascertain the increase. As a representative of United States of America (USA) adoption agency, the researcher is aware of the above mentioned issues.

The adoptive parent's psycho-emotional, social, cultural, and religious experiences are worthy to be studied. Therefore, this chapter gives brief background information about the adoptive parents' experiences of post-adoption in Maseru, Lesotho. The chapter also presents the problem statement, purpose, objectives and research questions and significance of the study. It also includes the scope of the study, the definition of concepts and the study limitations. It concludes by giving an overview of the chapter outlines in the study.

### **1.1 Background of the study**

Lesotho is a small country, completely landlocked by Republic of South Africa with a population of about 2 million, of whom 38 per cent are children under 18 years of age Lesotho Population and Housing Census (2016). It is classified as lower-middle-income country where most female workers work in textile factories. Because most textile workers have to leave their children go to work, the children become neglected and vulnerable leading to institutionalization and eventually adoption.

UNICEF (2018) reports that about 40 percent of the population lives below the international poverty line of US\$1.25 a day, which implies that a lot of people are poor and might resort to other means of survival such as sex-work which leads to unintended pregnancies and eventually the abandoning of children. This in some cases leads these mothers to neglect their children leading to those abandoned children ending up in care facilities and eventually they get put up for adoption. Lesotho has an HIV prevalence rate of 23.8% among adults of 15-49 years (LEPHIA 2019), who contract HIV/AIDS and die leaving behind orphaned children who have nowhere to go except to be absorbed in the orphanages, eventually ending up in the adoption system. Of the ten districts of Lesotho, Thaba Tseka is considered the district that has the highest number of orphanhood UNICEF- Child Poverty Report (2018). With a poverty rate of 49.7% in 2017, most households depend on subsistence farming that does not meet all the family needs. As a result, upon death of a relative, the extended family is more often unwilling to take up

additional members into their family, hence the decision to relinquish the child up for adoption.

In recent years, the family system has changed a lot, people are now focusing on their own nuclear family as opposed to the traditional custom of having an extended family, leaving most orphaned children vulnerable and with little or no care. Thabane (2015) notes that oral accounts depicted a picture where traditionally, orphans and vulnerable children that were born out of wedlock were absorbed by the extended family. Assumption of parenting responsibility became the duty of the surviving relatives in a manner that is comparable to adoption and or foster care as it is practiced today. However, with the high rate of financial insecurities coupled with the Covid-19 Pandemic, more than 75 percent of the population is either poor or vulnerable to poverty (Zikhali 2019). Consequently, people tend to be reluctant to take in anyone that is not their own blood.

High levels of poverty, disease, and desperate attempts by adults to earn a living, might be considered reasons why people abandon their families to go look for a better life in urban communities with greater employment opportunities. As they settle in these places, they contract diseases and die leaving their children orphaned and in the welfare system. According to the Constitution of Lesotho (1993), Lesotho is reported to be a Christian country in which abortion is considered illegal. The Penal Code Act (2010) openly prohibits and criminalizes abortion on social grounds, resulting in increment of unwanted babies that people cannot take care of but relinquish for adoption instead of terminating the pregnancy. Some women choose not to terminate or kill their babies due to Christian beliefs. Instead, they carry their pregnancies to full term and express the wish to give their children up for adoption.

Unlike in the case of legally recognized adoptions, traditionally arranged (defacto adoptions) adoptions whereby a parent gives their parental rights and responsibilities to a guardian has no legal validity as noted in United Nations Child Adoption Trends & Policies( 2009).In mitigating the impacts of infertility and childless homes, the fertile couple could through verbal consent to informally give away a child to be raised by the infertile one as their own (Maqutu 2005). In the cases where the woman was presumed to be infertile then polygamy was an option where the man would marry a second wife

who will bear children to avoid a childless family. The interventions used to prevent a childless home are now rendered obsolete as the family system is transforming into the new set up that recognizes the adoption of a non-blood related child into the family.

In primeval era, adoption of children by the indigenous people was prohibited by The Adoption Proclamation of 1952 which was the governing statute. It has since been abolished as it was aimed exclusively at adoption of Basotho's children by White settlers only (Kimane 2005), and criminalizing the adoption of Basotho's children by prospective parents of their own race. The prohibitions thereof made it difficult for the concept of adoption to be fully understood as an existing social issue because people assumed it is for Whites. The erroneous assumption and negative attitude towards adoption lead to lawmakers of the 1950s to assume there is a special set of traditional mechanisms for adoption that are exclusive to Basotho only. It is for this reason that adoption remained an uncommon and mysterious practice that Basotho remained ignorant of and continued to be suspicious of (Maqutu 2005) and would rather not dwell much on.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, adoption is beginning to be gradually understood as people begin to question a lot of traditional practices and are realizing their right to choice (UNCRC 1989). Although there is currently no specific adoption law, the Government of Lesotho through the Ministry of Social Development has put in place the statutes such as the Child Protection and Welfare Act of 2001<sup>1</sup>, Foster Care and Adoption Policy (2012) to mention but a few. It also ratified the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation (1993) in respect of Inter-country Adoption on December 2013 to show its commitment to adoption and the best interests of the child principle of the United Nations Commission on the Rights of Children (UNCRC 1989) which it is signatory to.

These Acts govern and guide adoption, as such, it is a well-known practice that is legal and well within the scope of measures to provide alternative care for children. Against the framework, adoption is still being considered a white men phenomenon. Therefore, in light of the above-mentioned Act, policies and conventions, the experiences of the few

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<sup>1</sup> This Act is currently under review.

parents who have undertaken the adoption journey need to be studied based on the fact that adoption is largely considered a “white phenomenon”.

Adoption is not a common concept, nor is it acceptable in some communities across Lesotho (Thabane 2015). Culturally, the main reason for marriage is to extend the family blood line (Maqutu 2005 ). A married couple that is unable bear children of their own is a taboo, to the extent that the extended family can advise on polygamy. It is often hard for extended families to accept a child who does not have the same bloodline as theirs to participate in family rituals like cutting hair after the family member’s funeral, burial rituals and sometimes having a share in the family heritage (Kimane 2005). Most adoptive parents are well over their 30s purporting that their chances of natural conception are getting slimmer therefore adoption is their last choice at parenthood.

Some adoptive parents suffer symptoms of depression after adoption and at later stage in life after an adoption (Senecky, Yehuda et al 2008). Parenting takes an emotional toll on parents either biological or adoptive. This study seeks to explore the psycho-emotional challenges of being parents to an adopted child on a permanent basis. Adding a child to their family means a few financial makeovers in insurances, medical aids and the human resource department logistics at their workplaces to include the adopted child.

In 2014, the Ministry of Social Development in preparation for the Central Authority which will regulate adoptions in Lesotho, established the Adoption Unit within the Child Protection Services Department where adoption issues are centralized, with Social Workers solely working on adoption issues. Even though, the Ministry of Social Development has offices in all ten districts of Lesotho, adoption can only be done in Maseru by the Adoption Unit. Even though there are care facilities and orphanages in the districts, delegating a minimum number of Social Workers in Adoption Unit works as a measure to curb human trafficking on account of adoption.

According to Statistics SA in 2017, there were about 550 children registered on the Register of Adoptable Children and Parents (RACAP) and awaiting adoption in South Africa alone with an estimated 21,000 children living in 355 registered Child and Youth Care Centers across South Africa and about 2,000 living in 115 unregistered ones (Thabane 2015). This is a clear indication that there are a lot of children in need of

adoptions. Adoption is an intricate process that require a lot of paperwork which at times hinder children from being placed for adoption. For example, no child can be placed for adoption without the birth certificate (Hague Convention 1993) thereby declaring unadoptable, such children who do not possess such a certificate.

Even though there are no official reports about the status of adoption in Lesotho, information from the Adoption Unit registration records depicted an increase over the past two years in the number of families that want to legally adopt a child. Basotho are warming up to adoption culminating into the increasing rate of adoption, despite the limited services that are put in place to help parents after adopting in Lesotho. Thus, the study seeks to explore their experiences of post adoption. The reasons for parents seeking adoption are articulated by Shuman (2013) as due to infertility which is the most common reason that prospective adoptive parents choose adoption. In many cases, they tried to have a child the natural way and with infertility treatments that have ultimately failed. As a result, Basotho citizens pursue adoption as an alternative avenue to becoming parents.

Some women face medical conditions that make it dangerous to carry a pregnancy to term, while other women have conditions that make a pregnancy impossible or ill-advised (Grotevant 2014). Whether it is a condition that a woman has been aware of since she was young, or that she developed during a previous pregnancy. These conditions could endanger her life and so she chooses adoption to become a mother. According to Grotevant (2014) another reason people adopt is they do not want to pass down genetic disorders or diseases as some couples may be fully capable of conceiving and having a healthy pregnancy, but they are worried about their child being born with genetic diseases such as Diabetes or Down syndrome gene in the family.

Some people are single parents and want to start a family (Harf et al 2015). When a person is ready to become a parent but does not have a partner to start a family with, they opt for adoption. Instead of going through fertility treatments to have a biological child, single parents decide that adoption will provide them an opportunity to be a parent, no matter if there is a hereditary connection or not. For them, it is mostly because family is much more important than biology, family is love (Jaskiewicz et al 2016).

Adoptive parents aspire to bring up a child in a loving home (Lee 2010), whether they choose to adopt domestically, internationally, from the foster care system or relative adoption is irrelevant. Prospective adoptive parents know that there are many children who don't have the safe, loving and nurturing home environments they need hence they choose to adopt. Furthermore, it is through adoption that the adoptive parents are at liberty to choose age and gender of their adoptive child (Child Protection and Welfare Act of 2003) and Foster Care and Adoption Procedures and Practice Guidelines for Lesotho (2012). Even though it is time consuming; most families go for this option because it is readily available than the natural way of bearing children.

Brodzinsky (1997) says that adoption processes have more potential for success as opposed to infertility treatments, because parents are guaranteed to have a child at the end of the process as opposed to the medical treatments that do not provide that same guarantee (American Pregnancy Association 2013). Some adoptive parents want to raise an older child rather than an infant. Therefore, if prospective parents do not want to raise a child from infancy and are fascinated by the challenge of raising an older child, this becomes beneficial to older children because the parents are giving them a family that they did not have before (Anthony et al 2019).

One of the factors that make it hard for parents to settle in and form a secure attachment bond as postulated by (Subhani et al 2014) after adopting a child is expectations. Parents have their own expectations and fantasies about parenthood that can be quickly obliterated by reality. Most of them believe providing and caring for the adopted child is enough. However, Hull (2016) depicted a contrary note that sometimes love is not enough to care for an adopted child, there is need to have less unrealistic expectations. According to Latham et al (2017) high levels of children's behavioral problems may also portend parent's sense of parenting competency; it is to this effect that adoptive parents may feel inadequate and overwhelmed to parent an adopted child. As such it creates a problem. As a result, the study investigated the adoptive parents' experiences of post-adoption in Maseru, Lesotho.



## 1.2 Statement of the problem

The fact that adoption on its own is a relatively new concept in Lesotho, means that there is little information known about the experiences of the adoptive parents after adoption as their experiences are not brought forward and addressed. Adoption is presumed to be for rich people who can deal with post adoption adversities on their own as they are alleged to afford extra support services such as counselling and therapies. Nevertheless, adoptive parents who cannot afford are left to deal with the adoption experiences on their own. In Lesotho there is little, to no support given to the adoptive parents after adoption, except the two weeks bonding period done under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Development's Social Worker that is solely for assessment of the bonding between the child and the parents<sup>2</sup>. There is therefore a need to explore the experiences of adoptive parents post adoption other than this undocumented best practice, specifically because there is no other support given to the adoptive parents.

Prospective adoptive parents enter the adoption journey bearing various experiences of their own. Child Welfare Gateway Information (2020) articulated that most adoptive parents have experienced loss due to incomplete pregnancies, failed fertility treatments, and dreams of raising a child with whom they are genetically connected to, experiencing the societal labelling and pressure that they have had to overcome to pursue the adoption route. Lack of institutionalized post adoption supportive programmes in Lesotho pose a huge problem for the adoptive parents that are struggling with this form of parenthood hence a need to explore their experiences in this study.

The experiences of the adoptive parents do not attract a lot of attention. Their emotional, psychological wellbeing and their attachment journey is overlooked as people show a lot of care and compassion to the adopted child more than the parent Ben-Ari et al (2007). Being an adoptive parent is relatively new approach to the family structure in Lesotho, as a result most parents are new to the parenting experience and concurrently must deal with stigma that comes with being unable to give natural birth. It becomes a problem

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<sup>2</sup> These Social Workers facilitate the bonding process over 2 weeks at their own discretion. This is a best practice that is found to work even though there is no legal framework to support.

because adoption is a two-way approach where both the experiences of parents and children should be taken into consideration for the family to function well as the adoption dyad (Sulwasky et al 2008). Unfortunately, that is not the case, the needs of the parents are overlooked. When they are investigated, the parents' accounts of adoption are littered with effects such as feelings of inadequacy, incompetence, fragility, and fear of failure (Follan & McNamara, 2013). Based on the above-mentioned problem, the study unpacked the experiences of the adoptive parents after adoption.

Vast amount of empirical literature on experiences of children after they are adopted is available. Unfortunately, there is little data on the experiences of parents. By virtue of adopting, it could be assumed that adoptive parents overcame a certain problem to finally decide to adopt. If the adoptive parents are not psychologically fit and resilient, they cannot resist the social stigma that is inherent in adoption, resulting in an unsecure attachment of the child and the adoptive parent. Basotho do not understand the concept of assuming the parental rights of non-biological children, the customary belief is that couples should consider relative adoption from either side of the family (Kimane 2005). Therefore, they tend to show less interest in the adoptive parents' problems after adoption because they perceive their problems as "man-made" and expected (Fassae 2013). The focus of this study was the adoptive parents who have adopted a child through legal means as outlined by the Child Protection and Welfare Act of 2011. The study explored the experiences of those parents who have adopted a child they are not related to. Even though, the above-mentioned stature recognizes them, single adoptive mothers are not included in this study, as it only seeks the experiences of both the father and mother who are married and living together as a couple. In order to be eligible, a couple should have been adoptive parents for at least a year as the researcher believes it is an adequate time to have gone through the bonding period and the time taken will provide in depth detailed experience after adoption. The adoptive parents' experiences of post-adoption incurred during this time are believed to be sufficient to adequately meet the objectives of the study.

### **1.3 Purpose of the study**

The study's need to explore adoptive parent's experiences is crucial as there is a rising number of adoptions in Lesotho. According to Mallory (2011), it is only through exploring adoptive parent's experiences that adoption and its underlying dynamics can be understood. The research aims to provide

- A greater understanding about how the process of adoption is experienced,
- Attachment influences that affect the post-adoption experiences of adoptive parents,
- And the meaning adoptive parent's give to each of their experiences post-adoption.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to discover the living experiences of adoptive parents with their adopted children and this study also seeks to understand the psychological, emotional, religious, socio-cultural and financial experiences in detail.

### **1.4 Objectives of the study**

The study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

#### **1.4.1 Main Objective**

- To explore the adoptive parents' experiences of post-adoption in Maseru, Lesotho

#### **1.4.2 Specific Objectives**

- To find out the adoptive parents' psychological and emotional experiences of post-adoption
- To explore the adoptive parents' social experiences of post-adoption
- To analyse the adoptive parents' cultural and religious experiences of post-adoption
- To investigate the financial implications of post-adoption living
- To explore the adoptive parents' attachment challenges experiences of post-adoption

## **1.5 Research Questions**

According to McCombes (2020) research questions are “a guide of the research paper, project or thesis as it pinpoints exactly what the researcher wants to find out and give the study clear focus and purpose”. In following the specific objectives, the study sets out to answer the following questions:

- What are the adoptive parents’ psychological and emotional experiences of post-adoption?
- What are the adoptive parent’s social experiences of post-adoption?
- What is the adoptive parent’s cultural and religious experiences of post-adoption?
- What are the adoptive parent’s financial implications of post-adoption?
- What are the adoptive parents’ attachment challenges experiences of post-adoption?

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

Based on the literature search done, only Thabane (2015) appears to explore issues surrounding adoption in Lesotho. Therefore, in following Thabane, this study becomes relevant as it contributes to the creation of knowledge further identifying gaps and strategies on adoption in Lesotho, specifically focused on the post adoption experiences of parents. Furthermore, this is critical in helping adoptive parents cope better with adoptive parenthood. According to Foli et al (2016), “given the extreme stress, uncertainty, and challenges that adoptive parents face throughout their journey into parenthood via adoption, it is important to understand what the adoptive parents are experiencing after adopting a child”.

Since there is insufficient research conducted in Lesotho about adoptive parents, this study filled the gap of insufficient literature on adoptive parents regarding their experiences. The study brought awareness to adoptive parents that they are not alone in their post-adoption experiences.

Furthermore, because there is an increase in significance of adoption in both political and media circles (Gibbs 2010), the study highlighted the importance for discrimination, social

exclusion, stigma and negligence among many other challenges that adoptive parents face on daily basis. It becomes significant in order to alert people who have limited and inaccurate knowledge about adoption. By conducting a study on experiences of adoptive parents, the myths about experiences of adoptive parents are either substantiated or disqualified based on the findings.

### **1.7 Definition of Terms**

Conceptualization is to specify exactly what is meant and not meant by the terms that are used in research, in order to fully understand the description of a given concept, each concept in that definition must also be understood (Seguira 2014). The study uses the following terms:

**Adoption:** is a “judicial process in which the legal obligations and rights of a child toward the biological parents are terminated and new rights and obligations are created between the child and the adoptive parents” (Baltimore 2008). According to Parliament of Lesotho (2011) adoption refers to a legal process of acquiring permanent parenting rights and responsibilities over children. For purposes of this study, adoption is the legal transfer of parental rights and responsibilities from birth parents to adoptive parents and can only be classified as such if it is done through the Ministry of Social Development.

**Adoptive parents:** According to Baltimore (2008) an adoptive parent is someone who provides a “permanent home to a child or children through a legal process”. In this study, only those who have gained parental rights through legal adoption and have been verified as such by virtue of the having adoption court order granted from the High Court of Lesotho are referred to as adoptive parents.

**Post adoption:** the time after placement of the child with the adoptive parents.

**Adoptee:** a child or person in respect of whom permanent parenting rights were acquired by legal rather than biological processes (Thabane 2015). In this study it refers to a child who has been adopted.

**Experiences:** The fact or state of having been affected by or gained knowledge through direct observation or participation (Merriam Webster 2020). The adoptive parents have gained or acquired knowledge by virtue of being parents to the adopted child and have

as such acquired the experience. For purposes of this study, the following kinds of experiences are studied:

**Psycho-emotional experiences:** Any experiences that trigger the psychological interaction with the emotions and it is often associated with psychological health, life satisfaction, and emotional well-being” (Golovey 2019). According to Barret (2007), “experiences of emotions are content-rich events that emerge at the level of psychological description but must be causally constituted by neurobiological processes”.

**Cultural experiences:** Culture is the “characteristics and knowledge of a group of people, encompassing language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music, and arts” (Johnson 2013). He goes a step further, defining culture as “shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs and understanding that are learned by socialization”. Adoptive parents must attune themselves to the cultural practices of the community within which they live in and how their experience about culture affects them as adoptive parents. For purposes of this study, culture is the way of life of groups of people, meaning the way they do things that adoptive parents have to adhere and live by.

**Social experiences:** It is defined as “the result of cognitive and practical activities of the individual manifested in the synthesis of knowledge” (Merriam Webster 2020). For purposes of this paper, social experiences are the way the adoptive parents interact with the immediate family, communities within which they live in, church and school, notwithstanding the interaction with friends.

**Attachment:** An emotional link between two people in which each seeks closeness and seeks more secure interaction when in the presence of the attachment figure (Brodwonsky 1979). For purposes of this study attachment is the emotional bond between a child and the adoptive parents.

**Challenges:** net (2021) defines challenges as something that by its nature or character serves as a call to battle, contest, special effort. For purposes of this study, challenge means to arouse or stimulate especially by presenting with difficulties.

## **1.8 Limitations of the Study**

Because of time and financial constraints, a nationwide study cannot be conducted, but the study is limited to the sample size of 10 adoptive parents (5 females and five males) which is small in relation to the population of adoptive parents, and a further longitudinal study is needed. The study is limited to the parents who have legally adopted a child who is not related to them through the Ministry of Social Development and have a court order to that effect. The scarcity of the empirical literature on the experiences of Basotho adoptive parents is one of the limitations of this study because as it is, adoption is a new phenomenon that is not yet fully accepted in Lesotho and is treated as a highly confidential form of parenting. As such, there is little to no literature on it. Due to Covid-19 pandemic, adoptive parents were sceptical and reluctant participate in the study in fear of infection.

## **1.9 Overview of Chapters**

The research report is organized into five chapters:

### **Chapter One: Introduction**

The chapter presents the general orientation of the study. It outlined the introduction, the background of the study, problem statement, purpose, objectives, and research questions as well as the significance of the study. It also includes the scope of the study, the definition of concepts and the study limitations.

### **Chapter Two: Review of literature**

The chapter gives an overview of empirical literature about the research problem at hand. It reviews studies conducted on the adoptive parent's psychological and emotional, social, cultural and religious, financial implications and attachment challenges experiences of post-adoption. The chapter also gives the theoretical literature guiding the study and highlights the gaps observed in the reviewed literature.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

The chapter focuses on the methodological approaches of the study. The rationale for the selection of sampling procedures, methods of data collection and data analysis

techniques used in the study are also reviewed and justification given as to why they were the most appropriate for addressing the study's research questions. Lastly, issues of ethical considerations for this study are explored.

#### **Chapter Four: Results /Findings**

Chapter four discusses the data analysis and presentation of findings. The adoptive parent's experiences of post-adoption summarized to give an answer to the research questions.

#### **Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion**

Chapter five is about the discussion and conclusion to the research questions. The chapter gives a discussion and interpretation of the key findings and provides conclusions and feasible recommendations for policy and programmatic interventions for dealing with the adoptive parent's experiences of post-adoption in Maseru, Lesotho. It outlines limitations and introduces recommendations and suggestions for future studies.

#### **1.10 Chapter Summary**

This chapter introduced the topic and concept of adoption. It outlined the background of the study and the statement of the problem that posed a challenge that is the experiences of adoptive parents post adoption that the study seeks to undertake. The justification and purpose of the study along with the research objectives and questions are charted to guide the research. Also articulated is the definition of concepts that used throughout the entire research, the eligibility of the participants and the limitation of the study are noted.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

The chapter gives a review of both the empirical and theoretical literature done on the topic under study. It begins with the empirical literature relating to the post adoption experiences of adoptive parents with their adopted children, then the theoretical literature, the link between theory, objectivity and research questions. The chapter finally concludes with the gaps observed in the literature reviewed.

Dance et al 2010) note that recently, poor matching of children with high needs by social work professionals to new families has been highlighted as an issue contributing to adoptive placement breakdown. Adoptive parents do not come into life with a gene for adoptive parenthood as observed by Gibbs (2010), meaning there is no written formula on how to be an adoptive parent, and as such they need all the help they can get. Palacios and Sánchez-Sandoval (2005) noted that there are many times in the life of an adoptive family when love and common sense are just not enough, adoptive parents need information and guidance to help them cope with the many challenges of adoptive family life.

#### **2.1 Empirical Literature**

Matthew and Ross (2010) define empirical literature as a portion of the literature that provides an investigation of already existing research done on the topic at hand and similar, related areas. In this paper, studies in the fields of post adoption experiences of adoptive parents with their adopted children are examined.

The adoption goal is to be a loving and supportive parent to the adopted child. Like all families, adoptive parents and the adoptee will experience joys and sorrows, ups and downs. The adoptive family, like many other families, may need support adjusting to life with the adoptee, who may need special help at times as alluded to by Stevens (2011). According to the Hague Convention (1993), adoption is a lifelong process, and families

may have new questions or needs for services and support at different developmental stages. Questions may arise about the adoption process, the birth family, and the child's life before adoption. It is at this point that there is need for post placement services that goes beyond just checking on the parents (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2018).

The post adoption services are scarce in Lesotho for the adoptive parents, they report to be going for counselling at their own expenses and have resorted to forming support groups on their own in the villages. Those support groups are not formalized, they are just two or three adoptive parents brought together by common phenomena of adopting children who coincidentally maybe from the same care facility. They share experiences and ideas together with coping mechanisms. Post adoption services are mostly common for intercountry adoption because the receiving countries are well developed and have clear policies put in place to address post adoption needs, while Lesotho does not have such services. Hence the aim of the research is to capture the experiences of adoptive parents to ascertain the kinds of post placement interventions they need.

Adolescence is a key developmental period, and young teens often reprocess the stories of their adoption, seeking more information about their history and birth family (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2018). Even though the majority of adopted children and their families adjust well after adoption, families seek post-adoption services 8–10 years after the adoption, which according to Gibbs (2010) is usually the time that they come to realize and understand their adoption story. Steven (2011) adds that post adoption services are needed for parents to access any time they want.

## **2.1.1 The adoptive parent's psychological and emotional experiences of post adoption.**

### **2.1.1.1 Fulfilling and satisfying**

All the adoptive parents that formed part of the study reported that they feel satisfied about their post adoption experience. The post adoption experience is fulfilling. Consistent with Foli (2012) that adoption is a life changing endeavor that is fully satisfying on the part of the parents who at times always longed to be parents.

### **2.1.1.2 Emotionally Draining**

One other possible stressor in open adoption is, that some adoptive parents feel fearful of birth family contact or wonder whether their child will understand and be able to differentiate the roles of adoptive and birth parents. Adoptive parents worry about having to compete with birth family for their child's affection or may fear feeling accountable to birth parents for their day-to-day parenting decisions as Singer (2010) points out. Some parents may feel that by avoiding contact with birth family, they are protecting their children from feelings of grief and loss. However, Van Andel (2012 ) notes that it really does not matter if the birth parents are present or not, because the feelings of loss, loneliness and grieve will exist regardless of birth family contact.

#### **2.1.1.3 Self-elevated status**

According to the Child Welfare Gateway (2018), dismantling and reconstructing one's identity within the context of parenthood is not shaped by a singular event, but is influenced by the decisions, choices, and issues adults face when confronted with infertility.

#### **2.1.1.4 Child Traumatic Stress**

Parenting a child who has experienced trauma can be difficult as most of them have been living in the care facilities that do not have a formal family setting environment, aggravated by the fact that Lesotho does not practice active Fostering (even though provided for in the Child Protection and Welfare Act of 2011). Dance (2010) asserts that adoptive parents sometimes feel isolated, as if no one else understands what they are going through, they may feel frustrated or even resentful toward their children. According to Child Welfare Information Gateway (2018), some parents begin to doubt their own parenting abilities and ask questions like "Why can't I fix this?" this doubt can put a strain not only on their relationship with the adoptee, but with other family members as well (including spouse).

Learning what adoptive children experienced can also trigger the memories in the part of the adoptive parents if they have gone through the same trauma previously in their own lives before adopting (Pickover and Brown 2016). It is therefore crucial for adoptive parents to take time and focus on their own self-care and healing before embarking on the adoption journey say Clapton and Clifton (2016). It is crucial to deal with their own trauma to avoid relapse when hearing the child's experience because, if adoptive parents

are not in a good psychological space, then there is a high likelihood that they might find it difficult to navigate through adoption as a form of parenthood Wilburg (2014).

#### **2.1.1.5 Parental Coping Strategies of Post Adoption.**

Child Welfare Information Gateway (2014) outlined three ways that can be suitable for adoptive parents to use where they are coping with the effects of the early childhood trauma as experiences by their adoptive children.

**2.1.1.5.1 Be prepared to have patience and talk things through:** Some traumatized children act in ways that keep adults at a distance (whether they mean to or not). Adoptive parents should provide attention, comfort, and encouragement in ways the child will accept. Younger children may want extra hugs or cuddling; for older youth, this might just need spending time together as a family. Following their lead and be patient if children seem needy will be helpful for adoptive parents and avoid imposing in them what the parents think will best help them deal with the situation.

**2.1.1.5.2 Be patient and consistent and do not take children's behavior personally:** Adoptive parents must allow the child to feel his or her feelings without judgment. Help him or her find words and other acceptable ways of expressing feelings and offer praise when these are used. The child who is always remanded will deter from telling the parents when they are experiencing bad things as they fear to be judged.

**2.1.1.5.3 Identify trauma triggers.** Something that the parents are doing or saying, or something harmless in the home, may be triggering the child without either of them realizing it. It is important to watch for patterns of behavior and reactions that do not seem to "fit" the situation. They should be aware of what distracts the child, makes him or her anxious, or results in a tantrum or outburst and help the child avoid situations that trigger traumatic memories, at least until more healing has occurred.

#### **2.1.1.6 Post adoption Depression**

According to the study conducted by Foli et al (2016) inquiring about post adoption depression among adoptive families that completed international adoptions from Russia,

of the 145 adoptive parents that responded, over 65% of the parents reported experiencing depression after the adoption of their children. Research conducted in Edinburgh Scotland on the sample of one hundred and twelve adoptive mothers of infants under 12 months of age, who were recruited from local and national adoption organizations, showed that rates of postpartum depression for biological mothers who give birth is at around 13%, whereas rates of depression in adoptive families were as high as 26% as Steward et al( 2003) noted .It is based on the above studies that it is safe to conclude that indeed post adoption depression is a new phenomenon to be reckoned with hence the study seeks to explore the experiences of adoptive parents post adoption in Lesotho.

Post adoption depression in adoptive parents is not limited to mothers only as it is seen to be found in adoptive fathers too (Foli 2009). This can be caused by the ever-changing roles of men and women in the society because in the past child rearing and home chores were roles reserved for women while men had to work and were deemed to provide for security of the family (Kimane 2005). However, in the latter days the roles overlap, men stay at home and take care of the kids hence at times some apply for paternity leave. The fact that adoptive parents go through the adoption process together and make it no surprising for the man to feel post adoption depression just as the biological father would feel so (Foli 2009), hence this study is undertaken to note the experiences of adoptive parents in Lesotho after adopting a child.

On the other hand, Dean et al (1995) conducted a study in UK using a comparison group design and found no difference in lifetime prevalence of depression between birth and adoptive mothers and a nonsignificant trend for women who had children to have had a major depressive episode during their lifetime as both the adoptive and birth mothers showed 11% of depressive symptoms. Senecky et al (2008) reiterated the same results in his study using a sample of mostly children adopted from abroad and who found no significant differences in the incidence of depression between adoptive and birth mothers. These percentages indicate that it is adoptive mothers who experienced more depression than birth mothers, as such the documentation of their experiences in Lesotho is critical to inform future adoption processes and support systems for adoptive parents.

As is the case of postpartum depression in nursing mothers, post-adoption depression may occur within a few weeks of adoption finalization at the same rate as postpartum depressions Foli (2009) says, with the adoptive parents falling into depression. There is a widespread assumption that postnatal depression is a direct consequence of the physiological changes that occur during pregnancy and delivery so the adoptive parents cannot have post-depression as their bodies did not undergo a biological transformation. However, Mott et al (2011) after doing a population study involving 84 Grade 3 children aged 7-8, refutes the claim that the experience of adoptive and biological mothers differ. Their findings show that across all groups, the depression rate of birth mothers is at 7.5% and 8.8% for adoptive mothers. They further note that both biological and adoptive mothers showed signs of depression.

#### **2.1.1.7. Post Adoption Distress**

The systematic review conducted by Anthony (2019) found that overall adoptive parents had lower rated levels of distress compared to biological parents, but depression was common. It is important to note that distress is different from depression. Biological parents have higher levels of distress while adoptive parents have lower rates of distress, which can be because the adoptive parents have been stressed by the process of waiting for unpredictable amount of time to adopt the baby (Selwyn et al 2015), so they are accustomed to distress and it doesn't impact them significantly as compared to the biological mothers who knew that after approximately 9 months they will be mothers ,so they can be easily distressed by any significant change in their life.

To ascertain the notion that adoptive parents have lower levels of distress, studies that investigated anxiety have found that adoptive parents have lower rates of anxiety compared to birthparents. For example, in a study of parental mental health, Mott et al (2011) found that adoptive mothers experienced significantly fewer symptoms of anxiety, including social anxiety, panic, and traumatic intrusions, and experienced greater well-being than the birth mothers. In addition, Selwyn et a (2015), found that adoptive parents were less anxious than people in the general population.

According to Lavner, Waterman and Peplau (2014) whose study investigated adoption satisfaction, depressive symptoms, parenting stress, and social support in 82 parents

adopting children from foster care in Los Angeles County at 2, 12, and 24 months postplacement. Results showed that on average, parents reported significant increases in adoption satisfaction and maintained low, non-clinical levels of depressive symptoms and parenting distress over time. Across all family types, greater parenting stress was associated with more depressive symptoms and lower adoption satisfaction.

Foli et al (2016), conducted a study using assessments three time points before and after placement of an adopted child with the family: 4–6 weeks pre- placement, 4–6 weeks and 5–6 months post-placement and found that the percentage of parents who screened above the threshold for depressive symptoms was highest immediately after placement of the child indicating that in the first few months after adoption, adoptive /parents experience more distress.

The conclusion of the above-mentioned study indicated that most parents (71%) belonged to a class with low levels of depressive symptoms across time. However, two classes of parents were above the threshold for depressive symptoms at placement, and three classes of parents were above the threshold at 6 months post-placement indicating that as parents get accustomed the adoptive way of parenthood, they feel more and more comfortable signifying less problems in their experiences.

Foli's longitudinal studies over the years (2012, 2016) steady stream of research have highlighted both the trajectories of adoptive parent's depression symptoms and factors associated with post adoption depression. However, this research has been conducted in the US with mostly private international adoptions. Very little is known about the normative trajectories of anxiety symptoms in adoptive families in other countries argues Brooker et al (2015). Lesotho is such a country, thus it is to this effect that the study seeks to explore and map the experiences of Basotho adoptive family experiences in the said country. However, the general tone of the analyzed research findings is that adoptive parents experience declining level of psycho emotional symptoms as time goes on and they grow accustomed to the adoptive parenthood.

#### **2.1.1.8 Fear of Incompetency or Parent worry and Self Doubt**

Van Adel (2012) says that after months or years of anticipating parenthood, the excitement of the actual adoption can give way to a feeling of “let down” or sadness in a

small percentage of parents. The realities of parenthood, including lack of sleep (for parents of infants or children with behavioral or sleep issues), is mostly evident in parents of children who have experienced trauma, they have difficulty sleeping because they keep seeing what they have been through and usually have nightmares, and the weight of parental responsibilities can be overwhelming. The adoptive parents are used to taking care of themselves alone, now there is an additional person whom they have to cater for in every aspect, like bottle feeding, diaper change and maybe school activities. To some parents this may seem too much to handle and lead them into a despair state of mind (Clapton and Clifton 2016).

Adoptive parents may have difficulty attaching to the new child (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2018), as such it is common that they may question their parenting capabilities. It is particularly difficult for children who grew up in the care facility to attach to new adoptive parents, mostly because in the care facility the care givers limit the amount of attachment with the children and having to adapting to new rules of the house pose a problem of attachment, the adoptee was used to the routine in the care facility.

Sometime the adoptive parents are hesitant to admit that there are any problems after a long-awaited adoption. They feel ashamed to admit they have the problem and fear being labeled bad parents, so they become hesitant in seeking help Billadeau (2014). This will result in even more post adoptive depression for the parents. It is therefore important for parents to have realistic expectations before adoption to avoid disappointments of feelings of incompetence (Moyer and Abbie 2017).

According to Child Welfare Information Gateway(2020) adoptive parents encountered a range of difficulties, such as forging parent-child relationships and managing behaviours experienced as challenging, which sometimes triggered doubts that they would be able to fulfill their own expectations of parenting. Parents become overwhelmed with the externalized behaviors of their adoptive children that they doubt their parenting ability. These feelings resolve on their own as parents adjust to their new life routine. However, if these feelings last for more than a few years or interfere with the ability to parent, seeking help to address the issues causing the doubt can help to enable the assumption of parenting role with greater confidence, says Higgins (2010).



## **2.1.2 The adoptive parent's social experiences of post adoption.**

### **2.1.2 .1 Need for Justification to family and friends about of post adoption,**

You're not required to share personal details about your child with anybody, not even loved ones. You may choose to be a little more open with family and the people you encounter regularly and try to educate them about adoption, but you can still avoid spilling sensitive information to those who don't need to know the particulars.

Their adoption information was never secret (which can connote shame), but it was always private (special and belonging to them). Respect on all sides brought them closer together.

### **2.1.2 .2 The supporting role their families,**

The immediate family members are the first circle of post adoption support. They function as the first layer of healing. Both softness and firmness are needed, that is, both nurture and structure. Adoptive parents are constantly looking for ways to ensure their new child feels secure. A soft, protective "cocooning" of the child within the safety of the family is critical. Simultaneously, parents must keep him or her in a highly structured, organized and predictable environment (Lee 2010). This allows for the child to gradually rest, knowing that the inconsistencies of their previous environment have given way to orderly, predictable days.

The adoptive families may change priorities significantly to focus on this process. Kind friends and extended family may propose many invitations and celebrations during this cocooning period. However, these are best deferred for a time. This may mean families say no to vacations and special family functions and to participation in previous activities. To the extended circle of family and friends, this shift in priorities can be painful. In Biological families, nursing mothers of a newborn are not expected to enter society immediately following birth. Similarly, this initial newborn-like period for an older child needs to be guarded carefully. It is important to emphasize that this cocooning is not forever, as children adjust, they will be able to accommodate to a busier social calendar. However, depending on the degree of previous trauma, this recovery time may vary. This shift in priorities can cause disappointed expectations and conflict with extended family members. This is a painful consequence often experienced by the adoptive family. Post

adoption support is needed to help families recognize and respond appropriately to expectations during this initial cocooning

**2.1.2.3 Reaction to Strangers:** New adoptive parents may be caught off guard by some of the questions that generally well-meaning friends and relatives ask. (Foli 2009). (In the worst cases, the questioners may not be well-meaning.) Preparing for how to respond to questions, how much of the child's story to share, and how to inform or educate relatives and friends about adoption can reinforce the new identity of parents and children, empower the new family, and even be a family attachment experience (if the children are old enough to be involved, Howe (2001)). The adoptive parents are not obliged to tell the story to people who ask because as Senecky et al (2008) noted the child's story belongs to them and them alone and should be sealed by careful parents against curiosity. The community is well aware that the child is adopted, and they might need to pry more to the child's story.

Most adoptive parents have learned that answering nicely is really the best way to go, no matter how annoying the questions can be. (Foli 2009). They also develop a plan for dealing with the silly, rude, and strange-but-well-intentioned remarks that can otherwise leave them feeling blindsided.

**2.1.2.4 Too much care and sensitivity to adoptee (positive discrimination),**

The community treats the adoptive child special not in an ill-mannered way on the basis of their status. They treat her as if she/he has already gone through enough bad experiences as it is so they shouldn't be adding to more of their troubles. Most of them think they are doing the child some good, but the child will wonder why the good things come to them while other kids are not receiving the same treatments. A good and well thought plan can trigger the same reaction as the bad and ill intended one (Hull 2016). Adoptive parents do not owe strangers the answer to any question, but may give the child, the child's siblings, and themselves permission to handle intrusive questions like "Where did he come from?" and "Whose child is he?". The best way is to talk with children about strategies and responses to give in such situations. As adoptive parents maybe not always be with their r children when they encounter outsiders' behaviours, so it's important that they know appropriate answers and reaction to such (Lee 2010)

**2.1.2.5 Sex life and intimacy.** The intimate relationship of the adoptive parents may have been hurt by the inability to conceive. This may shape the couple's relationship and affect the family dynamic into which they bring an adopted child. If you are an adoptive parent, you may struggle to help your child who is also experiencing attachment issues. Attachment challenges range from difficulties relating to others to severe social functioning disorders. Appropriate treatments can help parents nurture secure attachments and cope with behaviors that may result from earlier attachment disruptions.

#### **2.1.2.6 Adoption Dyad**

Merriam Webster Dictionary (2012) defined the adoption dyad as consisting of the adoptive parent and adoptive child. For a successful adoption journey the adoption dyad should understand each other and work collaboratively.

Parental identities are actively constructed through interactions with others within the parent's social system (Paivi et al 2016). The way the adoptive parent socializes and relates to the community within which they live will greatly influence the way the new child who just got adopted into the family perceives the world around him/her. Social encounters provide feedback that can verify parents' new identities as noted by Pace et al., (2015). This alludes that the social standing of being a mother serves as attainment of a new identity.

#### **2.1.2.7 Adoption and Identity**

Foli (2016) conducted a study using content analysis, with 64 parents at three time points: 4–6 weeks pre-placement, and 4–6 weeks and 5–6 months post-placement. Foli concluded that adoption may make normal childhood issues of attachment, loss and self-image even more complex as adopted children must come to terms with and integrate both their birth and adoptive families Child Welfare Gateway (2018), if they are in the system that practices open adoption. For the case of Lesotho as it practices closed adoption system there is less of this problem experienced. However, there is the inherent tendency of Basotho to reveal to children their adoption status, despite the fact that Article 60(1-5) of the Child Welfare and Protection Act of 2011 had prohibited and criminalized such an act.

McQuillan(2008) note that in most societies, there is a basic assumption that motherhood is a natural progression for all women, particularly following marriage. (This assumption disregards the fact that there are many ways by which people can become parents. For example, through birth, step-parenthood, or adoption as observed by Ceballo et al., (2003), with each leading to substantial changes in the individual's life. Of particular significance is the change in identity that women may experience in the transition to motherhood through adoption. McQuillan (2008) assert that women may experience identity reconstruction in motherhood, with a new identity forming through a process of identity disruption and identity integrations. In all types, parenthood identity often emerges as a central concern, hence a need to study the experiences of parents to gain knowledge.

For adoptive mothers, it could be argued that there are a few identity changes taking place. Adoptive mothers may not only experience identity reconstruction as described by McQuillan(2008) but for those choosing adoption due to infertility they may also need to reshape and redefine their anticipated identity of parenthood and accept their new identity as an adoptive parent (Ben-Ari and Weinberg-Kurnik, 2007).

Child Welfare Gateway (2018) investigated the transformation of identity from biological parenthood to adoptive parenthood in infertile couples. The findings revealed that dismantling and reconstructing one's identity within the context of parenthood is not shaped by a singular event, but is influenced by the decisions, choices, and issues adults face when confronted with infertility. The construction of a new identity was a joint experience in which the identity of adoptive parenthood was co-constructed, while on the other hand the findings of Timm et al. (2011) contradicted the above notion that identity due to infertility was negotiated and agreed, and the final concrete constructed identity was fundamental to the decision to adopt (Von Korff and Grotevant 2011).Whether the adoption is constructed or negotiated, the experiences of adoptive parents in Lesotho are worthy to be explored in this study.

Daly's (1988) research, although dated, provided a foundation in understanding the decisions behind adoption when adults face infertility and the anticipated identity of parenthood is blocked. It also shed light on how adoptive parenthood identity may take shape and is discerning in its findings that the transformation of adoptive parenthood identity seems to be a co-constructed experience. However, the applications of Daly's (1988) findings are limited in that they do not extend past the decision to adopt. That is to say, the study leaves out critical information on the adoption journey, placement, and post placement time. The adoption journey is tedious and takes a long time as per each country or agency programs, especially if it is intercountry adoption. The findings of Daly (1988) do not cater for the endeavors of after taking the decision such as completing the home study and numerous papers works and expenses that come with adoption. Just like in biological parenthood that entails pregnancy and nursing mothers. Adoptive parents report to view the time taken to wait for the child as "adoption pregnancy" even though it is not visible to the public( Harris 2013)

Although Ben-Ari and Weinberg-Kurnik's (2007) study is limited to a certain degree, focusing explicitly on single adoptive mothers. It does however provide some insight into the identity that adoptive mothers construct, by suggesting that adoptive mothers experience a personal and public identity as they enter parenthood. Public identity in the sense that adoptive parents often rely on public comment to cement their motherhood for example, when seen walking with the child and the public understands they were never pregnant, explaining to the public that in fact they are parents. Harwood(2013) noted that the baby becomes their affirming "tool", cementing their parenthood status thereby giving a new identity to the adoptive parents. The above-mentioned findings of the study suggests that adoptive mothers do not define their identity based on the single event of adopting a child but construct it in the moment as elements of adoptive motherhood are lived, hence the study seeks to explore their experiences post adoption after one year.

The study undertaken by Crawford (2017) revealed that the adoptive mothers experienced a change in identity as they transitioned from being childless to being placed with a child, thus becoming mothers. Adoptive mothers were of interest as they provide a

rich understanding of the process adoptive parents' experience. These findings reflect both the adoption and motherhood literature, which denotes that identity change to be a particularly significant event within the transition to motherhood. McQuillan (for example, found that first time mothers experienced a profound reconstruction of their identity, with the enormity of the change often challenging them in ways they had not expected as they develop their new identity and their views are crucial on formulating ways on how one might support women through the adoption process, hence a need to explore the experiences of adoptive parents in Lesotho.

#### **2.1.2.8 Social construction of adoption**

Miller (2005) noted that the arrival of a newly adopted child into the family is usually a joyous time for parents. In her doctoral thesis, (Hull 2016) identified that the complexity and internal battle many of the adoptive mothers' experience in displaying their adoptive status to others in society.

Adoption is seen by some parents as a sudden challenge not only to their old life, but to what they and others in society tend to see as normality. The same sentiment can be shared for Basotho adoptive parents who sometimes seek the approval of the society that they live in, to fit in as mothers. For example, most social network clubs of Basotho women commonly referred to as "pitiki" embrace that for one to be a mother they should have gone through labour pain, indirectly implying that adoptive mothers are not "mothers enough" so they are excluded. Although adoptive parents wanted to embrace the reality of the difference in their parenthood situation, they seemed to be denied or indeed rejected for their difference as most of them decide to live their lives as they see fit not how the society dictates (Hull 2016).

#### **2.1.2.9 Stigma internalization**

According to Schofield (2009), the social judgment that many parents were experiencing initiated the need for them to educate others in a bid for greater understanding and acceptance seemed to influence the way they interact with society. For many parents, the adoption was very private, and attempts are made to actively hide it from those around them for fear of exclusion. In Lesotho adoption is still a new phenomenon that is also regarded as private too. There seemed to be an internal battle between being open about

the adoption and hiding it to reduce the social stigma of infertility. Many adoptive parents thought that they might experience stigmatization as infertility was and continues to be a taboo in most African countries inclusive of Lesotho.

In a study conducted by Miall (1987), where data were collected using an online survey and semi-structured interviews in 43 participants. The purpose was to determine the extent to which adoptive parents feel that societal attitudes are stigmatizing and how social support influences stigma. reported that the motivation to adopt and the nature of the adoptive family are poorly understood by non-adopters and that the media portrays parents in an unrealistic manner, as either 'heroes' or 'desperate. The internalization of stigma by adoptive parents has been related to depressive symptoms and dysfunctional family behaviour.

Weistra and Luke (2017) conducted a study to investigate stigma internalization and perception, and their relationships with social support from family, friends and the broader community. Location was found to be significant, with people living in cities perceiving lower stigma than those in towns, suburbs, and rural areas. Social support came from an extended 'family' made up of close friends, other adopters, and religious communities. The findings point to a need for more extensive education on adoption in schools and the media, for increased support services in less urbanized areas and for earlier support for parents adopting from outside their local authority.

#### **2.1.2.10 Adoption and Secrecy**

Despite the frightening and traumatic past, Harf et al (2015) alluded that some adoptive parents mentioned that their child's pre-adoptive past with a repression of effects or comments, that makes children leave with more questions than answers as more often than not their quest to know their journey is met with resistance. Other parents did not wish to talk about their child's pre-adoptive traumatic past (Skandrani et al 2019). Connected to adoption parenthood challenging normality, exploration of the studies revealed that for many of the parents the status of adoption was one of secrecy (Skandrani et al 2019) and they actively sought to hide it from society. There is a high likelihood that adoption in Lesotho is treated as a secret because most women's perceptions

are that there is a social stigma attached to adoption and that if people know that their child is adopted, they will be seen differently within a society that links motherhood to the birth of a child not adoption as Thabane (2015) asserts.

Lee (2003) suggests that, despite the warm sentiment surrounding adoption, it would still appear to be a stigmatized institution, and this does appear to hold true when considering the findings of this research. For many of the adoptive mothers, there seemed to be experience of internal battle in displaying their adoptive status to others in society, and in this respect, it became apparent that the women perceived there to be a social stigma in adoption. The above-mentioned study supports Broadhurst and Mason (2020) which highlights the crisis women face when having to cope with the social stigma of adoption as they negotiate their role as adoptive mothers.

### **2.1.3 The adoptive parent's cultural and religious experiences of post adoption.**

#### **2.1.3.1 Problem of Inclusivity,**

According to Buckenberger (2020) one of these cultural factors is the belief in the ancestors of the family and their ability to watch over and protect members of the family. Both rural and urban families possess this belief. South Africans worry that children deprived of their roots would lose contact with their ancestors, with unpleasant, punitive consequences for the future happiness of the child (Rochat, Mokomane, Mitchell, 2015).

These beliefs that there is an ancestral family watching over the child must be taken into consideration when children are put up for foster care or adoption. Parents and community members worry about children being adopted or fostered by parents from a different tribe, as they are concerned that the ancestors "will fight over the child" (Rochat, Mokomane, Mitchell, 2015). When the child is abandoned and has no familial information attached to them it can make it difficult to appease the ancestors through certain ritualistic practices. These practices will allow non-kin (outside of the family) placement of the child and cannot be performed without family origin information (Rochat, Mokomane, Mitchell, 2015)



### **2.1.3 .2 Customary Rituals**

There are some customary rituals that are sentimental to some cultures and for inclusion into the ancestral lineage they should be observed. Some ritual shave to be performed on the adopted child. For Basotho it is the slaughtering of the animal inroder that their blood signifies the unison and acceptance into the family (Maqutu 2005).

Because some of the rituals are difficult and discriminatory the adoptive parents decides not to prone their children to such

### **2.1.3.3 Naming of the child**

Naming a baby is so elemental and so often the first mark of parenthood—of course people have really big feelings about it. Customarily in Lesotho the mothers name are a direct inferrement of their child’s name. Mothers are called after their children especially the first born, it holds even more substance if it is a boy child (Maqutu 2005).

Some adoptive parents have a family obligation to pass down a name of a loved one for family continuity or feel that giving an adopted child a family name is an important symbol publicly identifying this child as one of their own. While some believe they can call their child any name that is sentimental to them and disregard the tradition. For many reasons, it is most common for birth mothers to defer to the adoptive parents entirely on the naming issue and most adoptive parents do choose their child’s name. However, when there are multiple attachments to different names, there are a few successful strategies that can often meet the needs of both families. Pawel (2021) reiterated the following options to keep with regard to naming:

**2.1.3.3.1 The birth certificate option:** Sometimes birth parents put a name of their choice on the original birth certificate at the hospital, knowing the adoptive parents will call the child something else that will be inscribed later on the amended birth certificate that is issued when the adoption is finalized. This is typically a transparent solution and neither birth certificate is a surprise to anyone. In this way, both families have had the opportunity to name the child official on paperwork.

**2.1.3.3 .2 The multiple name option:** Adoptive families may choose the first name while the birth family choose the middle name, or vice versa. Sometimes there is agreement on

multiple middle names to ensure all the child's families are represented. This is not an option for Lesotho's adoption because the process does not involve the birth mother except for relinquishing a child.

**2.1.3.3. 3 The choosing together option:** When big feelings are all around, some families have had meetings in which adoptive parents and family elders come together, each with a list of favourite names. They are often easily able to land on one that everyone likes, and they have a lovely, inclusive and collaborative story to tell the child as she grows up.

#### **2.1.3.4 Exhalation and Prayer.**

The assertion from Maurer School of Laweur publication in 1953 that Adoption agencies want to place a child for adoption with parents having the same religion as that of the child. Lesotho a Christian country seeks to practice good principles. It has signed the MOU with agencies that allow Christian adoptive parents to adopt. In As much as there is no specific religion in the care facilities that one can attribute to children, there are prayer session and services conducted in the care facilities for the children and most care facilities have the volunteer missions coming in at interval for a prayer service.

According to Darren (1964), who studied the religious factors in adoption in Canada, found out that prospective parents without any religious affiliation were in a particular instance refused the opportunity of adopting a child on what was conceded to be the sole ground of lacking any religious faith. The same can be said by some adoption agencies that work in Lesotho. They can deny adoptive parents to adopt through them because they are no Christians and as they support their decision that they are Christian based organizations.

A study conducted by Belanger et al (2008) on 113 families from Louisiana and Texas who adopted 226 children, 48% African American, participated in a survey measuring children's behaviour and parent distress (PSI-SF Difficult Child and Parent Distress Subscales) and religiosity (Hoge Intrinsic Religiosity Index). Of the respondents, 93% of the respondents belonged to a religious congregation, 86% attended church weekly. This

meant that religion is considered by the adoptive parents as the main factor that contribute to the outcome of the way post adoption is experienced. The above study went on to reveal that for child's behaviour, religiosity predicted lower stress in adoptive parenting; church attendance was related to improvement in parental health since adopting. Faith was rated most frequently as essential in parents' decisions to adopt Belanger et al (2008).

## **2.1.4 The adoptive parent's financial experiences post adopt**

### **2.1.4 .1 Self-brought problems**

Some communities who believe there are orphans that can be taken care of in the family, they believe if adoptive parents are going through a rough patch just like any person their problem are more self-made than normal. Adoptive parents are often criticised for having taken more responsibility than they can take if they are unable to meet their child need. Bartholet (2014) refuted such assertions in that adoptive parents are not different from biological parents they also get affected by financial breakdown and their problem are not self-brought as most people purport.

### **2.1.4. 2 Extra effort.**

Adoption is a story that involves loss and love, pain and joy. It is a beautiful act, and it is one of the bravest things either the prospective birth mother or hopeful adoptive parents will ever do hence it is worth to explaining the cost of adoption (Hull 2016). Most adoptive parents work extra hard to afford their children the better life. In na case of transracial intercountry adoption, white parents would not like to be seen with a black child who seems like they are not well taken care of so they will make sure to provide for their everyday needs.

Langenhoven (2017) in her thesis study of 12 adult adoptees identified and recruited by Cape Town Child Welfare and through snowball sampling adoptees using Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, were used to collect data from. Thematic analysis was implemented to analyze the data obtained reiterated the same

sentiments that the adult adopted believed their parents were doing everything for them in order that they don't feel like left out. Adoptive parents sacrifice more for the benefit of their children even more so than the Biological mother whom (Foli 2012) stipulated they still have an option of passing the responsibility to other family members whereas with adoptive parents they are all the child has as sometimes the family is not accommodating of them.

#### **2.1.4 .3 Expensive**

According to Crawford (2017) most people have a negative reaction to the cost of adoption asking why it is so expensive. The story of adoption is so pure; why does money have to be involved? Why does adoption cost so much? While the initial reaction to learning about the cost of adoption is understandable, a better understanding of what it takes to complete a successful adoption process makes clear why the cost exists. The adoption process can be long and complicated. In most cases, it takes a lot of moving parts and skilled professionals to complete. To understand why adoption costs so much, you have to understand what it takes to complete the process.

Adoption is expensive because the process to legally adopt a baby requires the involvement of attorneys, social workers, physicians, government administrators, adoption specialists, counselors and more. While the adoption journey is an emotional one for prospective birth mothers and adoptive families, the adoption process is a legal function. Adoptions completed by fully licensed agencies are held to high ethical standards, which can mean more paperwork and higher costs. (Mountjoy 2015)

The Internal Revenue Services (IRS) in the USA provides significant tax incentives for people who adopt, including the adoption tax credit and an exclusion from taxable income for expenses paid through an employer's adoption assistance program as noted by Ben-Nun (2017). This means that following proper paperwork the adoptive parents are exempted from some taxes that they could otherwise pay had they not adopted as noted by Zosky(2005).

## **2.1.5 The adoptive parent's attachment challenges experiences of post-adoption**

**2.1.5.1 Lack of training.** Adoptive parents experience a great number of challenges throughout the adoption process. Hence, there is a need for thorough preparation of prospective adoptive parents prior to them receiving a child into their family and training/coaching is needed post adoption. In a study conducted by Atkinson and Riley (2017) aimed to evaluate a Norwegian pre-adoption course from the view of both adoptive parents and trainers. Participants were 10 adoptive parents and six trainers. Focus groups and semi-structured SWOT interviews were used for the parents and trainers, respectively. Thematic analysis was used as a framework for analysing the interview data. Participants reported a need for post-adoptive services and had various suggestions for what this kind of service should be like, whether it be a continuation of the pre-adoption course, a maternity or support group, or a resource centre for adoptive families.

### **2.1.5.2 Post Adoption Attachments**

The attachment relationships that children have with their caregivers are differentiated based on the extent to which they provide the child with a sense of physical and emotional security. Cairns (2002) says that at the end, these make the difference between securely and insecurely attached children. Cairns further goes on to say that the security of a child's attachment to a caregiver is dependent on two things which are the continuity of the caregiving relationship, and how sensitive and responsive the caregiver is to the needs of the child. The same sentiments can be shared for parents of adopted children in that their ability to respond to the needs of the distressed child will determine the kind of attachment that will develop.

Carranza et al (2003) note that young children become securely attached when:

- Caregivers respond quickly and warmly to their distress,
- Caregivers provide them with appropriate stimulation,
- Caregivers are affectionate and generally positive with them,
- Caregivers are responsive to their needs and feelings.

Insecure attachments develop when caregivers are intrusive, excessively stimulating, punitive and controlling, or are unresponsive and uninvolved (Rueter et al 2010). This indicates that the adoptive parents should always be available and responsive to the needs of their children because being unresponsive can create an insecure attachment. Some adoptive parents' resort to take time off work to be stay home mothers in order to focus fully into the life of the adopted child and hope to be there to form the secure attachment that would otherwise have not developed due to the institutionalization of the child Neil et al (2020).

For a secure attachment to form, a sensitive and responsive caregiver must be available to care for the child on a consistent and continuous basis (Harf et al 2015), it is for this reason that most Basotho adoptive parents, take the three months leave on top of their maternity leave (if they are graciously accorded such) to make time with their children. Caregiving that is unpredictable and usually disrupted by having other commitments will support the development of an insecure attachment (Cairins 2002) and that is not favorable in adoption because children can demonstrate frequent outbursts of rage and anger, as a reaction to early abuse or neglect Pace et al (2015).

A child's early attachment to their caregiver contributes very importantly to the development of their understanding and expectations about relationships and social interactions beyond the attachment relationship Subhani et al (2014). Subhani et al., (2014), further notes that securely attached children will develop an internal working model in which they view themselves as worthy and loveable and others as generous and predictable. For most adoptive children who have been abandoned or neglected, it is very hard for them to perceive themselves as worthy when they grow up. However, having a secure attachment to their adoptive parents will help them know their stand in their parents' lives.

On the other hand, insecurely attached children develop a sense of themselves as unworthy and, based on their histories, they expect neglect, malice, or rejection from others (Billadeau 2014) which makes it hard for them to blend in the society especially if it's the interracial adoption. This negative set of expectations can lead to anger and acting out or depression and withdrawal (Baltimore 2008), not only affecting the adoptee but the

adoptive parents as well because they will be struggling to meet the uncommunicated expectations of the child.

### **2.1.5.3 Challenges of attachment of institutionalized children**

Historically, foster care has been viewed as a solution to the problem of providing continuity of individualized care in an institutional setting (Child Protection and Welfare Act of 2011). In study conducted by Pickover & Brown (2016), the findings concluded that unless children are returned to their homes quickly after being removed and placed in foster care/care facility, there is a tendency for foster care or orphanage stay to become long-term with a high likelihood of frequent moves so it is important to find forever homes for children where they will have fixed attachment styles with their parents as the United Nations Commission on the Rights of Children (UNCRC 1989) comments that institutionalization of children should be the last resort.

Attachment theory, with its emphasis on continuity of the caregiving relationship, sensitivity, and responsive care, strongly suggests that break of care in multiple foster homes will have negative ramifications for the development of selective attachments and internal working models (Doyle and Cicchetti 2017). It is in understanding of the work of Stephen that adoption is seen to be providing a permanent form of attachment. The attachment system of the child who has moved around in the foster care system for any length of time is likely to be organized in such a way as to chronically anticipate rejection and loss (Singer 2010). Such children, who still hope for love and care, may be deeply worried about being neglected, rejected, or deserted. Consequently, they may behave in attention-seeking ways and experience considerable anger. In other cases, repeated separation and loss can lead the child to develop what Van Andel (2012) coins as a “defensive protective shell”. When that happens, the shell can become so thick that it appears that the child no longer feels loss.

The inability to feel loss results in relationships that no longer hold significance for the child so much so that even when they are adopted, they cannot form a stable and trusting relationship with their adoptive family members because they still have an underlying fear that they will be rejected again. This may cause the experience of the adoptive parent to be bad. To this effect, the study will explore the experiences of adoptive parents post

adoption to ascertain this notion especially because most of the children in Lesotho's adoption process are within the welfare system living in orphanages with few joining the adoption pool from foster homes.

#### **2.1.5.4 Attachment challenges for adoptive parents**

It is crucial that adoptive parents realize the central role of attachment in social and emotional development. The lack of opportunity to form an attachment can explain some of the reasons why institutionalized and fostered children behave the way they do post adoption (Higgins 2010). Higgins further goes on to note that the formation of an attachment to adoptive parents will be made possible by responsive and sensitive caregiving over a period. This happens in the post-adoption phase as the child spends most of the time with their new family. For this reason, it is a good practice for adoptive parents to be advised to limit the number of people that they expose the child to for about two to three months, so that the child gets used to them and recognizes them as people that she/he can trust. Introducing extended family early in the adoption journey can have an impact on attachment (Higgins 2010). Emphasis on relationships outside the family can come later once the child has had the opportunity to understand their relationship with the parents as unique and formed attachment (Gibbs 2010).

When a child has had the chance to form an attachment earlier in life, either to a birth parent or a previous caregiver, new parents should recognize that their child has already experienced a loss that would have shaken their sense of security (Foli 2009). If the previous attachment was secure (like in the case of where the child has been relinquished (for adoption), then the child's resilience will likely provide a positive foundation on which to build a new attachment. On the other hand, if the previous attachment was insecure, the child's loss is no less because they already had lost. For adoptive parents, the child may require greater patience and support, as the negative expectations associated with insecurity will need to be overcome National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2016).

Children who have experienced repeated losses might have great difficulty forming relationships because they are emotionally shut off, or because they behave in ways that seem to undermine attachment by expressing deep anger and demanding attention in



unacceptable ways (Foli 2016). Most parents report that their children become overly clingy towards them, to the extent that they refuse to sleep on the bed but prefer to sleep on their parent's lap. If adopted children feel like the attention is not given to them, they can throw unnecessary tantrums for the parents to afford them the time. Faasse (2013) says that even though attachment theory explains these behaviors, understanding such behavior is not the same as knowing what to do about it; however, it can go a long way in reducing parents' feelings of confusion and inadequacy. To achieve the latter, the experiences of adoptive parents post adoption are explored.

Many of the children appear unable to differentiate between their adoptive parents and unfamiliar adults when it comes to expressions of affection or doubt, suggesting that their early experiences had prevented the development of an understanding of one's caregiver as distinct from others, as a unique source of security (Selwyn 2014). Adoptive children tend to either be comfortable around whoever shows them a little bit of care even if it is for a short period of time, or they can be overly suspicious of anyone showing any kind of attachment to them who is not their adoptive parents. This is more common in intercountry or transracial adoptions where adoptive parents note that their child will smile and be courteous with anyone who is of their skin tone as asserted by Waid & Alewine (2018).

Although every child is unique, there are some general suggestions postulated by Brodzinsky (2011) that can be made regarding ways in which parents can support the development of a secure attachment with their child, and those can be applied even for endeavors post-adoption. Secure attachments develop through the consistent and appropriate responsiveness of caregivers to their children's cues. Previously fostered or institutionalized children, because of their histories, may not give clear clues regarding their needs. Hence it can be very difficult for parents to predict and understand them. They may not call out to the parent when they awaken, they may not cry when they are frightened or have hurt themselves, they may not let the parent know they are hungry. As a result, Paulsen and Merighi (2009) is of the opinion that adoptive parents are advised to think about what typical behaviour is in given situations and to respond to their child on that basis. For example, going into the child's room when the parent expects the child to be awake, greet and get them up; when the child bumps into or has a frightening

experience, comfort them even if they are not visibly upset; feed the child at mealtimes and always have healthy snacks available.

Adoptive children do the same negative, hurtful, behaviour repeatedly, as if the only purpose is to make the adoptive parent angry. In behaving badly, they appear not to be deterred by any form of consequences they may have to face Subhani et al (2014). These characteristics can be interpreted to mean that the child does not have a developed sense of others (Foli 2009). That is to say the children are not able to connect with the way they make other people feel, nor is they able to feel remorse or take joy for how they have made others to feel. Such a child who disregards the presence and feelings of other people around them are often seen as an adoption challenge to adoptive parents who want to be recognized by their children as noted by Ford (2016)

Adoptive parents need education on how to handle the child's rage or withdrawals. They need to be aware of the stage of the attaching process that their child is in (pre-attachment, early attachment, middle attachment), and not expect more of themselves or the child than is possible Foroughe and Muller (2014) warned. However, that is not possible as there is no vast literature on the subject from which prospective adoptive parents can gain evidence-based knowledge on the subject, but this study explored the experiences of adoptive parents post adoption.

#### **2.1.5.5 Examining post adoption services**

Post-adoption services have been implemented in countries with a longer history of adoption practice (Child Welfare Gate 2008), while other countries like Lesotho are in the process of instituting these services. It could be concluded that the need for post-adoption services is widely acknowledged. Owing to this, the implementation of these services should receive more attention in adoption policy as it is anticipated that the amendment of the Child Welfare and Protection Act of 2011, will enable the provision of post placement services and mark out guidelines on how to conduct them.

In Lesotho there is need to recognize that adoption is a lifelong experience and acknowledge the challenges it poses to those affected by it. Adoption service providers need to be creative in finding opportunities for adoptees, adoptive family members, and

birth family members to find and remain connected. This is critical as it enables these parties to access ongoing support from the adoption community and to some extent advocate for destigmatization of adoption communities. There is need to change the perception that something must be “wrong” when a challenge in adoption parenthood arises and instead equip individuals to anticipate those changing and challenging needs (Foli 2016).

Adoptive parents often resort to thinking there is something wrong with the child if things do not go their way and they quickly seek external help which would not be the case in biological parenthood settings. The goal is for all individuals impacted by adoption to feel empowered to ask for help and have their needs acknowledged. For that reason, post-adoption services must be developed to guarantee support to adoptive parents and (adult) adoptees to prevent insecure disorganized attachment, learning problems and mental health problems in international adoptees in Europe as alluded by (European Union Final Report 2009)

### **2.1.6. Types of adoptions in Lesotho**

According to Child Information Welfare Gateway (2019), there are two types of adoption frameworks: Open adoption and closed adoption process. Open adoption refers to the continuum of relationships that can exist between members of the birth family and the adoptive family, including the child (MacDonald 2017). Hull (2016) also notes that adoptive families have an ongoing relationship with members of the birth family. Open adoptions are those in which identifying and non-identifying information about the adoptive parents and the birth parents is shared with each other, which can include last names, addresses, and telephone numbers. Open adoptions vary depending on the type of relationship that the birth parents and the adoptive parents have agreed to. In some open adoptions, the birth parent and the adoptive family know each other and have ongoing communication about the child, these types of adoptions are usually facilitated adoptions where the birth mother chooses the adoptive parents based on the profile that the adoptive parents have submitted to the private agency Rueter et al (2010).

Open adoption is a voluntary process and no parties in the adoption triad may be forced to participate in open adoption (Selwyn et al 2014). In open adoption, there is never any guarantee that the adopting family will keep their side of the agreement to stay in contact. It is simply out of the goodness of their hearts if they do because the birth parents have signed off any rights and or contact to the child when they signed off the relinquishing letter.

According to Hull (2016), closed adoption is defined as one in which no identifying information is shared between the birth family and the adoptive family. In closed adoptions, no identifying medical information is generally provided, although this may be minimal in intercountry adoptions. The Government of Lesotho through the Ministry of Social Development practices the closed adoption because even though there is no policy to that effect, the practice is that there is no meeting the birth parents after the child is adopted especially in the case of domestic adoptions. In the case of adoptions in Lesotho, the birth mother who relinquishes the child up for adoption only has the issuance of the court order allowing legal adoption to other parents, beyond which the birth mother cannot revoke or renege on their relinquishing letter (Foster and Adoption Policy Guidelines 2012). However, the true nature of Lesotho's closed adoption system can be questioned as far as intercountry adoption, it is usually the discretion of the adoptive parents to decide if they want to meet the birth parents or not even if there is a relinquishing letter.

In light of the explanations of both open and closed adoption options stated above, there are many types of adoptions that are available and practiced around the world that fall under the mainstream of either being closed or open. However, the Government of Lesotho does not practice them for various reasons. For example, there is no foetus adoption in Lesotho because of lack of technological developments as it is still a least developed country (Lephia 2019). The types of adoptions that Lesotho does not practice are adult adoption, and gay-lesbian adoption to mention but a few. Step adoption, which is a way in which one can become the legal parent of their partner's child or children from a previous marriage or relationship (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2013), is allowed in Lesotho and is treated like a domestic relative adoption, where the biological father if

known is informed and not asked to consent (Foster Care and Adoption Policy Guidelines 2012).

There exist local and intercountry adoptions as the main frameworks within which adoption is practiced in Lesotho and are mainly guided by the Child Welfare and Protection Act of 2011. Article 51 stipulated the following requirements for a person to adopt a child. It should be a person who:

- (a) is above the age of twenty-five years.
- (b) is of good behavior,
- (c) is of proven integrity,
- (d) is of sufficient means of livelihood, and
- (e) has no criminal record.

Under the local adoption framework there are other types of adoptions which are discussed below.

#### **2.1.6.1 Relative/Kinship Adoption**

Kinship adoption is the adoption of a child by its relative, either biological or a relative by marriage (Argent 2012). Adoption of a child by a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or other member of the extended family is a kinship adoption. In Lesotho, grand parents can decide to adopt their daughter's baby who is born out of wedlock or they can decide to adopt the baby after the death of the relative. They approach the Adoption Unit to that effect and the due processes are followed to ascertain their eligibility and motive behind wanting to adopt, because in most cases, relatives are interested in adopting their relative child as there is the underlying reason, which sometimes is money that the child has inherited, (Argent 2012) and the relative wants to adopt such a child in order to have access to the funds and that is prohibited. Technically, kinship adoption is the most practiced one in Lesotho because even though it is not court ordered or even recorded, Basotho just decide to take in their relative's child as their own without reporting to the authorities just as Kimane (2005) indicated that most kinship adoptions are not documented but are done traditionally.

### **2.1.6.2 Domestic Non-Relative Adoption**

Kelly (2012) says domestic adoption is the term used when the adoptive parents, birth parents, and the child come from within the same country with the adoptive family. In this case, all the adoption triads (birth mother, adoptive mother and the prospective adoptive child), are Basotho residing in Lesotho. The entire adoption process, including initial placement, background checks, consent, and finalization, is regulated by laws and policy of Lesotho.

According to the Foster Care and Adoption Policy Guidelines (2012), the process is that the prospective adoptive parents will make an application at The Ministry of Social Development, Adoption Unit and be given a checklist of documents that they should officially fulfill to form part of their application dossier. The checklist includes medical reports, employment letter, family letter, police clearance and identity documents of the prospective adoptive parents (Foster Care and Adoption 2012). The prospective adoptive parents should also have the application letter within which they motivate their reasons for wanting to go the adoption route and describe the age, sex, and medical condition of the child they are willing and open to adopt.

The prospective adoptive family will then wait for the matching board to match them with the child who meets their application requirements. They will receive the child profile, which is usually the birth certificate, background report written by the social worker, medical report, relinquishment letter in cases where the child is given up for adoption and the preliminary pictures of the baby. Upon studying the profile, they will decide if they want to go ahead with adoption of that child and the government Social Worker will write a report to the High court of Lesotho, to be signed by the Minister of Social Development. The adoptive parents will have to pay for their own lawyer to get the court order granted. Only then will they be allowed to take the child home as their own in a forever family (Clapton and Clifton 2016). Most parents opt to continue with the process of changing the birth certificate to indicate the adoptive parents' surname way after the child is placed with them. Continuously, the Social Worker will make post placement visits at the time agreed in the initial contract.

### **2.1.6.3 Intercountry Adoption**

International adoption is the adoption of children by parents from other countries (Favara 2015). As of 2020, the Government of Lesotho through the Ministry of Social Development has the memorandum of understanding with only four countries in the world to be the receiving countries. These are United States of America, Canada, Sweden and Netherlands. They are called receiving countries because they are the countries that adopt Basotho children while Lesotho is referred to as the sending (Thabane 2015).

For each country, there is only one foreign adoption agency that is mandated to process the international adoptions to that country and as such hires a Mosotho Social Worker to be their representative. According to the Ministry of Social Development unpublished government documents, Small World Adoption Agency is representing the United States of America, Sunrise Family represents Canada, Adoption Centrum conducts adoptions for the Swedish and lastly Stich Sting is placing Basotho children in Netherlands.

Intercountry adoption is the last resort for children after exhausting all options for the child to be adopted locally Shura (2010). In some cases, as a child becomes available for adoption, he or she is matched with prospective parents who can meet that child's needs. Families often can review information available about a child before accepting a placement. However, in many cases very little is known about the child's medical conditions or any other history (Ellesef 2013 & Richard et al (2006) According to the Child Protection and Welfare Act of 2011 unpublished proposed guidelines, the international adoptive parents are legally expected to stay for two weeks in Lesotho at their own expenses for the bonding period to be observed and then leave with the child and submit the post placement reports at the interval that differs from country to country until the child reaches a certain age.

According to the Memorandum of Understanding of Small World Adoption Agency and Ministry of Social Development signed in April 2014, there is a mandatory reunion at the expense of the international adoption agency that happens every two years to the receiving countries, that is meant to bring together the families and children who were adopted from Lesotho and it is also to assess the progress of the children post adoption.

Intercountry adoption differs in several significant ways from domestic adoption as intercountry adoption has unique circumstances stipulated by Quinton (2012), which are:

- that children eligible for intercountry adoption may have lost their birth parents to death or abandonment,
- the birth parents must prove that they are incapable of caring for the children. In many cases, children adopted through intercountry adoption have been living in orphanages or institutional settings, which may have implications for brain development, social and emotional development (Pickover and Brown (2016)).

There is generally less information about a child's birth and family history in intercountry adoption than in domestic adoption. Intercountry adoption can also be more expensive in comparison to domestic adoption. Paulsen and Merighi (2009) also notes that there are issues of cultural and language differences to be considered as children adopted from another country, especially older children, will require sensitivity to their change in culture, including (possibly) language, food, customs and societal expectations. Pickover and Brown (2016) further noted that all children will need time to adjust to new people, surroundings, schools and family rules when adopted so it is usually not an easy type of adoption.

#### **2.1.6.4 Special needs adoption**

In December 2013, Lesotho ratified the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-Operation In Respect of Intercountry Adoption of 29th May 1993, thereby aligning itself with the world on issues of adoption. This therefore meant the international adoption agencies had to be Hague Accredited to work in Lesotho. The Convention recognizes the special needs adoption and provides a unique description for it. Special needs adoption refers to the adoption of children, usually from the child welfare system, who are older than 5 years of age, members of minority or sibling groups, or have disability. Twins are also considered a special need case, and so is a child who has some sort of illness. According to the Hague Convention of 1993, each country has its own definitions of a special needs because what is considered a special need in a sending country might not



be the special case in the receiving country (Ishizawa & Kubo 2014). It is worth mentioning that Lesotho considers HIV/AIDS positive children a special needs case.

### **2.1.7 Factors that affecting the adoptive parent's experience post adoption**

Although the public views adoptive children as the defenseless party in adoption, adoption professionals acknowledge that adoptive parents are also vulnerable Farber et al(2003). The lack of a mutual biological tie between parents and adopted child leads to feelings of insecurity, and adoptive parents may have difficulty believing that the child is really theirs. This attitude, when sensed by the child, may create anxiety and tension that could affect the entire family relationship (Borst 2015). It is therefore crucial for this study to examine the factors that contribute to either positive or negative experience of the adoptive parents in post adoption as discussed below.

#### **2.1.7.1 Parent's demographics**

In their study, Mountjoy and Van Landingham (2015) noted that parental demographics such as parent well-being, age, gender and if they were a first-time parent are factors that influence the experience that the adoptive parents will have after adoption. Age gap between the adoption dyad is considered paramount because the parents will be able to relate to the needs of the child. Child Protection and Welfare Act of 2012 alluded the same connotation when stipulating the upper age limit of adoptive parents to be fifty (55) years. This measure is purposed to bridge the gap between the ages of adoption dyad as a lot of disparity causes problems post adoption.

#### **2.1.7.2 Education and Income**

Research has shown that low socio-economic status is consistently associated with a higher prevalence of depression Lorant et al (2003). This means that when a family is having economic problems, the attachment is more likely to be affected. However, adoption research in the USA, found that higher educational level and higher family incomes are associated with higher rates of disruption and lower parent-child relationships, satisfaction, and attachment Ryan et al (2010). This might be because the parents are busy and don't have much time to be with their children.

### **2.1.7.3 Relationship status**

Some research has suggested that married adoptive parents tend to report more positive adjustment than single parents MacDonald (2017). This is because they share roles and when the other is overwhelmed with parenting the other one can take over without significant disruption on the process. In contrast, Selwyn et al (2014) found no statistical difference in the likelihood of an adoption disrupting due to placement with a single adoptive parent. This study interrogates both single and married couples and their experiences post adoption with results revealing whether relationship status is of significance in adoption experience.

### **2.1.7.4 Parental sense of competence**

The concept of parent efficacy is a derivative of self-efficacy, meaning to have self-belief in our competence Bandura (1977). Parent efficacy refers to parents' internal feelings rather than their outward behaviours toward their children. However, research has shown that parent efficacy tends to be associated with sensitive parent-child interactions and parent-child attachment as noted in Leerkes and Crockenberg (2002). Parenting self-efficacy has been strongly associated with parenting competence, when parents feel confident in their ability to parent, they are likely to use more effective parenting practices which promote positive developmental outcomes for their child (Jones and Prinz, 2005). Adoptive parents who do not doubt themselves in their ability to raise kids are less more likely to be anxious or panic when things don't go as expected.

In contrast, research has shown that parents who report lower self-efficacy experience increased levels of parenting related stress and emotional arousal in challenging parenting situations; thus, they are less able to put parenting knowledge into action. They also do not show persistence in parenting task. Additionally, parents who feel less in control of their children's behaviour are more likely to use negative parenting strategies (Coert et al 2021). As parents gain experience with raising children, their self-efficacy usually increases, but persistence of difficult behaviours can impact upon parents' assessments of their abilities (Maniadaki et al 2005).

#### **2.1.7.5 Child demographics**

Results seen by Selwyn et al (2014) highlighted no statistical difference in the likelihood of an adoption disrupting due to child gender, but children who were aged four or older at placement were 13 times more likely to have a disruption compared with those who were infants at placement. Children who are adopted when they are older are more likely to have experienced prior abuse and/or neglect, and multiple placements, which are strong predictors of behavioral, emotional problems (Dance et al, 2010, & Simmel et al, 2007). The adoptive parents of older placed children live with an increased risk of psychopathology, and attachment problems Dries et al (2012), which may make them particularly vulnerable to parenting stress (Harris-Waller, Granger & Gurney-Smith, 2016).

#### **2.1.7.6 Child behavior**

Children placed for adoption have higher levels of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems than the general population. Both foster and adoptive parents consistently rank children's behavioral problems as the most difficult challenge Clearly et al (2018). Experiences of the adoptive parents are mostly shaped by how the child behaves after adoption. Some children are unable to adapt to the new environment of rules and regulations in the family setting and are delinquents so that affects the experiences of the parents. High levels of children's behavioral problems may also threaten parents' sense of competency as noted by Latham, Mark and Oliver (2017). External displays of unruly behaviours of the child have been positively correlated with the breakdown of adoptive placements Selwyn et al (2014).

#### **2.1.8.7 Sibling group**

Adoptive parents may be parenting sibling groups rather than just one child, which results in potential challenges as alluded to by Meakings, Sebba and Luke (2017). The government of Lesotho discourages sibling separation, that one child can be adopted leaving the rest of the siblings if they are known at the time of adoption. Even if the discovery is made later, means are made to place them together or at least within the same vicinity. Erich and Leung (2002), find that the adoption of siblings has been associated with lower levels of family functioning and greater likelihood of placement disruption. Selwyn et al (2014) found that a range of systemic factors causes adoption

attachment problems, including difficult relationships with siblings, although there was no statistical difference in the likelihood of an adoption disrupting due to being placed as part of a sibling group. Tasker and Wood (2016) found that the stories of couples who had adopted two children contained glimpses of fulfillment, but overall conveyed a sense of being extremely busy which obscured some of their joy as parents.

Furthermore, a study showed that adoptive caregivers are more likely to be distressed if they've adopted multiple children and older youth, Bird, Peterson and Miller (2002). In contrast, a review conducted by Hegar (2005) observed that children tend to fare at least as well, or better, when placed with siblings. Despite these inconsistencies, Jones, and Stewart (2016) concluded that the evidence supports the call for policy makers and adoption practitioners to continue developing and maintaining sibling placements, when it is in the best interest of children.

## **2.2 Theoretical Literature**

Theoretical framework is a structure that holds and guides the research, it introduces and describes the theory that explains why the research problem under study exist (Abend 2013). This study of the experiences of adoptive parents after adopting children will be guided by Attachment theory. Attachment theory is a social science theory coined by John Bowlby in 1969. It stresses the importance of early parent–child relationships for normative development of socio-emotional functioning across the life span. Baumrind (1978) notes a few things that must be in place to give meaning to the parenting of a child. These are:

- to ensure the physical wellbeing of that child,
- stimulate the child intellectually,
- encourage socially acceptable and responsible behaviour,
- and to provide emotional security and give moral direction.

Attachment is a unique and very specific form of bond. It does not refer to all the feelings a child has for a caregiver, nor to the feelings a caregiver towards a child. It is a bond that begins in infancy with the baby's biological predisposition to single out a primary caregiver from whom to seek security. The infant's predisposition for forming an attachment has a

survival function. It is their attachment that keeps the young child near their caregiver and causes them distress when they are separated (Rueter et al., 2010).

Attachment does not always refer to a positive or healthy bond. As a result of the infant's biological tendency, attachments of babies to caregivers develop under nearly all circumstances. This therefore means there is nothing like "no attachment" because the child will be attached to the caregiver either in a positive or negative way. It is the availability of the caregiver, and the way he or she responds to the child's needs for security and protection, that determines the quality of attachment (Cairins 2002).

### **2.2.1 Attachment Theory**

Attachment Theory is guiding the conceptualization of this proposed study. Attachment Theory was first introduced by John Bowlby in 1973) and examines the impact of early parent-child relationships on human behavior and development. Bowlby (1973) suggested an individual's early experiences, and the nature of his/her early attachments, shapes the way that person views the world and will powerfully influence the dynamics of his/her future relationships. The best foundation for an individual's healthy human development and future relationships is secure attachment between that person and his/her caregiver during early childhood Melgels and Bowlby (1969). Secure attachment during early childhood is an exception to the rule for adopted children.

Adoptees commonly experience neglect and abuse during early childhood, preventing secure attachment to their original caregivers. Following these experiences, adoptees are then and permanently separated from their original caregivers and placed with different caregivers— and too often this cycle repeats itself as children are repeatedly removed around within the temporary placements' system and introduced to new caregivers, experiencing repeated disruptions in attachment before being finally placed in their adoptive homes (Carnes-Holt and Bratton 2014). The behavioral outcomes of these early experiences persist after adoption. Attachment-related issues within the parent child relationship of the adoptive family, or externalized behaviors arising from insecure or disrupted attachments are the most common obstacles experienced by adoptive families (Carnes-Holt and Bratton 2014).

One of the difficulties of uprooting a child from one family to another is a disruption in their attachments. Attachment is defined as “a long-lasting emotional bond between two individuals developed by infants toward their principal care-givers” (Pierson and Thomas 2010). However, attachment is also seen as a continuous process that passes through various phases. So, even in the case where disruptions come to the fore, there are no hindrances in attachment taking place. This is good news for adoptive parents and families as their adopted child may still bond and form new attachments with them (Pierson and Thomas 2010).

In the care facility, children mostly have insecure attachment with the caregivers because it is a work environment and care givers have to attend to the distress of many kids prohibiting the secure attachment to one child. When those children are adopted, they are unable to form secure attachment bonds with the adoptive parents as they have learned to deal with dismissive attachments and are unable to swiftly reciprocate the new attachment style. This happens regardless of the amount of effort parents put in creating attachments with their adoptive children. Therefore, the study seeks to explore the psycho emotional, social, cultural and religious experiences of adoptive parents.

## **2.2.2 Application of the theory to study**

### **2.2.2.1 Adoptive parent’s psychological and emotional experiences of post-adoption**

Frye (2010) says the journey post-adoption is reported by parents to be the most fundamental one as a child is removed from their familiar place to a new one that may have a completely new set of rules. Even after successfully adopting a child, the psycho emotional wellbeing of an adoptive parent is still crucial as the empirical literature had extensively reviewed post adoption depression as the contributing factor to the experiences of the parents’ post-adoption. Adoptive families must cope with infertility issues, the fear that birthparents may desire the child back (although there is a time period in which the biological parents’ rights are terminated) and knowing when and if to disclose adoption information with the child Brodzinsky (2011).

Attachment theory guides the study in that it postulated that the kind of attachment the child will have is mostly based on the emotional state of the caregiver, in this case the

adoptive parent. If the adoptive parent's cognitive ability is not well enhanced there is a likelihood that the attachment pattern will either be insecure or dismissive (Bowlby 1973). Based on the above theory information I have formulated objective one to find out the adoptive parents psychological and emotional experiences of post-adoption and developed the research question; what are the adoptive parents' psychological and emotional experiences of post-adoption?

#### **2.2.2.2 Adoptive parent's social experiences of post-adoption**

Families that have good social support are reported to be having good experiences after adopting as evidenced in Atkinson and Gonet (2007) who conducted a study with 500 in-depth interviews of adoptive families. Their findings showed that actively seeking social support from family members and other adoptive parents was associated with family integrity. Cohesion studies have also shown that support from family and a friend has been consistently associated with positive outcomes post after adoption. One of the requirements for adoption in Lesotho is to have references from the family that they agree with and support the adoption. This is because attachment of the adoption dyad is greatly influenced by the social community within which they live after adoption.

According to Viana and Welsh (2010) the perceptions of support and help from family and friends significantly predict lower parenting stress 6 months after adoption. The attachment theory is relevant to study because the type of attachment the child will have and the experience that they will go through is mostly influenced by the support they have from the family and community as posited by, Rosnati and Marta (1997) that higher levels of perceived parental supports were shown to decrease adopted children's risk for maladjustment.

On the other hand, adoption on its own is a new concept in Lesotho. The society rarely understands that it is safe to assume that adoptive parents have gone through a lot of stigma due to infertility to eventually opt for adoption Thabane (2015). The kind of society and community that the adoptive parents reside in influences the experience of the adoption dyad post adoption. Empirical literature reviewed above showed that a lack of support from family and friends and subsequent conflict represented the biggest threat to the stability of post adoption placement (Foli 2012) of children in Basotho families. Hence

the attachment theory will provide the framework within which to understand the social experience of parents after adoption.

Based on the above theory information, the second objective ensues, which seeks to explore the adoptive parents' social experiences of post-adoption and developed the research question; what are the social experiences of adoptive parents post adoption?

### **2.2.2.3 Adoptive parent's cultural and religious experiences of post-adoption**

The way the child attaches to the care giver is based mostly on the cultural beliefs of the of the care giver. Western and European culture has been thought to value an independent conception of the self. This is contrary to the interdependent conception of self-attributed to non-Western cultures including Asian, African, and Latin American cultures (Raj et al 2018). The way the child is brought up in the Western world advocates for self-dependency. Even at the younger age children can stand on their own to face life while the same cannot be said for children of Basotho.

Culturally, they are always perceived as children, even when children gain independence from their parents, they remain answerable to the very same parents. It is to this effect that the culture within which adoptive parents raise their children will determine the attachment style and ultimately their experiences post adoption. Raj et al (2018) posits that the independent conception of the self emphasizes uniqueness of individuals, abstracted from social responsibilities. By contrast, the interdependent construction of the self-places an individual within a social system with individuals' behavior being guided by social norms.

In traditional Basotho family setting, it is common for infants to be brought up by multiple individuals in the extended family as opposed to the Western culture which is a more nuclear orientated family (Maqutu 2005). This means in the traditional Basotho family that the adopted child will have a lot of family members belonging to the extended family that the culture embraces who will be around him/her as they grow up. This form of multiple caregiver system in has implications for attachment Niemann and Weiss (2012) and will influence the experience that the adoptive parents have post adoption. In Basotho culture,



for example, it is common for children to be attached to multiple nonparental figures in a way that children in Western or European cultures may not (Kimane 2005) since they have a lot of people to attach to.

The theory is relevant to the study because attachment theory is based on a Western middle-class conception of child development that has a focus on the individual. Yet, cultural contexts differ widely in their understandings of the self and in caregiving strategies where non-Western cultures are seen to have more interdependent social contexts Raj et al (2018). It is to this effect that attachment theory will help guide the study of the experiences of Basotho adoptive parents after adopting children.

The religion of adoptive parents can influence the attachment that they have with their adopted children. Some Christian's adoptive parents may feel that by adopting they are fulfilling the words of Gods as written in the bible James 1:27 that the pure Christianity is the one that takes care of orphans and widows. So, the type of attachment that parents already have with the superior power that gives them security will influence the way they attach to their adoptive child. Staying in a church that embraces adoption will influence the kind of attachment style the adoption dyad has with each other. It is possible that experiences with God may serve a similar function of supportive affiliative relationships in the religious communion and positive experiences from pastoral care are likely to at least contribute and potentially to mediate this presumed link between religiosity and earned attachment security (Granqvist 2002). Based on the above theory information I have formulated objective three to find out the adoptive parents' cultural and religious experiences of post-adoption and developed the research question; what are the cultural and religious experiences of adoptive parents after adoption?

#### **2.2.2.4 Adoptive parent's financial implications of post-adoption**

Adoption is seen to be an expensive avenue towards becoming a parent (Moyer and Abbie 2017). In Lesotho the preparation of the home study is a process which involves money because the prospective adoptive parents have to get a checklist of documents that sometimes require money. For example, the police clearance to ascertain that they are not criminals, and they pay for their own lawyer who will get the court orders at the

court. Bringing a child into a home means a change in the economic wellbeing of the family as highlighted by (Cao et al 2016) that the arrival of a first child can be marked by a range of stressors for biological parents, such as a decline in economic wealth. Research has indicated that adoption restructures the family atmosphere and in turn produces stressors, socially and economically (Bird, Peterson and Miller, 2002). Some of these stressors include concern about being able to bond with the adopted child, handling the pressures of instant parenthood, the children's future, and unexpected financial burdens of the adoption.

Attachment theory guides the study in that if the parents are stressed about the economic and financial wellbeing of the family after adoption then they will have less time to focus on the child and respond to their attachment needs as they will be busy trying to secure the means of survival. It is to the above-mentioned reason that the financial experiences of parents after adopting a child are worth exploring in the context of attachment. Based on the above theory information I have formulated objective four; to find out the adoptive parents' financial implications of post-adoption and developed the research question; what are the financial implications of being an adoptive parent?

#### **2.2.2.5 Adoptive parent's attachment challenges experiences of post-adoption**

It is important to note that although attachment formation in early life plays a key role in subsequent development, a young child's internal working model is not completely fixed. The early years of life are a particularly sensitive time for the formation of an internal working model but experiences beyond those years can alter what has already been formed. This implies that for children who have been in the welfare system and have developed unsecure attachment, it is still possible for them to have a secure one should they be in the presence of a responsive caregiver which in this case can be adoptive parents. Singer (2010) concludes that positive interactions within the context of a stable and sensitive caregiving relationship can result in an insecure child becoming secure, whereas repeated disruptions in a positive caregiving relationship, due to factors such as parental hospitalizations or discord, can lead a secure child to become insecure. Based on the above theory information I have formulated objective five to find out the adoptive parents' attachment challenges experiences of post-adoption and developed the

research question; what are the attachment challenges experienced by the adoptive child and adoptive parents post adopt?

### **2.3 Conclusions of the reviewed literature**

The chapter has reviewed both the empirical and theoretical literature regarding experiences of adoptive parents that can help shape the relationships between life spheres of the parents.

### **2.4 Gaps in the literature**

- A vast amount of empirical literature is on the experiences of adopted children post adoption as people are interested in their integration into the family. However, least is said about the parents,
- There is no study on adoptive fathers' experiences as they are often left out (Hull 2016&Thabane 2015).
- Furthermore, the literature is mostly on other countries and only one study by Thabane (2015) on Lesotho was found.

### **2.5 Chapter Summary**

In summation, the chapter has reviewed both the empirical and theoretical literature regarding experiences of adoptive parents that can help shape the relationships between life spheres of the parents. Most people regard the time between the submission of application and the day they get the baby (Gotcha Day) very crucial just like the actual pregnancy. Even way after adoption the experiences of adoptive parents are worth noting because parenthood goes far beyond adoption.

# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.0 Introduction**

According to Bryman (2016), research methodology is the specific procedures or techniques used to identify, select, process, and analyze information about a topic. In a research paper, the methodology section allows the reader to critically evaluate a study's overall validity and reliability (Langkos 2014). This chapter includes research methodology of the proposed study. The researcher's philosophical underpinnings of the study, outlining the research approach and design, the study site, population, sampling procedures, data collection and analysis techniques, reviewing ethical considerations and concludes with considerations of trustworthiness of data.

### **3.1 Philosophical underpinnings of the study**

A research philosophy is a belief about the way in which data about a phenomenon should be gathered, analyzed, and used (Matthew and Ross 2016) & Jackson 2013). On the other hand, Creswell and Poth (2018) elucidated that the philosophy in research is vital for the following reasons:

- Direction of research goal and outcomes.
- Enhancing the scope of training and research experiences.
- Providing a basis of evaluative criteria for research related decisions.

The importance of the underpinning in research is to transform things that are believed into things that are known (Hall et al 2016) which leads to two philosophical stances (ontology and epistemology) that will underpin this study of post adoption experiences of adoptive parents.

Slevitch (2011) stated that ontology can be defined as the study of reality or things that comprise reality. Allison and Hobbs (2006) mention that ontological consideration is about "What is the nature of the knowable, or what the nature of reality is?" and the epistemological consideration is about "What is the nature of the relationship between the

knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowledge)?" Meanwhile Bryman & Bell (2007) are of the view that an epistemological issue are concerned with the question of what is or should be regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline.

In simple terms, Ontology is the study of reality and epistemology is the study of knowledge (Chachar 2020). The ontology of the study into the experiences of adoptive parents post adoption is that indeed there are certain peculiar aspects that are experienced in adoption parenthood as opposed to biological one. The epistemological stance is the method to know and ascertain empirically that there are certain experiences that adoptive parents have. This study is guided by both the Constructivist Ontology and the Interpretivist epistemology.

### **3.1.1 The Constructivist Ontology**

In this study, the researcher engages a constructivist ontological stance which is dedicated to the notion that no single reality exists as individuals interpret and make sense of their own accounts of reality based on their personal beliefs and cultural experiences (Madill et al., 2000). It holds the view that certain objects do not exist independently of the mind but are constructed or invented by the mind rather than discovered. There is no single truth or reality, but reality is constructed (Matthew and Ross 2016). For example, the findings depend on who are the researcher and the background of the participants. Constructivist ontology asserts that two different researchers' interpretations will be different but can be equally relevant, and that all existing accounts of experience, are inescapably saturated.

Positivist researchers remain detached from the participants of the research by creating a distance, which is important in remaining emotionally neutral to make clear distinctions between reason and feeling (Carson et al 2001). They also maintain a clear distinction between science, personal experience, fact and value judgment. It is also important in positivist research to seek objectivity and use consistently rational and logical approaches to research (Carson et al., 2001).

Constructivist ontology is best suited for this study as the researcher attempts to remain detached from the participants of the research (adoptive parents) to remain emotionally

neutral to make clear distinctions between facts and value judgment in the study of the post adoption experiences of adoptive parents. In as much as the adoptive parents have gone through similar adoption process, their experiences might not be the same, what might be bad to one might parent will be good to another as it about how experiences are created for each parent. The experience of adoptive parents depends on their outlook and perspectives regarding adoption.

### **3.1.2 Interpretivist epistemology**

Interpretivists avoid rigid structural frameworks such as in positivist research and adopt more personal and flexible research structures (Carson et al 2001) which are receptive to capturing meanings in human interaction (Black 2006) and make sense of what is perceived as reality Carson et al (2001). In simple terms, epistemology is about how individuals go about uncovering this knowledge (that is external to researcher) and learning about reality. Reality must be interpreted to discover the underlying meaning of events and activities which will reflect reality. The interpretivist researcher enters the field with some sort of prior insight of the research context but assumes that this is insufficient in developing a fixed research design due to complex, multiple and unpredictable nature of what is perceived as reality.

The interpretivist epistemology is suitable for this study because in this study the researcher who works in the adoption field will allow the participants' experiences to emerge rather than preconceiving them. Adoptive parents are individuals with different backgrounds socially, economically, spiritually and culturally. It is those backgrounds that shape what reality is to the adoptive parents and contributes to their experiences post adoption. Adoptive parents cannot be separated from who they are (their background), therefore experiences of adoptive parents will differ depending on what is reality to them. Since the goal of interpretivist research is to understand and interpret the meanings in human behavior rather than to generalize and predict causes and effects (Neuman, 2000), in this study, the researcher will allow the adoptive parents interpret their own post adoption experiences and not generalize the results. For an interpretivist researcher it is important to understand motives, meanings, reasons and other subjective experiences by which time and context are bound Neuman (2000).

### **3.2 Research Approach**

A qualitative research employed because it helped the researcher discover and understand existing multiple facts and explore the experiences of adoptive parents post adoption. Furthermore, the research is a means of generation of knowledge on how to cope with challenges of post adoption for future adoptive parents. Again, the scarcity of research examining parents' experiences of caring for an adopted child warranted the use of a qualitative inquiry. Qualitative research is characterized by studying the meaning of people's lives in their real-world role and contributing insights from existing or new concepts that may help to explain social behavior, thereby enabling the researcher the opportunity of knowing the lived experiences of adoptive parents post adoption.

Empirical literature on the experiences of the child is widely available. There are, however, only very few studies on the adoptive parents' experiences across the world. In Lesotho, the concept of adoption is relatively new and mostly viewed as "the rich people dilemma", and as such an exploratory design will be used since the topic has not been well investigated (Stebbins 2001). The descriptive design on the other hand, shall enable the provision of an accurate account of the participants' real-life situations for purposes of describing what exists (Nassaji 2015 , Sandelowski 2010,) as parents outlined their experiences on all aspects of life pertaining to life after adopting a child.

Qualitative research is deemed suitable for this study as it allows for an in-depth exploration and generation of knowledge and facilitates an understanding of the post adoption experiences of adoptive parents. It is advantageous in that adoptive parents are to be interviewed in their natural setting where they will be free to express themselves.

#### **3.2.1 Research Design**

The study used Phenomenological Design. It is the design which is regarded as an appropriate methodology when the topic under study is dynamic, contextual, and subjective, relatively under-studied and where issues relating to identity, the self and sense-making are important (Creswell 2014). It is an inquiry where the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about the phenomenon as described by the participants. The experience of adoptive parents will be studied according to how they as

participants explain them, to get an in-depth content of their experiences as they live through adoption parenthood. Phenomenological design is suited for this study as it allows the researcher to understand the narratives of adoptive parent's experiences of post adoption from own perspectives.

### **3.3 Study Site**

According to Bryman (2016), the study site is the place where the research participants are located. For purposes of this research, the study site is Maseru district because it is where the adoptive parents selected for this research reside. The reason is that adoptions are only processed at Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) in Maseru district, in the Alternative Care Unit not in any other district of Lesotho. Adoption as the new phenomenon in Lesotho is erroneously thought to be practiced by the rich people who live in Maseru. Lesotho Poverty Trend and Profile Report 2000/2003 – 2017/2018 published in 2019 indicated poverty has a clear regional dimension, where some regions are largely rural and have the highest poverty rates, while in the urban areas (such as Maseru) have the low poverty rates.

As outlined by the Education Statistic Report (2014), majority of learned people reside in Maseru. The concept of adoption is complex (Child Welfare Gateway 2008). Learned people have easy access to information and comprehend adoption and its implications. The process of adoption is quite long and tedious (Mennis and Walker 2012). It also affects a lot of Basotho customs, as a result learned people are at the advantage of comprehending adoption because of their understanding capabilities and exposure to other cultures.

### **3.4 Population**

A research population is generally a large collection of individuals or objects that is the focus of a scientific query (Bryman 2016). The target population of this study are parents who have legally adopted a child from one of the care facilities and orphanages in Lesotho. Parents should have adopted the child of either sex using the structures provided by the Ministry of Social Development and officially have the Court Order issued



by the High Court of Lesotho to that effect. The adoptive parents should have stayed with a child for at least a year because it is believed to be enough time believed to have established a bond as the child would have gotten used to a new family, and its rules. Also, the adoptive parents would have had a significant experience of parenthood.

Even though studies show that attachment starts at birth (Cherry 2016), the idea of a one-year experience emanates from the fact that the adoptive children are expected to detach from their facility caregivers attach and form a notable bond with their adoptive parents Niemann and Weiss (2011). It is to that effect that a year is enough time for such to have been experienced.

### **3.5 Sampling technique and selection procedures**

This study employed the non-probability type of sampling consistent with a qualitative research that the study seeks to undertake. Purposive sampling is used whereby subjects were chosen to be part of the study with a specific purpose in mind. This because the researcher believes that some subjects are more suitable for the research compared to other individuals. In this study, adoptive parenthood is concise to the study than any form of parenthood, it is for that reason that adoptive parents are chosen.

The sample must be representative of the population from which it was drawn, and it must have needed size to warrant analysis (Bryan 2016), thus ten adoptive parents being five females and five males, who are a married couple, and have adopted a child are chosen as the sample and their experiences noted until data saturation is reached. This study employed snowball sampling which is considered relevant when the population of a study is difficult to locate (Rubin and Barbie 2013). In this case the adoptive parents are the group of people that are secretive and elusive emanating from the notion that the concept of adoption is relatively new in Lesotho. The first adoptive parent who is referred to as index person by Thabane (2015) to be conducted is known to the researcher by virtue of working in the adoption field as depicted in the reflexivity and duly referred the researcher to the next suitable respondent.

The Ministry of Social Development is reluctant to share the offices' unpublished records of adoption to the public on account of protecting their privacy. The researcher being a Social Worker in adoption field as it is noted in reflexivity is aware of the informal support

group network of adoptive parents. They come together to discuss their experiences especially as there are no formal post placement services available to them after adoption, so such a group is engaged in order to achieve the aims of the study. The purposive sampling method is the most suitable as the group of adoptive parents is known to the researcher and their elusive nature is mitigated by snowball sampling to get strategic data on adoptive parents.

### **3.6 Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

Garg (2016) explains who can and cannot be included in a study population. Inclusion criteria identify the study population in a consistent reliable and objective manner while the exclusion criteria identify characteristics that makes the population ineligible or not suitable for the study.

The inclusion criteria are the adoptive parents who have adopted a child through legal means as outlined by the Child Protection and Welfare Act of 2011. The study explored the experiences of those parents who have adopted a child they are not related to and such a child should have lived at one of the children's care facilities in Lesotho. In order to be eligible, a couple should have been adoptive parents for at least a year as the researcher believes it is an adequate time to have gone through the bonding period and the time taken will provide in depth detailed experience after adoption. Even though, the above-mentioned stature recognizes them, single adoptive mothers are excluded in this study, as it only seeks the experiences of both the father and mother who are married and living together as a couple to avoid conducting a comparison study.

### **3.7 Data Collection**

According to explorable.com (2009), data collection is the procedure of collecting, measuring, and analysing accurate insights for research using standard validated techniques. In depth interviews which according to Bryman (2016) are a useful qualitative data collection technique can be used for a variety of purposes including needs assessment, issue identification, and strategic planning which are employed in this study because they create a deeper confidence on the data. In-depth interview is an excellent tool to elicit qualitative information because it uses an open-ended discovery-oriented

method which gives the interviewer an allowance to explore in depth the respondent's feelings and perspectives on a subject.

In an interview, semi structure questionnaires are used. The researcher probed interesting areas that emerge and follows the respondent's interests or concerns, including the non-verbal communication ways as the respondents answer questions about their experiences after adopting a child. The nonverbal communications such as body language pauses and sighs along the interview process are noted, it is crucial to observe this type of communication because the participants will be free in their own natural space and can express themselves in many forms. Therefore, the researcher has to be in apposition to observe and give precise meaning to them. Semi structured interviews allowed the researcher to bring a set of questions while at the same time permits for the other information to arise along the process (Matthew and Ross 2016).

Open ended questions are used because they assist the researcher in understanding the experiences of the adoptive parents' life better. Lune and Berg (2016) say that questions need to be cautiously worded so that respondents expound on the topic, to avoid the short answers such as yes and no. Although, it is important to pre-plan the key questions, the interview should also be conversational and interactive, with questions flowing from previous responses when possible. The adoptive participants signed consent forms that outline the details of the research including the ethical considerations.

After getting the permission and signed consent form from the respondents, the interviews were also tape-recorded to allow them to entirely respond without interruption and generously express their thoughts and experiences as adoptive parents. The interviews were conducted in the two official languages (Sesotho and English) because the participants as mentioned are learned so their language of preference will be used. For the parents that preferred Sesotho, the interview will be recorded and translated to English later in order to allow easy transcription. Additionally, field notes used to note points are destroyed once the report is complete.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

For purposes of this research, thematic analysis which is in accord with the interpretative phenomenological analysis is used. It is a method of analysing qualitative data in which

the researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes and topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly (Given 2008 & Smith 2004). The data is analysed qualitatively using thematic analysis after being transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis is a good approach to research when the study seeks to find out something about people's views, opinions, knowledge and experiences. The researcher identified a limited number of themes and sub themes as per the research objectives into which the data was coded and analysed. The identification of themes posed no problem because the researcher is familiar with the data as they had been collecting the data themselves.

The researcher identified a limited number of themes as per the research objectives into which the data was coded and analysed. In this study the researcher identified common themes in the data, labelled the themes, organised the themes and analysed them to produce a research paper.

Thematic analysis is the most suitable for this study as it provides a vast amount of flexibility, and it can be applied across a various range of epistemologies. It permits researchers to grow the range of study past individual experiences. For example, after the study of the experiences of adoptive parents, more research topics can be found that warrant further study as the parents could have raised a lot of interesting themes to explore further (Matthew and Ross 2014).

### **3.9 Ethical considerations**

Research ethics are defined as the guiding moral principles that the researcher seeks to apply in their study (Rubin and Barbie 2013). For purposes of this research, the following ethics were adhered to:

#### **3.9.1 Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Confidentiality means that any identifying information is not made available to, or accessed by anyone but the researcher. To ensure confidentiality the researcher assured the adoptive parents that even if the study findings are to be published, any specific detail about the specific individual who took part in the research will not be disclosed Bryman (2016). Destroying field notes information after submission is also another way to ensure confidentiality. Anonymity is a stricter form of privacy than confidentiality, as the identity

of the participant remains unknown to the research team. The researcher did not use the real names of the participants but rather will use pseudo names if the need of mentioning names arises. Tape recorder was set to auto-tune the voices of participants, that way they are not easily recognizable and such recordings destroyed after submission.

### **3.9.2 Avoidance of harm**

Harm can be both physical and/or psychological and therefore can be in the form of stress, pain, anxiety, diminishing self-esteem or an invasion of privacy Bryman (2016). It is imperative that the research study does not in any way harm (unintended or otherwise) participants. Research should not harm the participants involved by physical harm, psychological distress or damage to participants' financial status. As such, all means are taken to minimize the risk of harm: Some questions maybe be sensitive and trigger emotional reactions from the adoptive parents as they recall their experiences post adoption. To avoid harm, the researcher, who is also a social worker was able to detect emotions and offer counselling where necessary and refer to relevant stake holders.

### **3.9.3 Informed Consent**

Informed consent means that the person participating in the research is fully informed about the conducted study (Bryman 2016). Participants need to be made aware of the purpose of the project, who or what group is funding it, how the findings will be used, if there are any potential adverse impacts of their participation and who will have access to the findings. The main purpose of informed consent is that the participant is able to make an informed decision as to whether they will participate in the research or not. The researcher adhered to this ethical consideration in that she allowed the participants to make an informed decision as to whether they will participate in the research or not after explaining the rationale behind the study.

### **3.9.4 Voluntary Participation**

Saunders et al (2019) explained that on top of having a right to decide on to partake in the study or not, participants also have a right to pull out from the study at any point if they want to, while De Vos et al (2011) also suggested that no one should be forced to participate in a study. De Vanclay et al (2013) also added on that as implied by the

informed consent principle, partaking should be voluntary and not subject to any pressure or intimidation.

Voluntary participation means that people participate in the evaluation free from coercion. Participants are free to withdraw their participation at any time without negatively impacting on their involvement in future services or the current research. It is the right of participants to leave a research study of this nature at any time, therefore no pressure should be placed on those who choose not to continue. The researcher ensured that participants are not asked to give any explanations as to why they would no longer be willing to participate in the research if they decided to leave and should not be subjected to harm and threats if they refused to partake.

### **3.9.5 Invasion of privacy**

Bryman (2016) explained that the invasion of privacy ethical concern transmits to the concern of the degree to which invasions of privacy can be pardoned. De Vos et al. (2011), elucidated that the principle can be desecrated in a variety of ways, and it is critical that researchers be reminded of the significance of safeguarding the discretion and identity of participants, and to act with the necessary thoughtfulness where the privacy of participants is relevant.

Invasion of privacy can be two-fold, according to De Vanclay et al (2013) there is notion of unrecognizability, wherein, participants are of the assumption that they will be unidentified, and their anonymity will be safe, unless they have given authorization to be named, while with confidentiality, respect for participants should be rendered to all private or personal matters or views, when any such undertaking is given.

The privacy of the participants needs to be always respected. Adoptive parents are a secretive group of people, as such the researcher ensured no invasion of privacy in that she respected their personal space and did not go to their homes unannounced but rather set appointments for interviews and collected data at a time convenient to the adoptive parents.

### **3.10 Reflexivity**

According to Dodgeson (2019) reflexivity is when a researcher clearly describes the background interconnecting relationships between the participants and themselves (researcher). The importance of reflexivity is that it increases the credibility of the findings while at the same time deepening the understanding of the topic. Ideally is how the researcher is related to the problem that they seek to study. It is worth mentioning that the researcher is the social worker working as the Lesotho's Representative for Small World Adoption Agency, the only adoption agency that has signed the Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Lesotho through Ministry of Social Development to place adoptive children with adoptive families from the United States of America.

Having worked and specialized in international adoption for 10 years, being the sole contact liaison person between the two institutions, the researcher is quite conversant of the adoption processes pre and post-adoption and all the stakeholders' roles in child protection issues that are involved. There are post adoption services that the international adoptive parents enjoy back in the receiving countries that are not available or known to the researcher that the local/domestic adoptive parents have. The availability and nature of these services therefore shapes their post adoption experiences hence the need to study them. In this study, errors have be minimized by suspending personal experiences and judgments and practicing a strict adherence to ethical principles guiding social research.

### **3.11 Trustworthiness of the Research**

As articulated by Noble and Heale (2019), triangulation is a method used to increase the credibility and validity of research findings. Credibility refers to trustworthiness and how authentic a study is while validity is to assess whether a study accurately reflects or evaluates the concept or ideas being investigated. This study seeks to map the experiences of adoptive parents post adoption.

Triangulation: The preferred way of ensuring the trustworthiness of the study is through triangulation which uses a variety of data sources, including time, space and persons, in a study to validate a certain phenomenon Carter et al (2014). The data triangulation approach has been used in many studies to strengthen conclusions about findings and

to reduce the risk of false interpretation Noble and Heale (2019). This therefore strengthens the validity and credibility of findings, thus making it much easier to explain and justify. To ensure trust worthiness the data collected is triangulated through parents who have adopted their relatives, step child adoption, those that adopted children born out of wedlock.

Dependability: This requires the research proposal to be logical, traceable, and clearly documented. To ensure dependability, any changes that occur during the study which were not initially in the study proposal are documented, the methodological processes can also be audited to accommodate dependability.

Transferability- Extensive methodological procedures are provided and clearly spelled out so that those who seek to transfer the findings to their own site can judge transferability. In this study the research methodology along with the philosophical underpinnings are shared, to enable other researchers to work on.

### **3.12 Chapter Summary**

The chapter outlines the methodology which the study used while exploring the experiences of the adoptive parents after adoption. It is the qualitative research that employed the interpretivist paradigm and data is collected using open ended questionnaires in a face-to-face interview. Data was recorded, and the ethics of the research were considered in order not to violate the participants. Finally, it was transcribed and analysed thematically.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the detailed qualitative research approach as the methodology of this study. In this chapter, the research findings, as obtained through in-depth interviews directed by a semi structured interview guide, were analyzed based on the objectives and problem statement of the study. The researcher decided to utilize Braun and Clarke's method of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), which was described under the methodology chapter. Themes were developed based on the relatedness of the categories of data collected. Once the data was transcribed, the researcher checked that the recordings and transcriptions correlated. Initial themes were noted during this process. Initial themes were written under each interview and compared across interviews. Codes were given to themes that were repeated over interviews.

Data was collected from ten participants who were couples that have adopted from the Ministry of Social Development and had been parents for over a year. Couples were interviewed separately in order to have individual experiences of both adoptive mother and adoptive father. 10 couples (five females and five males) were interviewed in Maseru district in their own homes of which strict Covid 19 regulations were adhered to. The researcher went to their home for an interview upon which they were interviewed separately. All interviews lasted for one hour except for one adoptive mother who got emotional during the interview, and the recording had to be paused to allow for counselling. All interviews were audio taped using a recorder. Purposive Snowball sampling techniques were used to select eligible parents, with the index couple known to the researcher was able to provide the next participants

Data was collected in the two official languages Sesotho and English. During the interviews the languages were used interchangeably. The Sesotho part of the interview

was translated into English later after it was transcribed. Participants were given time to debrief after the interview and ask additional questions. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six of thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from the interviews,

The first stage of analysis which is data familiarization was done and data was transcribed by the researcher. This stage provided an opportunity to 'relive' the interview process and take note of the thoughts and feelings of the adoptive parents that had originally been evoked and were evoked again on listening to it a second time outside of the interview process. Pauses, emphases, and gestures were noted during transcription; however, all identifiable data relating to the adoptive parents and their families were anonymised or excluded to ensure confidentiality. Smith and Osborn (2003) argue that, "mentally hearing the voice of the participant during subsequent readings of the transcript assists with more complete analysis", and this was felt to be the case during the initial analysis and subsequent steps in the analytic process

Once the researcher was familiar with the data, the second stage of analysis which is coding was employed whereby the initial codes were developed from small sections of the data. After initial codes were completed, they were collated into a table and arranged into groups based on the relationship between the codes. In the third stage, the codes groups were then transferred into themes and sub-themes relevant to the statement of the problem, objectives and research questions, and were later refined and reviewed by both the supervisor and the student, discarding any which did not represent the data sample and also re-coding if necessary.

The fourth stage of refining and reviewing themes was characterized by the researcher sorting the themes, checking for repetitions, similarities, differences, and contradictions that emerged and the supervisors and the researcher collaborated and refined the themes. Naming as the fifth stage took place whereby specific names were given to the themes and subthemes to indicate the content of each theme. Major themes and minor sub-themes were named and defined. The last stage of thematic analysis, which is the reporting stage, was accomplished in the next segment, which entails reporting the findings and the discussion of the experiences of adoptive parents post adoption.

Additionally, when a theme was analyzed, related literature and the theoretical framework were considered in order to produce profound findings. The chapter is divided into two sections; Section A, entails biographic details of participants and children cared for by these participants and Section B provides the thematic analysis of the findings and the chapter conclusion ended the chapter.

## **4.2 Demographics profiles of adoptive parents**

This section describes the demographics of the participants. As highlighted in chapter 3, ten participants 5 couples in those five females and five males who identifies as a couple were selected using purposive snowball sampling methods. The participants of the study were couples who adopted a child through the legal framework provided by the Ministry of Social Development for more than one year as this was the criteria for sampling inclusion. One couple out of ten couples adopted more than five years before the enactment of the Child Welfare and Protection Act of 2011 which to a larger extent is seen as most modern statute to children's rights which meant they had a different view of the adoption, and it provided a deeper perspective of the shift in adoption paradigm since the previous years.

According to Duquia et al (2014) presentation of tables is an important part of data analysis and publication of results because it organizes the collected data in a clear and summarized fashion as such, a table of the biographic characteristics of the adoptive parents is presented, it is followed by pictorial representations in the form of pie charts, bar charts showing the adoptive parent's age time in adoptive parenthood, educational level of the participants and the employment status as the last representations.

### **4.2.1 Demographic details of adoptive parents**

Table 4.2.1 shows the adoptive parent's age at the time of research and the age at which they became adoptive parents, the age of the child at the time of the research and at the time of adoption respectively, the sex of the child and the educational background of the adoptive parents. Since the study sought the experiences of adoptive parents post adoption, it was obvious that the participants are married people hence no need to include their marital status in the biographic table. Only one adoptive couple reported to have had one child biologically after the adoption.

Of the ten participants (100%), five were females and five were males. The age groups of the adoptive parents were 31-70 whereby adoptive mothers' age ranged from 31- 65 and adoptive fathers' age range was 35-70. The employment status of the participants was classified using the categories employed, self-employed and unemployed and retired. In the study, seven (7) adoptive parents (70%) were employed, the remaining three parents (10% each) were self-employed, unemployed, and retired respectively. Educationally, all ten adoptive parents who took part in the study had tertiary level educational background, one parent (10 %) had a master's degree, one parent (10 %) attained honors degree, three adoptive parents (30%) had bachelor's degree, while the only two adoptive parents (20%) had diplomas and the last three adoptive parents (30%) had certificates.

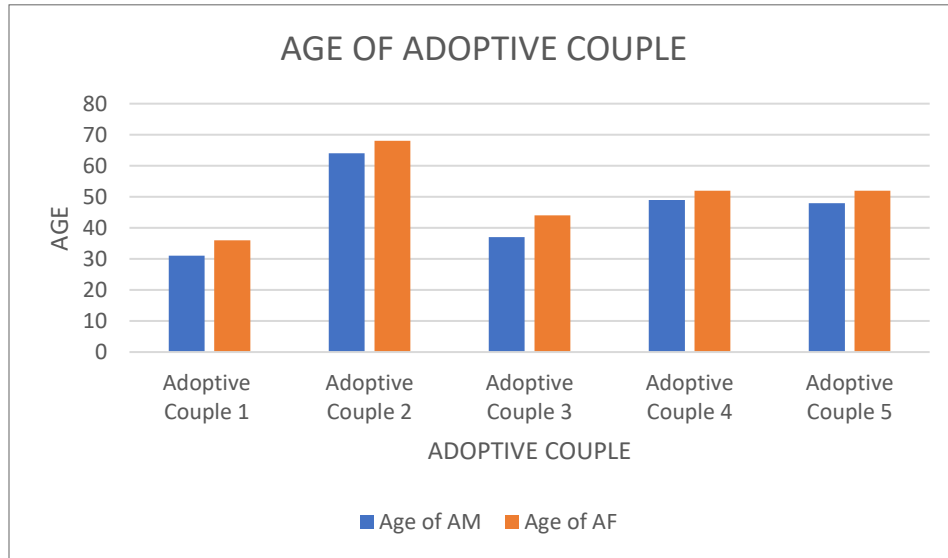
**Table 4.2.1 Demographic Details of Adoptive Parents**

Participant s	Adoptiv e parents	Curren t age	Age at adoptio n(years)	Current age of child	Age at adoption	Sex of child	Educational Background	Employme nt status
Couple 1	Mother	31	28	2 years	9 months	F	Degree	Employed
	Father	36	34	2 years	9months	F	Degree	Unemploy ed
Couple 2	Mother	64	39	25 years	6weeks	F	Certificate	Retired
	Father	68	43	25 years	6weeks	F	Diploma	Self employed
Couple 3	Mother	37	34	3 years	8months	F	Honors	Employed
	Father	44	41	3years	8months	F	Masters	Employed
Couple 4	Mother	49	44	8 years	2 years	F	Certificate	Employed
	Father	52	47	8years	2 years	F	Certificate	Employed
Couple 5	Mother	48	45	3 years	11month s	M	Diploma	Employed
	Father	52	49	3years	11month s	M	Degree	Employed

#### 4.2.2 Age of Adoptive Parents

Figure 4.2.2 shows the adoptive parents' age .The participants were in age range of 30-35, that being the one couple and the mother from the third couple, while most of the

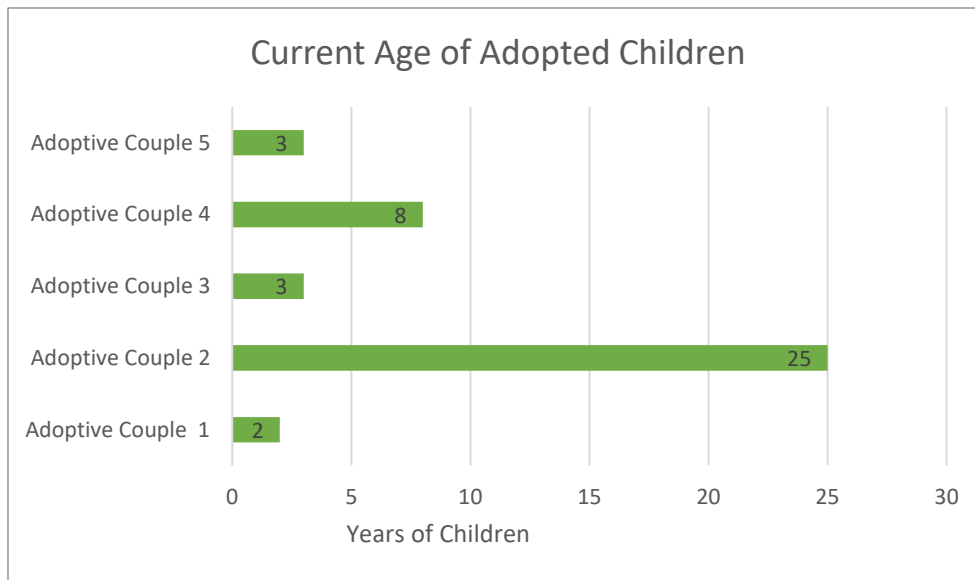
adoptive parents were in the age range 40-55. Only one couple of adoptive parents were above 60 years of age.



**Fig 4.2.2 Age of Adoptive Parents**

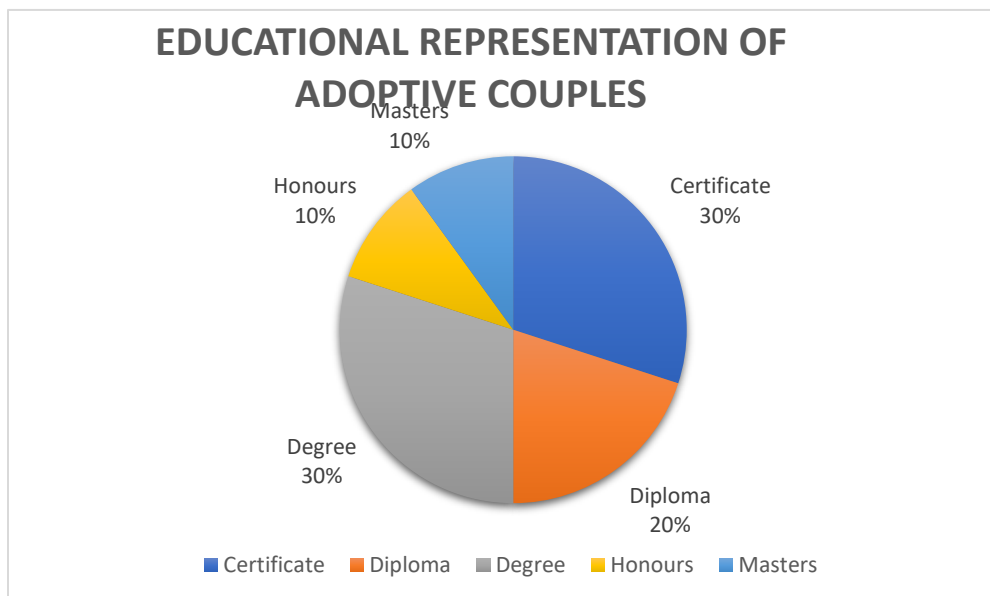
#### **4.2.3 Current Age of Adopted child**

The Figure 4.2.3 below shows indicates that 2(two) adoptive couples have 3(three) years old children, one couple has (2) two year old child while the other couple has (8) eight years and the other couple has a child who is 25 (twenty five) years of age



**Fig 4.2.3 Current Age of Adopted Child**

#### 4.2.4 Educational Representation of adoptive parents

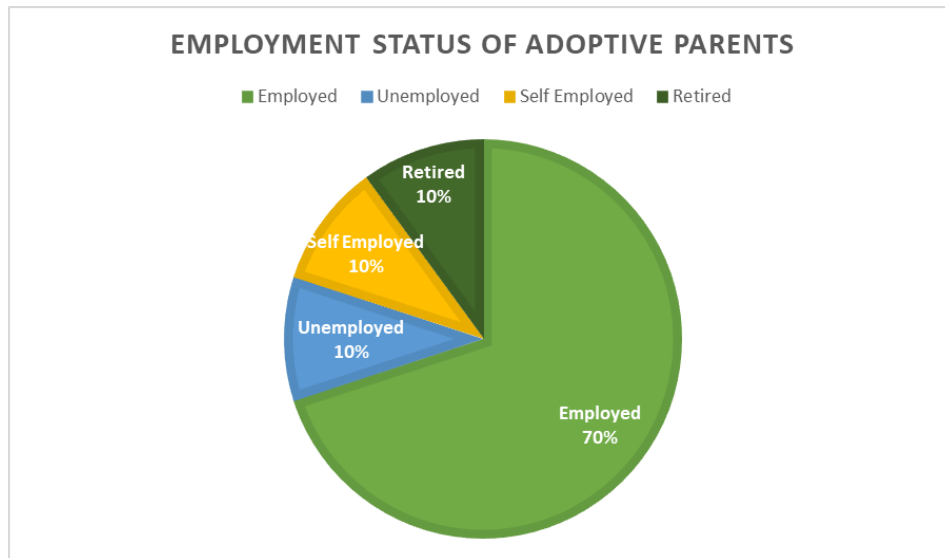


**Fig 4.2.4 Educational Representation of Adoptive Parents**

The educational background of the participants as shown by Fig 4.2.4 above indicated that out of the 10 participants, one parent (10 %) had a master’s degree, one parent (10 %) attained honours degree, three adoptive parents (30%) had bachelor’s degree, while

the only two adoptive parents (20%) had diplomas and the last three adoptive parents (30%) had certificates.

**Fig. 4.2.5 Employment Status of Respondents**

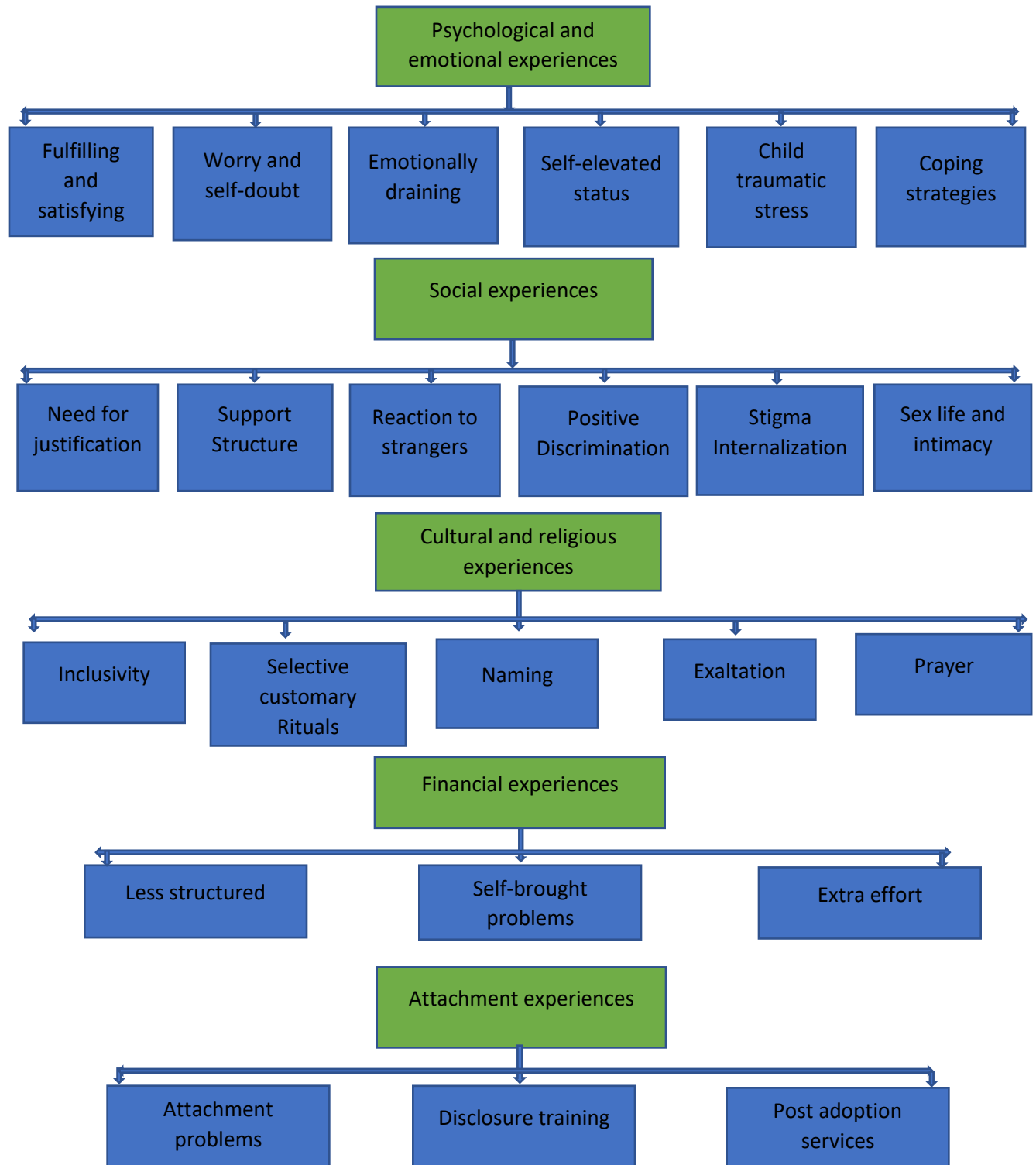


**Fig 4.2.5 Employment Status of Respondents**

As depicted by Fig 4.2.5 above, at the time of data collection, one (10%) parent was self-employed, one parent was unemployed (10%) and only one (10%) parent was retired while the rest 7 participants (70%) were all employed.

### **4.3 Findings**

The section outlines the themes, major sub-themes, and minor subthemes by providing verbatim quotations from the transcribed interviews they aim to provide a clear representation of the patterns and connections between the emergent subthemes, and the common experience of the adoptive parents. Five key themes emerged from the data, and these have been guided by the study objectives, problem statement and the chosen theoretical framework. Each theme is then discussed in an interpretative narrative, using extracts from participant interviews as supportive evidence. Below is the representation of themes in a hierarchical diagram and sub themes as they merged in the data analysis. Some themes were discarded as they did not hold to form part of the conclusive analysis.



**Figure 4.3: A Diagrammatic Representation of themes and subthemes**



### **4.3.1 Theme one: To find out the adoptive parent's psychological and emotional experiences of post adoption.**

Under this theme, the following sub themes emerged; post adoption experience as fulfilling, adoptive parents worry and self-doubt, emotionally draining, Self-elevated status, Child background (early traumatic stress), Parental coping strategies of post adoption.

#### **4.3.1.1 Fulfilling and Satisfying**

Most of the post adoptive parents especially adoptive mothers report to be finding the post adoption experience as fulfilling. To them experiences of having a child in their home is filling the void that always had in their heart of being parents. Most of them report that being the only two in the house was boring so the presences of the baby who cries and makes a mess of stuff gives them a change of atmosphere that they needed hence it is satisfying to have a child at home. It gives them so much joy and satisfaction to have a child in the family that they commented

*“Fulfilling I tell you, it's like a great shift has happened in my life, this is the place I wanted to be at, and I have arrived” (Adoptive Mother, 1)*

*“The arrival of the new baby has filled a void in my life and gave a peace of mind that I had wanted for so long, when I look at my baby, I know I have to be the best for her because she has made me the best for me” (Adoptive Father, 5)*

*“There is extreme happiness in my family, what a completer! She was the last piece of puzzle that I needed in this picture” (Adoptive Mother, 2) said cheerfully.”*

Contrary to common opinion of cleanliness and housekeeping, two adoptive parents commented that, the messy rooms and ill placed toys gives them a gist of fulfillment that indeed they are parents and it is emotionally satisfying to have

*“ At first I was worried that I am never going to experience it, I was starting to think my child is too clean.Yoooh(exclaimed gladly) three months later the games*

*began, He became the son I prayed for, playing and unpacking everything, I said to myself" Go Boy!". It was so good to see him in the pool of toys all around him. Thing is I grew up with a strict mum who was a neat freak and I wasn't allowed to mess up the house, I knew I was not going to raise my son like that, I wanted to let him be a child and mess up...In a way I was supplementing the messing up stage with my boy and it was fulfilling, I was living my dream" (Adoptive Father, 4)*

Adoptive Couples who were undergoing marital problems in terms of late-night arrivals especially in the part of the father, direction loss in marriage and sometimes reduced intimacy before adoption reported that after the adoption their family life has changed for the best that is satisfying to them.

*"I come home early after work knowing the little guy is waiting for me with a smile, and open arms ready for a biiiiiig hug, and an airlift, that makes me see 4:30 pm as the distance time, No time to stop for one drink at the bar, I am family man now" ( Adoptive Father 4 )said proudly*

*"I always want to be home, I know now that I have a reason to work, previous time I worked and spend my money purposelessly, now I am working for her". (Adoptive Father 3)*

*"The intimacy is back again because we have both taken our mind away from conception, my family is happy again and that obviously makes me happy, my husband is now focused" (Adoptive Mother 3)*

For many parents the presence of the child their families has given them a purpose in life and it is fulfilling to them. The adoptive parents' life is now complete. They are in the psychological and emotional state that is truly fulfilling to them. One would argue that they have arrived at the self-actualization stage advocated by in the Maslow's hierarchy of need.

#### 4.3.1.2 Worry and self-doubt

Most adoptive couple reported that they felt a different sense of pressure onto them because they were at the thin line between getting it wrong or right. For them, they worry about being the best parents they can be to their adopted children. The sense of worry is elevated mostly by fear of unsupervised disclosure to their kids about their adopted status.

*“In as much as it is a peaceful state to being, I worry about whether the child will view me as the best mother they can ever have” one parent commented with deep consent” (Adoptive Mother, 1)*

*“I am always in constant fear of what will happen to my child when they reach teenage years as to whether they will resent me or not” (Adoptive Mother 3)*

*One father said” I am always wondering about my boy when he is away, I worry that people will disclose to him before I do” (Adoptive father 1)*

One parent who had raised a teenager and is past the disclosure phase iterated that they worry most about the sudden appearance of the birth parents now that the child is well on her own.

*“Not that I will have a problem with them, I so want my baby to know them if and when she needs to. My worse fear is the suddenly appearing in our lives and I have no control over it, I guess you could say it would allay my fears if I knew for sure I will have control over it, I know what will and will not hurt my baby, so I don’t want other people controlling it hence I fear so much for her“(Adoptive Parent 4)*

*“Sometimes when I allow her to be the baby, I am frowned upon that I am spoiling her, trust me I have seen spoilt kids and she is nowhere near them, I just wanted her to have a good time. That makes me worry if I am the best parent for her, I doubt my parenting skills ,I so wish to give her everything but I can’t, she needs to know right and wrong, I doubt myself on some occasions” (Adoptive Father 1)*

*“Parenting an adopted child is worrisome, you get to self-doubt if you didn’t take a child from the vigil to the funeral, you bend over backwards to be a best parent. I think biological parents have it easy as they are no been judged on so many factors, for me it will always come down to “It’s not her child”, I try to ignore such comments if my boy has done some silly stuff ,I keep in mind that a child is a child, adopted or not” (Adoptive Mother 5)*

One parents shared a different view that even she never worries about anything in parenting her girl, she just does what feels right at the moment.

*“I have waited for so long to have a child and I really can’t be withholding myself on account of someone, It is my baby and yes I can be called overcompensating, so what? I like it and it doesn’t worry me so I will do it. As long as I can afford it them, she gets it. It’s my baby and I have to please her, let her be limited when I am no more, for now she is the princess” (Adoptive mother 5)*

Most adoptive parents feel a sense of worry about the future of their children and how they will cope when their status is finally revealed. The common sense is they wish they could be the first ones to do it. They self-doubt their parenting skills because they love their children so much and would like to be the best parents to them however the issue of principle come to their lives in teaching their kids right from wrong.

#### **4.3.1.3 Emotionally draining**

The state of having a child in the family home is demanding for the parents who didn’t have young kids in the family before. The adoptive parents explained that the joy that comes with the presence of the child in the family is also the same as the emotional strain that come with post adoption experiences.

*“In as much as I didn’t give birth biologically, the presence of the baby requires me to be on high alert, should something happen and that on its own is overwhelming for me as my body has to adjust to be on alert drive for the baby” (Adoptive mother 4)*

One adoptive father commented that *“I have to keep up with my meditations and gym as caring for the baby demanded a certain level of consciousness that had to be sudden”*. (Adoptive parent 1)

*“Learning to be available for my wife during those episodes at night when the baby was just not controllable, and tomorrow was workday’ I was loving every moment while at the same time I was adjusting to the demanding night routine” (Adoptive father 3)*

*“It gets tiring for me to explain to my friends that I am not going to attend their party because I am babysitting, my boy is teething, “Adoptive Mother 5)*

*“You only rest when they are sleep, the trick is to tire them with play” (Adoptive father 4)*

*“It was emotionally touching for me to take my sick baby to the doctor, I was not coping with the sight of her getting injected (mind you I am a nurse). I wish I could have gotten her earlier when she still had to go for immunizations that way I would deal better with the idea of shots so it was a complete new thing for me and her. It was nerve wrecking to let the nanny be the one who holds her for a shot, I couldn’t emotionally take it” (Adoptive mother 5)*

One adoptive mother who has now gone through the emotional stage, reported that the first few weeks of having a baby were the toughest as she kept looking at the baby and blaming God for her infertility.

*“I would look at the baby and start thinking why God not blessed me with my biological child, the happiness that I was feeling them was sometimes clouded by the bad spirit of blaming and that was emotionally challenging for me. I eventually got over it and now my baby is my baby” (Adoptive Mother 2)*

Most of the parents were feeling happy with their newly attained status however just as biological parenting comes with its own problems so is adoptive parenting where they were emotionally drained and sometimes felt inadequate. However, there is no parent that reported that in their emotional distress they felt like returning the child, they all wanted to keep the child and persevere through.

#### **4.3.1.4 Self-elevated status**

Most of the adoptive parents feel like they fit into the community of parenthood and through this form of parenthood, they regard themselves highly elevated in the community. Since they have broken all the psychological and emotional barrier of always blaming themselves and their partners for infertility or childlessness, they value themselves so high in the area where they live and the people gives them such status. In essence, they thought high of themselves.

One parent reported that with a smile on the face *“I feel so proud when the neighbor’s call me “Girl’s Daddy”, nothing surpasses that title” (Adoptive father 5)*

*“I know dads carry their kids on their shoulders, when I am carrying mine, it feels most satisfying and most awesome, it’s almost like m carrying a jewel on my shoulder which of course she is. I have a status because of her” (Adoptive father 4)*

*“I feel like a pioneer in this form of parenthood that is otherwise made a secret, I might be the youngest person to ever adopt and gone public with it, I am a mum and proud of it” (Adoptive mother 1)*

*“I have the most brilliant girl in this village she is about the only one who made it to tertiary. You should have seen the look on my face and the pride it brought me when on the graduation day I had to speak as a father to the graduate. I knew I was her father but somehow on that day it felt like heaven, I waited for the MC to call me three time just so everyone could get it that I am the father of the graduate, from that day on, most of the people even those who did not believe in adoption finally did and they afforded me a certain level of respect”* Adoptive father 2 commented proudly.

In this era where the world is a global village and social media is immensely used the adoptive parents felt by just posting their stories online or having pictures they command a certain level of elevation as opposed to other women whereby they are pioneers of an otherwise hidden endeavor and being adoptive parents elevated them.

*“I get so much attention even for people whom I don’t know simply because I am public about my adoption. Getting referrals from young couples who are childless and helping them through the process is truly elevating me as a person”* (Adoptive Mother 1)

*“Apparently on my birthday my daughter posted my picture captioned **“My mother by choice and not birth, I am because she is, no greater love endured”**. I didn’t see it because I am too old for social media, but my neighbor’s child showed me. I was so happy because she voluntarily posted that that meant she isn’t afraid of her story and she is able to share it. I was so high up there”* (Adoptive Mother 2)

#### **4.3.1.5 Child background (early traumatic stress)**

Because of the system in Lesotho whereby most children are from the care facilities, or they might have undergone a certain level of childhood traumatic stress. Their background might influence the way the child behaves post adoption. Adoptive parents have to deal with the aftermath of those adverse childhood experiences. Most of them comment they feel sympathetic towards their child and wish they could have done something to prevent it happening as one parent tearfully commented that

*“It affects me a lot, I feel it is my job to calm her down, when she cries, I sometimes recall her background and fell an urge to comfort her even more” (Adoptive mother 4)*

*“I had to convince myself every day when going to work that I am going to work and not abandoning her again” (Adoptive father 5?)*

*“Sometimes I wish I didn’t know her story because that makes me overcompensate when treating him, on the other hand, I need that story.... I guess it is part of the journey” (Adoptive mother 3)*

On the other hand, one parent who reported that their child couldn’t cry and throw a tantrum like other children when she was leaving for work, that made her remember the arrangement in the care facility that they do not get to attach to a lot of people and sometimes they learned how to self soothe themselves.

*“I know it’s a good thing when a child doesn’t cry for their mother who is leaving for work, children should be that disciplined. For me, my child wasn’t crying, and I thought that was awkward, I wanted to teach her not to cry for me, yet she never gave me a chance to because she was always a quiet and peaceful baby, I missed that! Little did I know that when she was teenager, she was going to be the clingiest, she could call me anytime to an extend I wonder if she had friends, I had to make myself busy in order for her to have time with friends. She was making up for the time she didn’t cry for me when she was younger. I think since she was left alone for the first few days of her life she has learned to not care/ cry for adults” (Adoptive Mother 2)*

*“Sometime I need more information than I have that can help me deal better with him, He has this thing of just looking at me and not responding to whatever I am saying when He is in distress, It’s like he is in a world of his own, I can’t interpret that and worries me”(Adoptive parent 5).*



*“I know for sure my child doesn’t like stuffed animal toys like other kids, so I have decided not to buy them, He threw it away from his package and never plays with it, that is when I knew He has a story to toy animals, his experience is affecting him because he didn’t like the family cat so much when he first came in, they are better housemates now since we understand his perspective” (Adoptive Father 3)*

One parent comment that it doesn’t matter to him whether the child has a bad traumatic experience or not, he is willing to change the future for the child and the past don’t matter, He lives with the child in the state that He adopted her in not anything more.

*“My child has a story; I always believe all children biological or adopted have a story to their life. In biological child it goes like” When I was pregnant with you.....” In adopted child it is like” when you were found.....” Either way one has a story to them and it really does not affect me how her story is, it’s how her present shapes her future that I am concerned about” (Adoptive father 4)*

According to the adoptive parents, the childhood traumas that their children has gone through is always going to be with them post adoption and most have come to realize it is part of their parenting journey. Most of them are willing to get help should any experience pose a risk on either the child or anyone.

#### **4.3.1.6 Parental coping strategies**

After the adverse childhood experiences, adoptive parents have developed coping mechanisms to deal with the effects of the traumatic experiences of their children unto their lives/family. When asked about the coping strategies they use for when their children are experiencing early childhood stress, most of the parents reported that they try to be understanding of the child’s behavior.

*“When my child is hungry, they eat their clothes, I overcome that by making sure that I keep a readymade bottle in her cot, I make sure she never runs out of food because it’s not a good thing to watch your child being unable to express themselves, yet they resort to the previous ways”. (Adoptive mother 3) commented tearfully*

*“When in distress, he shivers, I make sure that I am always available to hug him and comfort him, even the nanny has been made aware that the baby needs extra hugging. I love it he loves it so it’s a win- win situations” one parent comments. (Adoptive mother 4)*

*“I used to practice Kangaroo Mother Care approach to mitigate the rate of frustration she got when the stressful episodes rocked her” (Adoptive parent 1)*

On the other hand, one parents lightly reported that He goes back to the original voice that is assuring to the child that they will never forsake or abandon them and the child understand.

*“When she has those moments, I literally carry her around the house and talk to her like I am talking to an adult, not in a baby coos but in my real voice and tell her in assurance **“I am here for you, please stop crying I have your back now and everything will be fine”**, Fortunately, it worked all the time I did it so I am sticking to it, babies listen. I speak in my voice and talk to her”. He said with a smile on his face. (Adoptive father 5)*

*“I use communication, I always try to let her to talk about her frustration rather than throw a tantrum that no one will understand. She is now a better communicator and reports her feeling because I always tell her my feelings too. Like when I am from work and I am tired from the days job, I let her know that mummy has worked hard helping sick people at the hospital so I might be giving her short answers she shouldn’t worry, It has groomed her to also tell me when she doesn’t want to talk*

*about what happened at school because she is sad, it has helped me a lot”*  
(Adoptive Mother 2)

*“We go out for a drive and let him sit on my lap. He likes it and its soothes him, we makes the car sounds like in movies that He thinks he is going on high speed”*  
(Adoptive father 5)

Furthermore, two adoptive parents noted that they turn to the Most High God in prayer when their child is experiencing their traumas

*“I pray, I pray I pray”* (Adoptive Mother 4)

*“I have holy water that I let her drink in trying to cast away the evil spirits”*  
(Adoptive Father 4)

It is evident that the adoptive parents are affected psychologically and emotionally in their post adoption experience that is shown in the comments they made. They are well off put in the society class while at the same time they must undergo tremendous change in the way they used to live before adoption and that affect them. The adopted child traumas are part of their live journey that they have learned to deal with and cope with their everyday life. In general, they reported to be doing well in adoption.

#### **4.3.2 Theme two: To find out the adoptive parent’s social experiences of post adoption**

Under this theme, the following major themes emerged; Justification to family and friends about of post adoption, the supporting role their families, Strangers, Too much care and sensitivity to adoptee (positive discrimination), Stigma internalization towards post adoption.

#### 4.3.2.1 Justification to family and friends

The adoptive parents reported that they felt a need to justify to the larger circle that they have adopted. The people knew them as childless and now they have a child whom they call their own, so they feel a constant urge to explain to the people how they became parents. They are required to prove over and above other parents that they are indeed the parent to their children. For most of the adoptive parents, whom infertility was the reason to adopt feel like they need to tell justify to the society about their child. One parent noted with concern that

*“Because these people are well aware that I am not able to have kids, when I appear with my daughter, I feel a need to explain beyond “she is my daughter” In adversely I feel a need to explain that she is “adopted daughter” that doesn’t sit well with me because for biological children there are no stories attached to ones’ child. No body say” She is my baby I want to labour on a certain date, so why me?”(Adoptive parent, 1)*

*“I sometimes feel like people believe they are entitled to some sort of a story after knowing that I adopted, they want to pry my baby’s story which I am not owing them an explanation” (Adoptive father 4)*

*“My close family and friends know and have accepted my baby into their circle and that gives a great deal of support through this journey” (Adoptive parent 4)*

In addition to feeling a need to justify, even some children who might have heard adoption stories from their parents, sometimes genuinely ask questions that gives out the impression that it is the talked about issue in their home. One parents who has a biological child after the adopted child and when the adopted child playmate saw the newborn asked

*“Where did you get this baby?” It is as if I am getting them somewhere, giving me the impression that I am a baby getter not a baby carrier. I thought to myself, now*

*I have to justify to kids where I get my kids because according to them I get them at a different place than their mothers” (Adoptive Mother 3) laughed the impact off.*

The need for justification was so prevalent in some adoptive parents that even the family felt a need to intervene behalf of the adoptive mother. One parent reports that

*“My own mother asked me to stop at “She is my daughter”: She didn’t like the reminder of to the introduction of my baby. That she is adopted. She reminded me that nobody does what I do and it should stop and I did” (Adoptive Mother 1)*

Most of the adoptive parents felt a need to tell the world that it is their adopted child beyond the ordinary introduction.

#### **4.3.2.2 Support structure**

The support that the adoptive parent got in their post adoption journey is key to the whole experience as opposition can have tremendous effect on the child and the adoptive couple if their adoption is not well received. All adoptive parents commented the support they had post adoption.

*“My friends had a themed welcoming party for the baby, that’s how much they supported me”. You should have seen the convoy of friends’ car on the day I was going to bring the baby home, and it was a surprise (Adoptive mother, 1)*

*“The power of adoption! My baby looks so much like me so much so that my family believes we are not telling the truth, that how much they have supported me.” (Adoptive father 3) commented happily*

*“I think the world has changed, back then it was a taboo for a man to marry a woman who has a child but this day’s people are more open in relationships, I think that is the reason for them to support me this much, they are embracing the new thing and most of all my in-laws want to see me happy’. (Adoptive parent,5)*

*“There is never a day that goes by without a neighbor coming to check on in on my girl” (Adoptive Mother 3)*

*“Even people whom you knew that they never regard you of anything, this day I am asked just by the bar how is the little girl doing” Adoptive father 4*

For one adoptive couple that has a child who is independent and out of the house the support has been so great that they want them to adopt again since they seem to be so good at raising kids.

*“Hahahah!! They want me to adopt again now that my child is independent, I asked them why they didn’t say that while I was still at my prime years” (Adoptive Father 2)*

Unlike in the past where adoption was frowned at, and the introduction of another child who does not belong to the family was a taboo (Kimane 2005), the support that the adoptive families got from their families is worth noting that the parenting world has taken a new shift that is more accommodating to adoption.

#### **4.3.2.3 Strangers**

It is not uncommon for adoptive parents to have strange people whom they never met to approach them and ask about the welfare of the child or how their journey have been because they have seen it on social media or have been told about them. When asked how they felt about that, most adoptive parents noted that

*“To some people who are distant relatives, I knew they wanted to snoop around for information or they wanted to confirm their suspicion that I had “bought a child” as they put, so I made it my duty to put it out there even before they can ask” (Adoptive mother 1 )*

*“Sometimes when in the mall people just walk up to me and start praising me for the good deed I did, saying they knew from a friend that I adopted sometimes it’s too much but hey! It is what is its” (Adoptive father 1)*

One older commented that they get referral from other people because their older daughter is more vocal about it and isn’t afraid to mention she is adopted. To this effect they are approached by people they don’t know and have never met

*“One time I was in town I was approached by one couple who said their niece went to school with my child and she told them that she was adopted so they are going through a childless marriage and would prefer to hear the ordeal from me since I raise her well”(Adoptive Father 2)*

For some that are against the idea, those distant relatives who believe the couple could have taken an orphaned child in the family, the adoptive parents respond that

*“Unless they tell it in my face, I let it be, but I know they are talking so I can’t confront them because first of all they are extended family that I don’t meet all the time and they never talk it to my face” (Adoptive Mother 3)*

*“Luckily, I grew up in a close family that isn’t much of an extended family and I married into such a family, so family gathering, and big family reunions are not my thing, so I turn not to socialize with them a lot, I have the support of my in-laws and I am good, nothing else matters” (Adoptive Parent 3)*

On contrary one adoptive parent comments that they never get comments from the strangers

*“I am a quite person by nature, so I guess people don’t just approach me easily. I am a talkative person once you get to know me so maybe strangers find it hard to approach me even if they know my adoption story” (Adoptive mother 4)*

#### 4.3.2.4 Too much care and sensitivity to adoptee (positive discrimination)

Most of the adoptive parents reported that their children received a special kind of treatment from other children of their age. It is much like people were much more aware of them than other kids. Parents still consider it discrimination because they adopted children have a special treatment that is less harsh than other kids. Most adoptive parents expressed a special kind of care and love their adopted child gets to experience from the society.

*“In the playground my daughter was like a pearl, all other kids can fall but the adult nearby felt a need to comfort her first, they treated her special and somehow that didn’t sit well with me, but I didn’t know how to address it back then”* (Adoptive Mother 3)

*“They never treat her any different from any other kid”* (Adoptive father 4)

*“My child is super brilliant so naturally he will stand out from the rest of the group, prompting the adults around him to always refer to me as his mother and that makes me proud. The support I get is great”* One parent commented happily. (Adoptive parent 5)

When complementing the looks and the behavior of the adopted child in association with parents, adoptive parents commented that that most people would always try to bring biology in it, with no hard feeling or bad impression whatsoever

*“Your child is beautiful, she looks so much like you then I quickly respond she is my baby she is supposed to look like me, who else should she look like?”* (Adoptive Mother 1)

*“One time the teacher told me that my baby like pouting, I was convinced this baby takes after her mother because she liked to pout when being reprimanded, but then again I thought, yes she takes after her, it’s her mother after all what was I expecting”* (Adoptive Father 2)



#### 4.3.2.5 Stigma internalization

In most cases, the reasons that lead to parent to adopt is in its own a reason to be stigmatized in the society. Being a marriage for a long time without children often called for discrimination from the family that eventually impacts the way the couple perceives themselves. Most couples reported that since having the baby they are enjoying the same treatment from the society as other parents.

*“Not because they said it verbally, but I used to refrain from things that will remind me I am unable to have kids, right now I participate in them for example at work I participated in “take your daughter to work day and it gave me so much pleasure to be with my daughter at work” (Adoptive mother 1)*

*“I can finally take him on my lap on an afternoon drive I always wanted to do that”. Commented one father proudly. (Adoptive father 5)*

On the other hand, one couple reported that they never had any stigma to themselves before adopting as they were well aware of their biological status however now that they have a child, they see that they have been missing out

*“First thing I did was get matching t-shirts; I never knew I wanted those till I had my child” (Adoptive mother 5)*

One father joking noted a different view of what it felt to be an adoptive father

*“unlike other people I was so happy to be called for the first time ever when my daughter had misbehaved with her peers at primary school, I knew I had been missing out on the experience because of that and unlike other parents who were angry I was finally shaking off the stigma, I was a father to this child” (Adoptive father 2)*

One parent who was reported to be the one who initiated the adoption after seeing the void that is being left by a childless marriage in the life of the wife commented that He thought of his wife first and knew that adoption had to happen

*“We had tried everything, and my wife wasn’t a happy woman that I used to know so I knew that it is eating her from inside I had to do something. When I proposed the idea to her, she told me she wanted that but couldn’t break it through to me, she has always been happy thereafter and the stigma is shaken off, I am lighter now and can finally have my family back “(Adoptive Father 4)*

Contrary to the abovementioned views, one parents said because of their careers and the fact that they were well off nobody dared to talk little of them even if they did it wasn’t to their face, the couple commanded the respect among family members, and there was always a child in their home, so they never felt anything

*“I was the provider for the whole family so nobody dared to bite the hand that feeds them; besides I was a nurse people thought I was doing something scientific about infertility, so they never talked much about it and that meant no stigma on my side, even after adopting the situation was still the same, they didn’t attach anything to it except they wanted to see me happy” (Adoptive Mother 4)*

### **4.3.3 Theme three: To find out the adoptive parent’s cultural and religious experiences of post adoption.**

Under this theme, the following sub-themes were established: problem of Inclusivity, Selective Customary Rituals, naming of the child, under Religious Experiences following sub-themes were established: Exhalation and Prayer.

#### **4.3.3.1 Inclusivity**

In asking the issue of inclusivity the researcher wanted to find out how the process of including an adopted child has been in the family, considering the lineage and blood

relations that Basotho value so much (Maqutu 2005). All the adoptive couples reported that the family was accommodative of their adopted child into the family. The customary slaughtering of an animal when the child is welcomed into the family was done in all the families of the participants. None of the families reported any problem in this regard.

*“The same well-respected grandfather of the family who facilitated the letter from the family that is needed in the adoption application is the same person who was in the forefront in the welcoming ceremony. Because of his stature in the family lineage most of the people easily accepted his decision and it worked best for us”.* (Adoptive mother 2)

*“My mother-in-law was the one who actually was in the forefront in welcoming her grandson, she even wanted to babysit, my baby even had the black thing (traditional protective necklace) that goes around the neck, my mother had it made for her, when I asked the answer was every child should have it so I was happy she is considered like every child”* (Adoptive mother 3)

*“We took the child back home to the rural areas and a sheep was slaughtered in her welcoming ways that gave me peace of mind knowing she is well recognized in the family”* (Adoptive father 4).

*“We are not much of a cultural family, but trust me on that occasion, the family made sure to gather and welcomed my child. It’s almost like everyone wanted to come and see the miracle that I have brought in the stranger into the family. It was the great day for my wife who was skeptical my family is going to sideline the kid, now they love the child more than her, she says when people call they hear about the child not her wellbeing anymore. Hahahah!”* (Adoptive Father 5)

#### **4.3.3.2 Selective Customary Rituals**

While it is most important for adopted children to be part of the family there are some rituals that prone children to further discrimination especially if they are not blood related. For adoptive parents they had to choose those rituals that their children can partake in

order to shield them from harm that can occur to them and to this they selected some and let go some. In doing so they were not pleasing the elderly who are the custodians of the culture who believed there are no shortcuts to culture. While most parents wanted to uphold the importance of customary welcoming ceremony of the child into the family by animal slaughtering, they however chose to ignore other rules including burial rituals.

*“I was already excluded from the ritual practices because of my religions so there was no way I was going to allow my child to be part of those, we don’t participate”*  
“One participant commented sternly. (Adoptive mother 2)

*“Because I was raised by the uncles, the burial ritual never really affected me so automatically my child was immune to those, so much so we adopted a girl who by default is excluded from a lot of those cultural practices, so no she wasn’t affected”* (Adoptive father 1)

*“We purposefully adopted a baby girl to test waters with her, we knew how strict our family was so we wanted to see how they will react, luckily they are understanding and never gave us tough time when we explained our stance in the customary rituals that we won’t participate”* (Adoptive mother 1)

However, some participant never had it easy in explaining their stance as they are powerful people in the community.

*“I had to step on few toes for them to understand that I will continue doing the rituals, but my child is not going to do such things, It was fighting at first because they thought if they had slaughtered a sheep for her it means she is inducted into the ancestry route but I knew it would create problems in the future so I refused and just stuck to denying everything”* (Adoptive father 4)

*“Slaughtering was enough, anything more was too much”* (Adoptive Father 5)

#### 4.3.3.3 Naming of the child

Just as inclusion into the culture and rituals, naming hold a significant place in the Basotho tradition. For someone has to have a child first in order to have a matrimonial name. Again, children of a certain family had to follow a distinct naming pattern that they can easily be distinguished with according to which sometime is hierarchical. It is the elders of the family that chooses a name for the child that is born is inducted into the family. Most of the adoptive parents related that they had no problem in naming the child. Welcoming the baby in the family meant the lineage names had to be bestowed upon the child and for most that was not the problem.

*“It was automatic, the child had to take after my matrimonial name” (Adoptive mother 2)*

*“She took my matrimonial name as the second name, I wanted to avoid confusion that was could be caused by remaining her after the care facility had already given her the name” (Adoptive mother 3)*

However, with one couple, they had the name for their child which was not what they family had intended to give to the baby at the welcoming ceremony and that created problem because of insubordination

*“If we wanted the child to be welcomed into the family, we had to agree to the lineage family names which we didn’t want because we are educated people and wanted to name the baby ourselves. That caused problems because they claimed we wanted to agree to half of the stuff and leave others whereas if we want full inclusion of the child, we should agree to all we stood our ground, and the child was given the name we wanted” (Adoptive father 4)*

*“Allowing my girl to have another name was going to be too much for her, it was going to be the fourth name and I could let it at all costs. The first name was by her biological mother, the second was the caregivers name, third was the care facility*

*name, then our name, it was too much, and I had to stand for my child” (Adoptive Mother 1)*

As it is tradition there is a saying that “a woman names herself “taken from the fact that one must have a child first in order that they get the maternal name that the child will have. One adoptive mother commented that she was so quick to remind people that she had eventually name herself so the name of her child should be from her not from the family

*“You used to say I will name myself, so I adopted and named myself, his name will automatically be mine in this family” (Adoptive mother 5)*

#### **4.3.4 Religious Experiences**

Adoptive couples just like biological parents still conform to a certain religious denomination that will ultimately affect the child and their experiences in the religious part especially church had to be noted. Most adoptive parents reported not to have any problem in the church, in conforming to some of the traditions of the church like baptizing and communions.

##### **4.3.4.1 Exaltation**

Most adoptive parents felt their spiritual status was exhausted and lifted higher than anyone in the church. They were suddenly viewed as having a good standing with the Lord. They were praised for their bravery and act of kindness. In their respective religious groups, adoptive parents reported an elevated religious status that they are viewed as the best examples of loving one’s neighbor.

*“They even asked me to join their catholic group forum as example nary role models to other parents”. (Adoptive mothert4)*

*“You should see my child’s godmother!” one parent commented cheerfully. “She felt like a best godmother in the house as she was representing an adopted kid”. (Adoptive Mother2)*

*“The priest came to me specifically, I didn’t know He knew I adopted, that’s how highly I am regarded at church this day”. One parent reported with a large smile on his face. (Adoptive father 1)*

*“I always wanted to join a certain church forum but couldn’t because of being childless, first thing I did after adoption is to lodge my application onto the group to be a candidate. Had it not been because of Covid19 I could have long been inducted into the group” (Adoptive mother 3)*

On the other hand, one parent who had a protestant religious believe noted that nothing had changed in as far as her religious group

*“It was mute, no reactions from them nut I know my religion is pro adoption just like Moses was adopted by the Egyptian Princess” (Adoptive mother 2)*

#### **4.3.4.2 Prayer**

By adopting, most parents commented that their church members believed they are the perfect human being that deserves nothing but praising and good things coming their way. A holy act most adoptive couple report that they are regarded to have dome the holiest act ever,

*“Sometimes I feel overly exalted, these people think I am holier than thou” (Adoptive mother 1)*

*“My church mates believe my marriage is the most solid, as the decision to adopt is the most difficult one”. (Adoptive father 1)*

*'Most of the elderly people at church believe now that I have adopted. God will bless me with a biological child, it's as if I had a curse that is removed through adoption, I don't like that mentality'* one parent replied with a consent (Adoptive mother 4).

Even the way their child is treated at church is different because church mates afford them a certain standard at church. One father comment that sometimes He doesn't know what to do.

*" By nature I have an inquisitive child who doesn't sit in one place in church but wanders, church goes don't remand her like they do to other kids because they know she is adopted they think they are making her feel at home, one time she walked up to the pastor preaching n just stood there in the aisle, I didn't know what to do because her mother had gone out and instead of sternly rebuking the pastor gently brought her to me which I have never seen happening with the same kids that are as naughty as her"* (Adoptive father 3)

#### **4.3.5 To find out the adoptive parent's financial experiences of post adoption**

Under this theme, the following sub-themes emerged: Less structured, Self-brought problems, Extra effort.

##### **4.3.5.1 Less structured**

Most adoptive parents view the process of adoption in Lesotho as difficult to predict, which affect the result of their adoption journey financially impact their post adoption experiences. Most adoptive parents report the process is more ambiguous and mostly unknown developments.

*"There is no time frame of events, everything can happen at a glance, one minute you are matched and the next you have a baby in the house"* (Adoptive Mother 1)



*“Due to rollercoaster of activities that require money, it is difficult to come up with moneys instantly” (Adoptive father 2)*

*“I think adoption is expensive, not everyone can afford it, I wish there was some reduction in lawyer fees as we are doing a great thing to the society, it should be hurdle” (Adoptive couple 3)*

One contrary, one parent reported not to have any problem financially as they were super ready for the baby having budgeted for 4 full years prior to lodging their application

*“I had four years of preparation, I knew nappies and formula are super expensive, so I had no problems” (Adoptive mother 3)*

#### **4.3.5.2 Self-brought problems**

Couples of adoptive parents reported that that when they are having a financial problem at a point and try to ask for assistance for their family and friends, the response they get is that they were better off before they adopted and that they could not have had the financial problem had they not adopted.

Most of the participants felt the family was judging them when facing financial times

*“You could never have this financial problem had you not adopted” Adoptive Mother 2*

*“Most of your financial problems are self-brought”. (Adoptive father 1)*

*“So, what was your financial plan B when you adopted a child?” one noted that people asked sarcastically. (Adoptive father 5)*

Contrary to the above comment some adoptive parents report that instead of being judged instead people whom they ask help from help them willingly now that they have adopted

*“It’s like they understand better, I think they view our financial stuck as just a phase so they don’t want our child to suffer” (Adoptive Mother 4)*

One parent reported that when going through a phase they don’t ask help from anyone they rather solve it themselves.

*“I make sure that I don’t ask them for anything I keep to myself and the close family” (Adoptive Father 2)*

#### **4.3.5.3 Extra effort**

Since they took in a child who has a certain story, and the fact that some distant members might not be approving of the adoption. Most adoptive parents noted that in everything they do they put in extra effort to be good parents and be seen to be taking care of the child. To avoid people, martyr some participants mention commented that

*“I make sure I am financially well so that my child doesn’t lack anything” (Adoptive father 5)*

*“I am the older child who is a little bit well off than my siblings, so I make sure not to give them a reason to doubt me” (Adoptive father 2)*

One parent reported that it is like the adopted child isn’t cut out to attend ordinary school, it is almost like taking their children to ordinary school is treating them bad.

*“From the some of it, it is like my baby should attend high class schools, more like there are special schools for adopted children, now I have to put in extra effort to take her there” (Adoptive Mother 1)*

*“Everything I do for my child I make double of it just to make sure she doesn’t lack anything” (Adoptive Father 3)*

#### **4.3.6 To find out the adoptive parent's attachment experiences of post adoption**

Under this theme, the following sub-themes emerged: Attachment, Lack of training. Post adoption services

##### **4.3.6 .1 Attachment**

On attachment, since the adoptive parents are raising children they got at different phases, there is a high likelihood that there will be attachment problem with their parents exacerbated by the fact that most of the adopted children have been in the care facility where they might have attached to different caregivers, any type of attachment is possible post adoption.

On the attachment note, most of the families report that a child is more attached to the father than the mother

*"I think it's because I was at home most of the time" (Adoptive father 1)*

*"He likes me better, obvious! A father responded proudly (Adoptive father 5?)*

*"Who do you think the baby looks like? Me! So, by default I attach," (Adoptive parent?)*

Most of them commented that there have not been any attachment problems with the baby.

*"I really was hoping to see problems so far but I am blessed, I don't have them" (Adoptive mother 3)*

*I don't know if it's because the child is relatively young or not but there hasn't been anything notable about the attachment" (Adoptive Parent 4)*

*“She was the only child at home, so I guess the problem was leaving her with relatives when I was away, She didn’t like them so much so I had to carry her around my daily endeavors” (Adoptive Mother 2).*

One parent provided a different perspective in that expectations sometimes cloud the attachment process because the adoptive parents are expecting their child to love them instantly.

*“I never had any expectations of my child, I allowed her to be her own being that is not defined by where she is from and what she has experienced and what I think a child should be like, if parent can do away with their own images of what their child will be like then they can allow the natural processes to happen on their own. I am not trying to name it, but I know my child loves me and is safer around me and my husband, that is enough for me” (Adoptive Parent 4)*

#### **4.3.6.2 Lack of training**

There is inadequate training on how to parent an adopted child. Adoptive Parents feel like this is one of the reasons that are affecting their post placement experiences as they are not well equipped on how to deal with some of the issues that come up in the adoption parenthood. For example, disclosure, post adoption counselling. Most of the participants commented that they are unequipped on how to disclose to the child about their adoption status so much so that it is adversely affecting the attachment.

*“I am not ready to disclose to the child as I don’t even know where to start, in fact I don’t even think about it, when I do it frustrated me, so I don’t think about it”.  
(Adoptive mother 3)*

*“I will do it when I am financially stable, until now I can’t figure it out, but I know I am going to do it” (Adoptive mother 1)*

*“I will rely on her stories from school and take it from there, otherwise it scares me to think of it” (Adoptive mother 5?)*

*“I have relocated the adoption papers just in case she finds them. That’s how much I dread the topic because I feel I do not know how to address it” (Adoptive mother 3)*

*“I am yet to seek profession help in disclosure counselling when I confront it” (Adoptive mother 4)*

Adoptive fathers think the mothers are better off telling the children about their status than them

*“My wife will, I just can’t” (Adoptive Father 3)*

*“I know for sure my wife will I am not so good in deep talks however; I will be there to help” (Adoptive Father 4)*

*If his mother can start it and break the iceberg, I am pretty sure I can talk, starting the conversation is the problem (Adoptive father 5)*

Some parents reiterated that the counselling done before adoption is not enough, they wish there can be courses prescribed for adoptive parents as part of the process

*“Because there isn’t much in Lesotho to go with, I researched adoption and learned there are some courses that one has to undertake, I wish I did those” (Adoptive Mother 1)*

*“Everything I know is because I join social media groups of adoptive parents, they share stuff that I wish could happen to be but didn’t, not that I am complaining but I wish the preparation could be intensified” (Adoptive Mother 5)*

#### 4.3.6.3 Post adoption services

In as much as adoptive parent's report that there are not enough post placement services available to them to use after adopting, they find solace in knowing that the Ministry Social Worker said they can call anytime should there be a problem.

*"I am comfortable now because the social worker lady said I should call anytime and gave me her number"* (Adoptive mother 3)

*"I wish they can do continuous post placement assessments to check on how were are doing with the baby, A timed one. On the other hand, I wouldn't the car to be parking here saying they are visiting, I think that will make me and the neighbor's uncomfortable, and my baby will one day ask why she has to be monitored while other kids are monitored" I don't know but a strategy has to come up"* (Adoptive Mother 1)

*"I wish there was a building I can go to talk about post adoption experience with someone who understands"* (Adoptive Father 4)

*"Much as they require detailed paperwork prior adoption I wish it could be mandatory to demand paperwork for post adoption but I don't know how that will work"* (Adoptive Mother 3)

When asked what they think should have made their post adoption journey better. Most parents commented

*"I wish they could allow us to visit as much as we want, why wait for the court order because already that is our child"* (Adoptive Father 5)

*"Can the baby visit me for some time at home while still finalizing the process? I mean it will be helping the care facility indirectly"* (Adoptive mother 3)

*“I wish the government can allow us to breastfeed, as in prepare our hormones for milk production. Currently there is no such service in Lesotho, but they could make it available solely for adoptive parents, even if it means buying it but prescription be some letters form the Ministry indicating I am a prospective adoptive parent, that way it will limit over the counter misuse” (Adoptive Mother 1)*

#### **4.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the findings on the post adoption experiences of adoptive parents in Maseru, Lesotho. It presented a demographic profile of the participants and proceeded to present five themes, providing direct quotes originating from the transcripts. Theme one investigated the psychological and emotional experiences of adoptive parents post adoption. Findings established that the adoptive parents find the time after adoption as fulfilling and satisfying. The void they always had of being childless is filled. In as much as they worry about the welfare of the adopted child and what will happen when it is time to tell them their adoption status, they report that their life has a purpose.

The study also found that the parents sometime doubt their parenting skills but try to persevere through because to most of them it comes naturally. The finding revealed that because they are adoptive parents, they are high elevated in the society. It might be from the fact that people believe they did a good thing of taking in an orphaned child. Just like biological parents, they report to have distress as they care for the child, true their bodied have not underwent the hormonal change but they report to be going through emotional distress when caring for the baby.

Findings also established that adoptive parents must take in the child with all the traumatic experiences that they have experienced and sometimes the children have episodes that require parents to be extra careful when dealing with them. They are emotionally affected post adoption as whatever the child has gone through or is going through, the parents feel it. They employ different coping mechanisms to help the child, interestingly the prominent one seems to be communication and being there for the child and letting them know they are secure with the adult who is now their parents, and they are there to stay, they won't be left alone.

Theme two found out the social experiences of adoptive parents post adoption in Maseru Lesotho in relation to friends, family strangers and the social construct of adoption in general. Findings pointed out that the adoptive parents always felt a need to justify to people that they have an adopted child. Considering at the years in marriage and sometimes failed fertility treatments, the society understands the couple is childless then they are seen with an infant. Adoptive parents are compelled to answer and explain to people that they adopted the child surprisingly, it is the family members that remand the parents not to do so as biological parents do not tell people the type of birth, they had their child with.

Surprisingly, the families of the adoptive parents are supportive and loving the kids, one would think that they would have a problem if their son/daughter is bringing a stranger child into the family. Instead, they are more focusing on their happiness. Results showed that most adoptive parents are not secretive about their adopted child not that they will tell anybody who has no business knowing but it's not kept a secret. Most of the adoptive parents post their children on social media, so it does not come as a surprise when they get approached by strangers who ask them about their adoption and sometimes come as referral from friends.

One theme subtheme revealed that the adopted children are positively discriminates in the community. Interestingly when something bad has happened to a group of children the first responder will pick the adopted child first. That was observed by the parents but did not have ways to address it People think and treat the adopted child differently in a good manner. However, some parents expressed that they wish their children could be let to be themselves without someone cautioning them. In terms of the stigma that they used to live with prior adoption that is now either removed or decreased by adoption, the study revealed that most adoptive parents' situation is different, because of the way they are respected in the community it was rather hard for people to discriminate them as they held important position even if they did it was in their absence. However, two couples noted they never saw anything with their childless state so much so that post adoption



they are more elevated. Interestingly, the couples' intimacy is said to have increased as couple have gotten, they baby that they desired and have time to focus on intimacy, and improving the marriage life and family life as they now have someone to look up to.

Theme three investigated the cultural and religious experiences of adoptive parents post adoption in Maseru Lesotho. The findings of the revealed that all the adopted children were inducted into the family history by the customary slaughter of the sheep/goat and that was evidence that the family had no problem with foreign child and are fully accepting the child hence introducing him/her in the ancestry line. On the other hand, the study found out that in as much as the adoptive parents would like their adopted children to be welcomed in the family traditionally, they did not go into full circle of traditional things, they tend to choose what part of the tradition they like and which they will do away with. Quite interesting is that they want their child to be welcomed into the family, yet they refuse for their participation into burial rituals and cutting of the hair in mourning for the loved ones. This brings about conflict in the family as it is believing that they should invest in the tradition as a whole or abandon it altogether that be selective of cultural practices.

Naming of the adopted child has caused some cultural conflict as older members of the family clan felt that are by virtue entitled to give a child any name into the family especially if such child has been inducted by a goat slaughter into the family. It causes problems as most adoptive parents wanted to name their own child especially for those couples that come from a family that naming does not come automatic.

In the religious sphere the study revealed that the status of the adoptive parents had increased as they are seen to have done God's work while similarly other church member found them worth to be part of their group, so they are recruited into the otherwise difficult group to be a member of. Just because they are adoptive parents. The study found out that the special attention that the child gets at church is evident in the way their godmothers react during their baptism. The findings reveal that, the elderly members of the church think the adoptive parents has made a sacrifice of some kind and will be blessed with the biological child of their own, very interesting perspective as they believe

adoption will remove the curse of childless family. Young couples at church tend to believe the adoptive couple's marriage is solid so much so that they took a huge step into adoption, they are idolized for that.

Theme four on the financial experiences of post adoption of adoptive parents in Maseru Lesotho, the findings revealed that the way the adoption process is structured in Lesotho makes it costly and to some extent agree with the social construct of adoption that it is expensive. The process is not well timed to prepare them financial for the baby, they are sudden and often require money. For some if they ask help in affiliates, they are reminded that they brought the financial problem upon themselves otherwise they could have been doing fine. Quite fascinating is the fact that adoptive parents feel a need to put in extra effort in raising the child in order that they are not blamed for making the child's situation even worse than when they were in the care facility, interestingly the adoptive parents don't perceive this a pressure but rather a motivation to work harder and excel in their financial status.

Lastly the fifth theme about the attachment post adoption experiences of the adoptive parents with their children in Maseru Lesotho was explored. The study found out that since most of the children are young there has not been much attachment problem as they are very much relying on their parents a lot. However, the study found out that the adopted children are more attached to their adoptive fathers than the mothers and that was quite interesting. One subtheme that emerged that the adoptive parents are afraid of the disclosing their adoptive status to their kids because they are not well equipped to do so, they avoid the topic altogether, yet they know and understand they will do it one time.

Most of them reported that the pre and post training given by the Ministry of Social Development is minimal if it exists at all because they have been on their own and it sometimes get overwhelming. The post adoption services that adoptive parents can utilize are not there in the country thus making it difficult for them so much so that they resort to social media groups and at some point, the close-knit support group of other parents who have adopted who are few and evasive too. Interestingly most adoptive

parents want the government to help them with post adoption services, but they are not willing to fully commit as the study found out that it will be invading their privacy, besides for them no biological child is monitored so their adoptive child should not be constantly checked on but they want a structured post placement assessment.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Introduction

The goal of this study was to investigate the experiences of adoptive parents post adoption in Maseru, Lesotho. This chapter provides a discussion and interpretation of the findings articulated in the previous chapter in connection with earlier reviewed literature and the theoretical framework employed by the study. The findings, which were analyzed using thematic analysis, revealed five main thematic areas, three of which revealed further sub-themes. Challenges encountered while conducting the study are also written and these are followed by conclusions drawn from the findings and recommendations of interventions to address the some of the challenges raised by adoptive parents in their post adoption journey. The chapter subsequently concludes with suggestions for further research. In this chapter the discussion and interpretation of the identified themes and subthemes are presented using the same sequence with which findings were presented in chapter four. The themes are;

- The psychological and emotional experiences of adoptive parents post adoption,
- The social experiences of adoptive parents post adoption,
- The cultural and religious experiences of parents post adoption,
- The financial experiences of the adoptive parents post adoption.
- The attachment process between the adoptive parents and the child post adoption in Maseru Lesotho.

### 5.2 Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

#### 5.2.1 Theme one: To find out the adoptive parent's psychological and emotional experiences of post adoption

Under this theme, the following sub themes emerged, post adoption experience as;

### **5.2.1.1 Fulfilling and Satisfying**

All the adoptive parents that formed part of the study reported that they feel satisfied about their post adoption experience. The post adoption experience is fulfilling. Consistent with Foli (2012), who mentioned that adoption is fulfilling as most parent believe they have reached the long-term goal that they always wanted to achieve, which is parenthood. After more than five years of trying for a baby for most of the adoptive parents, they finally are parents to the adopted baby and that is reported to be fulfilling. Most of the adoptive fathers indicated that the look and the behaviour of their wives changed for the best after adoption and that indicated satisfaction. They looked much healthier and to some even gain weight to show they are satisfied with their choice.

### **5.2.1.2 Adoptive parents worry and self-doubt**

The adoptive parents are mostly worried about how their child will integrate into the community and if they will have enough resilience to oppose those that tease them based on their adoptive status. Farber et al (2003), noted that even adoptive parents in the adoption process can be a vulnerable group, and this should be taken into the consideration. People can intentionally or unintentionally disclose the adoptive status of the child without prior consent of the adoptive parents which is worrisome. The adoptive fathers are concerned that people with bad intentions to hurt them can maliciously tell the child that they are adopted. Even though the Child Protection and Welfare Act of 2011 criminalizes the disclosure of the adoption status by an unauthorized person, people continue to do it and the parents are concerned.

The study found that the adoptive parents can have self-doubt post adoption and that affect them psychologically. (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2018) reiterated the same concern that it is common that adoptive parents may question their parenting capabilities as they progress in adoptive parenthood. A main concern being posed by the behavior of the adopted child. Sometimes the adoptive parents are hesitant to admit that there are any problems after a long-awaited adoption. These feelings of self-doubt resolve on their own as parents adjust to their new life routine as observed by Higgins (2010).

The study indeed revealed that when in doubt about their strengths, the adoptive parents do not tell anyone but rather opt to wait on the problem and solve it themselves.

### **5.2.1.3 Emotionally draining**

In as much as the experience of being adoptive parents is good and worth the wait, it can be emotionally draining and because of post adoption distress experienced in the first few months of adoptive parenthood. However, the study found out that it is not as intense as the postpartum distress in biological mothers. They attribute this to the fact that their bodies never went through a hormonal change experienced by biological mothers. The distress is mostly caused by change in the environment and living situation as Ji et al (2010) posited. The adoptive parents are used to taking care of themselves alone, now there is an additional person whom they must cater for in every aspect, like bottle feeding, diaper change and maybe school activities. To some parents, this may seem too much to handle and lead them into despair (Clapton and Clifton 2016). Adoptive parents experienced significantly fewer symptoms of anxiety, including social anxiety, panic, and traumatic intrusions, and experienced greater well-being in comparison to the birth mothers. The adoptive parents are mostly tired from the physical demands of tending to the new baby.

Dance et al (2010) asserts that adoptive parents sometimes feel isolated, as if no one else understands what they are going through, they may feel frustrated or even resentful towards their children. According to Child Welfare Information Gateway (2018), some parents begin to doubt their own parenting abilities and ask questions like; “Why can’t I fix this?” This doubt can put a strain not only on their relationship with the adoptee, but with other family members as well (including spouse).

Post adoption depression in adoptive parents is not limited to mothers only, it is found in adoptive fathers too (Foli et al 2012). The study further confirmed this assertion that it is mostly adoptive fathers that have post adoption depression. Firstly, since the social roles have changed, some adoptive fathers stay with the adopted children along with the nanny and can be considered prime caregivers. The second way they experience post

adoption distress is when they see their partners are in distress and that indirectly affects them when their wives are not able to cope with needs of parenting.

#### **5.2.1.4 Self-elevated status**

There is high sense of pride that the adoptive parents feel. Post adoption, the parents have a high self-elevated stature in the society. People are praising them for the heroic act that they did for giving a home to the orphaned child. Adoption on its own is kept a secret in the Basotho Community but the adoptive parents that formed part of this study indicated that they did not hide their status, and this contributed to them being praised as they were forth coming about it. Some adoptive parents even had baby showers and welcoming parties that they posted on social media signaling they do not hide it.

According to the Child Welfare Gateway (2018), dismantling and reconstructing one's identity within the context of parenthood is not shaped by a singular event, but is influenced by the decisions, choices, and issues adults face when confronted with infertility. The way the adoptive parents perceived their identity, greatly shaped their post adoption experience. Most of the adoptive parents are not shaken by the post adoption experience because they never had any problems before adoption. They valued themselves despite their infertility, so they get to enjoy the high self-elevated status post adoption.

#### **5.2.1.5 Child Background (Early Traumatic Stress)**

The welfare system of Lesotho is in such a way that even if foster care is catered for in the Child Welfare and Protection Act of 2011, it is practiced on a very low scale. Most of the orphaned and vulnerable children are put into alternative care in institutions otherwise known as orphanages. Most of them are not fostered before adoptions, meaning adoption becomes their first time being in a family setting. Therefore, episodes of traumatic experiences are expected. Most of the parent's report that their children throw tantrums, and they never regard them as caused by trauma as most of the participants had younger children. The realities of parenthood, including lack of sleep is mostly evident in parents of children who have experienced trauma. They have difficulty sleeping because they

keep seeing what they have been through and usually have nightmares, and the weight of parental responsibilities can be overwhelming Selwyn et al (2014).

#### **5.2.1.6 Parental Coping Strategies of Post Adoption**

Learning what adoptive children experienced can also trigger the memories in the part of the adoptive parents if they have gone through the same trauma previously in their own lives before adopting (Pickover and Brown 2016). The study found out that some adoptive parents had an adverse experience even if it cannot be as big as the one that the child has undergone. One parent was raised by the extended family and reported understanding what the impact of not being raised by ones' biological parents can cause. Therefore, they were determined not to let their adopted child go through the same thing. It is therefore crucial for adoptive parents to take time and focus on their own self-care and healing in the adoption journey say Clapton and Clifton (2016).

The adoptive parents revealed that when overwhelmed, they take time off from being primary care givers of the child and focus on their wellbeing and that proves beneficial. One couple let the mother in-law who lives in the villages to babysit and they take time off to relax in their urban home in Maseru. All the adoptive parents were Christians by religion, they resort to praying. When their child is going through an episode, they pray on it and the child calms down and that works well for their psychological wellbeing. This is also evident in adoptive fathers.

The erroneous believe that fathers are not the religious type is disproved because they seemed to be in the forefront in the religious ideals of the family in this study. Furthermore, as a coping strategy, they self-assure the child about their new identity and it works. In the past times, it was unusual for parents to have a serious talk with the family, in fact it was considered disrespectful. However, times have changed and the real talk works as the studies revealed that actually talking to the adopted child and letting them know they are loved and are there to stay is a good practice.



## **5.2.2 Theme two: To find out the adoptive parent's social experiences of post adoption**

### **5.2.2.1 Justification to family and friends about the child**

For most adoptive parents their post adoption experience involved having to explain beyond what meets the eye the circumstances of their parenthood. They felt a need to justify to the people and some distant members of the family that they are now parents to the child they were never pregnant with. Owing to the fact that they are infertile and have had more than 5 years in marriage without bearing child, it is evident that they are infertile so people know very well that they cannot conceive but they see them with an infant whom they say is theirs so the introduction goes beyond just that the baby is theirs.

Ben-Ari and Weinberg-Kurnik's (2007) study found out that the adoptive parents often rely on public comment to cement their parenthood. For example, when seen walking with the child, the public is well aware that they were never pregnant, there is therefore a need to explain that in fact they are parents. Similarly this study revealed that the adoptive parents did not really mind telling the people that the child is adopted. It is however the close family and friends that had a problem with the extra introduction as they noted that with biological children the parent never tell when, where and how their child was born, instead they just mention the name when introducing the child. They also reminded that they did not have to tell everyone the story behind the child, in as much as they are not secretive about their adoption, the background story is the private story of their child that does not need to be told to the people especially because it might affect the child later on.

### **5.2.2.2 The Supporting Structure**

Adoptive Families that have good social support are found to be having good experiences after adopting as evidenced in Atkinson and Gonet, (2007). For all the participants in this study, the adoptive parents are enjoying having the support structure in their families. Surprisingly, it is the mother in laws who are at the forefront in offering support to their daughters in law who have adopted. As mentioned before in (Maqutu 2005), customarily in a childless family, the man could be advised to get a second wife if the first one cannot

bear them children. The study contradicted that practice in that in this era, a lot has changed in the family institutions that shapes the way marriage is seen. There are now equal rights afforded to both men and women and they both get to make decisions that affect them, and the family is forced to respect them.

This enormous support from the family that the adoptive parents receive might also be accorded to the fact that the family set up has changed so much in Lesotho, there are a lot of blended families in the communities. It is no more viewed as a taboo when a childless man marries a woman who has two children that were born out of wedlock and have different father and the man will become a stepfather to them. It is no more frowned upon by the family and society. So even when the childless couple decides to adopt, the family now supports their decision without challenging it because they respect their choice and are fully aware that the world has changed, and such endeavors are happening around the world.

The study also revealed that the friends of the adoptive couple are a source of the support that shapes their post adoption experience. Most of the adoptive friends were there throughout the whole adoption journey and continue to be there even post adoption. The support from friends is seen by Foli (2012) as the crucial element in post adoption, failure to garner support denotes problems that can potentially cause despair to the couple. One couple disclosed that they are private people by nature. Therefore, they have few friends and not most of the people know about their adoption. However, the few that know are a constant support who always want to babysit. Their friends take pride in being friends to them.

The adoptive fathers reported that they are supported even by people whom they never thought know them or their story. The adoptive parent's friends are going all out to show support that they threw baby showers for the mothers after the court order was granted confirming adoption. Their friends are of the opinion that adoptive parenthood is the same as biological parenthood because it is parenting. Therefore, anything that is done to expecting mothers should be done to the prospective adoptive mother. This shows that

their relationship with friends matters so much in post adoption as it shapes the social relations.

### **5.2.2.3 Reaction of Strangers**

Most adoptive couples were not secretive about their adoption. Some of them talked and posted about it on social media. For some participants who hold powerful positions in the community, it was the matter of defying social protocol to adopt. Irrespective of the medium through which people know their adoptive status, it is a well-known fact that they are adopted. The study revealed that a stranger who might have heard or seen the social media posts sometimes comes up to them and praise them for their actions. The fact that the strangers seem not to be judgmental of them denotes that there is a change in the mindset of people. Respecting one's decision to live their life the way they deem fit and not want to interfere or judge.

During the adoption process, not everyone can be told about the parent's decision( Berry 2007). This applied particularly to distant family members who are not known to the adoptive parents and have allegedly passed comments that are derogatory and infer that there are lots of children who needed a home. They are said to have continued to say adopting strangers was unnecessary. The adoptive parents report that they never actually hear those people utter those comments to their face but rather other people will tell them later so they decide that they cannot deal with them if the words were not said to them directly as it might be gossip. Participants, who are influential people, have shown in this study that their status alone speaks volume so they cannot hear people pass bad comments about their parenthood.

### **5.2.2.4 Too much care and sensitivity to adoptee (positive discrimination)**

The society which understands the child is adopted seems to be giving the child extra care that could not otherwise be afforded to the child. The community discriminates children and treats the adopted children differently. Because adoptive parents are not secretive about their adoption, the society is fully aware, so they treat their child

differently. Some members of the community within which adoptive parents live with are aware of legal adoption as offered by the Ministry of Social Development, this means they know that most of the adopted children are from the orphanages in the country that there is a story that resulted in institutionalization.

With that in mind they think by treating children as special, they are not inflicting more pain. The adoptive mothers believe people treat their children special because they are afraid that anything less than the best treatment is going to make the child remember their traumatic childhood experiences. Such treatment is done in good spirit. Surprisingly though, the adoptive parents report this behavior of the society treating their child special as worrisome and not welcomed. Adoptive parents want their children to be included in the activities of the village children. If the kids are hurting at the playground, they should all hurt not spare the adopted child some hurt on that basis of their adoption. They report that this treatment much as it positive, is discriminatory and will make the child wonder why he/she is not treated the same as his/her age mates, therefore culminating into more harm.

The adoptive parents wanted their children to live a normal life that does not have to be qualified and or defined by adoption. For them a child is a child in the family no matter the way they came into the family and as such the treatment should be universal with all children. Contrary to common belief that adoptive children are treated in a bad way in the society, the study found out that they are treated in well and the society is accepting of them.

#### **5.2.2.5 Stigma Internalization**

Some parents reported that in as much as they were childless, their careers and their social class made them not internalize the stigma that the society might accord them. Some participants who work in the health system have indicated that they never had problems because people believed they were in the right field of specialty that they can “heal themselves” or are in a better position to consult doctors and get medication or treatment to have children. This is contrary to the findings of Broadhurst and Mason (2020), which highlighted the crisis women face when having to cope with the social

stigma of adoption as they negotiate their role as adoptive mothers. This study revealed that since some adoptive parents didn't experience much of the stigma, they didn't have much of it post adoption. On the other hand, since some parents indicated that they had internalized stigma due to infertility. The findings of this study denote that by virtue of being adoptive parents they overcame the stigma and are doing well with their adopted child.

On the theme of social experiences of adoptive parents post adoption, the sex life and intimacy emerged as a subtheme whereby all adoptive parents report that their sex life has changed for the best after they adopted. There is a purpose to do some transactions in life and the adoptive fathers report that they have time for their family and seldom frequent the bar after work which was not the case before having a child. The sexual intimacy has increase as they are not focusing on conception anymore because they have the child.

### **5.2.3 Theme three: To find out the adoptive parent's cultural and religious experiences of post adoption**

#### **5.2.3.1 Inclusivity**

Customarily for the child to be accepted into the family lineage a sheep is to be slaughtered (Maqutu 2005). The study revealed that all the adoptive parents have had their child accepted into the family the customary way. This means the Basotho culture is starting to be diffused and is becoming accommodative of the new form of parenting. It is an exciting revelation because the sovereignty of the family lineage is important to the Basotho people. As such, the slaughtering of an animal to welcome the adopted child into the family is a noteworthy act. This welcoming act has a positive impact on the post adoption experience as they are more relaxed and know their child is inducted into the family line.

### **5.2.3.2 Selective Customary Rituals**

After a sheep has been slaughtered to welcome their child into the family lineage, the adopted child is fully part of the clan and as such is bound by blood to perform some of the rituals that the family members practice. The post adoption experiences of the parents prove to be worrisome as the study reveals that they want to partially be involved in the rituals. For example, every person who is the member of the clan has to shave their hair and wear a mourning cloth after the death of the family member, however the adoptive parents want the children not to participate in such, much to the anger of family members. Family members believe that the adoptive parents are pushing them too far because they have been supportive of their endeavors.

The study found out that the adoptive parents decided not to allow their children to participate in rituals because they are protecting them from possible harm. During the time at which they are alive and the family with which they started the journey with is still alive, the child might be allowed to participate fairly but by the time they die, the child will be subjected to harsh treatment when it comes to such protocols. It is for this reason that they decide to be excluded. Interestingly, most of the adoptive parents reported that they adopted a girl child because customarily the girl child will get married and is not forced anymore to abide by the birth/adoptive family traditions but will do those that are for the matrimonial family. The family that adopted a boy child report that they have stopped any cultural activities based on their religion, so they don't find it any harder to navigate the adoption parenthood of the boy child.

### **5.2.3.3 Naming of the child**

A child deserves a nondiscriminatory name as per the Lesotho's Constitution (1993). Culturally as the child is welcomed into the family, it is expected that they are given a family name that follows a certain lineage. Some names are hereditary and predetermined for a specific home. So, when the adoptive couple wants to choose a name for their child it becomes a problem for the family. Just as in ritual section, family members feel the adoptive family are given a leverage to do as they please in the family as they

have been given chance to bring a child that is not blood related, the child is accepted into the family, yet they don't perform some of the rituals and lastly, they have their own name given to the adopted child.

The study revealed that some parents do not get to enjoy the adoptive motherhood identity of being called after their child's name because they chose to call their child the name that suited them as adoptive parents not the family, much to the disappointment of the family. Traditionally the mother is named after their first child, especially if it is a boy child (Maqutu 2005). For example, Thabo's Mother will be called Mathabo. Ma denoting Mother of. When the bride married and is first introduced into the matrimonial family she was called by the name, inferring to the name that her baby will be given, so when time goes on and it is evident that the family is childless, the mother's name stays. In the case of Thabo, the expectation is that the adopted child name will be Thabo so if the mother decides to call him Mpho meaning Gift noting that they have been gifted with a baby they so desired, the family will get angry and resort to calling the mother with the birth-name thereby depriving the mother to enjoy the motherhood identity. Adoptive parents' resort to naming their own children as some of the hereditary names are discriminatory.

Some adoptive parents had no problem in the naming situation as they already had good names that did not require changing their child's name. Their adopted child got the name after their mother. The fact that most of the families had no problem with allowing the adoptive parents to choose their own names shows that the Basotho elderly people are beginning to be more flexible and allowing people to be themselves and in control of their lives as oppose to the prehistoric times when people were forced to abide by the tradition or risk sanctions.

#### **5.2.3.4 Exaltation and Prayer**

Adoptive parents are perceived to have done the most holy act of God and are exhausted from all members of the church. They are afforded a certain high-level status in church as people believe they are the fulfillers of James 1:27 that denoted that pure Christianity

is looking after the orphans and widows. The perception of their religious groups is that the adoptive parents are the exemplary of how people should live.

Being adoptive parents has afforded some adoptive parents the opportunity to be part of some church group which they could not have been allowed to be part of as they had no child. But by virtue of adoption, they can invoke their candidature to such groups. The study revealed that some members of the church are still ignorant of some facts about adoption as they believe that being childless is a curse and the family has paid the ultimate sacrifice of adopting. Therefore, they will be blessed with their own biological baby. This affects the adoptive parents negatively as they try to diffuse the myths that being childless is not a curse and their child and adoption is in no way a sacrifice.

#### **5.2.4 Theme four was to find out the adoptive parent's financial experiences of post adoption**

##### **5.2.4.1 Less Structured**

The process of adoption on Lesotho are less structured and framed. Most adoptive parents reveal that they had to adapt to be in ever ready anything can happen mode. The process is very difficult to time as they are not fully aware of the exact time when the matching will happen. They keep checking and awaiting the call. Good thing is they get called after any matching to update them about the status of their adoption. Thabane (2015) asserts that people postulate that adoption is an expensive endeavor to embark on therefore it is left for the rich people. Similarly, the findings of this study as revealed by the parents, is that it is an expensive exercise that requires some savings before one embarks on it.

Most participants reveal preparing the adoption checklist is expensive that most of the prospective adoptive parents do not make it to the finish line but get discourage because they cannot afford. The study notes that the effects of pre-adoption have a huge impact on the financial experiences of the parents post adoption as most of the money has gone towards bringing the child home. Moyer and Abbie (2017) noted the same findings in their



study that adoption is seen to be an expensive avenue towards becoming a parent, the participants in this study report that they thought since they were disburdening the government then it could be free or affordable charges. Interestingly they complained that paying for the medical bills of the child they are matched with is expensive. Some fees they thought could be incurred by the Government are securing the court order and paying for the lawyer fee which some parents sternly noted depleted their savings.

Adoptive parents share that if the adoption process can be structured in such a way that there is a predicted timeline event just like there is in biological motherhood they would prepare better financially. The biological mothers have nine months to prepare for their child and they go for medical consultations and are fully aware of the financial repercussions, however for the adoptive families, the processes and developments into their parenting journey are quick and untimed hence resulting in financial implications.

#### **5.2.4.2 Self-Brought Problems and Extra Effort**

One of the major negative financial implications revealed by the adoptive parents is that if they have financial black out just like ordinary families, they are judged on that they brought the problem unto themselves as they didn't have such when they were childless. So they are usually on their own if the immediate parent (grandparents) cannot help. The study revealed that most of the adoptive parents' financial experiences is blamed on their adopted child even if it has nothing to do with it. To this effect most of the fathers noted that they always work hard and put in extra effort not to ask anyone whom they believe have bad intention about them any money. The adoptive families are judged and stigmatized to have over-burdened themselves with the child that they cannot afford. Interestingly, in order to avoid tension and fights for estates in the case of their deaths, some adoptive parents already have drawn watertight and comprehensive Last Will and Testament to enforce the inheritance of their family properties to the adopted child for fear that the extend family might grab some of it and dismiss the adopted child on the basis that they are not blood related to the deceased.

### **5.2.4.3 Insurances**

Most of the adoptive parents reported that they did not have any problems in as far as registering their child in their medical aids and insurances. The study revealed from the experiences of adoptive parents that it is quite easy to register and or include them in their medical aids, insurances, and Will because the birth certificate of the child bears their names as parents and it does not mention whether it is adopted or biological children. This concept the adoptive parents not being noted pleases them and affects their lives positively as they are not discriminated upon. There is no mention of their adoptive status on the birth certificate. Adoptive parents just submit the new birth certificate to their human resources manager and update their files without any troubles.

One positive revelation of the study is that most of the adoptive parents, who were employed or are retired but were employed by the time they adopted, indicated that their bosses allowed them some leave off work to focus on the child. Interestingly the bosses were not aware of the maternity leave that is enshrined in their human resource policy because it is never sought but they agreed to it. This meant that education and capacitation and awareness raising in the adoptive mother's workplaces took place as they invoked their right to adoption maternity leave. On the other side the adoptive father reported that they never asked for it as they didn't know if paternity leave can be afforded to them, even in the case of biological parents so they believe their case of adoptive paternity leave was farfetched.

### **5.2.5 Theme five was to find out the adoptive parent's attachment experiences of post adoption**

Under this theme, the following sub-themes emerged:

#### **5.2.5.1 Attachment problems**

One of the factors that make it hard for parents to settle in and form a secure attachment bond as postulated by (Subhani 2014) after adopting a child is expectations. The adoptive

parents reported that they didn't have any expectation regarding their children. Because of the reason that their children are still young in age they report that they have not experienced much of the attachment issues. However, the following were remarked as those issues that have the likelihood of causing attachment problems for them.

#### **5.2.5.2 Disclosure training**

One of the factors that affect the experiences of adoptive parents and have an impact on attachment is the notion of disclosing to their adopted child that they are not their biological parents. None of the participants in this study seemed to have a solid plan on how they were going to disclose it, but they shift it for later. It reportedly affects their attachment as they worry about the reaction of the child when they hear that they are adopted and worry that the adopted child might dislike them when they grow up because they are not their birth parents. Interestingly, the adoptive parents do not have a problem about the adoptive child having contact with their birth parents. They are prepared to walk that journey with them. It is the disclosure that they dread and that affects their parenthood experiences as the idea keeps popping in their heads as Krakauer(2014) mentioned that the working model for one parent might not necessarily be the one recommended for the next parent, each is unique on its own. One of the participants report that every time their family was happy together on holidays, he was worried about how long that will last and couldn't bear the thought of telling their child she is adopted and risk their happiness. However, it affects them it is as if they are parenting on borrowed time as William et al (2019) noted.

#### **5.2.5.3 Post Adoption Services**

Dunkelber (2098) noted that there is need for post placement services that goes beyond just checking on the parents. The study revealed the same comment that the attachment process is greatly impacted by the fact there are no post adoption services afforded to the child. On top of adoption journey being expensive on its own, they must pay for their own private consultation if they are distressed and want to seek help. The study revealed the mixed feelings of adoptive parents about the scheduled post placement as some

denoted that in the same way that the adoption process is controlled before and during the process, the same framework can be modelled to work for post placement services that way they will know they have a requirement to fulfill and have a place where they will be attended.

On the other hand, some parents believed the scheduled one would be like they are monitored and will more likely be judged to their parenting skills so they in as much need the post placement service, it should be voluntary and on the need basis not mandatory and schedule. The adoptive parents that are against the scheduled services believe it is discriminatory as biological parents do not have anywhere, they report themselves so they should also not be subject to such. Palacios and Sánchez-Sandoval (2005) say that there are many times in the life of an adoptive family when love and common sense are just not enough, adoptive parents need information and guidance to help them cope with the many challenges of adoptive family life.

### 5.3 Application theory to the study

Attachment theory is a social science theory coined by John Bowlby in 1969. It stresses the importance of early parent–child relationships for normative development of socio-emotional functioning across the life span. Table 5.3 below is an illustration of the application of the attachment theory for the post adoption experiences of adoptive parents in Maseru Lesotho.

**Table 5.3 Summary of application of Attachment theory to post adoption experiences of adoptive parents in Maseru Lesotho.**

<b>Psychological and Emotional experiences</b>	<b>Social Experiences</b>	<b>Cultural and religious experiences</b>	<b>Financial Implications</b>	<b>Attachment Problems</b>
Most parents are psychologically and emotionally fit to parent so no likelihood of	Friends and family were supporting thereby making attachment easier.	Welcoming children signaled the formation of secure	The adoption process is expensive It is unpredictable resulting in sudden financial choices	Children form secure attachments with their adoptive parents and report no significant amount of trouble because they are always available to

dismissive attachment				attend to their distress.
Post adoption distress experienced just as post natrum depression	Stigmatizations did not hinder the attachment as parents overcame them before adoption	Naming of child caused problems that triggered traumatic event and disrupting the attachment	People believe a financial problem is self-brought by adoption	The Major factor affecting attachment is the thought of disclosure of the adoption status and the reaction thereafter
Worry of Disclosure Status affects parents emotionally	Positive discrimination affect the integration of the child	Parents praised for their religious servitude to God elevated their children's bonding with the religious group		

**5.4 Challenges Encountered**

The following challenges were encountered during the study.

**5.4.1 Ministry of Social Development Database**

The main problem encountered by this study is the fact that the Ministry of Social Development had a challenge of providing the researcher with list of adoptive parents that the researcher can lobby and find out if they were willing to participate in the study. The initial plan was that since they are the custodians of the Adoption Unit, they can be forthcoming with the data. However, they cited the privacy and confidentiality of their clients and that cannot be compromised. As a result, the researcher had to employ index sampling that the first known adoptive parents identify the next ones. However, it seemed to be a long process as most of the adoptive parents turned out to be single women who were excluded from the study and the adoptive couples were hard to locate.

#### **5.4.2 Adoptive Fathers Working Far**

The sample of the study was the adoptive parents that constituted of married couples who adopted. The challenge was the adopted fathers worked far from the family home, so their data was a little bit delayed as the researcher had to wait for them to come home by the end of the month. However, the collection of data from adoptive mothers was completed on time. Fortunately, they were willing participants who expressed their desire to be interviewed so much that as soon as the adoptive fathers arrived in Maseru the researcher was alerted, and the interviews were conducted. The challenge of interviewing the couple on separate dates was fear that the adoptive mother would brief the partner about the content of the study while the actual plan was to interview them both sequentially to avoid those sharing views.

#### **5.4.3 Covid-19 Restrictions**

The novel Covid-19 saw the world go into a global pandemic and as a result to curb further spread, the Kingdom of Lesotho imposed the strict restrictions. During the time of data collection, the third wave was approaching, and most adoptive parents were skeptical of the face-to-face meetings. However, the researcher convinced them that strict Covid-19 regulations as recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) would be adhered to. Hands were sanitized by both the respondents and the researcher before and during the interview, pens that were used to sign the consent forms were also sanitized. Social distancing and wearing masks were observed. It was a challenge because the advantage of face-to-face interviews is to observe the nonverbal communications as the interview progresses. However, the challenge was overcome by observing the change in voice as the adoptive parents answered the questions.

#### **5.4.4 Late Working Hours**

Most of the adoptive parents were employed, as such the interview had to be scheduled at their convenient time which is after hours at their homes where they felt much safer and free to talk.

## **5.5 Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions reached by the study, the following recommendations are put forward to guide social work practice and welfare policies in Lesotho to promote the positive experiences of adoptive parents post adoption. With the help of the empirical literature, the theoretical framework and the collected primary data, the following recommendations were made.

### **5.5.1. Recommendations to Guide Social Work Practice**

The adoptive parents report that adoption is the personal journey that they wish the Social Workers who are in Adoptions Unit cannot be transferred as they had built a rapport with them and they can easily tell their stories rather than introducing to new people when they seek help.

### **5.5.2 Parenting Programmes**

Adoption parenthood sometimes requires more than love (Clapton 2016). Adoptive parents in as much as they didn't mention having any parenting problems, they are fearful that when their children grow up they might be resentful of them when they finally get to meet their birth parents, Kris Faasse (2014). The parenting programs can be established now and the parents need to be equipped with skills to handle any negative impacts in the adoption journey.

### **5.5.3 Formation of Support Group**

Adoptive parents are an evasive group that is sometimes difficult to locate. However, the parents noted it will be helpful if they have the support group within which parents can share the experiences and help others. The support groups can be established with the help of Adoption Social Workers who can ask the parents preadoption if they want to be part of and when they are placed with the child can be inducted into the group. This support group will not be constituted by many participants due to low numbers of adoptive parents. They will get to share their experiences and shape the future of adoption parenthood.

#### **5.5.4 Community Sensitizations and Awareness Campaigns**

The communities can be sensitized about adoption and what it entails in order to try to mitigate the stigma that is associated with adoptive parenthood. Using adoptive parents as real testimonies, the campaigns can be successful as other childless families can learn from the adoptive families about the challenges faced and struggles to be anticipated and how to deal with them. Through radio campaigns and nation-wide advocacy, these activities can decrease the rate of abortions and neglect in Lesotho and also make childless families aware of the option of adoption. Another advantage of holding these awareness campaigns is because the community will be more receptive of the adopted child and even those that stigmatize the adoptive parents will be educated.

#### **5.5.5 Recommendations towards an inclusive policy**

The policies that are formulated in respect of adoption should be inclusive of the adoptive parents. In the adoption dyad, the role of the adoptive parents is often overlooked as more focus is given to children and their experience post adoption. The inclusion of adoptive families in policy framing and enacting will enable them to have a say in most of the things that affect them. The adoption process is well articulated in the Children Protection and Welfare Act of 2011 and the Foster Care and Adoption Policy of 2012. However, there is little said about the adoptive parents. In particular, there is no emphasis of how the post placement should be handled and therefore the inclusion in the policy will be a great stride in helping the adoptive parenthood.

#### **5.5.6 Reduction of cost**

The adoptive parents recommend that the adoption process as they experienced it is quite expensive. Therefore, the recommendation could be that the legal and medical fees be free. There is also the notion that the adoptive parents in Lesotho are not getting any sort of benefits as opposed to other countries where they are exempted from some expenses. Some people in Lesotho get social grants, so the lawyer fees shall be paid by the government as the grant to adoptive parents. Either they be allowed to use Legal Aid



lawyers who will treat their cases as urgent, or the Ministry of Social Development legal section can appear on their behalf in court.

### **5.5.7 Breast Feeding Prescription**

Adoptive parents suggested that they should be given a prescription of the injection changes the hormonal balance to enable milk production for breastfeeding. By the time they are told of the match, they should start treatment. The Ministry of Social Development should provide parents with certificate that will enable them to get the hormonal treatment from South Africa or liase with the Ministry of Health to enable the procurement of the drug as it is currently no available in Lesotho. The adoptive parents report that they want to breast-feed as failure to do so is believed to be a loss of developmental stage and they feel they have not bonded enough with their children when they do not breastfeed them if adopted at infancy.

### **5.5.8 Need for further research**

The findings of the study revealed that the gender roles are slowly getting diffused. So much so that the adoptive fathers become the primary caregivers of the children. There is a need for a qualitative study that will exclusively investigate the experiences of the adoptive father. The fathers are usually left behind in the similar studies.

There is also a need for studies to be conducted about the experiences of the children and adoptive parents that were in the defacto adoption parenthood. Traditionally there are relative adoptions where the adopted child is previously known to the adoptive parents. The comparison study between them and the adoptive family that undertook the adoption as stipulated by MoSD will provide an in-depth analysis of the current situation in adoption sphere in Lesotho, and how the interventions can be developed that can be in the best interest of all children in both adoption paradigms.

One of the participants of the study had adopted a child who was now a teenager. This finding indicated that there are older children in the community that can be participants of

the research about how adoption has been for them. There is no literature to that effect in Lesotho as the adoption is relatively new and the few that happened were rather secretive. Their documented experiences can help the MoSD revise and review the management of social welfare institutions as they have the great impact on the experiences of adoption later on. The findings of such a study can come up with the plan for formulation of the post adoption strategy that is greatly required in Lesotho.

## **5.6 Chapter Summary and Conclusion**

The chapter presented the discussion and interpretation of findings, challenges encountered, conclusions reached by the study and recommendations suggested to deal with the challenges that the participants faced. Concluding the chapter was suggestions for further research followed by the chapter summary and conclusion.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Interview guide for adoptive parents

Place of residence:

Age:

Sex:

Educational Background:

Religious denomination:

Place of employment:

Sex of adopted child:

Age of adopted child:

Number of biological children:

### **The adoptive parent's psychological and emotional experiences of post-adoption**

1. What are your overall experiences with adoption?
2. Could you tell me about your personal views regarding adoption affect the adoptive parents?
3. Describe being adoptive parents, what are the psychological effects of post-adoptions?
4. Can you tell me, being adoptive parent's what are some of the emotional experiences had post-adoption?
5. Describe about the adoptive parents' feelings about the parenting role, family life and your responses to early trauma?
6. Could you share about the Impact of your decision to adopt, Impact of the adoption process and Impact of parenting?
7. Can you share with me particular experiences you have encountered, positive or negative, that are solely related to being an adoptive parent?
8. Do you think adoptive families are different from other families? Why or why not

### **The adoptive parent's social experiences of post-adoption**

1. Could you please tell me about the social experiences of post-adoption?
2. Could you share about the stigma internalisation and perception, and their relationships with social support from family, friends and the broader community?
3. What is the social construction of adoption?
4. How have your experience been with family members and friends, and how will you deal/have dealt with questions from family, friends, and strangers about adoption?
5. What do you think society, in general, thinks about adoption? Why do you think of that?
6. What would you like others to know about adoption?

### **The adoptive parent's cultural and religious experiences of post-adoption**

1. Can you share with me cultural and religious experiences of post-adoption?
2. Basotho has blood related beliefs and cultural practices, (death and burial rituals) how do you do it with your adopted child?
3. What are your religious beliefs about adoption?
4. What is the perception of your religious group on adoption?
5. How did the above perceptions affect you?

### **The adoptive parent's financial implications of post-adoption**

1. Can you share with me financial implications of post-adoption?
2. How was the experience of registering your adoptive child in your insurances, provident funds and medical aids?
3. Along the insurance, provident fund and medical Aids registration process what kind of problems did you have?
4. How did you overcome those challenges?
5. Could you share about the financial impacts of your decision to adopt, and the adoption process?

## **The adoptive parent's attachment challenges experiences of post-adoption**

1. Could you tell me about your personal views regarding how does attachment affect adoption?
2. How was the attachment process like to you?
3. What challenges did you have attaching to your child?
4. How did you cope with those challenges?

## **Final Questions**

1. Are there any other things you would like to share with me that we haven't talked about?
2. Do you know other adoptive parents who may be interested in participating in this study?

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!!**

## APPENDIX 2: LETTER OF CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY



### **PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

Hello...I am a Social Work student from the National University of Lesotho conducting a study about the post adoption experiences of adoptive parents. The aim of my research is to provide a greater understanding about how the process of post adoption itself is experienced and what meaning adoptive parents give to each element of this process. The interview should not last than an hour. You are also allowed to ask any questions in relation to this study.

**Research Title:** The post adoption experiences of adoptive parents in Maseru, Lesotho.

**Name of Researcher:** Malefa Semakela (Clinical Social Work Masters student, National University of Lesotho)

**Please sign at the bottom to confirm your agreement with the following statements:**

1. I confirm that I have understood purpose of the above research project. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and decided to take part.
2. I understand that my involvement is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason,
3. I understand I will be interviewed about my experience as an adoptive parent and with my permission my comments will be audio recorded and anonymously transcribed. The transcription will be undertaken by the researcher only who will be bound by strict confidentiality guidelines.
4. I understand that my interview comments may be quoted (as verbatim) in the research report but that my comments will be anonymized, and that neither I nor any members of my family will be identifiable.
5. I understand that if I choose to withdraw from the study, I have the right to withdraw any data associated with my involvement (including data I provided during the interview)
6. I consent to taking part in the above research study by participating in a recorded research interview.

Name of Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for consenting to participate in this study.**

**Appendix 3: Letter of approval to conduct research from Department of Anthropology, Sociology and Social Work .NUL**



**THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF LESOTHO**  
*Faculty of Social Sciences*  
*Department of Sociology and Social Work*  
*P.O. Roma 180*  
*Lesotho.*

Telephone: (+266) 22340601/22213668  
Fax: (+266) 22340000  
Website: <http://www.nul.ls>

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4<sup>th</sup> May 2021

To:


Adoptive Parents,  
Maseru.

**RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH.**

This letter is concerning the research study that student Ms. Malefa Christinah Semakela, ID Number: 200603191. She is a Master of Social Work student at the National University of Lesotho. She is currently working on a thesis entitled "The Experiences of adoptive parents post adoption in Maseru, Lesotho", in partial fulfilment towards obtaining a master's degree in Social Work. In light with this, I humbly ask you to provide permission to collect data in Maseru. I assure you that the information respondents will share, will be kept confidential and that it will only be used strictly for educational purposes. I have also include with the necessary information about the study below. Please kindly do the needful.

1. Study site: Maseru
2. Method of data collection: face-to-face interviews, Take down notes during the conversation and record conversation.
3. Timeframe for data collection: MAY 2021.
4. Sample Size: 10 adoptive parents- 5 couples (5 females,5 males)
5. Protocol to be observed by the researcher: when she collects the data: Letter of informed consent requesting Adoptive Parents participation in the study.
6. Supervisor: Dr.Xavier Rosario Arun Kumar.

Thank you

  
Dr. Xavier Rosario Arun Kumar  
Supervisor - Department of Sociology and Social Work  
The National University of Lesotho

