

Factors that Motivate African Women in South Africa to Depart from Kinship Care to Legal Adoption of Non-Kin Children

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Abstract

For hundreds of adoptable African babies in South Africa, their right to be permanently raised in a loving family environment is not being realised because there are an inadequate number of adopters. To help deal with this child welfare challenge, a study was conducted in South Africa to investigate what factors affect the decision-making processes of Africans regarding the legal adoption of non-kin children, because only a small number choose the legal adoption trajectory to parenthood. To acquire this knowledge, the grounded theory research method of Corbin and Strauss was implemented. Data were gathered by personally interviewing five different cohorts of African participants; most being women. It was found that African women usually decide to legally adopt non-kin children because their desire to mother permanently is not realised when engaging in kinship care. The four main reasons they turn to legal adoption of non-kin children are: (1) legal adoption offers security because it is a permanent childcare arrangement; (2) legal adoption provides a sense of “ownership” because the adopter acquires full parental rights and responsibilities for raising the adopted child; (3) once accepting infertility, legal adoption can ease the psycho-emotional pain of infertility; and (4) the desire to nurture an infant can be realised through legal adoption. Recommendations for practice and future research regarding this phenomenon are discussed.

Keywords: grounded theory, motherhood, legal adoption, non-kin children, infertility, kinship care

Introduction

Annually, hundreds of young children (mostly infants) become available in South Africa for legal adoption by non-kin adults (i.e. adults who are not related to the children). From the researcher's work experience, adoptable young children are

usually babies who have been abandoned and whose parents, guardians or relatives cannot be traced (see also Blackie 2014; South Africa 2005, s. 230). Other babies made available for non-kin adoption are children whose parents have voluntarily consented for them to be adopted (South Africa 2005, s. 233).

In principle, adoption is preferable to non-kin foster care or residential care for children in need of permanent alternative care (Doubell 2014; Mokomane and Rochat 2010; Sloth-Nielsen, Mezmur, and Van Heerden 2010). This is because adoption endorses the goals of permanency planning by attaching a child to secure and caring family relationships on a permanent basis.

“Kinship care” refers to the informal or private arrangement of care offered to children within their extended families (Fortune 2016, 28). This form of childcare (also referred to as informal adoption or informal foster care) is considered the most prevalent traditional form of out-of-home care globally for children and is practiced in most African countries (Assim 2013; Foster and Williamson 2000). Although kin adoption has been advocated in South Africa because of the huge number of orphaned children as a result of the Aids epidemic, members of the extended family who become primary caregivers of orphaned children have shown reluctance to legally adopt kin children, because by doing so they are not entitled to a foster care grant. It is also deemed not culturally appropriate to legally adopt kin children (Gerrand and Ross 2009; Mokomane and Rochat 2010).

Problem Statement and Rationale for Research

Unfortunately, because the legal adoption of non-kin children is not popular practice in South Africa, many adoptable children are denied the opportunity of being raised in a loving family environment meant to last a lifetime (Blackie 2014; Jackson 2018; Voster 2018).

To help solve this pressing child welfare problem, the researcher focused her study on the African population for the following two main reasons: Firstly, virtually all babies and young children who become available for non-kin adoption in South Africa are of African descent. Although transracial adoption is encouraged in South Africa, the Register on Adoptable Children and Prospective Adoptive Parents (RACAP) (Blackie 2014) indicates that adoption applicants prefer same-race adoption. This preference is not unique to South Africa; studies in Europe and the USA have established that prospective adopters prefer to create families that bear a resemblance to those formed biologically, which usually means of the same race (Sweeney 2020). Same-race adoption is also supported by research studies, which have revealed that same-race adoption serves to promote healthy identity development and facilitate psychological adjustment of the adoptee (Bergquist and Kim 2018; McGinnis et al. 2009).

Furthermore, studies have identified difficulties faced by transracial adoptees; specifically, complex ethnic identity, perceived discrimination, and adoptive parents who underestimate their adoptive children's connections to their cultural origins (Docan-Morgan 2010; Ferrari et al. 2015; Godon-Decoteau and Ramsey 2018).

Secondly, statistics obtained from the National Register of Adoption in 2016 (Gerrand 2017) indicate that the number of African adoptions has been declining significantly on an annual basis. For example, in 2009 the number of African adoptions was 898, but in 2016, the number had decreased to 207. In February 2018, the number of African adoptive participants on RACAP was just 62 (Voster 2018). Unfortunately, there is limited research evidence explaining the reasons for this small number of African adoption applicants and their annual decline in numbers.

The fundamental aim of the study was thus to develop a grounded theory that explains factors affecting the decision-making processes of Africans regarding the legal adoption of non-kin children. In other words, the main research question underlying the study was: What factors affect the decision-making processes of Africans regarding the legal adoption of non-kin children? The grounded theory developed is intended to contribute to knowledge development regarding this under-researched phenomenon in the South African context.

Research Methodology

The grounded theory methodology – specifically the version of Corbin and Strauss (2015), which has a constructivist slant (Mills, Bonner, and Francis 2006) – was selected for conducting this research. The researcher selected the Corbin and Strauss (2015) approach to grounded theory because their constructivist research paradigm is congruent with her philosophical assumptions from both a relativist ontological and an epistemological perspective. The constructivist research paradigm is theorised as having relativist ontology with a subjectivist epistemology (Denzin and Lincoln 2011).

Creswell (2012) explained that theory development in grounded theory methodology involves generation of a theory that is “grounded” in data from participants who have experienced the phenomenon being explored. It is appropriate when little is known about the phenomenon.

Typical of a grounded theory research, a comprehensive literature review was not conducted before data gathering and analysis. This is because a rigorous literature review focusing on the research topic is deemed a constraining exercise because researchers are expected to “... minimize preconceptions to ensure the concept of interest is grounded in data” (El Hussein, Kennedy, and Oliver 2017, 198).

The researcher used non-probability, purposive sampling to select the adoptive and social work participants. Adoptive participants were recruited through adoption social workers employed in various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Gauteng that specialise in the field of non-kin, legal adoption. The social work participants were employees at these organisations. Convenience sampling was used to select citizen participants. The researcher personally approached adult citizens on a university campus. If they had some knowledge of legal adoption and were willing to participate in the research after being informed about the study purpose and procedures, they were selected to participate.

In order to ensure anonymity of research participants, codes are placed in square brackets to refer to participants in specific cohorts. The five cohorts consisted of the following participants: (1) adults who had adopted non-kin children [A = adopters]; (2) adoption applicants in the screening process [IS = in screening]; (3) potential adopters who did not enter the adoption screening process after being oriented regarding adoption screening procedures [NE = not entering]; (4) social workers specialising in the field of adoption [SW = social worker]; and (5) citizens with some knowledge of legal adoption [C = citizens]. In this study, the term “adoptive participants” referred to the first three cohorts of participants.

It is important to note that although gender and education levels were not used as selection criteria when recruiting research participants, 35 of the 39 participants were women. More specifically, three of the adoptive participants had completed grade 12, seven had obtained diplomas, two an undergraduate degree and seven a postgraduate degree. Because the sample accidentally comprised predominantly women, the researcher decided to include only the female participants’ narratives in this paper.

Data were gathered by personally interviewing the research participants. The research tools, namely different semi-structured interview guides for each of the five cohorts of participants, were created and used to steer the conversation towards the topic. For example, data collection questions put to adopters and prospective adopters (i.e. participants still in the process of being screened) focused on what factors motivated them to apply to adopt a child not related to them by blood ties and their experiences of the adoption screening process. Participants not entering the screening process were asked questions that centred on reasons why they had decided not to enter the screening process. Gathering data from social work participants involved investigating their perceptions of factors that affect the decision-making processes of Africans regarding legal adoption, based on their personal work experience in the field of adoption. Research questions presented to citizen participants explored how they came to know about the practice of legal adoption and their perceptions of the legal adoption of non-kin children. Data gathering and analysis took place until data saturation was reached.

Figure 1 summarises the Corbin and Strauss (2015) data analysis process followed by the researcher when gathering and analysing data concurrently.

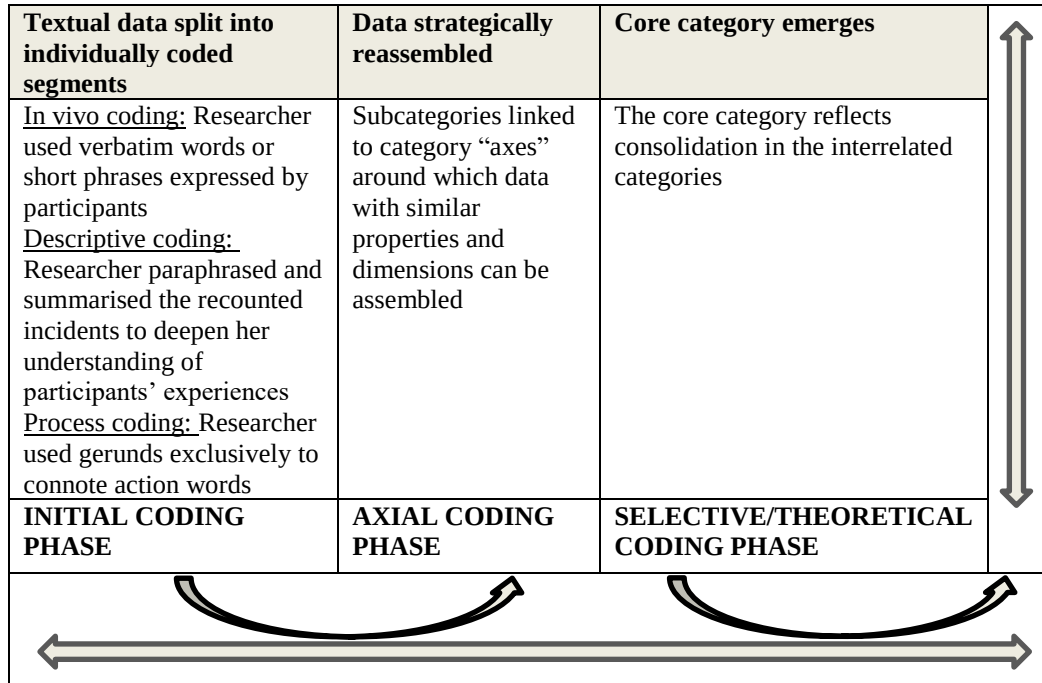


Figure 1: Overview of the Corbin and Strauss model of data analysis (2015)

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

All qualitative research, including the grounded theory, has its limitations (Marshall and Rossman 2011). The main limitations in this study follow. A grounded theory is considered “transferable” rather than “generalisable”, as is the case with formal theories. The theory is transferable because elements of the context in which the study was conducted can be transferred to contexts of action with similar characteristics under study. Consequently, the findings in this study will only be transferrable to various urban areas in South Africa where African women are legally adopting non-kin children through NGOs accredited to manage adoption cases and have similar demographic profiles to the participants in the study.

The means of data gathering and the analysis implemented in the study also had shortcomings. For instance, in this study the researcher did not interview the participants of a specific cohort until saturation was reached and then proceed to interview the next cohort of participants. Rather, the participants were interviewed when they were available. By focusing on each cohort of participants separately, the researcher might have been able to identify specific characteristics and trends in the

decision-making processes of each cohort, and then compared findings emerging in each cohort with one another.

However, the trustworthiness of the study was enhanced by the following features. The researcher spent a prolonged period in the field gathering in-depth data – approximately three years. The researcher is also familiar with the specialised field of adoption, based on her lengthy work experience as social work supervisor responsible for overseeing social workers managing cases of child abandonment at a large child welfare agency in South Africa. Personal reflectivity came into play throughout the investigation. There was also triangulation of data sources, because five different cohorts of participants participated. Constant comparison was conducted throughout data gathering and analysis to compare and explain emerging ideas. This process continued until saturation was reached.

Ethical Considerations

In order to adhere to a code of ethics, the study did not commence until the researcher received ethical clearance for the study by the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Non-Medical). To facilitate the participants' rights to autonomy and self-determination, the researcher provided all potential participants with information about the purpose and procedures of the study and they were then invited to participate. To avoid claims regarding the use of coercion or undue influence, the researcher provided no incentives for participation in the study. If they willingly agreed to participate in the study, the participants were required to sign a letter of consent for being interviewed and for the interviews to be audio taped. Participant codes were used in the final report to ensure anonymity of the participants. Raw data, which the researcher kept on Microsoft OneDrive, could only be opened with a secret password. The avoidance of possible emotional harm and the ethic of non-maleficence were also respected. Although the study did not involve physical risk, some questions put to adoptive participants were sensitive and did arouse feelings of psycho-emotional hurt. The researcher dealt with this issue by using effective communication skills, such as showing empathy and providing guidelines to resolve concerns.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The core category or grounded theory that emerged in the study was tensions surrounding adoption policy and practice and perceptions and experiences of adoption. However, the findings in this article are based on initial and axial coding phases of a grounded theory data analysis that lead to some significant subcategories of this grounded theory. Four subcategories emerged regarding factors that affect woman participants' decision to legally adopt young, non-kin children. The findings indicated that the participants' perceptions and experiences of non-kin adoption enabled them to deal with or consider dealing with tensions surrounding adoption policy and practice.

These four subcategories were: (1) legal adoption offers security because it is a permanent childcare arrangement; (2) legal adoption provides a sense of “ownership” because the adopter acquires full parental rights and responsibilities for raising the adopted child; (3) once accepting infertility, legal adoption can ease the psycho-emotional pain of infertility; and (4) the desire to nurture an infant can be realised through legal adoption.

Subcategory 1: Legal adoption offers security because it is a permanent childcare arrangement

Most adoptive participants had already experienced taking on the role of primary caregiver of a kin child before approaching an accredited adoption NGO. They stressed that this traditional African kinship care exposes one to separation and loss because kinship care is not a permanent childcare arrangement.

For example, one adopter pointed out that a relative had asked her to take care of her child. She had willingly agreed to do so, because she was involuntarily childless and longed to mother a child. When caring for her niece, she had developed a close bond with the child, loving her as if she were her own daughter. She felt that the biological parents of the child did not consider this when they insisted that the child be returned to their care. She did not want to experience this form of loss again:

They [biological parents] would want to take the child back, you know, not realising that she is as she is because of what she has with me. So, you know, I don't want to have to go through that way, where you love a person [a relative's child]. You willingly open your heart to love someone and then it's not easy to close that door again when it's open. So, I didn't want that to happen. (A6)

An adoptive woman in the screening process also shared that she did not want to take care of a relative's child because she did not want to be subjected to further hurt; something inevitable when the biological parents insist that the child be returned to their care. She wanted to legally adopt a child because it would provide her with the assurance that she could love the child “forever”; knowing that the child could not be removed from her care:

... because if you take her child [a relative's child], you know, she can just say, ‘Okay take my child’, I take that child ... You see that the child is growing; the child is everything, but she comes and takes the child back ... she said ‘It's my child. I'm taking my child back’ and you are left with nothing. So that's why we decided for an adoption because she is going to be our child. (IS2)

This point of view was reiterated by other adoptive participants:

I mean they [biological parents of the child] can come and take the child anytime and they can come and say to you, ‘but this is my baby’. You know, and to me I could not

do that [kinship care]. I need this child to be mine forever, to eternity and not having to have someone coming in to say, but that's not your biological mother. (NE5)

It is like losing a child that you have 'mothered' as your own. I did take this child when she was two months. When the child is 10 years, they come with everything, and he knows me, I am his mum. Even now he just calls me 'mum'. (NE4)

Most adoption social work participants also highlighted that generally adoption applicants who approach adoption agencies have beforehand experience of caring for a relative's child. They emphasised that woman adoption applicants do not want to continue to experience motherhood in this way because it lacks permanency and exposes them to emotional loss:

Some of them [adoption applicants] find out that they have been let down by the family. They've tried to raise a child of the relative ... and when the child has grown up, the family has taken the child away from them. Then the people realise all along that we've been used by the family. We've tried to be kind to this family, look after this child; raise this child; educate this child; invest our love in this child, but look it now, we've lost, we've lost. (SW2)

Another social worker stressed this issue by using a Sesotho proverb to aptly describe how adoptive applicants become weary of kinship care. She emphasised that adoption applicants repeatedly ask family members for some assurance that they will be able to parent the child concerned permanently. However, this plea is seldom satisfied. The biological parents of the child also become tired of hearing this plea.

'Mphe, mphe iya laphisa. Motho ogona kesagaye'. It just means that if you keep on asking, you get tired and you also tire other people. So, when people finally come for adoption, they realise the protection the law offers them upon adoption. Legally the child is now theirs, and the law says the child is yours as if it was born from you... (SW4)

The findings thus clearly indicate that most adoptive participants who had practiced kinship care had experienced emotional hurt when separated by the parents from the kin child they had grown to love. There is much research recording the negative emotional and psychological effects on children when separation between parent and child (for many different reasons) takes place (Humphreys 2019; Lamb and Kelly 2009; Miller et al. 2018; Waddoups, Yoshikawa, and Strouf 2019). However, even though conducting a rigorous literature review, the researcher could not locate first-hand documentation published internationally or domestically, of how kinship caregivers in the African context experience this separation. The thrust of research focus is on how children in kinship care experience this separation (Farmer and Kiraly 2020).

Subcategory 2: Legal adoption provides a sense of “ownership” because the adopter acquires full parental rights and responsibilities for raising the adopted child

Assuming full parental rights and responsibilities of a child not born to them, was another motivation for most adoptive participants when considering taking the legal adoption trajectory. For example, one single adopter affirmed this desire for legal “ownership”. She indicated that if a child has the same surname as his/her parent, this is a form of proof that the child concerned is their child and cannot be removed from their care:

I wanted her to be mine ... I wanted her to take my surname and to be completely mine. (A4)

An adoption social worker reiterated this point:

Also, the fact that they change the names and surnames of the child to stipulate that the child is theirs is very important. That sense of ownership gives them assurance and peace that this is their child. (SW4)

It also became apparent that most of the adoptive participants felt that when rendering kinship care, their capacity to parent effectively was frequently challenged by the biological parents of the child or other family members. The frequent criticism directed at them was perceived as an ongoing reminder that the child they were parenting was not their own child. For example, one adopter, who was parenting her sister’s child at the time the researcher conducted an interview with her, expressed her frustration about the childcare arrangement because unless a child is orphaned, there will always be interference when raising the child:

She is such a sweet child, but you know the mother is constantly interfering ... Even one winter she [the child’s biological mother] asked, ‘It’s winter, does she have shoes? Does she have warm clothes?’ ... she knows the school fees [are being paid], the child eats, every day. (A3)

Many of the citizen participants had personally observed or engaged in the practice of kinship care. They highlighted how difficult it becomes to raise a relative’s child since the relatives tend to find fault with one’s parenting skills. More importantly, they also tend to sway the child’s mindset against the relative caring for the child, by reminding the child that they are not the biological parents of the child:

When you are staying with somebody else’s child you try to correct the wrongs and the right. If the biological parent came, they would play around those points and say, ‘Can’t you see you are not like this? This is not your real parent.’ Then they play with the child’s mind. (C4)

Similarly, a citizen participant explained that the traditional African principle of ubuntu endorses kinship care; that taking care of other community members' children is a way of life in the African community. However, she held the opinion that for involuntarily childless people, there has been a shift away from practicing kinship care because the primary caregiver frequently tends to be undermined, denying their wish to fulfil their parenting responsibilities independently:

I think it's safer to adopt a child that's not related to you 'cause then there's no family issues in terms of the family members are telling you how to grow the child ... the members have this to say about the child. (C7)

Another citizen echoed this point:

People wanting to avoid family's involvement in the raising of the child and have the time, go the route of formal adoption ... I think because there has been a shift in terms of how things used to be in the past. There have been a lot of boundaries created ... the actual ubuntu where you could raise someone else's child ... Even these days you can see you can't actually discipline anybody's child because they then ask: 'Who are you? You are interfering.' (C2)

The findings thus indicate that acquiring full parental rights and responsibilities for the raising of the child was a primary motivator for most adoptive participants to explore adoption. They longed to enjoy exclusive rights concerning parenting the child. Studies regarding taking on parental rights and responsibilities have mainly been the focus of divorce matters, where the issue of post-divorce child custody is highlighted (Gong and Carano 2019; Lin and Wang 2019).

It is understandable why the legal implications of adoption regarding childcare encourage African women to explore adoption. In many contemporary societies, including South Africa, the rights of parents typically protect them from interference in decisions about how the child lives, including what school they attend, where they live, and their involvement in religious practices (Moyo 2014). It is interesting to note that a recent study conducted in Northern Ghana supports this researcher's findings. Nachinab, Donko, and Naab (2018, 1767) also drew attention to the fact that some adults consider adoption because they want "... some freedom from being harassed or wrongly accused by the biological parents."

Subcategory 3: Once accepting infertility, legal adoption can ease the psycho-emotional pain of infertility

All the adoptive participants in the study were involuntarily childless. Some single participants were involuntary childless, because they were not involved in an intimate relationship but wanted to mother a child. However, for many adoptive participants, involuntary childlessness was related to infertility. They had experienced infertility as a deep psychological and emotional pain and as a form of loss; the loss of expectations around womanhood, of life possibilities, and of fulfilling their need to

nurture a child. Only once coming to terms with infertility, was adoption of a non-kin child considered a means of experiencing motherhood.

A single adopter explained that when she finally reached the point of acceptance, she could consider other options of fulfilling her need to mother a child. She also emphasised that the pain of infertility never goes away:

I had to go through the process of acceptance and forgiving myself, and saying, ‘You know what, there’s another way of doing it.’ But I had to go through that process of acceptance and move on. I just came to a point of saying, ‘This is what it is; you cannot change it, so what are you going to do?’ I just accepted it. If it’s not meant to happen, it’s not meant to happen and just move on. It’s not easy. It wasn’t easy. It’s still not easy to live with. (A5)

All adoption social workers verified that many women interested in adopting non-kin children have been exposed to the psychological and emotional pain of infertility, and that it requires a process of grieving to come to terms with the condition. Usually it is only once this process has taken place that they contact an adoption agency to inquire about adopting a child. For example:

They don’t want to give up ... it’s like ... let’s keep on trying ... a miracle can happen ... we’re not infertile. It’s like maybe they hear a story of someone who conceived at a late stage ... maybe that person was just lucky ... they will think ... look at so-and-so, let’s keep on trying ... admitting to yourself that we are unable to have children ... coming to terms with their inability to have children ... until they see ... you know what ... how many years have we been this clinic ... nothing has happened. (SW1)

Infertility is a global problem that affects all racial, ethnic and religious groups (Quinn and Fujimoto 2016). The negative psychological and emotional consequences of infertility among women have received much attention across the globe. The psychological and emotional impact include non-fulfilment of a desire for a child, loneliness, guilt, grief, feelings of worthlessness and loss of gender identity (Ezzell 2016; Hasanpoor-Azghdy, Simbar, and Vedadhir 2014). The findings in this study thus support evidence found throughout the world.

The findings in this study also suggested that infertility carries additional negative consequences, such as stigmatisation, which exacerbates the psycho-emotional pain of infertility. Some social work participants stressed that issue:

You know, outside of us [social work profession], it’s a lot of pressure ... people just look at you like this [facial expression reflecting disapproval]. They think you [women] are useless ... They start talking, you know, ugly words. (SW4)

The problem is that there is a stigma attached to infertility, especially for women. In our black culture, you are thought of as being useless if you cannot bear children. (SW8)

It has been emphasised by other researchers that infertility in the African context carries negative social impacts, such as stigmatisation, loss of continuity and loss of social status (Dyer 2007; Ombelet 2011). In this study, however, only the social work participants emphasised that infertile women are exposed to stigmatisation; the adoptive participants were inclined to emphasise the need to relieve the psychological and emotional pain of infertility.

Subcategory 4: The desire to nurture an infant can be realised through legal adoption

Abandoned children and children voluntarily made available for adoption by their parents are usually infants. During the study it became apparent that the age of adoptable children is another motive for adoptive participants' decision to explore legally adopting a child. Most women adopters pointed out that kinship care usually involves caring for older children. They take on caring for a relative's child because they enjoy better financial circumstances than the child's parents. They thus accept responsibility to meet the child's educational and other basic needs. They emphasised that caring for older children did not meet their own need to nurture and form a close bond with a child. One adopter described how her mother had responded when she said that she intended legally adopting a non-kin child:

'Why don't you take your cousin's children?' The children were orphans, but I said to her no because they are grown up. They were about eleven at the time. I wanted a baby. I wanted someone who I can mould from scratch. We should both start ground zero ... if one might put it like that. And she was like, 'No, because they're struggling, they've been put in a home.' It's really sad, and I am sad for them, but if they had been babies, I might have considered taking these children. (A5)

Another adoptive participant expressed similar feelings:

... that's what I wanted to feel ... seeing a child cry ... changing nappies and definitely know that the child is very, very young ... and it's easy for you to bond at that early, early age ... that was what was on my mind ... I kept on feeling that I want to hold my baby. (NE4)

A married adoptive participant in the screening process reiterated that, as a woman, she longed to "mother" an infant. This need could not be met if caring for her relative's child:

They [an adoption agency] give us from three months ... Three months is fine. It won't work if I take my children, my sister's kids. I even tried my own sister, that, "Why, how come, why don't you give me your smaller boy?" She said, "No ... my

child. No, I can't give you." We want to bond with the child. We want the child to know that when she opens her eyes, she sees us. (IS2)

Worldwide research has identified that various characteristics of adoptable children may influence prospective adopters' willingness to adopt them. For example, many adoption applicants choose not to adopt children with special needs (Burge et al. 2016). Findings in this study support extensive adoption literature, which highlights that adopters prefer adopting younger children (Brind 2008; Rogers 2018).

Whether or not the desire to enter motherhood is a biological urge, has long been debated (Henderson 2018; Rickett 2016). However, the findings in some studies that focus on infertile women who want children highlight that many infertile women described motherhood as a "natural instinct" (Ulrich and Weatherall 2000). Research that explores motivations to adopt points out that infertility is often cited as a key reason parents choose to adopt a child (Malm and Welti 2010; Onayemi 2019).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the study findings, one can conclude that involuntarily childless African women in South Africa (especially infertile women) are departing from practising kinship care because it exposes them to separation and loss. This is because, although they usually establish close bonds with the kin child in their care, the parents of the child can insist that the child be returned to their care at any time. Furthermore, when taking on the role of primary caregiver of kin, one does not acquire full rights and responsibilities. This can lead to interference of the primary caregiver's parenting responsibilities and she can feel undermined in her parental capacity. Kinship care often involves caring for older children, but for involuntary childless women, caring for an infant is perceived as fulfilling their desire to nurture.

Key role players in the field of adoption emphasise that placement of a child in adoption needs to be in the best interests of the adoptable child; not that of the prospective adopters. However, if recruitment of black South African women as prospective adopters is going to be successful, it is important to examine adoption motives. In many respects, these findings suggest that some black South African women who choose to depart from kinship care and legally adopt a child want to satisfy specific needs not being met by kinship care. If these needs are met through adoption, they reinforce the best interests of adoptable children. Adoptable children need a permanent family home environment where their placement will not be disrupted. They also need parents who want to conduct parental roles and responsibilities in a competent manner. Young adoptees certainly need to be nurtured in a caring manner to develop their full potential and this is what women who consider adoption want to do.

The recruitment of prospective adopters from this sector of the population is not simple, because research has indicated that many single, black women in South Africa are prioritising building their careers first; rather than taking on the role of motherhood (Gerrand 2017). However, they can be made aware of the facts that single, working women can adopt, that young children are available for adoption, and that legal adoption involves acquisition of full parental rights and responsibilities on a permanent basis. They also need to hear (via social media and in-person) how many black South African women are finding happiness when following the adoption trajectory.

There is still a wide knowledge gap regarding factors that affect the decision-making processes of black South Africans regarding the legal adoption of non-kin children. Further insight into the phenomenon explored in this study is needed. Broader domestic studies, such as national case studies using mixed methods and a triangulation approach, are a possible way forward. This could assist in establishing trustworthy findings related to this topic. Implementing and evaluating different marketing strategies aimed at tapping into this potential source of adopters are also required.

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