

**“A STUDY ON LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FAMILIES WITH
ADOPTED CHILDREN IN KERALA”**

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Abstract

A nation's most valuable resource is its children. They represent a country's best chance for the future. Every country, developed or developing, draws a link between the state of its children and its future. Children who are healthy, well-protected, educated, and developing normally are a country's future. A family is a basic institution in the society where a child gets groomed. Every child has the right to grow up in a family. It gives them a feeling of identity and sense of belongingness in the world. It offers emotional support and comfort, nurturing and care, safety and security. Therefore, a child's development and conduct are greatly influenced by the family. A warm, loving, and nurturing atmosphere is essential for children's holistic development, which will mould them into better people. Adoption can be a most beautiful solution not only for childless couples and single people but also for homeless children. It enables a parent-child relationship to be established between persons not biologically related. It is defined as a process by which people take a child not born to them and raise it as a member of their family. After further readings the researcher could find the relevance of this research topic in the current scenario is that most of the studies related to adoption are in western context. Thus this particular study will support in generating new knowledge on the topic. It will help to analyse the effectiveness of the existing policy and its implementation in our state. It will help to identify the remedial measures that can be adopted in case of any drawback and at what level according to the need. Thereby we can bring changes to family and policy level intervention accordingly. Adoption is a significant area where a social worker can make an impact in the context of social work. The roles that a social worker can play are varied.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

A nation's most valuable resource is its children. They represent a country's best chance for the future. Every country, developed or developing, draws a link between the state of its children and its future. Children who are healthy, well-protected, educated, and developing normally are a country's future. They are the potential and valuable human resources needed for a country's advancement. The nation as a whole loses when children are ignored or neglected because they are the country's most valuable resource.

A universally recognised set of rights, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF) (1989), assesses a children's overall development in relation to both their micro and macroenvironment. The necessity of families and a safe environment for children is emphasised in Articles 9 and 20 and is listed as one of their fundamental rights. It guarantees the right to a family to all children. The right to a family gives individuals defence against infringements on their rights and gives kids a sense of history. Children who have been separated from their family are more susceptible to maltreatment such as assault, exploitation, trafficking, and discrimination.

“Every child deserves a home and love. Period.” - **Dave Thomas.**

A child is raised in a family, which is a fundamental institution in society. The right to family upbringing is assured to every child. It helps them feel like themselves and like they belong in the world. It provides nurturing and care, safety and security, as well as emotional support and comfort. As a result, a child's upbringing has a significant impact on both their growth and behaviour. Children must grow up in a warm, loving, and nurturing environment in order to develop holistically and become better people.

Community rehabilitation techniques, such as adoption procedures, are preferred over institutionalisation because it is recognised that families play a significant role in a child's socialisation (UNICEF statement, 2003). Numerous studies have shown that institutional placements, especially over lengthy periods of time, have a profoundly negative impact on a child's development (Mulheir & Brown 2007). The practice of adoption was born out of these failings; foster care is another related citation and is now more often used than the former, especially in the west. Adoption is the process and practice of raising a kid of a different biological parentage as one's own child. Adoptees are typically young children who are found in challenging situations.

“There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children. There is no duty more important than ensuring that their rights are respected, that their welfare is protected, that their lives are free from fear and want, and that they can grow up in peace.”- **Kofi Annan**

1.1 Adoption

“Adoption” means the process through which the adopted child is permanently separated from his biological parents and becomes the lawful child of his adoptive parents with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities that are attached to the biological child (Juvenile Justice Act). A child who has been taken from their biological parents is given a permanent home by adoptive parents. As a result, the adoptive parents get custody of the child from the biological parents.

Not only for childless couples and single people, but also for homeless youngsters, adoption might be the most lovely answer. It makes it possible for people who are not

biologically related to one another to develop a parent-child connection. It is described as the procedure by which individuals adopt a child who was not born into their family and raise it as a member of their own.

Prior to the 1956 implementation of the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, which facilitated the adoption of Hindu children by a person adhering to the Hindu community, the option of adoption was only available to the Hindu community. It did not apply to other communities, such as Muslims, Christians, or Parsis, who had to rely on the Guardians and Wards Act, 1890, under which they could become guardians. But the process simply formed a relationship between the guardian and the ward. The first step toward a secular adoption law was the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act of 2000, which was most recently revised in 2015 (Sneha Mahawar, 2021).

1.2 Types of Adoption in India

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act of 2015 and Adoption Regulation of 2017 has recognized five kinds of adoption:

- An abandoned, surrendered, destitute child adopted by an unrelated person(s) living within the country.
- An abandoned, surrendered, destitute child adopted by an unrelated person(s) living outside the country.
- A related child by relatives living within the country.
- A related child by relatives living outside the country. Adoption of a child by step-parents within the country.

1.3 The Guardianship and Wards Act, 1890

Jewish, Christian, Parsi, and Muslim personal laws do not recognise full adoption. People of these religions who want to adopt a child must take the kid into "guardianship" under the terms of The Guardians and Wards Act, 1890, as non-Hindus do not have an enabling law to adopt a child lawfully. The act primarily deals with guardianship rather than adoption as a whole. The procedure does not result in adoption; rather, it creates a ward. According to this regulation, when a child reaches the age of 21, they cease to be considered wards and take on separate identities. They are not necessarily entitled to inherit property. Adoptive parents must leave their children whatever they want through a will that can be challenged by any "blood" relative.

The above acts say nothing regarding orphans, abandoned children, or children who have been turned in. Regarding the adoption of the children of these categories, there was no codified law. As a result, there were a number of misunderstandings or irregularities regarding the custody, guardianship, or adoption of these kinds of kids that were detrimental to the kids' best interests (Debaditya Roy).

1.4 Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956

The Hindu Code Bills, which included the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act (HAMA), were passed in 1956. This law applies to Hindus who reside in our nation and covers the entirety of India, with the exception of the State of Jammu & Kashmir. In order to standardise and codify the current Hindu legal system, the Hindu Adoptions and

Maintenance Act was introduced. This act dealt primarily with the legal procedure for an adult Hindu to adopt children as well as the Hindu's legal duties to support various family members (THE HINDU ADOPTIONS AND MAINTENANCE ACT, 1956).

1.5 The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act of 2015 makes reference to both children who need care and protection and children who are in legal trouble. It gives a comprehensive framework for domestic and international adoption of orphans, abandoned children, and children who have been turned in. Through the legal process of adoption, a child is legally removed from his biological parents and made the legal child of his adoptive parents.

Children's rehabilitation and social reintegration are covered in chapter VII of the Act. The main goal of rehabilitation and social reintegration is to support kids in regaining their self-worth and dignity by mainstreaming them through alternative care programmes or, if that is not an option, through rehabilitation within the family. Long-term institutional care should only be used as a last resort. According to Section 40 of the J.J.Act, a child's rehabilitation and social reintegration must start while they are living in a children's home or special home. However, because families are the best place for children to receive care and protection, adoption is the first available option for orphans, abandoned children, and children who have been turned over (Debaditya Roy).

The Central Adoption Resource Authority, a statutory body of the Government of India, is in charge of enforcing the complex procedures for both intra- and inter-country adoption that are established by the Juvenile Justice Act. The Adoption Coordination Agency (ACA), a CARA-accredited organisation in each state, is where prospective parents can submit an application. The pre-adoption counselling is good for three years, and the adoption agency creates a thorough examination of the family. According to statistics from the Ministry of Women and Child Development, many adoption cases in India's civil courts have been languishing for much longer than the period of time allowed by section 61(2) of the Juvenile Justice Act. Despite the fact that the Act has undergone a number of modifications throughout time to address issues that arose during its implementation (Sneha Mahawar, 2021).

1.6 Central Adoption Resource Authority

The Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) is a legal division of the Indian government's Ministry of Women & Child Development. It serves as the central authority for adoption of Indian children and has oversight and control over both domestic and international adoptions. The Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, 1993, which the Government of India ratified in 2003, designates CARA as the Central Authority to handle international adoptions. Through its affiliated and recognised adoption agencies, CARA primarily deals with the adoption of orphans, abandoned children, and children who have been turned in (Central Adoption Resource Authority Ministry of Women & Child Development).

More than 300 adoptive parents and hopeful adoptive parents petitioned the Minister of Women and Child Development about the improvements required to increase the number of CCI children available for adoption in October of last year. They cited the excessive wait time, noting that some of these would-be parents had signed up with CARA as early as 2018. The letter spoke of the emotional and monetary impact on adoptive families, adding that "ultimately the concern is towards the welfare of orphaned, surrendered or abandoned children who do not find a place in the system" They demanded "processes to ensure that [child welfare committees] bring every possible child into the legal adoption pool and ensure that the kids are not stuck in CCIs" (Divya Gandhi, 2022).

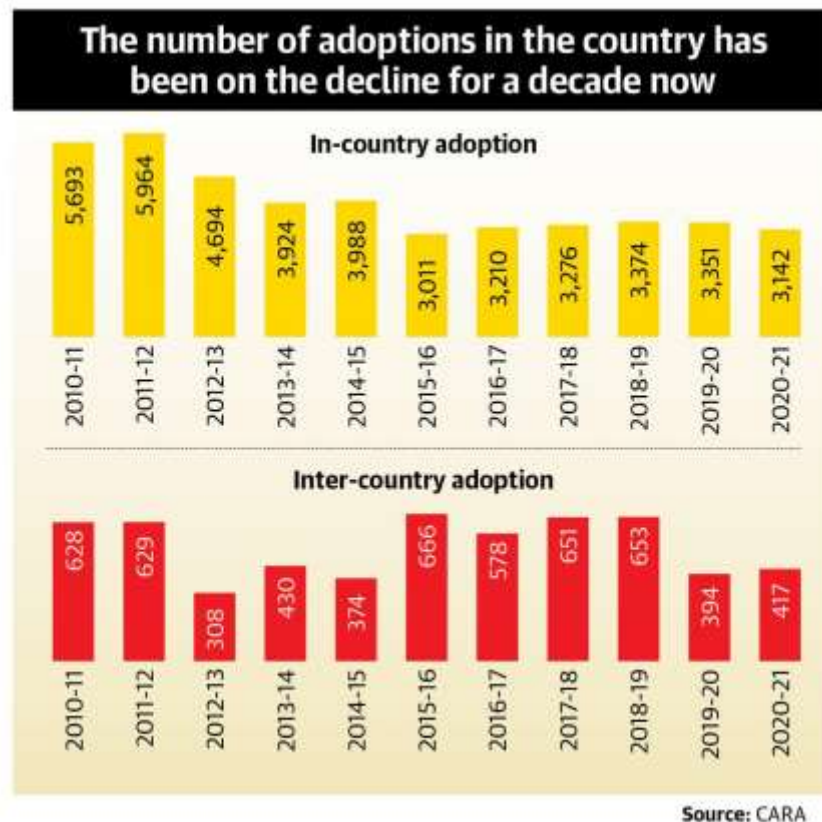


Fig 1

Conclusion

In the context of social work, adoption is a crucial area where a social worker can have an impact. A social worker can fill a variety of positions. An adoption social worker should aid the adoption process for both the adoptive family and the adopted child. These qualified social workers support children whose biological parents are lawfully separated from them and unable to provide for them financially. To locate adoptive homes for orphaned children, they can work in conjunction with governmental organisations and/or adoption agencies. Social workers with expertise in adoption may choose to handle both domestic and foreign adoptions, or they may concentrate on one or the other.

Social workers who specialise in adoption must be adept at making matches between children and the perfect adoptive family. It is typically necessary for this process to conduct research about the child's past as well as the family and history of the adoptive family. To ascertain and satisfy the needs of the kid in these circumstances, social workers may also need to bargain with and counsel the child's biological family.

In addition to serving as a bridge between the child and family, social workers who specialise in the adoption process frequently find themselves working on research and policy development concerns related to advocating for orphaned children. They frequently work with the child's teachers at school to make sure the adopted youngster is doing successfully academically and is getting any necessary special support.

The majority of adoption-related studies are conducted in a western culture, making this study issue relevant in the contemporary environment. Hence, in this context will contribute to the creation of new knowledge on the subject. Analysis of the effectiveness

of the current policy and how it is being applied in our state would be aided by this. It will be useful to determine what corrective actions can be taken and at what degree, depending on the situation, in case of any shortcomings. Based on that, we can alter family- and policy-level interventions as necessary.

In this context, the research has made an attempt to explore and examine the lived experiences of families having adopted children.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF

LITERATURE

Introduction

A child is raised in a family, which is a fundamental institution in society. The right to family upbringing is guaranteed to every child. It helps them feel like themselves and like they belong in the world. Every kid has the right to develop in a setting that is both secure and welcoming. Adoption is widely acknowledged and embraced. The lived experiences of families with adopted children are the focus of this study. Because there isn't enough adoption-related research in our nation, we must rely on western literature as a source of information (Intercountry adoption UNICEF, 2015).

This chapter deals with the review of literature of the research. This is done through literature review based on various articles, journals etc. The review covers the topic of adoption in global and indian context, the adoption process, the experiences and challenges of families with adoptive children and the misconceptions prevailing in our society about adoption.

2.1 Adoption in Global Context

In order for all couples to have the number of children they wish, the World Population Plan of Action of the World Population Conference urged nations to encourage child adoption. By doing this, the Plan of Action acknowledged that child adoption could help couples who would not otherwise be able to have children get close to being biological parents. Many of the demographic changes connected to the demand for adoption have intensified throughout the intervening years. Fewer people are getting married later in life, delaying having children, increasing numbers of childless people, high divorce rates, and a wider acceptance of nontraditional family structures are just a few examples of demographic trends linked to a growing population of people turning to adoption. At the same time, adoption has developed as a legal institution. The notion of protecting the child's best interests has been firmly established as the utmost priority in all decisions connected to child adoption since the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child came into effect. Countries have changed their existing laws to recognise new adoption models and to permit adoptions by those who were previously disqualified. In order to establish clarity in issues of jurisdiction and applicable law when intercountry adoptions are implicated and to ensure that the welfare of the children involved is safeguarded, a large number of nations have accepted multilateral and bilateral agreements related to adoption. Despite these advancements, little is known about the wider demographic environment in which adoptions occur. Such investigation has been hampered by the absence of comparable data on the number of children adopted each

year and on the characteristics of the people involved, including the adopted person, the adoptive parents, and the birth parents. There are still significant issues to be resolved.

There has been an increase in international adoptions since the 1960s. Alongside this development, there have been increased worldwide efforts to guarantee that adoptions are completed in a fair, legal, and transparent manner that benefits the children and families involved. The requirements and procedures in place were insufficient in some instances, however, to prevent unethical practices like the sale and abduction of children, coercion or manipulation of birth parents, falsification of documents, and bribery. As a result, adoptions were not always carried out in the best interests of the children.

Every child has the right to grow up in a family context, to know and be cared for by their own family, if feasible, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which directs UNICEF's operations. Families who require assistance to care for their children have a right to obtain it because of this and the significance and importance of families in children's lives. A kid should be able to grow up in a loving, caring, and supporting environment through finding appropriate and stable family-based solutions when, despite this aid, the child's family is unable, unwilling, or unable to care for her or him.

One of the possibilities for stable care is international adoption. Intercountry adoption may be the greatest long-term choice for specific children who are unable to be cared for in a family environment in their country of origin.

When conducted in accordance with the norms and tenets of the 1993 Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-Country Adoptions, which is now recognised by 95 countries, UNICEF supports international adoption. This

Convention represents a significant advancement for children, birth families, and potential international adoptive parents. It lays out responsibilities for both the governments of the nations receiving the children and those from which they are being adopted. The Convention aims to ensure honest and open procedures. The best interests of the child are given top priority under this international law, which also provides the basis for the actual application of the intercountry adoption principles set forth in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These include making sure that adoptions are only approved by competent authorities and are guided by the informed consent of all parties involved. They also include making sure that international adoptions are subject to the same safeguards and standards as domestic adoptions and that no one involved in the adoption receives an improper financial benefit. Although these rules are primarily intended to safeguard children, they also have the beneficial effect of protecting birth parents' rights and assuring potential adoptive parents that their kid has not been the focus of illegal practices.

Children who are uprooted from their homes and communities as a result of war or natural calamities deserve special attention. Family tracing should come first, and international adoption should only be considered for a kid if solid domestic alternatives are not available and family tracing efforts have failed. International NGOs including the Save the Children Alliance and International Social Service as well as UNICEF, UNHCR, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Hague Conference on Private International Law, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and others agree with this stance.

Worldwide UNICEF offices promote the improvement of child protection protocols. In order to safeguard vulnerable families, make sure that strong legal and policy frameworks are in place, and increase the capacity of the social welfare, justice, and law enforcement sectors, we collaborate with governments, UN partners, and members of civil society.

UNICEF prioritises addressing the root causes of child abuse, exploitation, and violence above everything else.

2.2 Adoption in Indian Context

A different way to create a family is through adoption. The need for a family for an orphaned, abandoned, or penniless child is met by adoption, as is the desire for a childless couple to experience motherhood (Pati, 2016). Parenthood is the central concern in adoption, yet procreation is viewed as the more "natural" and "better" method of parenthood. This has a lot to do with the idea that blood ties are preferable to love ties. One had to either be "married" into the family or "born" into the family in order to belong to the family. As a result, adoption is not acknowledged and is not a behaviour that many religions approve of. There is a dearth of empirical research, according to a thorough evaluation of both published and unpublished literature on adoption in India. From the perspective of human rights, adoption poses a number of issues that need to be investigated. In comparison to the adoption literature available in western nations, India now has a dearth of resources. Additionally, there is not enough research being done on child welfare and development. Empirical research must be fostered in these fields since

it is important and helpful for service evaluation, offering suggestions for enhancement, and assessing the effects of the human rights perspective.

The lack of interest in research in the field of child welfare services such as adoption can be attributed to:

- ❖ Lack of focus on research of an applied nature.
- ❖ A poor understanding or awareness about the service in society (Sini paul).

There are few empirical studies on adoption in India, carried out by Chattejee, Singh and Yadav (1971), Ahmad (1975), Mehta, Krishnan and Munshi (1983) and Billimoria (1984) (Kumar & Rani, 2019).

The adoption is defined in the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act of 2015 under Section 2 (2) and is defined as means the process through which the adopted child is permanently separated from his biological parents and becomes the lawful child of his adoptive parents with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities that are attached to the biological parents. After the adoption process is complete, the adopted child cuts all ties with his or her biological parents and inherits all the rights that would otherwise belong to a child born naturally to the adoptive parents. In India, adoption proceedings were conducted in accordance with the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act of 1956 through adoption deeds between the biological and adoptive parents of the child, although this restriction only applies to Hindu households. Nevertheless, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act of 2015, a secular legislation, allows anyone, regardless of their religious

affiliations, to adopt a child in India. Islamic law forbids Muslims from adopting children, but the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act of 2015 removes this restriction, including for Muslims in India. Three methods can be used to complete the adoption process: signing adoption documents between the parties, having a judicial court rule in accordance with the law, as in the case of India's J.J. Act 2015, or using administrative orders. Due to the fact that there is only one party involved in the adoption proceedings, the order made under the second category is non-adversarial in nature. In India, the administrative authority has not been given the authority to issue adoption orders; however, in light of the judicial officers' obligations to resolve other types of disputes, it has been proposed to amend this provision to give the District Magistrate the authority to issue adoption orders in order to streamline the adoption process and swiftly resolve adoption cases in the interest of the adoptive parents and child in need of protection.

2.3 Adoption of Children Under Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act 2015

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act 2015 is India's most comprehensive piece of law addressing the subject of kids who require care and protection, and it represents a real effort to find solutions to every issue that affects and involves kids. Hindu citizens of India have two options for adopting children: they can use the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act of 1956 or the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act of 2015, which has more stringent requirements. The main difference of adoption under the HAMA 1956 is that it is personal law of Hindu based on the customs, usage and religious

views of Hindus which revolves around and focuses on the childless parents and is enacted with the object to caters to the needs of adoptive parents, however, the J J Act is a secular enactment and any person can adopt under the provisions of this act irrespective of their religious affiliations subject to complying with the provision as contemplated in the Act. The HAMA is a statute that prioritises parents, whereas the J.J. The law is centred on children. The J.J. Act is gender-biased legislation since it forbids male single parents from adopting female children, a clause that was included on purpose to protect the child from sex abuse and exploitation. Regardless of their sexual orientations, female single parents are allowed to adopt any child as long as the age difference between the male adoptee and the female adoptive parent is at least 25 years. However, this distinction is made under HAMA. If the parents already have a male child, they cannot adopt another male child under HAMA, and the J J Act does not place any restrictions on this. The adoption of orphans, abandoned, and surrendered children primarily takes place under the J J Act; however, there is a provision in the Act for relative adoption; however, there is no mention of step parents adoption in the Act and the J J Model Rules despite that the J J Act and the J J Model Rules require that every inter-country adoption be done under this Act alone, as required by Section 56 of the J J Act 2015. Through adoption, foster care, or sponsorship, the social reintegration of children is enacted. For Hindus, which includes Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists, the adoption of children is legally accomplished either through provisions created under the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act of 1956, which is a personal law of Hindus. the intended adoptive parents. In such cases, parents may prefer to adopt such children under HAMA as there is no requirement for a court order. On the other hand, in cases of adoption of a relative

child under J J Act, the family court of jurisdiction shall pass an adoption order prior to the custody of a child being granted to the prospective adoptive parents. When adopting under the HAMA, the adoption process is finished when the adoption deeds are registered; nevertheless, when adopting under the J.J. Act, it takes much longer before the family court issues a final ruling to that effect. According to the JJ Act, adoption orders could only be given for a maximum of two months; however, it almost always takes far longer than two months to pass an order of this nature.

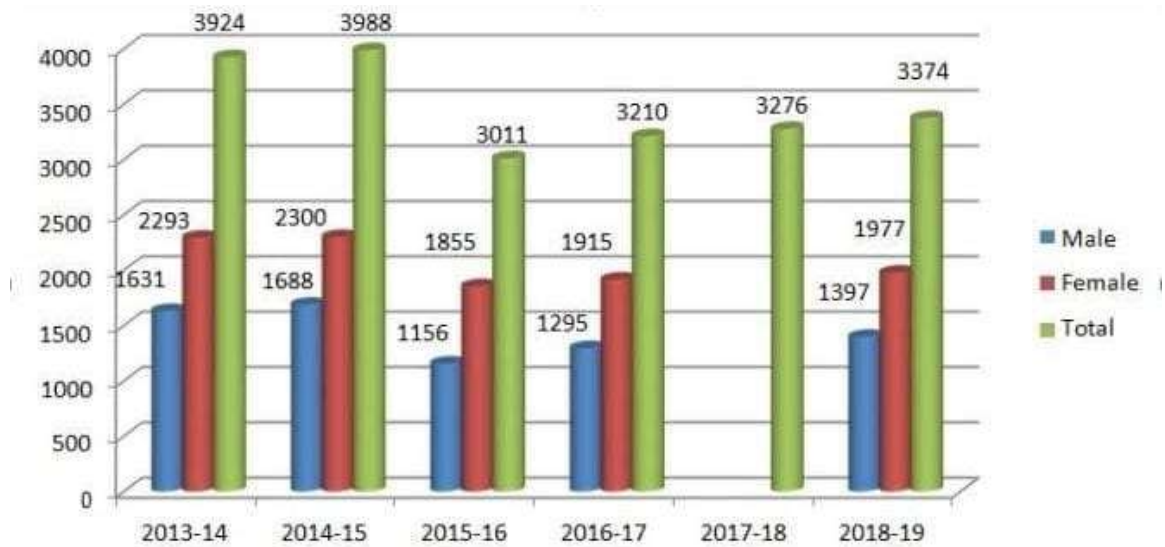


Fig 2 Gender wise adoption in India

Figure 2 Demonstrates that the total number of girls adopted from 2013–2014 to 2018–19 outnumbered the number of boys, leading one to the conclusion that girls are more likely to be abandoned and given up for adoption than boys because of this. It would not be safe to draw the conclusion, however, that adoptive parents prefer to adopt girls over boys even though boys are also legally eligible for adoption. The graph almost guarantees that there are more female children available for adoption than boy children owing to

surrender and abandonment, and that there are therefore many more girl children adopted. Given that there are 30% more adopted female children than adopted male children, the attitude of Indian culture toward girl children is not particularly encouraging. The total number of adopted children reached its lowest point in 2015–16, and from 2016–17 to 2018–19, there was only a slight uptick.

2.4 Adoption Process

In India and throughout the world, adoption of children is thought to be on the rise. The two main reasons for adoptions are either because the parents are unable to have children of their own or that they want to help and offer a new start to a child who has been abandoned by their parents. Adoption in India was once stigmatised, but it is now accepted and openly discussed in Indian society (Mahak arora, 2020).

2.4.1 Fundamental principles governing adoption

The following fundamental principles shall govern adoptions of children from India, namely:-

- ❖ the child's best interests shall be of paramount consideration, while processing any adoption placement
- ❖ preference shall be given to place the child in adoption with Indian citizens and with due regard to the principle of placement of the child in his own socio-cultural environment, as far as possible

- ❖ all adoptions shall be registered on Child Adoption Resource Information and Guidance System and the confidentiality of the same shall be maintained by the Authority.

2.4.2 Stakeholders in adoption process

1. The Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA), which periodically produces adoption guidelines outlining the procedures and processes that must be followed by the various adoption programme stakeholders, makes sure that the adoption process runs smoothly.
2. State Adoption Resource Agency (SARA) - In collaboration with the Central Adoption Resource Authority, the State Adoption Resource Agency (SARA) serves as a nodal entity within the State to promote and oversee adoption and non-institutional care.
3. Specialised Adoption Agency (SAA) - Under subsection 4 of section 41 of the Act, the State Government has granted recognition to Specialised Adoption Agency (SAA) for the purpose of placing children for adoption.
4. Authorised Foreign Adoption Agency (AFAA)-An authorised foreign adoption agency is one that the Central Adoption Resource Authority has approved on the suggestion of the relevant central authority or government department of that nation to handle all aspects of the adoption of an Indian child by a national of that nation.
5. District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) - District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) refers to a district-level organisation established by the State Government in accordance with Section 61A of the Act. The district's orphan, abandoned, and

surrendered children are identified, and the Child Welfare Committee declares them to be legally available for adoption.

2.4.3 Who is eligible to adopt a child?

- ❖ The prospective adoptive parents should be physically, mentally and emotionally stable; financially capable; motivated to adopt a child; and should not have any life threatening medical condition;
- ❖ Any prospective adoptive parent, irrespective of his marital status and whether or not he has his own biological son or daughter, can adopt a child;
- ❖ Single female is eligible to adopt a child of any gender;
- ❖ Single male person shall not be eligible to adopt a girl child;
- ❖ In case of a couple, the consent of both spouses shall be required;
- ❖ No child shall be given in adoption to a couple unless they have at least two years of stable marital relationship;
- ❖ The minimum age difference between the child and either of the prospective adoptive parents should not be less than twenty five years;
- ❖ The age for eligibility will be as on the date of registration of the prospective adoptive parents;
- ❖ The age criteria for prospective adoptive parents shall not be applicable in case of relative adoptions and adoption by step-parent.
- ❖ Couples with three or more children shall not be considered for adoption except in case of special needs children as defined in sub-regulation (21) of regulation 2, hard to place children as mentioned in regulation 50 and in case of relative adoption and adoption by step-parent.

- ❖ The age of prospective adoptive parents as on the date of registration shall be counted for deciding the eligibility and the eligibility of prospective adoptive parents to apply for children of different age groups shall be as under

Age of the child	Maximum composite age of prospective adoptive parents	Maximum age of single prospective adoptive parent
Upto 4 years	90 years	45 years
Above 4 upto 8 years	100 years	50 years
Above 8 upto 18 years	110 years	55 years

2.4.4 When can A Child be Eligible To Be Adopted?

- ❖ As per the guidelines of the Central Government of India, any orphan, abandoned or surrendered child, declared legally free for adoption by the child welfare committee is eligible for adoption.
- ❖ A child is said to be an orphan when the child is without a legal parent or a guardian or the parents are not capable of taking care of the child anymore.
- ❖ A child is considered abandoned on being deserted or unaccompanied by parents or a guardian and the child welfare committee has declared the child to be abandoned.

- ❖ A surrendered child is one who has been relinquished on account of physical, social and emotional factors which are beyond the control of parents or the guardian and is so declared by the child welfare committee.
- ❖ In order to be adopted, a child needs to be “legally free”. On receipt of an abandoned child, the District Child Protection Unit puts up an alert with the child’s photograph and details in state-wide newspapers and requests the local police to trace the parents. The child is considered legally free for adoption only after the police have given a report stating that the parents of the child are non-traceable.

2.8 How to Adopt a Child in India?

The Central Adoption Resource Authority is in charge of ensuring compliance with the various rules that govern the adoption process in India. The following steps can be used to understand the adoption process in India:

Step 1 – Registration Future adoptive parents must register with a recognised organisation. The organisations that are permitted to complete such registrations in India are Special Adoption Agency (SPA) and Recognized Indian Placement Agencies (RIPA). The prospective adoptive parents can go to the local Adoption Coordination Agency, where a social worker will walk them through the registration procedures and go through the necessary paperwork, formalities, and general preparation.

Step 2 – Home Study and Counselling A potential adoptive parent's house will be visited by a social worker from the registration agency who will conduct a home study there. In order for the agency to fully comprehend the motivation, preparation, strengths, and limitations of the prospective parents, it may be necessary for the parents to participate in counselling sessions. The home study must be finished within three months of the registration date in accordance with CARA regulations. After the home study and counselling sessions, the honourable court is informed of the findings.

Step 3 – Referral of the Child When a kid is available for adoption, the agency will let the interested couple know. Once the couple is comfortable with the information supplied, the agency will share medical records, physical examination reports, and other pertinent information with them and also permit them to spend time with the child.

Step 4 – Acceptance of the Child A few paperwork connected to the acceptance of the child must be signed by the parents after they are at ease with the youngster.

Step 5 – Filing of Petition A lawyer receives the required paperwork and creates the petition that will be brought before the court. As soon as the petition is prepared, the adoptive parents must go to court and sign it in front of a court official.

Step 6 – Pre-Adoption Foster Care The adoptive parents can take the child to a pre-adoption foster care facility once the court petition is completed so they can learn about the child's habits from the nursing staff before taking the child home.

Step 7 – Court Hearing An appearance in court requires both the child and the parents to be present. The hearing is conducted before a judge in a private setting. The court may have a few inquiries and will specify how much money must be invested in the child's name.

Step 8 – Court Order Once the receipt of investment made is shown, the judge shall pass the adoption orders.

Step 9: Follow Up After the adoption is finalised, the agency must provide the court with follow-up reports on the welfare of the child. This could go on for one to two years.

2.5 Misconceptions about Adoption

The adoption community as a whole, adoptive parents, and adoptees all frequently deal with preconceptions. Even though they are not always intrinsically malicious, many of them spread inaccurate information about adoption, which can result in damaging misunderstandings (Mahli Rupp,2022).

Myth 1: Adoptive parents aren't the child's "real" parents

A family is not created by biology. The love they get, not their DNA, is what ties children to their parents. The truth is that developing a relationship with a child, showing them love, and doing everything you can for them is how a real mom' or real dad' is created.

Myth 2 : Children who are adopted won't "fit in" to the family

Whether they are adopted or not, parents and kids will always battle. Even parents with biological children occasionally question where their children "came from" because parenting is difficult. The bond between parents and their children may be difficult for both biological and adoptive parents at times, according to family therapist Bobbi J. Miller, Ph.D., LMFT, who specialises in adoption.

Myth 3 : The birth parents did not want the child.

There are unfortunate instances of this, but there are also a lot of other reasons why a biological parent would decide to give their kid up for adoption. They might not have been prepared for parenthood's responsibilities, they might not have had the means to provide for a child in a healthy manner, or they might have passed away. Numerous factors, many of which are beyond the birth parents' control, may influence their choice to place a child for adoption.

Myth 4 : Adoptive parents are heroes.

It is exaggerated, at best, and presumptuous, at worst, to refer to adoptive parents as heroes. The phrase "saviour complex" is actually used in the adoption community to characterise someone who feels as though they are intervening to rescue the day by adopting a kid, typically from another nation. New adoptive parents may find it simple to embrace this attitude, but it's crucial to stay away from the saviour complex. Adoptive parents aren't superhuman; they're just individuals who want to adopt like everyone else.

Myth 5 : Adoptive parents must have struggled with fertility issues.

Although adoption is frequently chosen for this reason, it is not always the case. Although some parents desire children, they do not wish to experience pregnancy and labour. Some single parents still desire to have children. Some parents genuinely believe that adoption is their life's calling. Additionally, this image frequently ignores adoptions that took place within families or through foster care. There are numerous reasons for adoptive parents to choose adoption, just as there are numerous reasons for birth parents to decide to place their child for adoption..

Myth 6 : Adoption always involves strangers.

The most evident and well-known type of adoption is probably when children are adopted by other families. A common theme in adoption-related films and television shows is the protagonist's quest for self-discovery while having no knowledge of their biological parents. However, depending on the situation, adoptions can and frequently do occur between relatives and/or close acquaintances. Legal adoption of stepchildren is an option open to stepparents. Adoption may take place if a parent is unable to care for their child but a family member (like an aunt or an uncle) can. Godmothers and godfathers are another choice; parents can designate particular friends or other people to act as their children's legal guardians in the event that something were to happen to them. There are more paths to adoption than you would imagine.

Myth: The bond isn't as strong.

A parent is not any less of a parent simply because a child does not share genetics with them. People occasionally worry that because a child is not biologically theirs, they won't bond with them or feel as much love from them. This claim is untrue. You will need to be open to new experiences and ways of thinking because they might bond slightly differently than a biological child might. But different does not imply inferiority or badness. Love is an activity and emotion that should be experienced outside of DNA's confines.

2.6 Experience of Adoptive parents

In a study, Billimoria (1984) noted that while the adopted parents' personal social circle (family and friends) had a favourable attitude about adoption, their community had lost that positive environment. Most parents found their parenting experience to be mainly acceptable. Most of the parents' adoption experiences were positive overall. Due to emotional uneasiness and concerns that the parent-child bond might be impacted, very few parents really discussed adoption with their child. In comparison to adoptive parents who had not discussed adoption with their kid, it was found that those who had were generally more content and at ease in their parental roles, had fewer expectations of their adopted child, and were a happier family. Although a few of the adopted children who had learned of their adoption status felt uncomfortable and nervous, most of them were well adjusted (Lizy P.J, 2010).

2.7 Challenges in Adoption

In their study Brodzinsky et al. (1998) described the following Family Life Cycle Tasks of Adoptive Parents and Adopted Children.

The table 2.2.5.1 below shows Family Life Cycle Tasks of Adoptive Parents and Adopted Children

Age Period	Adoptive Parents	Adopted Children
Pre - Adoption	Coping with infertility Making an adoption decision Coping with the uncertainty and anxiety related to the placement process Coping with social stigma associated with adoption Developing family and social support for adoption decision	
Infancy	Taking on the identity as adoptive parents Finding appropriate role models and developing realistic	

	<p>expectations regarding adoption Integrating the child into the family and fostering secure attachments Exploring thoughts and feelings about the child's birth family</p>	
<p>Toddlerhood & Preschool years</p>	<p>Beginning the telling process Coping with anxiety and uncertainty regarding the telling process Creating a family atmosphere conducive to open adoption communication</p>	<p>Learning one's adoption story Questioning parents about adoption</p>
<p>Middle Childhood</p>	<p>Helping child master the meaning of adoption Helping child cope with adoption loss Validating the child's connection to both adoptive and biological families</p>	<p>Mastering the meaning of adoption Coping with adoption loss Exploring thoughts and feelings about birth parents and the relinquishment Coping with stigma associated with</p>

	<p>Fostering a positive view of the birth family</p> <p>Maintaining open communication about adoption</p>	<p>being adopted</p> <p>Maintaining open communication with parents about adoption</p> <p>Validating one's dual connection to two families.</p>
Adolescence	<p>Helping the adolescent cope with ongoing adoption – related loss</p> <p>Fostering positive view of the birth family</p> <p>Supporting the teenager's search interests and plans</p> <p>Helping the adolescent develop realistic expectations regarding searching</p> <p>Maintaining open communication about adoption</p>	<p>Integrating adoption into a stable and secure identity</p> <p>Coping with adoption loss</p> <p>Exploring thoughts and feelings about birth family and birth heritage</p> <p>Exploring feelings about the search process</p> <p>Maintaining open communication with parents about adoption.</p>

Conclusion

The majority of adoption-related studies take place in a western culture. In India, adoption is a more recent notion; some research can provide details about adoption-related experiences and difficulties in the Indian setting. The adoption experience has also been the subject of numerous research. However, no study took a comprehensive look at the experience and difficulties faced by adoptive parents. The researcher also hopes that future studies will examine adoption in Kerala in greater detail, succeed in illuminating a variety of other facets of this admirable practice, and inform people about how adoption can significantly improve the lives of kids who yearn for sincere parental love and care.

CHAPTER III
RESEARCH
METHODOLOGY

3.1 Title

Lived experiences of families with adopted children in Kerala.

3.2 Introduction

This chapter deals with the methodology of the research. It discusses various aspects of the research. It deals with the statement of the problem behind the research and points out the significance of the study. The research objectives, both general and specific are mentioned here. The different concepts which are used in the research are defined both theoretically and operationally. The researcher also states the universe of the study, sampling procedure and sample size. The exclusion and inclusion criteria of the sample of the universe is clearly defined. The tools used for data collection, data analysis and interpretation, chapterization are mentioned in this chapter. The chapter also mentions the challenges faced by the researcher and the limitations of the study.

3.3 Statement of the problem

There are 472 million children in India, who make up 39% of the overall population and are under the age of 18. It is crucial to develop and construct sustainable and inclusive cities from their perspective because, of the 128.5 million children living in urban areas, about 7.8 million are still living in poverty and in disadvantaged conditions in informal settlements (Status of Children in Urban India, 2016).

India has historically opposed the concept of adoption. Families and communities are wary of the thought of adopting a child whose parentage is unknown due to social issues

of caste, class, and genetics. Given this background, the existence of a waiting list for potential adoptive parents is a significant shift. From the moment they are found until they are put in an adopted home, an orphan or abandoned child's journey is arduous and protracted.

Every child has the right to develop in a setting that is both secure and welcoming. Adoption is widely acknowledged and embraced. In our nation, adoption comes in a variety of forms. One of them is international adoption. Intercountry adoption may be the greatest long-term choice for specific children who are unable to be cared for in a family environment in their country of origin. Because there isn't enough adoption-related research in our nation, we must rely on western literature as a source of information (Intercountry adoption UNICEF, 2015).

Institutionalised childhood is not ideal for children. Children may be placed in institutions due to poverty, broken families, disease, and family deaths. The level of individualised, supportive care that children need for effective emotional, physical, mental, and social development cannot be successfully provided in institutions. Institutionalised children do not experience the caring and stimulating environments necessary for healthy growth and psychological development. Instead of reducing, it seems that the trend of institutionalising youngsters is accelerating (Children in Institutions, 2001).

3.4 Significance of the study

The relevance of this research topic in the current scenario is that most of the studies related to adoption are in western context. Thus this particular study will support in generating new knowledge on the topic. It will help to analyse the effectiveness of the existing policy and its implementation in our state. It will help to identify the remedial measures that can be adopted in case of any drawback and at what level according to the need. Thereby we can bring changes to family and policy level intervention accordingly.

The study helps to understand the best practices that can be taken which will enhance the present Adoption system from the experiences of adoptive families. The findings of the study can contribute to developing a mode of intervention in adoption.

3.5 General Objective

To understand the experiences of families with adopted children

3.6 Specific Objectives

- ❖ To explore the lived experiences of adoptive parents in rearing the adopted child.
- ❖ To understand and examine the best practices that have been adopted by these parents that enhanced their family functioning.

3.7 Definition of Concepts

3.7.1 Experience

3.7.1.1 Theoretical definition

Experience is the practical knowledge, skill, or practice derived from direct observation of or participation in events or in a particular activity. – Merriam Webster.

3.7.1.2 Operational concept

Experience is described as changes that adoptive parents have gone through since the beginning of the adoption process.

3.7.2 Adoption

3.7.2.1 Theoretical definition

It refers to the procedure by which an adopted kid is permanently separated from his biological parents and becomes a lawful child of his adoptive parents, with all of the rights, benefits, and duties that a biological child enjoys (*Section 2 (2)* of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015).

3.7.2.2 Operational definition

It is a process of giving a permanent shelter by adoptive parents to a child who is separated from their biological parents.

3.7.3 Families

3.7.3.1 Theoretical definition

Family, a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood, or adoption, constituting a single household and interacting with each other in their respective social positions, usually those of spouses, parents, children, and siblings.

3.7.3.2 Operational definition

Family is a group of people living together under one roof, who share values, beliefs and a connection with each other.

3.7.4 Positive Experiences

3.7.4.1 Theoretical definition

A positive fact, situation or experience is pleasant and helpful to a person in any way.

3.7.4.2 Operational definition

The situations which positively contributed to adoptive parents that led them to the adoption process and nurturing the adoptive child.

3.7.5 Challenging Experiences

3.7.5.1 Theoretical definition

An experience or situation which requires great effort and determination.

3.7.5.2 Operational definition

The difficult situations which were experienced by the adoptive parents in the adoption process and nurturing the adoptive child.

3.8 Research Design

The researcher has adopted a qualitative approach to inquiry using phenomenological methods.

3.9 Universe

The universe of the study consists of Adoptive families having an adopted child for more than 10 years and residing in the state of Kerala.

3.10 Sampling Procedure and Sample

Purposive sampling is a technique used in this study. Purposive sampling is a form of non- probability sampling that qualitative researchers use to recruit participants who can provide in-depth and detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation. In-depth interviews of 5 adoptive families are taken.

3.11 Inclusion Criteria

- ❖ Families having an adopted child for more than 10 years and who is residing in the state Kerala.

3.12 Exclusion Criteria

- ❖ Families having an adopted child below 10 years are excluded.
- ❖ Families having an adopted child below 10 years residing outside Kerala state are excluded.

3.13 Tool of Data Collection

Interview guide is the tool selected for the study. It helps the interviewer to focus on the experiences of the adoptive families. So this in-depth interview allows freedom for both the researcher and the respondents to explore additional points and understand the underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings of respondents on a particular subject.

3.14 Methods of Data Collection

Primary source of data was collected from the respondents through in-depth interviews. Secondary sources of data were collected from Articles, Journals, Newspaper and Websites.

3.15 Expected Outcome

The study will develop insight on how to enhance positive experiences of adoptive families. The study will contribute to the knowledge base of professional social work practice.

3.16 Limitations

- ❖ Identifying the families with adopted children was a challenge for the researcher.
- ❖ The families cooperation to be part of in depth interviews was a biggest challenge.

3.17 Chapterisation

- ❖ Chapter 1 - Introduction
- ❖ Chapter 2 - Review of Literature

- ❖ Chapter 3 - Research Methodology
- ❖ Chapter 4 - Case description
- ❖ Chapter 5 - Thematic analysis & Discussions
- ❖ Chapter 6 - Suggestions and Conclusion

CHAPTER IV

CASE

DESCRIPTION

Demographic details of Respondents

Name	Age	Gender	Place	Family type
P	52	Female	Trivandrum	Nuclear
M	53	Male	Trivandrum	Nuclear
J	53	Female	Ernakulam	Nuclear
U	54	Female	Ernakulam	Nuclear
R	52	Male	Alappuzha	Nuclear

CASE 1

Name: P

Sex: FEMALE

Age: 52

Place: TRIVANDRUM

Family: NUCLEAR

The respondent is a 52 year old female who resides in Chakkai, Trivandrum. Her family consists of her husband and a child. Both of them are government employees. The child is 13 years old and currently studying in 8th grade.

The couple got to know about adoption from the respondents mother and sisters. But her husband had no interest in adoption. He used to say *“if we have no children let it be like that and let's live as it is”*. In 2010, they decided to adopt. Her mother's friend had a friend who was a social welfare officer in Kannur. She always used to say there is a monastery where women from wealthy families come to surrender their babies for adoption but her husband had no interest. One day the respondent's aunt called her mother saying a pregnant lady had come to the monastery to surrender her child for

adoption. She said that the child is of good origin, tell your daughter to adopt the child even if it is a girl or a boy.

The aunt frequently called the respondents mother saying go see the child she is of good origin. Tell your daughter to just go and see the mother even if they don't want to adopt the child. So they went to Kannur to see the biological mother. The pregnant lady was in the house but they couldn't see her. Later they contacted us just the day before the mother was admitted to the hospital to give birth to the child. The child was born the next morning. The respondents husband somehow was interested. He came to see the child. *"Before seeing the child, we had an image about what our child should look like. The child looked exactly the same according to our wishes. We liked the baby"* said the respondent.

After seeing the child the people came for home study and soon everything was done. The process was difficult. By the time everything was ready, there was no provision to give the child to us because the biological mother was told to stay with the child for three months. The child was of nursing age but they used to visit her all the time. The respondent said *"The child was handed over to us on May 28 when she was three months old. At that time my age was 40 and my husband was 44."* The child was given to the couples after all the procedures and they got the child very quickly. *"However, the child was received after two or three years after we registered for adoption and nobody came for home study till then"* said the respondent.

The child is now 13 years old. At that time we got counselling and required orientations. *"We did not experience any kind of discrimination from the family."* said the respondent. I was worried about how my husband would treat the child. But still this fact is unknown to her husband's family. Many people still believe that the child was born through surrogacy. They lived away from their relatives due to work demands. Then on the way back they went with the baby and everyone still thinks that they got the baby through surrogacy. In the future, even if they know it won't be a big problem for them.

"We were happy even if we didn't have children. But people used to hurt us on purpose of being childless when we attend family functions. We had a hard time facing the questioning of others for not having children" said the respondent. They didn't feel low or hurt of not having a child. Only after adopting the baby did they realise how they lived without the child for so long. *"Still we can't think how we lived without her. It's a feeling we don't know how to express. We still wonder how we went so long childless"* said the respondent. It was like a festival. *"To those who look from the outside, it may seem like raising someone's child, but for all mothers and fathers like us, the child is nothing else but our life itself"* said the respondent. As a parent they will never feel that the baby belongs to someone else.

During the time of bringing the child and preparing for it, they did not experience any kind of difficulties, there was nothing like that. *"We didn't prepare much but after the child came, we became parents without even knowing what parenthood is. I became a mother without even knowing it . I know when she's worried, I know when she's thirsty, I*

know when she's in pain, before she feels pain it starts hurting me. I don't know how to explain it to those who have not experienced it." said the respondent. That's why they need no other preparation to become a mother.

It is our baby that comes to our hands. That's why the child came to us because she is supposed to be our baby, who should be in our hands no matter what. The child loves us so much and wants mom and dad wherever she goes. She won't go anywhere without mom or dad. She will never stay away from her father. Her father is her safe place. She is so attached to her father that she does not sleep without him.

"I am afraid that her biological mother will come back." said the respondent. Because when the child was little there was a problem that the couples were asked to surrender the baby. The child is said to be given birth through surrogacy and she knows that. Even if the biological mother returns, the child will not leave the couple. When other children have brothers and sisters, the child comes home and says that she wants a brother or sister too. She would tell the respondent that "you should also go to the hospital and come back with a baby as others do." That's how the child was told about the fact that she was born through surrogacy. *"I am healthy to give birth to a baby, that is the reason why you were delivered by another mother. I will die if I give birth."* said the respondent. Then she will say that you should go to the hospital and take a baby like you took me. The respondent wants to adopt another child but is afraid that there will be a problem between her and the new child. *"God has blessed us this much. It is more than enough we can ask for."* said the respondent. There is no problem with her, she does everything carefully.

There is support from everyone at home. The child belongs to everyone and is the youngest in the family. There are no people in the family who have the intention to inform the child that she is adopted. But everyone asks whether she knows that she is adopted. They are happy with the 12 year journey. The respondent used to take the child to her office during childhood days. The child used to come to the office after school. One day someone in the office told her that “you are my daughter, you were lost in the train and your mother took you away from us”. The child was terribly hurt after hearing this.

The child is good at studies. Earlier the respondent used to take a lot of strain thinking about her studies but now she let her go. *“I used to tell the child that you should study well not to be the first, our goal is to get a job. Now mom and dad have jobs but it doesn't matter. Who will look after you when we die?”* said the respondent. The child is very careful about spending money. She is brilliant.

There was an organisation named KAAFO to support adoptive parents and children. *“Follow-up was accurate until she was five years of age, after corona follow-up was poor,”* said the respondent. There were meetings conducted for families with adoptive children. In those meetings the children interact with one another and there will be a feeling that *“I am not the only one and many children have been adopted like me. So then they will have less sorrow about the fact of being adopted”* said the respondent. So they used to take her to such meetings.

The child has many friends at school and in the neighbourhood. The child quickly mingles with everyone. The respondent said *“I fear that whether her friends tell her that she is adopted. If she learns the truth, will everyone isolate her? Once she learns about the adoption from school, it will be too much for her to bear. No matter how much you try to comfort it, it will be a shock inside.”* The child loves it when people say that she resembles her father and mother. The child repeats it and says I am the blood of my mother and father and I will look like them. Then the respondent feels like the child is struggling to accept something that is not true.

The couple have a lot of hope for their child. They are concerned about the child's future. *“Getting her married is not our priority, let her study and reach a higher level”* said the respondent. She is not compared with other children.

“The day she was born is the greatest gift” said the respondent. They used to celebrate her birthday. They went to orphanages to celebrate her birthday every year. They used to sponsor uniforms for the children there and eat food with them during the Onam Christmas celebrations. The child used to play with other children of the orphanages. They doubted that the rest of the children would be disappointed if she was taken alone back with us to home. Respecting the feelings of other children, that stopped that practice.

“The biggest challenge is telling the child that she is adopted. I don't want to say that she was born through surrogacy. Maybe I'm selfish but I don't like to even think about having a mother like that. I can't believe it and I don't want to believe it. I like to say that she is ours.” said the respondent.

The respondent used to write articles about adoption. While everyone adopted children secretly, I did it publicly. Mothers with adopted children were given maternity leave for the first time after releasing my articles. Everyone has been granted leave since 2010. After that, some people asked me how the adoption process was and the experiences. Among them, three families did adoption. *“I got an award for writing the article and it was a great feeling, a feeling that cannot be expressed. We reflect on our life journey since then.”* said the respondent.

CASE 2

Name: M

Sex: MALE

Age: 53

Place: TRIVANDRUM

Family: NUCLEAR

The respondent is a 53 year old male who resides in Peroorkada, Trivandrum. His family consists of his wife and two children. He is a government employee and wife is a homemaker. The older child is an 18 year old girl and she is pursuing graduation. The younger one is 14 years old and studying in 9th grade. The older one is the adopted child. Four years after they had a biological child.

“My sister had adopted a child. From her we knew about the adoption process” said the respondent. The couple was inspired to adopt through his sister. The respondent always asked about his sister's experience of rearing a child. After having a serious discussion with his wife, the couple decided to adopt a baby. The respondent's sister was highly

supportive in the couple's decision. There were no issues with his family in adopting a child. The family members were extremely happy to have a new member to the family.

The respondent's wife's family was less supportive and not interested in adopting a child. They had the stigmatised thought that prevailed in the society about adoption. But the couple had already decided to do adoption and they kept their decision even if they lacked support. After several conversations with the wife's family, they finally agreed to adoption. Everything was good and fine. The couple decided to register for adoption in 2004. At the time the respondent was 35 and his wife was 32.

They had attended the counselling sessions. It gave them curiosity and interest in continuing with their decision. They never felt they had made a wrong decision. The respondent's sister had adopted a child and she knew an officer via whom she did adoption. The couple had good contact with that officer. They maintained the relationship with her which helped in the adoption. It helped the couple to deal with the process quickly. *"We registered the adoption in 2004 and met the child in September that year. She was brought home the following month. Now she is 18 years old. We got the child following all the criteria to do things without difficulty."* said the respondent.

"We had the same feelings when we got her as we do when we have a child of our own." said the respondent. In the respondent's workplace, many people had done adoption and none of them wanted to reveal that to anybody. They kept it a secret. It was because they were scared of how society would react and isolate them. *"But I informed everyone*

about the adoption. I adopted my child by informing all the colleagues in my office. I told all my friends and relatives at that time of adoption. It should not be something that should be kept secret. Every person who does adoption should feel proud.” said the respondent.

The preparation they did was to find and provide the necessary things to take care of their child when she comes. Prior to receiving the baby, everybody in the organisation including the child was diagnosed with an infection. The couple bought the necessary medicines needed for the child and others in the organisation. They made sure everybody was fine. Finally, when the child was 3 months old they received their baby. The couple did the same customs and tradition that they follow while a new baby is born. *“We did the Noolukettu Chadangu for the baby. We had the same happiness and feelings of having our own baby”* said the respondent.

“Even today when I think about those incidents, it brings back all good memories” said the respondent

Now both the families of the couple are satisfied and happy with the child. It was difficult to convince them initially. The respondent’s family was alright with the adoption process initially but his wife’s family was less supportive. They had the stigmatised views about adoption that were common in society. However, the couple had already made the decision to adopt, and they kept with it even in the face of opposition. They finally

decided to adopt after communicating with the wife's relatives for a while. Everything was perfect and good.

The couple faced difficulty handling the child during her teenage years. As a normal teenager, the child had a lot of behavioural problems. It was when the couple felt it was not easy to handle the child. *"It was the biggest challenge"*, said the respondent. The couple says it to be a problem of the child's biological parents' genes. Her tantrums were uncontrollable at times. The child had a love affair during that time. She never thinks wisely decisions are taken on the spur of the moment. It took them a certain time to make the child realise what is wrong and right. They found it difficult to bring the child to control. Even after there were problems, it was normal in any child.

Every child undergoes hormonal changes during adolescent age, likewise the child also went through the process. Slowly, everything was in control. The respondent quoted that *"The genetic variation in the child is the reason behind the tantrums. The child shows issues of their biological parents. 90% of adopted children have these problems. Thus the adoptive parents have the responsibility to control all these behaviours"*.

The respondent is one of the board members of the organisation named KAAFO. Basically it is a trivandrum based organisation to support families with adoptive children. They conduct meetings and organise programmes for the families. Now the meetings are not conducted. After the covid pandemic it is not that active. Otherwise every two months there was a meeting for the children and parents. In those meetings the children interact

with one another and there will be a feeling that *“I am not the only one and many children have been adopted like me. So then they will have less sorrow about the fact of being adopted”* said the respondent.

“The child knows she is adopted. From three years of age, we used to take her to the place from where she was adopted. Like a story, we used to narrate everything to her.” said the respondent. Revealing the fact that she was adopted was not a challenge to the couple. It is better to say to the child that they are adopted at a very young age. Because at times it can become a stressful situation. So they highly recommend every parent who did adoption to reveal the fact at the earliest.

“Our child is a good singer and we give maximum motivation to her. Currently, she is studying music.” said the respondent. Adoption is one of the best options for all childless couples. If it is our own child, we know that the gene is ours and it is easy for us to control it, but since the gene of a child belongs to their parents, we have to control it. That is one of the biggest challenges.

In such a situation, we can help these children to the maximum and make them understand things. Not everyone can accept children and some people cannot accept children. Other problems people face for example A friend of mine wanted to adopt but they made the decision now and they can't do the process because they are too old. And one thing that everyone asks is what will happen when the child grows up. But there are some misconceptions about adoption which are not true. Not everyone can do this.

CASE 3

Name: J

Sex: FEMALE

Age: 53

Place: ERNAKULAM

Family: NUCLEAR

The respondent is a 53 year old female who resides in Kaloor, Ernakulam. Her family consists of her husband and a son. Her husband is a maison and she is a homemaker. Her son is 23 years old and he is a daily wage worker.

"We came to know about adoption from a friend of ours." said the respondent. She had health issues even before marriage. Because of that they didn't have any children. They tried for a baby but couldn't. It was in such a situation that their friend talked to them about adoption. The respondent discussed adoption with her husband. They thought about how it would be like to adopt a baby. But the couple didn't know whom to ask about it. Finally they decided to adopt a baby. The couple got married in 1993. They had no children for seven years. They adopted the baby when the couple was 31 and her husband was 36.

That's when they registered for adoption. People came for home study. Its report was also submitted to the agency. *"For the first time we met a baby boy. We liked him very much. We both loved the baby so much but we didn't know if we would ever have him". By God's grace we got that baby.*" said the respondent. There was a lot of paperwork related to the adoption. Seven months after registering they got the baby. The respondent said *"Adopting a child is not an easy task. There are a lot of procedures from registering for adoption to getting the baby in hand. We had to run a lot for that, but when we saw the baby, we forgot all those difficulties. We felt that our suffering had paid off."*

The couple had to wait seven months after registration. It is the sole responsibility of the agency to ensure the safety of a child in all aspects when they are giving the child to the adoptive parents. *"I believe that is why the adoption process took seven months. We were able to adopt the very first baby we saw. We are very happy about that."* said the respondent.

"We didn't know how the rest of the family would react to adopting a child. When people came from the agency, others would ask what happened. We didn't know what to answer them. We were concerned whether they would see us in a stigmatised way." said the respondent. There was a lot of paperwork to be done after registration. That has been the biggest challenge throughout the entire process.

The couple got counselling and everything right before doing the adoption. The counsellor told the couple everything. What they should be like when a new family member joins home. No one can predict the character of an adopted child. Children may

show some kind of problems of their biological parents. Therefore, they prepared the couple to do and accept everything.

The counselling sessions increased the curiosity of the couple. They really wanted to have a baby as soon as possible. They had a tension of what will happen when a new baby arrives. The respondent's husband was very fond of children. It gave her tremendous confidence. They had faith that they could take care of the baby well. They adopted the baby out of that one faith. *"The fact that we were soon to be parents raised a lot of excitement in us."* said the respondent. So when everything was done they got hold of him and were very happy that day.

"My husband and I used to discuss what our world would be like if we had a baby. When a new person came into our world of two people, we were sure that the baby would benefit us." said the respondent. The counselling sessions prepared them well to accept the baby. It boosted their confidence. *"We both prayed and prepared to receive the child,"* said the respondent.

"We had to face many objections. The biggest problem before us was how to get everyone to agree. But everyone was happy after seeing the baby." said the respondent. It was a great relaxation for them.

"It was only after my son came that I realised that I am a mother and I can be a mother too. I am very happy about that," said the respondent. The child was very smart in everything and loved by everyone. He goes to school and gets along well with his friends. Although, like any other family there were small quarrels in the house, all three of them were happy. *"Our life was moving along a smooth path. At a certain point of*

time they faced financial constraints. So my husband became a drunkard. He was drinking day and night and causing trouble at home. It destroyed the peace of our family.” said the respondent.

Their son is very smart and young. *“As he became a teenager, his engagements with friends increased. He started lagging behind when compared to other students in class and was bad at studies. The teacher used to call me from the school because of his poor performance.”* said the respondent. Thereafter, problems started arising between the son and father. The child didn't like being asked about his studies. He got bad marks in 10th standard. His friends would always come and pick him up from house. When the respondent asks him where he is going, he gets angry.

“I was very worried about his future,” said the respondent. The situations at home and his associations are bothering the respondent a lot. Now her son is 23 years old. He studied till 12th and discontinued his education. He is not interested in studies. He shows resistance and anger to everything. He was employed in many stores, but he was unable to stay permanently. *“My wish is to teach him and bring him to the high levels, but the circumstances at home is non conducive. He slowly started drinking and smoking cigarettes.”* said the respondent.

He loves us terribly. But something is bothering him and the couple doesn't know what it is . He is short-tempered. The respondent knows those are the problems of his age.*“Whatever it is, he is my baby. We have faith that he will look after us in the future.”*
“It was he who called us father and mother for the first time. He gave meaning to our lives. We don't know how these 23 years went by so quickly.” said the respondent.

“He came as our little angel to our life. He is our guardian angel. It was only after he came that we had a meaning to our life. His arrival deepened my relationship with my husband.” said the respondent.

No one has ever treated him badly. Everyone sees him as their own child. He has little behavioural problems like any child. We want him to understand that and have a good life ahead of him. May he complete his studies and get a good job and live a good life.

He knows he is adopted. He has been brought up by us informing him. But that's an awfully big challenge. We told him that he was adopted because we felt it was better than someone else telling him tomorrow. Where we live, the houses are close together. Therefore, the couple told him that before he knew from others. It is better for us to tell than someone else. It was not easy for us to reach such a decision.

“Parenthood is a blessing,” said the respondent. The childless couples should definitely adopt if they genuinely wish so. It helps us to enhance the family relationship especially with your partner. We support each other and bring up the child. It is the best feeling and every couple should feel that. The adopted child is no less than a biological child. We have the same emotions and responsibilities towards these children.

CASE 4

Name: U

Sex: FEMALE

Age: 54

Place: ALAPPUZHA

Family: NUCLEAR

The respondent is a 54 year old female who resides in Cherthala, Alappuzha. Her family consists of her husband and a child. Her husband is a business man and she is a homemaker. The child is 16 years old and currently completed her 10th grade. They are a happy family.

The couple got married in 1992. Despite undergoing several treatments for 14 years they were childless. They were desperate to have a baby but had biological issues. They were introduced to the adoption process by a psychology doctor who was familiar with the doctor they were treating. Through him they got an opportunity to attend a meeting of parents of adopted children. They interacted with the adoptive families and learned the experiences of families with adoptive children.

“That meeting really helped us. We totally accepted and prepared mentally for adopting a child and it gave us a lot of relaxation. The Next week after the meeting, we registered for adoption” said the respondent. At that time the respondent and her husband were 38 years and 40 years old respectively.

When they made the decision to adopt, there weren't many kids available for adoption. They had to wait for almost a year to get the child. She was interested in adopting a girl child because she had five brothers as her siblings. They met multiple children available for adoption but none of them went well. After a long wait they got their baby girl. The child was four and a half months old at the time when they saw the baby for the first time. Finally they decided to adopt that child.

Everyone in the family was excited and extremely happy when they went to receive the child. *“We went in two cars with a lot of people to receive her and my brother and sister in law gifted her with a gold chain”* said the respondent.

They used to attend the meetings organised for adoptive families. The child was curious about a lot of things happening in the meeting. The respondent said *“ We got the opportunity to prepare ourselves but many of the other couples with us didn't”*. Everybody in the family knows the child is adopted but nobody tries to hurt the child because of being adopted.

“She was naughty when she grew up, like any other child. But we never treated her like an adoptive child. She is our own” said the respondent. The child rearing experience is tough in the initial stage because the respondent found it difficult to feed the baby but managed it. Till now they have done everything for the child and motivated the child in every stage of life. *“I’m concerned about her future. All I can give her is education”* said the respondent.

The respondent said *“Everybody should be given the opportunity to adopt and every couple should do so. It is a beautiful experience. But some couples who wish to adopt are unable to fulfil their wish because there is not enough environmental support like we have”*.

CASE 5

Name: R

Sex: MALE

Age: 52

Place: ERNAKULAM

Family: NUCLEAR

The respondent is a 53 year old male who resides in Ernakulam. His family consists of his wife and a daughter. He worked in the military and she is a homemaker. His daughter is 16 years old.

The couple married in 1994. After marriage, they had no children. Many treatments were taken but it did not work. They spent a lot of time behind the treatments. *“ Then a thought why don't we adopt?” came to our mind,*” said the respondent. They decided not to adopt according to anyone's influence, it was completely their choice. They sought the help of their parents in making a decision, and their parents talked to them about the options.

Both of them received positive support from their parents. *“It gave us more courage,”* said the respondent. The respondent's mother always said that raising a child is not easy. The couple really wanted to experience parenthood. So they registered for adoption when

he was 36 and his wife was 31. A few days after the registration, people came for home study. They said that they will hand over the home study report to the authorities. There was tension whether the report would be in their favour or not.

Finally after a two to three month wait they got the call. Children are available for adoption. They can come and see. The couple were very happy after that call. They both went there to see the baby. One or two children were there. Both of them were interested in a girl child. They happened to see a baby girl just like their wish.

After a few months of registration, they got the baby. The wait turned sweeter later. They did not have to face any difficulties. Immediately after registration, people came for home study. All reports were submitted. There were a lot of procedures after seeing the child. The baby was taken for a check-up and an order was obtained from the court. That one process has its own procedure objects. Following all that, they got the baby.

They incur various expenses during this procedure. There was a lot of paperwork and stuff. "We realised that adoption is never an easy task," said the respondent after attending many counselling sessions. During counselling, they made the couple understand how one should be towards children and how children should be towards us. The counselling team knows many couples who have been counselled with us. Some of them still haven't got the baby. Because there are a lot of procedural matters involved. Anyone will get the baby only if all that is fulfilled.

"We had a feeling that we should be good parents whenever we were preparing for this," said the respondent. Children learn by watching their parents. Therefore, even before the child came, *"we had a thought that the child should always be a good role model,"* said

the respondent. *“We believe that it has been possible. We did a lot of preparations before receiving the child. Especially mentally.”* And we tried to provide all the necessary things for the baby on time.

So the couple got her in the month of July. Me and my wife and both of our families came to receive the baby. *“It was an unforgettable day in our life and also the happiest day. When she was wrapped in a white cloth and handed over to us, the feeling we felt was indescribable. We both had tears in our eyes. When we got her, we kissed and caressed her. That day was a celebration for us. A new person came to our family. So we became a complete family”* said the respondent.

They began to understand the meaning of every movement and cry of the child. *“The first time she called us mommy and daddy is a day I will never forget.”* said the respondent. The couple had to listen to a lot of people's jabs when they're childless. They both went through a lot. But all those pains disappeared with the baby's call. The respondent said *“We were given a child when we thought that we could not be parents. I can't ask God for anything more than this.”* If there was any doubt about the child, the couple asked their mother and other family members. They have supported me. I was told everything about the child. And so we are able to look after all her affairs.

Now she is a bright child of 16 years old. She is an average student in school. But get along well with others. We went to the organisation to join the adopted family group. There will be a lot of programs and things going on. So when the meeting went, *“we told her openly that she is an adopted child. My partner and I had prepared a lot before*

telling her this. We didn't know how to present it to her. But anyway she should know it once so we told her in that situation."

At that time she felt bad. But through those meetings, she learned that there were many children like her. It was a relief to her. She realised that there were many children like her. She was worried. We assured him that the child would never leave her mother and father. It also improved our relationship. We felt that our decision was not wrong.

She was always an obedient child. She is a silent killer. From the outside, she seems to be a poor child with no mischief. But when she was at home, she used to show some naughty behaviour. She likes to dance a lot. From the organisation the family used to go on tour with the families who did adoption. Then the child will always dance. Everyone loves it. Now she is studying in 11th standard. Although she is average academically, she is talented in many other things.

The couple want her to get well. She loves her father and mother equally. Sometimes we have to scold her when she is mischievous. Then she will fight with us. Then the fight will change by itself. One of the biggest challenges for us was when we were raising her as an adopted. "*But it improved our relationship,*" said the respondent. After entering her teenage years, she became somewhat silent. She started to feel embarrassed. Hormonal change would be the difference. "Other than that we have no problem with her. She will do her own thing. She is a very sweet child. Even Though she shows disobedience at times, said the respondent..

"Some people in the family have tried to hurt us many times and also our child." said the respondent. It's not our fault that the couple and they didn't have children. And no one

does it on purpose. So we had a process called adoption to help. *“Doing adoption is never a mistake. This is an option for couples like us. A lot of people will try to discourage it by its name. But don't let that stop you. We are living and they are not living for us. An outsider can say whatever he wants. To them it may be someone's blood baby but to us she is our own till death.”* said respondent.

“All couples could adopt. It is very good that they are all prepared for this. Being mentally prepared in particular is a huge factor. Bringing a baby into our lives suddenly is not an easy task. It is different from what we have been in for so long. So adopt the child only after preparing ourselves. It was a very good experience. Our lives will change. At the same time, when the child grows up, let them know that it is adapted. Our parents tell our children how much better it is for them to know tomorrow through someone else. It can affect the child psychologically and emotionally. So it is better to raise the child to be informed.”

CHAPTER V

THEME

ANALYSIS AND

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter, the discussion part is to interpret the narration of case studies that got from the information collected from the participants. The research problem has been identified and certain objectives were set up to address the research problem. In the light of objectives research questions were answered. The discussion focuses on solving the research questions. This is a description of the findings and a result is formed from it. The data is interpreted and a pattern is identified. These data are considered as the themes. Themes are formed from the coding process done using the collected data, that is the case studies. In this part, these themes are reviewed.

The relevance of this research topic in the current scenario is that most of the studies related to adoption are in western context. Thus this particular study will support in generating new knowledge on the topic. It will help to analyse the effectiveness of the existing policy and its implementation in our state. It will help to identify the remedial measures that can be adopted in case of any drawback and at what level according to the need. Thereby we can bring changes to family and policy level intervention accordingly.

This chapter outlines the five themes that are reflections that adoptive parents had during their journey, positive and negative feelings and experiences, the major challenges they experienced and the support system they received through the journey.

5.2 *“We still wonder how we went so long childless”*

The families with adopted children have lived through different life experiences and have fruitful insights throughout their journey. From the in depth interviews, the researcher could identify such responses from respondents.

P, the respondent says *“Still we can't think how we lived without her. It's a feeling we don't know how to express. We still wonder how we went so long childless”*. It was the couple's reflection after they adopted the child. *“We were happy even if we didn't have children,”* said the respondent. They were happy before adoption but after having a baby they realised how wonderful that feeling of being a parent is.

“We didn't prepare much but after the child came, we became parents without even knowing what parenthood is. I became a mother without even knowing it . I know when she's worried, I know when she's thirsty, I know when she's in pain, before she feels pain it starts hurting me. I don't know how to explain it to those who have not experienced it.”

They consider parenthood as a blessing. When a child comes to life , one automatically becomes a father or mother. It is not necessary to have a blood relationship with them. *It was only after he came that we had a meaning to our life.”* said respondent J. The arrival of a new member to the family reduced their emptiness and sorrows that troubled them. They started to see life as more meaningful.

The researcher could understand that most of the respondents connect adoption with a spiritual aspect. *“God has blessed us this much. It is more than enough we can ask for.”* says respondent P. *We both loved the baby so much but we didn't know if we would ever have him”. By God's grace we got that baby. We both prayed and prepared to receive the child,”* said the respondent J. *“He came as our little angel to our life. He is our guardian angel.* The respondent R said *“We were given a child when we thought that we could not be parents. I can't ask God for anything more than this.”*

The adoption process has helped to enhance their couple relationship as well as family as whole. *His arrival deepened my relationship with my husband.”* said respondent J. *“ But it improved our relationship,”* said the respondent. R. The couples realised the importance of children in their lives. It improved their couplehood relationship.

“ I got an award for writing the article and it was a great feeling, a feeling that cannot be expressed. We reflect on our life journey since then.” said the respondent P. The respondent used to write articles about adoption. While everyone adopted children secretly, the couple did it publicly. Mothers with adopted children were given maternity leave for the first time after releasing my articles. Everyone has been granted leave since 2010. It is the greatest achievement and recognition one could ask for. The effort of the respondent really helped other adopted mothers too.

“Even today when I think about those incidents, it brings back all good memories” said M the respondent. Most of the couples say their long journey went so easy and quickly.

“We don't know how these 23 years went by so quickly.” said J the respondent.

U the respondent said *“Everybody should be given the opportunity to adopt and every couple should do so. It is a beautiful experience.”*

*“All couples could adopt. It is very good that they are all prepared for this. Being mentally prepared in particular is a huge factor. Bringing a baby into our lives suddenly is not an easy task. It is different from what we have been in for so long. So adopt the child only after preparing ourselves. It was a very good experience. Our lives will change. At the same time, when the child grows up, let them know that it is adapted. Our parents tell our children how much better it is for them to know tomorrow through someone else. It can affect the child psychologically and emotionally. So it is better to raise the child to be informed.”*said respondent R.

“Parenthood is a blessing,” said J the respondent. The childless couples should definitely adopt if they genuinely wish so. *“It helps us to enhance the family relationship especially with your partner. We support each other and bring up the child. It is the best feeling and every couple should feel that. The adopted child is no less than a biological child. We have the same emotions and responsibilities towards these children.”* said J the respondent. The lived experiences help to improve their lives ahead. It also gives hope to those childless couples.

“Doing adoption is never a mistake. This is an option for couples like us. A lot of people will try to discourage it by its name. But don't let that stop you. We are living and they

are not the one's living for us. An outsider can say whatever they want. To them it may be someone's blood baby but to us she is our own till death." said respondent. R

Thus the couples express their viewpoints about adoption. They never felt like their decision was wrong. They are confident in their decisions till date. Their life lessons are the best example for couples who wish to adopt in future. The researcher understood the couples are proud of their decisions. For anyone to survive, family is an important factor in their lives and these couples value the same even if they don't share a blood relationship.

5.3 *“Will everyone isolate her?”*

The adoptive parents have similar worries and concerns as a biological parent. The adoptive parents experience isolation from society and have anxiety and fear about various situations which can affect them and hinder their family functioning. The families sometimes have to go through such negative experiences.

“We had to listen to a lot of people's jabs when they're childless. Both of us went through a lot” said R. *“We were happy even if we didn't have children. But people used to hurt us on purpose of being childless when we attend family functions. We had a hard time facing the questioning of others for not having children”* said P the respondent.

“I am afraid that her biological mother will come back.” said the respondent. Because when the child was little there was a problem that the couples were asked to surrender the baby. *“I fear whether her friends will tell her that she is adopted. If she learns the truth, will everyone isolate her? Once she learns about the adoption from school, it will be too much for her to bear. No matter how much you try to comfort it, it will be a shock inside”* said P.

“Our life was moving along a smooth path. At a certain point of time they faced financial constraints. So my husband became a drunkard. He was drinking day and night and causing trouble at home. It destroyed the peace of our family.” said J. These are some of the situations that adoptive families go through which can affect their peace of mind.

“I fear whether her friends will tell her that she is adopted. If she learns the truth, will everyone isolate her? Once she learns about the adoption from school, it will be too much for her to bear. No matter how much you try to comfort it, it will be a shock inside” said P.

“I’m worried about his future,” said J. The situations at home and his associations are bothering the respondent a lot. Now her son is 23 years old. He studied till 12th and discontinued his education. He is not interested in studies. He shows resistance and anger to everything. *“I used to tell the child that you should study well not to be the first, our goal is to get a job. Now mom and dad have jobs but it doesn't matter. Who will look after you when we die?”* said P. The adoptive parents are worried and stressed about their children.

Expectations can be positive or negative. At a certain point of time it can burden the other person. Adoptive parents also have such expectations from their children. *“Whatever it is, he is my baby. We have faith that he will look after us in the future”* said J. Such statements put a huge burden on the child.

5.4 *“It was like a festival”*

For every parent, the moments or *day* of birth of their children is something to cherish and remember. Likewise for the families with adopted children, the day they saw and received the child is the happiest and the best moments of their life. For them it will be a day to celebrate. The researcher could identify such positive experiences shared by the respondents from their life journey.

“The fact that we were soon to be parents raised a lot of excitement in us. So when everything was done they got hold of him and were very happy that day” said J. To be a parent is one of the most exciting feelings a person could have.

“It was an unforgettable day in our life and also the happiest one. When she was wrapped in a white cloth and handed over to us, the feeling we felt was indescribable. We both had tears in our eyes. When we got her, we kissed and caressed her. That day was a celebration for us. A new person came to our family. So we became a complete family” said the respondent R. *“The first time she called us mommy and daddy is a day I will never forget.”* said the respondent. The above quotes given by the respondent is very evident how happy the couple was.

The couple did the same customs and tradition that they follow while a new baby is born. *“We did the Noolukettu Chadangu for the baby. We had the same happiness and feelings of having our own baby”* said M the respondent. *“The day she was born is the greatest*

gift. We used to celebrate her birthday. We went to orphanages to celebrate her birthday every year.”(Respondent R) These gestures of the couples denote the positive attitude and acceptance towards their adoptive child.

Deciding to adopt a child is not an easy task. It requires great courage and commitment to raise a child. The couples were influenced and inspired by the thoughts and actions of their family members. *“My sister had adopted a child. From her we knew about the adoption process”* (Respondent M). The couple was inspired to adopt through his sister. The respondent always asked about his sister's experience of rearing a child.

Curiosity is the trait common among children. But the researcher could see here, the curiosity that these couples had to have their baby. Counselling sessions are an inseparable part of the adoption process. It provides basic understanding to the couples who wish to adopt. It can create a kind of excitement in couples as well they become curious to know and experience their parenthood. *“They had attended the counselling sessions. It gave them curiosity and interest in continuing with their decision”*(Respondent R). *“The counselling sessions increased our curiosity”*(Respondent J). They really wanted to have a baby as soon as possible. It boosted their confidence.

Most childless couples have to face the questioning of their family and society for not having a baby. It may pressurise and increase the stress of the couples. Most of them try to escape from such questioning. Therefore, it is important for such couples to find a way to relax. *“That meeting really helped us. We totally accepted and prepared mentally for adopting a child and it gave us a lot of relaxation”* (Respondent U). The couple was in

distress for not having a baby. So they were introduced to the adoption process by a psychology doctor who was familiar with the doctor they were treating. Through him they got an opportunity to attend a meeting of parents of adopted children. That helped the couple to deal with tensions.

In interviews, some couples have stated the same points which struck the researcher. The couples said the feelings are indescribable, one should experience it to know how valuable and precious it is. *I don't know how to explain it to those who have not experienced it*" (Respondent P).

"Before seeing the child, we had an image about what our child should look like. The child looked exactly the same according to our wishes. We liked the baby (Respondent P) We have faith that he will look after us in the future." (Respondent J). These statements indicate the positive expectations that the couple have about their child.

5.5 “Like a story, we used to narrate everything to her”

Parenting is a challenging task. No couples are professionals of their own. They learn and grow through experiences and thus become “good parents”. A couple has to go through different stages of life after marriage. Each stage has different developmental tasks. So the developmental tasks of couples who have done adoption may differ from normal couples. The researcher has identified different types of challenges faced by the couples during their adopting journey.

Just as any couple prepares for their first baby, adoptive couples do prepare for their first baby. The preparations done by couples differ from one another. Some couples made sure that all materialistic needs are available for the child whereas others prepared themselves mentally and through counselling. *“The preparation we did was to find and provide the necessary things to take care of their child when she comes”* (Respondent M). *“We got counselling right before the adoption”*. The counsellor mentioned everything. What we should be like when a new family member joins home. No one can predict the character of an adopted child. Children may show some kind of problems of their biological parents. *“That meeting really helped us. We totally accepted and prepared mentally for adopting a child and it gave us a lot of relaxation”* said the respondent U. They used to attend the meetings organised for adoptive families. The respondent U said *“ We got the opportunity to prepare ourselves but many of the other couples with us didn't”*. *We did a*

lot of preparations before receiving the child. Especially mentally. And we tried to provide all the necessary things for the baby on time” (Respondent R).

Families with adoptive children are comparatively more worried and concerned than other families about the future of their child. The couples worry about the situation of their children without them. Whether the children will be accepted by the other family members and relatives and community. So the couples want their children to be self-reliant. Education is one among their priorities. *“Getting her married is not our priority, let her study and reach a higher level” (Respondent P). “My wish is to teach him and bring him to the high levels” (Respondent J). “All I can give her is education” said (Respondent U).*

A society free from stereotypical thoughts and attitudes never exists. Everything you do will be scrutinised with bias. An adoptive family has to face the judgemental attitude of others in certain points of life. It depends on how each couple responds to such criticisms and judgements.

“The respondent’s wife’s family was less supportive and not interested in adopting a child. They had the stigmatised thought that prevailed in the society about adoption. But the couple had already decided to do adoption” (Respondent M).

“We were happy even if we didn't have children. But people used to hurt us on purpose of being childless when we attend family functions. We had a hard time facing the questioning of others for not having children” said P the respondent. People at times show care and concern through unwanted questioning. They fail to understand or realise that it hurts others. This is a common pattern practised in our society. “ To those who

look from the outside, it may seem like raising someone's child, but for all mothers and fathers like us, the child is nothing else but our life itself” said the P respondent. *“We had to face many objections. The biggest problem before us was how to get everyone to agree”* said J. *“We didn't know how the rest of the family would react to adopting a child. When people come from the agency, others ask what happened. We didn't know what to answer them”* said J.

In order to avoid people's questioning couple tend to keep adoption a secret. They fear how to handle such situations. In respondent M's workplace, many people had done adoption and none of them wanted to reveal that to anybody. *They kept it a secret.* It was because they were scared of how society would react and isolate them. *“But I informed everyone about the adoption. I adopted my child by informing all the colleagues in my office. I told all my friends and relatives at that time of adoption. It should not be something that should be kept secret. Every person who does adoption should feel proud.*

The child rearing experience of adoptive parents are different from another. The couple seems to be extremely concerned in raising their child. The families with adoptive children face more challenges during the adolescent age of the child. *“The child rearing experience is tough in the initial stage”* because U the respondent found it difficult to feed the baby but managed it.

Adolescent stage of a child is said to be the most vibrant stage and the children in this age group are normally curious about everything. During the adolescent age the child

undergoes bodily, hormonal and various other changes. The parents find it difficult to handle the child during that stage, especially an adoptive parent. *“As he became a teenager, his engagements with friends increased. He started lagging behind when compared to other students in class and was bad at studies. The teacher used to call me from the school because of his poor performance.”* said J the respondent.

The couple faced difficulty handling the child during her teenage years. As a normal teenager, the child had a lot of behavioural problems. It was when the couple felt it was not easy to handle the child. *“It was the biggest challenge”*, said M. The couple says it to be a problem of the child’s biological parents’ genes. Her tantrums were uncontrollable at times. Every child undergoes hormonal changes during adolescent age, likewise the child also went through the process. Slowly, everything was in control.

The respondent quoted that *“The genetic variation in the child is the reason behind the tantrums. The child shows issues of their biological parents. 90% of adopted children have these problems. Thus the adoptive parents have the responsibility to control all these behaviours”* said M. After entering her teenage years, the child became somewhat silent. She started to feel embarrassed. Hormonal change would make the difference. She will do her own thing. She is a very sweet child, said R..

Children learn from parents. The parents can play an important role in the children's life. They are the role models for their children. *“We had a feeling that we should be good parents whenever we were preparing for this,”* said the respondent. Children learn by

watching their parents. Therefore, even before the child came, *“we had a thought that the child should always be a good role model,”* said R.

Adoption process is said to be time consuming and stringent. It includes registration, home studies, counselling sessions, medical check ups, court orders, follow ups, paperworks and so on. Thus it is a lengthy process. It is mandatory for couples to follow and fulfil the criteria prescribed. For some couples it took less time to complete the procedures but for some it was time consuming.

“There was a lot of paperwork related to the adoption. Adopting a child is not an easy task. There are a lot of procedures from registering for adoption to getting the baby in hand. We had to run a lot for that, that has been the biggest challenge throughout the entire process, said J. “The child was received after two or three years after we registered for adoption and nobody came for home study till then” said P.

There were a lot of procedures after seeing the child. The baby was taken for a check-up and an order was obtained from the court. That one process has its own procedure objects. Following all that, we got the baby, said R.

Revealing the child that they are adopted is a biggest challenge for adoptive parents. The child has a right to be informed of their adoption. They should be told from a very young age if they are adopted. Early disclosure helps both the parent and child. It may or may not affect the parent-child relationship. It depends on how the child responds to the fact.

It is better to have an open communication and discussion with the adopted child by the parents.

“The biggest challenge is telling the child that she is adopted. I don't want to say that she was born through surrogacy. Maybe I'm selfish but I don't like to even think about having a mother like that. I can't believe it and I don't want to believe it. I like to say that she is ours.” said P. The couple is afraid to tell their daughter that she is adopted. The child is being told that she is born through surrogacy. They are scared to reveal the truth to the child.

“The child knows she is adopted. From three years of age, we used to take her to the place from where she was adopted. Like a story, we used to narrate everything to her.” said M. Revealing the fact that she was adopted was not a challenge to the couple. It is better to say to the child that they are adopted at a very young age. Because at times it can become a stressful situation. So they highly recommend every parent who did adoption to reveal the fact at the earliest said M. *“He knows he is adopted”*. He has been brought up by us informing him. But that's an awfully big challenge. We told him that he was adopted because we felt it was better than someone else telling him tomorrow, said J. *“We told her openly that she is an adopted child. My partner and I had prepared a lot before telling her this. We didn't know how to present it to her. But anyway she should know it once so we told her in that situation”* said R.

Economic stability is a factor to be considered for families with adoptive children. In the home study report it is a criterion which the agency looks for. It is the sole responsibility

of the agency to ensure a safe and secure environment to the adoptive children. Thus a family needs to be economically stable to provide for the child. Most of the respondents are having a sound stability. Her family consists of her husband and a child. *“Both of them are government employees”*(Respondent P). *M is a government employee and wife is a homemaker. U’s husband is a business man and she is a homemaker. R worked in the military and she is a homemaker.*

The composite age of the couple is the most important criterion. It is on the basis of which the couples who wish to adopt are granted children. As far as the composite age of a couple matters, the difference in age between them and the child is considerably high. The problems related to the age gap between the parent and child may arise in the family as an effect. M said *“The child was handed over to us on May 28 when she was three months old. At that time my age was 40 and my husband was 44.”*

“At that time of adoption me and my husband were 38 years and 40 years old respectively.”

The researcher has identified a variety of challenges that families with adoptive children confront.

5.6 “It gave us more courage”

Adoptive care families are more stable when their families are supportive. It improves families' ability to satisfy the wide variety of needs of their children and assure that children have access to the resources they require. A positive environmental support increases the confidence of adoptive parents. The researcher understood the importance of a conducive environment for adoptive families.

“We did not experience any kind of discrimination from the family”(Said P). The couple got to know about adoption from the respondents mother and sisters. *“There is support from everyone at home. The child belongs to everyone and is the youngest in the family”* said U.

“My sister had adopted a child. From her we knew about the adoption process” said M. The couple was inspired to adopt through his sister. The respondent always asked about his sister's experience of rearing a child. The respondent's sister was highly supportive in the couple's decision. There were no issues with his family in adopting a child. The family members were extremely happy to have a new member to the family. Now both the families of the couple are satisfied and happy with the child, said M.

Everyone in the family was excited and extremely happy when they went to receive the child. *“We went in two cars with a lot of people to receive her and my brother and sister in law gifted her with a gold chain”* said the respondent” said U. Both of them received positive support from their parents. *“It gave us more courage,”* said R.

Friends also play an important role in supporting the adopting families. *“We came to know about adoption from a friend of ours,”* said J.

Extended post adoption support from agencies helps the families to enhance their family functioning. The couples have received such services which helped them in difficult times. There was an organisation named X to support adoptive parents and children. There were meetings organised for families with adoptive children. In those meetings the children interact with one another and there will be a feeling that *“I am not the only one and many children have been adopted like me. So then they will have less sorrow about the fact of being adopted”* said P. So they used to take her to such meetings.

She is an average student in school. But get along well with others. We visit the organisation to join the adopted family groups. There will be a lot of programs and things going on. From the organisation the family used to go on tour with the families who did adoption. Then the child will always dance. Everyone loves it. said R.

M is a board member of one such organisation named X. Basically it is to support families with adoptive children. They conduct meetings and organise programmes for the families. Now the meetings are not conducted. After the covid pandemic it is not that active. Otherwise every two months there was a meeting for the children and parents.

A conducive environment is a contributing factor to enhance the functioning of such families. The positivity and confidence that gives is not measurable. Billimoria (1984) in her study observed that the adoptive parents experienced a positive attitude towards

adoption in their immediate environment (family and friends), but a loss of positive environment in their community.

Conclusion

In this thematic analysis chapter, the researcher analysed and interpreted positive and challenging experiences of families throughout their journey. Major themes identified are reflections that adoptive parents had during their journey, positive and negative feelings and experiences, the major challenges they experienced and the support system they received through the journey. Through this analysis, the researcher understands that all the themes are interconnected with each other. There are so many negative influencing factors that are faced by the respondents and they are overcoming that negativity through the support systems and positive contributing factors.

The first theme describes that the families with adopted children have lived through different life experiences and have fruitful insights throughout their journey. The positive contributing factors for higher education. The second theme states the adoptive parents have similar worries and concerns as a biological parent. The adoptive parents experience isolation from society and have anxiety and fear about various situations which can affect them and hinder their family functioning. The families sometimes have to go through such negative experiences. The third theme describes that for every parent, the moments or *day* of birth of their children is something to cherish and remember. Likewise for the families with adopted children, the day they saw and received the child is the happiest and the best moments of their life. For them it will be a day to celebrate. The researcher could identify such positive experiences shared by the respondents from their life journey. The fourth theme talks about parenting as a challenging task. No couples are

professionals of their own. They learn and grow through experiences and thus become “good parents”. A couple has to go through different stages of life after marriage. Each stage has different developmental tasks. So the developmental tasks of couples who have done adoption may differ from normal couples. The researcher has identified different types of challenges faced by the couples during their adopting journey. The last theme discusses the importance of a conducive environment for adoptive families.

CHAPTER VI
SUGGESTIONS
AND
CONCLUSION

Suggestions

The following suggestions are contributed by the researcher as well as from the lived experiences of families with adoptive children. These suggestions are the ideas to overcome the challenges faced by adoptive parents.

- The number of children in institutional care is increasing. Therefore the search for adoptive parents must be done more quickly. The Child Welfare Committees (CWC), which are the responsible authority for adoption placements, can be extremely helpful if they are active and available in all of the districts. Thus, promote adoption in the state.
- Pre-parenting and post parenting, family planning training programmes should be ensured to both adoptive parents and adoptive children. Such programmes will be effective and sufficient in equipping the adoptive parents with the skills and information they need to successfully raise the children.
- It is also suggested that awareness building campaigns regarding the adoption as a best option for couples can be promoted in the state. Such promotions and campaigns help to raise proper awareness to society, in-order to promote adoption and to avoid the stigma towards it.
- As far as the composite age of a couple matters, the difference in age between the adoptive parents and the child is considerably high in certain cases. It can lead to problems related to the age gap between the parent and child. It would be better to bring a policy level change in such criteria.

- Revealing the child that they are adopted is a biggest challenge for adoptive parents. The child has a right to be informed of their adoption. Early disclosure about the fact helps both the parent and child to enhance their relationship. It is better to have an open communication and discussion with the adopted child by the parents.

Implication for Professional Social Work Practice

"Social work is defined by the International Federation of Social Workers, as a practice based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people". Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance well-being. In order to promote individual independence and well-being with the ultimate goal of societal welfare, social work is a profession in which a professional social worker with scientific knowledge and expertise engages with diverse individuals, families, groups, communities, etc., addresses various life problems, and helps people to deal with their problems. There are many different functional areas where a social worker might put his or her knowledge and abilities to use as society serves as the social worker's "practical labs." Women are a crucial target group for interventions in these areas since they are among the most disadvantaged members of society.

More than 3,50,000 children are sheltered in more than 9,500 CCIs in India, which is estimated to have the third-highest number of children living in institutions or residential care worldwide. India has an estimated 35 million children who require care and protection. A warm, loving, and nurturing atmosphere is essential for children's holistic development, which will mould them into better people. Adoption can be a most beautiful solution not only for childless couples and single people but also for homeless children. It enables a parent-child relationship to be established between persons not

biologically related. It is defined as a process by which people take a child not born to them and raise it as a member of their family.

Adoption is an important area in social work where a social worker can make a difference. A social worker could work in many different capacities. Both the adoptive family and the adopted child should get assistance from an adoption social worker during the adoption process. These licensed social workers provide assistance to children whose biological parents are financially unable to support them and are legally separated from them. They can collaborate with governmental entities and/or adoption organisations to find adoptive homes for orphaned children. Adoption-savvy social workers can decide to handle both domestic and international adoptions or they can focus on just one.

Adoption-focused social workers must be competent at connecting children with the ideal adoptive home. Research on the child's past as well as the family and history of the adoptive family is often important for this process. Social workers may also need to negotiate with and offer advice to the child's biological family in order to determine and meet the child's needs in these instances.

Social workers who specialise in adoption frequently find themselves working on research and policy development issues related to advocating for orphaned children in addition to acting as a bridge between the kid and family. They frequently collaborate with the adopted child's teachers to ensure that they are succeeding academically and receiving any necessary special assistance.

Since most research on adoption takes place in western societies, this study subject is still relevant in the modern era. Consequently, in this context will help create fresh

understanding about the issue. This would make it easier to evaluate the success of the current policy and how it is being implemented in our state. In the event of any flaws, it will be essential to ascertain what corrective steps can be made and to what extent, depending on the circumstance. We can adjust family- and policy-level interventions as necessary based on that.

The above suggestions can be operationalized through Social Work methods and practices.

Program Level Interventions

Pre-parenting and post parenting, family planning training programmes should be ensured to both adoptive parents and adoptive children. Such programmes will be effective and sufficient in equipping the adoptive parents with the skills and information they need to successfully raise the children. Couples registered for adoption should be given at least one pre- parenting training before getting the child. Parenting training programs should be conducted for adopted families and their children every six months after adoption. This helps to enhance their family dynamics and relationship. Family life cycle concept should be introduced to the families with adoptive children. Every family goes through different family developmental stages and tasks. Hence, providing family life education is necessary.

Social Group Work Practice

Apart from this, social group work as a mezzo method of direct social work practice can be done among the adoptive families. The formation of groups including members having

similar life experiences will work as a secondary social group and support system for the families. This will provide a platform for the families for ventilation of their feelings, to instil hope, to solve parenting challenges through interacting and communicating with others, will develop a sense of belonging, to have recreation, support and guidance etc. Therefore, social group work can be practised among the women.

Policy formulation and Practice

Generation gap between the adoptive parents and children is considerably high. In general, parents and their children do not view things from the perspectives of one another. Thus, miscommunication is a major factor in the emergence of the generational divide. They discuss topics including homework, sibling disputes, boundaries, and trust that can lead to conflict between teenagers and their parents. While they are aware that parents are mostly merely worried about their safety, some teenagers believe their parents should trust them more and give them more freedom. The composite age of couples are considered as an important criteria for adoption which can lead to generation gap issues. Therefore the social workers can intervene to bring a policy level change.

Scope for Further Research

This research study is only limited to a small sample of host families. Future research can bring insight about adoption care. A sample that is more representative of the entire host parent population will also contribute to a broader view of the host parents' experiences and therefore inform better decision-making with regard to the hosting programme. Adoption-based research should be conducted in order to increase understanding of the subject.

Conclusion

This research study focuses on the lived experiences of families with adopted children in Kerala. The idea of the study was generated from the academic learning of the researcher. After further readings the researcher could find the relevance of this research topic in the current scenario is that most of the studies related to adoption are in western context. Thus this particular study will support in generating new knowledge on the topic. It will help to analyse the effectiveness of the existing policy and its implementation in our state. It will help to identify the remedial measures that can be adopted in case of any drawback and at what level according to the need. Thereby we can bring changes to family and policy level intervention accordingly. As a part of this process, the researcher approached the Child Welfare Committee to get the permission to collect data from the respondents. The researcher could not get the data due to confidentiality. The respondents were identified with the personal contacts of different people. Through this research, the researcher understood the lived experiences of families of adopted children and examined the best practices that have been adopted by these parents that enhanced their family functioning. The researcher conducted five in depth interviews. It included families from three different districts of Kerala. The researcher got the opportunity to visit families in trivandrum. It helped the researcher to experience their feelings when they speak about the adoption process. The researcher analysed and interpreted positive and challenging experiences of families throughout their journey. Major themes identified are reflections that adoptive parents had during their journey, positive and negative feelings and experiences, the major challenges they experienced and the support system they received through the journey.