

A Study of Adoptive Families In Jammu

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Abstract

Adoption is a legal process by which a set of parents become parents of a child not naturally born to them . The claiming of an alien child as one's own and facing the family and community's attitude towards adoption are important aspects of adoptive experiences which need a deep study. With this aim present research was conducted to study pschyo-social aspects of adoption among adoptive families in Jammu.The sample of the study comprised of 12 families taken from urban Jammu. Snowball sampling technique was used to select the sample. Observation , and interview guide were used for data collection.The results of the study revealed that major reason for adoption was childlessness. Childlessness had not caused friction in relationship between husband and wife in majority of the cases .However, after adoption , with parental needs being satisfied, there was greater marital harmony in the relationship , even among the couples who had certain problems. Age of the child at the time of adoption was found to be an important variable affecting the adjustment of the child .Lower the age, the better was found to be the adjustment in the family.50% of the children knew that they had been adopted and this does not influenced their relationship with their parents , except in case of one family . But all the parents found the experience of adoption very positive and satisfactory .

Key words: Adoption, childlessness, emotional maturity

1. Introduction

A home is complete only when filled with the laughter and play of a child. A child is a source of eternal joy for the parents in their young age and support and hope when they grow old (Kamala ,1990).The coming of a child into family brings hope and happiness in the family. Parenthood confers honor on a couple. A person graduates to the status of a full fledged adult only upon acquiring parenthood. It is supposed to make individuals more responsible and trustworthy in their household and community. A person's image and respectability get enhanced with every additional child's birth and survival (Patel, 1994). Many couples see parenthood as a means of obtaining family continuity and an investment in the future. Others see this continuity in far more specific and personal terms – in having a child they hope to raise a person who will achieve in all the areas where they have failed. Children are also looked as a type of insurance policy, where it is anticipated that the child will look after the parents in their old age(Dixit, 1986). In India, much importance is given to children, particularly son, in family because it is believed that son is very important for performing the last rites of father for his salvation. Sons also help to gain immortality. The coming of children also gives a sense of fulfillment and achievement to the parents, which are added incentives to living. Children cement the solidarity of the family and pose a challenge to project into the society, parents by their contribution to the world(Devdas, 1984).Childless couples feel a kind of vacuum, even if they enjoy all the comforts and luxuries of life (Kamala, 1990). Fertility ensures the mother a permanent position in the conjugal household. Child birth lends stability and security to the bride's relationship with other household members. On the other hand, inferior status is accorded to the barren women is the other side of the high value accorded to fertility in our society (Patel, 1994).The couples who are not blessed with a child can go for various alternatives available like – artificial insemination, in-vitro fertilization, religious measures so as to have a child or they may decide to remain childless throughout their life and engage themselves in various activities like social work, fulfillment of hobbies etc. Adoption is also one of the ways by which a couple can attain the status of parents. Among these alternatives available, adoption is certainly considered as best as it not only benefits parents but child also.

The concept of adoption is not new. In Greek mythology the Goddess Hera placed Hercules, her adopted baby, inside her clothing and pushed him until he fell out between her legs. In imitating the natural

birth process Hera proclaimed that baby Hercules was now her own. (Kirpalani, 1996). The essence of adoption is that a child not born to you is incorporated into your family as though he was your own. This practice can be found in some form in most of the cultures. (Tizard, 1977).The growing science of child development with its emphasis on the stable emotional ties with parents for the normal growth of children led to the consideration of adoption as a means of providing permanent parent child relationships, for children deprived of natural parents and for parents deprived of natural children.Adoption is a legal process by which a set of parents become parents of the child of another set. Thus adoption of a child is a process of his/her rebirth in a new adoptive family. Most couples essentially dream of bringing forth an ideal child into the world whom they can call as their own. But this is not always possible. Thus couple makes a conscious decision to adopt a child or at times is pushed by societal pressure to consider the option. In the interim period, the brave mother has to balance living her life with equanimity by learning to tolerate or becoming indifferent to bearing the social stigma of not being able to bear a child, irrespective of the fact whether she or her husband is responsible for it (Kirpalani, 1996). Whatever the reasons behind adoption, it produces some changes in the natural family dynamics.

With adoption there is no nine months preparation, no skin contact, no breast feeding. One moment you are a childless couple, the next an unannounced stranger has arrived in your midst (Green, 1988). There is a common view that once a child is placed in adoption with a family everything will go smoothly but this is not always the case. Every family has its own problems and no one in this world is free from anxiety. When a adopted child who is from a different culture and background is ushered into a new family, problems do arise (Panicker, 1987) especially when adopted from stranger or from an institution. Despite all the theoretical difficulties, adoption usually works very well. It works well because the adopting couple dearly want the child and pull out all stops to make it a success of course, there is always the chance of some hereditary temperamental characteristics causing friction, but for most couples this closeness and commitment overcome anything they may have missed in early days (Green, 1988). There are important differences between the care of one's own child, with the personal interest and abiding relationship involved and the provision of care to the children of others. In later, one does not have time that supports learning and socio emotional development with positive experiences.

From theoretical view point any emotional damage which might result from adoption from one family to another family should be the effect not of forming a new relationship but of breaking an old one. The more well established the original relationship, the more the child should be disturbed by breaking it, but this principle is limited by the fact, that as a child becomes older he can understand the circumstances better and protect himself against their emotional consequences. The ideal time for adoption is, of course, soon after birth and no later than the neonatal period. At this age the baby reacts to its adopted parents just as it would to its real ones and their only concern should be to give him the good physical care that any baby should have. The bonding with parents is easier when child is adopted between the ages of one and eight months. Between 18 months to 3 years the child has developmentally entered into the separation– individualism process wherein it has begun to recognize itself and to have a sense of self separate from the mothers .Once the primary social relationship has been strongly established and their reaction to strangers has begun to appear, a much more severe emotional upset should result. Indeed such objective evidence as is available indicates that children who have been separated from familiar persons and surroundings and adopted in the second half of the first year are more likely to show difficulties of personal adjustment later in than those adopted in first (Smart and Smart, 1972).

A younger child can be molded easily. Also, the child gets emotionally attached to “parents ” easily.Adjustment of child in the family gets affected when she/he comes to know that he/she is not a natural child of his/her parents. The best thing is to allow the child to find out for himself about his adoption if he does not know the fact even after becoming adult, then the truth must be told to him ” (Tizard, 1977). Adopted children have a right to all available information about their origins and circumstances of their adoption. Provision of an information helps to provide the children a greater sense of continuity with their sense of self esteem. In addition, they develop most positive image of their birth parents. There are chances of friction in the family when relationship of adopted child, with adoptive parents is not healthy. Adjustment of child in the family and his/her later personality development greatly depends upon the environment he/she got because surrounded environment which includes extended family members, neighbors and other persons of society greatly influence his/her development.

The adoptive situation is very complex having many facets. The acceptance of an unknown child into the immediate family, and the community arouse many deep emotions, and is significant aspect of the adoptive situation .The claiming of an alien child , as one's own child and facing the families and community's attitude towards adoption are important aspects of adoptive situation. It was felt that the adoptive experience

being many faced , needed an in depth investigation in a holistic perspective.No such study on adoption was available in the setting (Jammu district of J&K State, India).Since Jammu is a place dominantly inhabited by Dogras who are considered to be conservative and carry on strictly with their past traditions , it was considered worth while to look at the adoptive behaviour of families , with a view to provide data base for future research and policy decisions.

2. Objectives

The major objectives of the present research were:

1. To study interpersonal relations of husband and wife before and after adoption.
2. To study adoptive child's adjustment in the family.

3. Method

Sample of the study consisted of 12 families having at least one adoptive child.The sample size was quite limited but it could be considered adequate keeping in view the small number of adoptions that take place. Snowball sampling technique was used for sample selection. Interview guide, informal observation, emotional maturity scale (singh&Bhargava) was used for data collection. Qualitative analysis was done and case studies were prepared.

4.Results and discussions

After the collection of data for the study by using interview guide, observation, and emotional maturity scale, the findings of the study are categorized under the following headings:

4.1 Pre adoption history

This category includes information related to interpersonal relationship between husband and wife before adoption, attitude of family members and society towards their childlessness.

It was found that the friction between husband and wife was there only in two (2) families out of twelve (12), and the main reason behind friction between their relationship was childlessness.In case of one family the friction was so intense that they were on verge of taking divorce and in case of another, friction was due to inability of mother to bear male child. But in rest of the ten (10) families there was not any friction between husband and wife. In these families both husband and wife had accepted their inability to bear the child. Moreover they stated that their childlessness had brought them closer to each other, but still these couples found some kind of vacuum in their life which gave rise to feeling of some thing missing from the life.

It was found that there was pressure from both relatives as well as from neighbors to produce a child in case of six (6) couples. In two (2) families, there was pressure on the couple by grandparents to provide son for the continuance of family lineage. Out of these two families, in one family, the couple was pressurized by maternal grandparents. But this pressure did not give rise to any tense situation or discord relationship between husband and wife. In rest of the six (6) families there was not any pressure on couple neither from family members nor from other people related to family because both husband and wife had so much of understanding between them that did not let any problem to arise in their relationship

4.2Adoption Process

This category includes information related to reasons for adoption by the couple and information about adoption process.Main reason for adoption in the present study was childlessness .Ten (10) couples out of twelve (12) adopted the child as they were childless and they adopted the child to fill vacuum of their life, continuation of family name and old age security, etc.The other two couples adopted child because they had daughters only so they adopted male child for perpetuation of family lineage. In Jammu, there is no organization / adoption agency which can help childless couples in adopting child so many couples adopt children of relatives or from hospitals or from private nursing homes by the help of doctor. After study of twelve (12) families it was found that six (6) of the families had adopted the child from hospital and rest of the families adopted child from relatives as they were of opinion that it is better to adopt child from their own relatives because that child have same blood as well as there are also chances that child may develop similar physical features like his adopted parents. But in rest of the six (6) families, who adopted child from hospital, reason was to avoid divided loyalties and possible interference in the care and upbringing of the child they adopted. Out of twelve (12) families only ten (10) couples planned properly before they finally went for adoption but in two (2) families, proper planning was not done by couples before adoption, it just occurred spontaneously. In all the families adoption was made after nine 9 years to 14 years of marriage this shows that they waited long before they finally went for adoption. Out of twelve (12) families, only five (5) adopted child by legal process to avoid any further problem in future whereas rest of seven (7) did not follow any legal process for adoption.

4.3 Post adoption history

In this category information is presented about effect of adoption on the life of couple, relationship between parents & adopted child and adjustment of adopted child in the adoptive family. The results of the study revealed that it in all cases it was a mutual decision of both husband and wife to adopt a child. When these couples brought child to their home, ten (10) families out of twelve (12) celebrated the arrival of child in their family. Main reason behind celebration by these couples was to make public announcement of the arrival of the child in the family and to show that they are not different from others. In case of two families mothers faked the pregnancy to other people and celebrated birth of the child like normal mothers. After adoption both father and mother found changes in their life but mothers in the study noticed more changes in the attitude of people and family members regarding them. Out of twelve (12) families, eleven (11) found that arrival of child in their home changed their whole life. But six (6) of the mothers in study also found changes in the attitude of others towards them. All the twelve (12) mothers reported that after adoption they themselves developed feeling of being complete. In case of adoptive fathers, their views regarding changes in life style or effect of adoption on their life was found in all the twelve (12) fathers and feeling of completeness developed but none of the respondent reported that adoption brought any change in the attitude of other people regarding them. After the application of emotional maturity scale to both husband and wife it was found that in most of the families both husband and wife were satisfied with their life and were happy except in one family where wife was not satisfied with her life. In families where there was friction between couples before adoption which lead to unsatisfactory attitude towards life but after adoption both found changes in their relationship and this resulted in satisfactory attitude towards life. In families where couple adopted son there prevailed insecurity and main cause behind this insecure feeling was that they did not inform child about his adoption. It was also found that in nine (9) families child was closer to his mother than father and in rest of the three (3) families child was closer to father. But in five (5) families parents showered more affection and love on child and also fulfilled each demand of the child which made child pampered. Out of twelve (12) families, eleven (11) were very excited and also other family members were very happy about their decision of adopting but in one (1) family grand parents wanted that couple should adopt child from within the family but they adopted child from hospital which gave rise to the negative attitude of grandparents towards the child. In most of the families, it was found that decision regarding upbringing of child like, the kind of food given to child, type of clothing etc. was taken by both parents but decision related to education was taken by father only.

4.4 Adjustment of The Adopted Child In Family

The results of study revealed that in case of eleven (11) families, child adjusted himself very well in the new home with new family members but in case of one (1) family, though adjustment of child was very good because he was adopted from the same family after adoption child failed to develop any loving and healthy relationship with his adoptive parents.

Out of twelve (12) families, five (5) of the adopted children knew that they are not the natural children of their parents and in these families parents had contacts with natural parents of the child. It was observed that telling about adoption to child did not affect his relationship with adoptive parents except one. It was also found that in families where child had no information about his adoption, parents had no wish to inform child about his adoption in future because all the parents fear that after getting information about his adoption child may leave them or develop negative feelings towards them.

There was no friction between the biological child and adopted child, not only this, there also existed relationship of affection, mutual dependence but moderate amount of rivalry was also there which is very common in families where there was more than one child. Regarding parent's views about child it was found that in all the families parents claimed that there was some similarity between them and adopted child, but most of the parents found that there was similarity in behavior activities of child with either parent more than similarity in physical features. Though all the parents wanted child which was the main motivation behind adoption but still parents disliked various activities of their adopted child, it was observed that this was because they wanted to improve their behaviour.

5. Conclusion

In all the families adoption was the most memorable event in their entire life. As most families found changes in their life style after adoption. In some cases adoption of child brought changes in the attitude of society towards adoptive child. These results are consistent with the study conducted by Billimoria (1984). In most of cases both the parents developed a feeling of completeness. As most of the couples were very excited about their decision of adopting child so they celebrated the arrival of the child in their family. In some families the main purpose behind celebration was also to show people that they are not different from others. In all the

families couples were satisfied with their decision of adoption this was also reported by Deodar(1995).All the adopted children were well adjusted in the families.

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