

**Adoptive Parenting  
From Placement to Adoption Order:  
*“Long, Gruelling, Intrusive and in the  
End... Just Another Number on Someone’s  
Spreadsheet”***

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*Yr Athrofa: Education and Humanities*

**DECLARATION FORM**



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1. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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Date ...March 2024.....

2. This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA Equity and Diversity in Society.

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3. This dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references.

A reference list is appended.

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I am satisfied that this work is the result of the student’s own efforts.

Signed: Associate Professor C Lohmann-Hancock

Date: April 2024

## CONTENTS

<b>DECLARATION FORM</b> .....	2
<b>CONTENTS</b> .....	3
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	4
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	5
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	6
<b>2. LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	8
<b>2.1. Introduction</b> .....	8
<b>2.2. Current Legislation and Policy: Children and Birth Parents</b> .....	9
<b>2.3. Current Legislation and Policy: Adoptive Parents</b> .....	11
<b>2.4. Social Workers in the Process</b> .....	14
<b>2.5. Conclusion</b> .....	16
<b>3. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS</b> .....	17
<b>3.1. Introduction</b> .....	17
<b>3.2. Context of Study</b> .....	17
<b>3.3. Methodology</b> .....	17
<b>3.4. Methods</b> .....	20
<b>3.5. Analysis</b> .....	22
<b>3.6. Ethics</b> .....	23
<b>3.7. Conclusion</b> .....	27
<b>4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION</b> .....	28
<b>4.1. Introduction</b> .....	28
<b>4.2. Approach of Social Workers/ Lack of Consistency with Expectations</b> .....	30
<b>4.3. Being the Perfect Parent</b> .....	37
<b>4.4. The Legal Process and Setting the Family Culture</b> .....	40
<b>4.5. Lack of Support for Adoptive Parents</b> .....	48
<b>4.6. Conclusion</b> .....	55
<b>5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	56
<b>6. REFERENCES</b> .....	60
<b>7. APPENDICES</b> .....	66
<b>7.1. Appendix 1: Ethics Form</b> .....	67
<b>7.2. Appendix 2: Proposal Form</b> .....	68
<b>7.3. Appendix 3: Consent Form</b> .....	69
<b>7.4. Appendix 4: Interview Schedule</b> .....	73
<b>7.5. Appendix 7: Adoption Process Flowcharts</b> .....	77

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Adoption is the process of the removal of parental rights from birth parent(s) to adoptive parent(s) (Seymor 2019). This research will consider the lived experiences of eight adoptive parents during the process of adopting their children, all eight adoptive parents have been given full parental responsibilities through the UK court system (UK Government, 2024).*

*This research is new, it fills a gap in knowledge when considering the lived experiences of adoptive parents from when their child(ren) move in (placement) until they are legally considered their children (order) (UK Government, 2024). This is an area of research that has not been considered previously. The experiences and views of adoptive parents below is hard hitting, unexpected and at times shocking. This research identifies a number of challenges for adoptive parents, who are parenting some of the most vulnerable children in society (Jenson & Fraser 2016) at the same time as trying to construct a new family.*

*Recommendations are made at the end of this research which include bespoke training for adopters, independent support and guidance for adopters and specialist professionals who understand the needs of adoptive families in this timeframe.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

There is research and information available on the experiences of children through the adoption process (Pösö, Skivenes & Thoburn 2021; Brodzinsky, Gunnar & Palacios 2002), equally the feelings, considerations and experiences of birth families are also well documented (Lewis 2022; Psychology Today 2024; Smeeton & Boxall 2014; PAC-UK 2023), however there is nothing that the researcher can find that considers the experiences of those people who adopt children, especially when looking at the period of time from when the adopted child is placed in the adoptive parents home, until they have been granted an adoption order and the child is legally theirs. This research aims to fill this gap. The sole purpose of the research is to listen and give a voice to an integral group of people within the process who are not represented. Policy and legislation are also, rightfully so, geared towards the child first. Both then go on to consider how this will impact birth families. Policy and practice, in the experiences outlined in this research, then puts the child and birth family at the front and centre of all decisions made taking little regard for the adoptive parent(s) (Weistra and Luke 2017). With, according to AdoptionUK (2023), between 3 and 9% of all adoption's breaking down, and children being returned into care the research will consider if, more support for adoptive parents early in the process might make a difference. Although all adoptions in this research have not broken down, there may be some learning from the experiences below that might give insight into how to prevent breakdowns.

Through the use of unstructured interviews (Punch 2014) the research will hear, understand and record the lived experiences of eight adoptive parents from when their children move into their home until they are granted the adoption order from the court. I am to seek the experiences of adopters to gain an understanding of if the process could be improved, for them as adopters,

and to highlight, when applicable, good practice within the process. To explore this issue and gather rich data this dissertation will answer the following research question:

*RQ) What are the lived experiences of adoptive parents from placement to Adoption Order?*

To answer the research question the literature review will need to consider wider than adoptive parents, due to, as previously mentioned, the gap in knowledge. The literature review will therefore consider how the adoption process works from when an adoptive parent registers their interest to the adoption order being granted, the experiences of birth families and children in the process in relation to social workers and the rights of birth parents and children in the adoption process. Through the literature review the themes concerning the legal process for adoptions, behaviours and attitudes of social workers, the experiences of birth parent(s) and children the legal processes for adoption for all concerned will be discussed.

The conclusions and recommendations section will consider the repercussions of the findings and pose recommendations for the future.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Introduction**

To add some context to the discussions and findings below there were a total of 2,960 children who were adopted in England in 2023, which is a 2% increase on the previous year (UK Government, 2023) in Wales there was a 4% increase on the previous year with 244 children being adopted in 2023 (Welsh Assembly Government, 2023). According to AdoptionUK (2023) between 3 and 9% of all adoption's breakdown. In research conducted in 2014 by the University of Bristol there are a number of factors which contribute to the breakdown (Selwyn, Wijedasa, & Meakings, 2014) including ability to manage behaviour of adopted child, adopted child and parent not bonding (attachment), violence towards adoptive parent and returning to live with birth families. Adoption, according to Krutzinna (2021 p.195) is 'the legal process through which the state establishes a parental relationship... where there exists no previous procreative relationship'.

There is no research available, at the time of writing, on the experiences of adoptive parents from when an adoptive child is placed with them until the adoption order is granted. This research aims to fill this gap, as such however, the literature review will consider some of the themes from the research and consider if these themes are carried across into general research and literature available. The literature review will consider the following themes:

- Current legislation and policy – Birth Parent(s) and Children
- Current legislation and policy – adoptive parents
- Social worker roles

Through these themes an overview of adoption and the process will be gained. There is a recognition that the literature review does, at times, utilise the UK Government (2024) website



a significant amount, as this is a legal process it was a conscious decision of the researcher to draw from this source.

## **2.2. Current Legislation and Policy: Children and Birth Parents**

When considering the current legal position and policy of the adoption process the main source for information are individual adoption agencies, however agency policies, although slightly different, they are informed by central government and generally follow the same process. According to central government (UK Government, 2024) in order for a child to be put up for adoption they must be under the age of eighteen. Both parents of a child who is taken into care and put up for adoption must ultimately consent to the adoption taking place. This is unless the parent(s) cannot be found, if the parent's capacity has been questioned or if the child would be more at risk if they were to continue to live with the birth parent(s) (UK Government, 2024).

Prior to a child being placed for adoption a number of assessments of the birth parent(s) ability to care for and cater for the needs of the child must be conducted (Warker 2018), these assessments include the suitability of the birth parent(s) to keep their child(ren) safe. A number of supportive measures are put in place before a child is removed from the care of the birth parent(s) (Munro 2020), however if these supportive measures are not successful and the decision of Children's Social Care is that the birth parent(s) are unable to keep their child(ren) safe or meet their needs that the child will be removed from their care and put into foster placement (Jenson & Fraser 2016).

While the child has been removed from their birth parent(s) and is in foster care there are a number of actions for the child's social worker to complete alongside each other (Adoption and Children's Act 2002), the local authority, along with birth parent(s) will retain parental

responsibility at this time. The children's social worker will be supporting the birth parent(s) and family to improve what has been identified as a need, for example mental health needs, and at the same time be developing a Permanence Plan for the child(ren) (Adoption and Childrens Act 2002). This might include the child(ren) living with wider families, continuing to live in foster care, or finally, considering an adoption plan (One Adoption 2024). Once an adoption plan is in place the child's social worker will present this to an agency decision maker who will, with guidance from the legal department of the safeguarding agency, and the reports from a social worker, make a decision if they should apply for a placement order from family court (Walker 2018). Once this has been agreed forever family searches can be commenced for the child matching them with prospective approved adoptive parents (Adoption and Childrens Act 2002).

Up until the placement order has been applied for, the child social worker will still be supporting the birth parent(s) in order to possibly return their child into their care. However, once the permanence order has been granted (with consent from the birth parent(s)) the process to having a child returned is different (UK Government, 2024). With regards to the child preparatory, this work should be conducted so that both the birth parents and the child(ren) fully informed, at an age-appropriate level, what is happening with regards to a forever family being sought and what this means for them (Adoption and Children Act 2002). The birth parents, in this process may still have their child returned to them, as long as they are able to evidence and prove that they have rectified the concern of social workers and reasons their child(ren) were removed from their care in the first place (Adoption and Children Act 2002).

During the court proceedings birth parent(s) are able to attend court and contest the adoption based on three oppositions, this is called 'Leave to Contest' (Adoption and Children Act 2002).

This permission, obtained by a judge, gives birth parent(s) the opportunity to state their case as to why the child(ren) should be returned to their care rather than the adoption be approved and legal responsibility for the child(ren) to be moved to the adoptive parents (Adoption and Children Act 2002). According to the Adoption and Children act (2002) the only reasons that a birth family would be granted a leave to contest would be because of a significant change in the circumstances of the birth parent(s) and families or, if it is deemed that returning the child(ren) would be considered best for their welfare (Adoption and Children Act 2002). If this leave to contest is approved there is a possibility that the child(ren) will be returned to their birth parent. During this process in court there is no representation for the adoptive parents. The birth parent(s) and possibly family along with legal representation are present, as are the child's social workers and legal representation for the placing authority or agency, but no one to represent the adoptive parents and family (Adoption and Childrens Act 2002). This gives no say to the outcome of the hearing to the adoptive family.

### **2.3. Current Legislation and Policy: Adoptive Parents**

In order to be an adoptive parent an applicant must be over 21 years of age (UK Government, 2024). There are no restrictions on adopters regarding marital status, sexual orientation, gender, race or employment status or having other children in the home, however there are stipulations within these identifying features (AdoptSouth 2024). For example, if in a relationship with another person that relationship must be assessed as stable, and those who apply to be adopters must evidence that they have enough money to support the child once they have moved in (AdoptSouth 2024).

Once an adult over 21 has expressed an interest in adopting a child they must then attend an open event where prospective adopters are able to meet current adopters and adult social

workers (AdoptSouth 2024) who will discuss the requirements of the adoption process, from application, assessment, panel through to matching with a child(ren) and placement (AdoptSouth 2024). From here, according to the UK Government (2024) the adoption agency will then start the process of completing stage 1 of the assessment and the prospective adopters will be required to attend the preparation to adopt training sessions. At the same time as this, medical assessments will be done, and a DBS completed (see appendix 7 for flow chart).

Once progressed onto stage 2 (UK Government, 2024) a far more in-depth assessment of the prospective adopter's life will be undertaken (see appendix 7 for flow chart). This involves discussing the parenting style of the prospective parent(s) and how they were parented (to consider their attachment style), relationships past and present are discussed, financial security is checked, this assessment is to gain the suitability of the prospective adopter to parent (AdoptSouth 2024). Interviews with referees, family members, and any previous partners deemed important (e.g. ex-husbands and wives) will also take place here. A consideration of the prospective adopter's support network will also be made to ensure the support is available once a child has been placed with them (AdoptSouth 2024). A report will then be written, shared with the prospective adopter and taken to an adoption approval panel, where people who are experienced in adoption will be present and decide if the prospective adopter(s) are suitable to parent a child and therefore be approved (UK Government, 2024). This panel is conducted with the prospective adopter(s) and their social worker present to answer any questions the panel might have. Once approved the adoptive parent must wait to be matched with child(ren) who are waiting for a forever family (AdoptSouth 2024). Once child(ren) have been found the process around finding out about the child(ren) from the Foster Carers, Child Social Worker, School or Nursery if applicable, Safeguarding Paediatric Consultants and anyone else who has had contact with the child. The prospective adopters will then be requested to meet with the

birth parent(s) (AdoptSouth 2024). Once the adoptive parent, child social worker and adult social worker are all happy that the match is appropriate the adopter(s) will complete an application form to outline how they can best support the child, they produce photo albums of their homes and stories explaining who they are. This is then taken to a second approval panel, where they will decide if the adoptive parent(s) will be able to meet the needs of the child. If approved the information produced goes to the child and introductions start (AdoptSouth 2024). After these introductions and all parties are happy, the child(ren) will then move into their new home from foster care and the adoptive parent(s) will start to parent the child(ren) as if they are their own. Although the adoptive parent does not have legal responsibility over the child(ren), this remains with the local authority and the birth parent(s) (UK Government, 2024). This removal of parental responsibility is only removed after the adoption court order has been granted, this can be applied for after a minimum of ten weeks (UK Government, 2024). Once the order is granted it is permanent and the child(ren) becomes adopted, all rights and responsibilities are removed from the birth parent(s) and local authority and transferred to the adoptive parents (UK Government, 2024).

The process can leave adoptive families questioning their decisions and with fatigue (Kohn-Willbridge, Pike & de Visser, 2021) before even welcoming a child into their home. Macleod, Storey, Rushe, Kavanagh, Agnew and McLaughlin (2021) agree that the process is long and hard for adoptive parents and that, at times, if feeling judged by social workers, the prospective adopters may not be honest about their feelings and concerns. Weistra and Luke (2017) support this further by suggesting that adoptive parents do not ask for support following the adoption process due to the possible perceptions of statutory services and their own family perceptions.

## **2.4. Social Workers in the Process**

Arguably, the people with the most power within the adoption process are the social workers (Wildling, 2024). Wildling (2024) outlines that as decision makers, who are aligned with governmental policies and guidelines, the social worker will have the overarching decision making permissions and authority. This means that social workers, will ultimately decide if a child is to be removed from their birth family. Payne (2023) agrees that the power, in any situation that involves a social worker, is always with them, outlining that the power imbalance between the social work practitioner and the parent, child or adoptive parent is large and can impact the result of any given discussion. Conversely Tedam (2021) considers that social workers, in the main, can be reluctant to use their authority and power over individuals so that they are not negatively affected by them. This however is not the case, there is much written around the experiences of individuals, families and communities who have felt undermined, discriminated against and controlled by social workers and the system they work within (Oliver, 2010; Furguson, 2017; The case of 'Hertfordshire Council v. M and F, 2021; Rowlings 2020). This is admitted by Tedam (2021 p.34) who states that, specifically within safeguarding children 'interventions are undertaken with power-laden contexts'. For Parker (2021), in order to reduce the impact of power within the social work relationship is for the social worker to be reflective upon said power and how this can be managed for the children and families. This is further supported by Thompson (2016 p.76) who states that reflection should enable social workers to have a 'basis for learning' and expanding their knowledge base rather than basing decisions on the power dynamic and assumptions they hold. This, according to Thompson (2021) could allow for discriminatory practice. Linked to the views of assumptions and views that social workers hold is that of Payne (2023) who points out that social work theory is socially constructed, this means that, although social workers are trained through degree programmes, ultimately for Payne (2023 p.3) 'both practice and theory are not given to us from

on high, but we build them through our experience in the real world'. This means that an individual social workers life experiences, class or upbringing may influence their views and assessments of the families they visit and therefore could inform the decisions they make regarding the care a child receives from both birth and adoptive families.

According to Birrell and Gray (2017) this ability for social workers to make decisions to remove children has become easier. Conversely though, since The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (2014), although it is easier to remove a child from their birth families, there has been a larger emphasis on keeping children within their birth family through the use of interventions and preventative support and guidance from social workers, medical professionals, the police and voluntary organisations (Birrell and Gray 2017). Some of the reasons a child will be removed from the care of birth parents, according to Walker (2018) are neglect, parental abuse, domestic violence and abuse in the home, drugs and alcohol misuse and many more. The need to remove children from these environments and move them onto new families if the circumstances do not improve, are to Jenson and Fraser (2016) ensure the safety of vulnerable children at all times. Parker (2021) points out that, for social workers who are family finding or child social workers there is a need to be resilient and strong to safeguard the children who are living in those conditions. This is supported by Tedam (2021) who outlines that social workers are under a great deal of pressure to make sure that everything is right for the child, at the same time as possibly getting abuse and receiving threatening behaviour from birth parents and families. Tedam (2021) goes on to explain that, sometimes, as a result of this pressure and the difficult natures that social workers are working in that, they may respond in unhelpful and inappropriate ways to birth families, parents and adoptive parents. However according to Rutter and Brown (2020), the approach of social workers throughout their communications with anyone within the process should be kind, considerate

and professional, Rutter and Brown (2020 p.78) further state that social workers should ‘identify and behave as a professional social worker...promote independence, provide support, prevent harm and enable progress’.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

As outlined in the literature review above there is no literature available which discusses the needs or experiences of adoptive parents from when the child is placed with them until the order is granted. Not only is there a lack in literature on this area of an adopter’s experience there is little on the rights of the adopter beyond what is set out within the Adoption and Children Act 2002. There are policies and guidelines that adoption agencies follow which align to the Adoption and Children Act 2002, which are discussed and outlined in some of the findings below, such as training on offer for adopters, however, as also outlined in the findings they are, at times not appropriate to meet the needs of the adoptive parents or their prospective children. What is clear from the literature review is that the process of adoption can be a clinical and legal one rather than one that considers all involved within it. There is a lack of support for adoptive parents, birth parents and children (Sanders 2020). It is the hope that, through this research, some of the needs of adoptive parents will be considered and catered for. In the next section of this research paper the methodologies, methods and ethics of the research will be considered.



### **3. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

In this section of the research paper the methodology and methods of the research will be considered. The decisions on what approaches will be used to gather information from participants will be discussed and supported in relation to the researcher's positionality. It will then consider the ethical considerations of the research and what these mean for the participants and researcher throughout.

#### **3.2. Context of Study**

As outlined above, there is little research and literature into the lived experiences of adoptive families, especially within the placement to adoption order period of time. There are a number of research papers that consider the birth family and the adoptive child, however the voice of the adoptive parent, especially through the time from placement to adoption order is not heard. For this reason, the researcher has decided to ask adoptive parents about their experiences of adoption from placement to adoption order.

#### **3.3. Methodology**

It is important that the researcher outlines their positionality, methodology and methods used within the research prior to undertaking it (Biggam 2021). The following section will consider the approach of the researcher towards the way in which in the research will be conducted and, the reasons behind the decisions made. Positionality is concerned with how a researcher places themselves within their research, and how the researcher views the world and the way in which the world and any views are constructed, this then, ultimately dictates how the research is designed (Clough & Nutbrouwn, 2012; Creswell & Clark, 2018; Bryman 2021). In order to outline this there are a number of theoretical approaches and perspectives that need to be

considered which include the ontological, epistemological and methodological viewpoints of the researcher, and to an extent, but not in the design of the research, of the participants (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003).

The researcher acknowledges that there are ontologies, such as those from a positivist paradigm where reality is viewed from one single truth (Berbour, 2014) or those from a subjectivist paradigm who view reality as what an individual chooses to be reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher however has a constructivist paradigm and, as such design and approach of the research will reflect this. The constructivist approach affirms that the world, reality and truth is merely constructed by an individual and how they specifically view events, situations and experiences, meaning that reality is not singular or unbiased (Berbour, 2014; Coe, Waring, Hedges & Ashley 2021) which means that every individual experiences the world and each experience, shared or otherwise, is different to one another. Not only does this constructivist approach align to the ontology of the researcher, it also aligns to the research question itself, as the purpose of the research is to gain the lived experiences of adoptive parents. This viewpoint aligns to the research as participants will be asked about their lived experiences, these experiences will be formed by their own lives and world views.

Alongside this there is a need to align the ontology of the researcher and research to the epistemology of the researcher. Epistemology is strongly linked to ontology and takes it a step further in considering how not only what reality is (ontology) but how we gained said knowledge or reality and how it is then interpreted (Creswell & Clark 2018). For the researcher, the lived experiences of individuals influence their epistemological view and, as a result of this the methodological approaches will meet this belief by enabling participants within the study to engage with their own views of the world in which they live and what their experiences are

within it. According to Bryman (2021) the epistemology of each participant, and the researcher themselves, will have an impact on the outcome of the research. The position of the researcher will be considered alongside the ethical considerations later in this research. This means that there will be a clear understanding of what the researcher believes in relation to the research question and the subject considered. As a result of this ontological and epistemological viewpoint the theoretical perspective will be that experiences, stories and viewpoints will need to be interpreted by the one telling the story – in the case of this research the participants. The design of the research is solely informed and guided by the views of the researcher on this (Punch 2014).

Methodology is concerned with how the research is designed and should link with the epistemology, ontology and positionality of the researcher (Kumar 2014); this should then inform the research methods used to gather data. For the purposes of the research the decision has been made to use semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This decision has been informed by the theoretical standpoint of the research as discussed above, and the richness of data desired by the researcher. Through the use of narrative inquiry, the researcher will use methods which will enable this. According to Gavidia and Adu (2022) narrative inquiry is the process of recording and outlining an individual's or a groups experience in a chronological order. This is used to improve standards and policies or share experiences with wider community (McNiff, 2017). For the purposes of this research, in line with the positionality of the researcher, a semi structured interview would be used with participants (Clough & Nutbrown 2012; Wengraf 2001; Bryman, 2014). Bryman (2021) attests that the purpose of identifying one's positionality in research is to be more transparent in the research. Bryman (2021) goes on to suggest that in order for research to be fair, ethical, transparent and valid the position of the researcher within the research is of imperative. Once the position of

the researcher is outlined and considered the research undertaken, as far as possible, can hold authority (Wengraf 2001). Within the context of this research this means that, within the ethics section of the research paper, the researcher will make clear what their position is whilst conducting the research.

### **3.4. Methods**

Linking to discussions outlined above, Punch (2014) states that the methods chosen to conduct research should be based on and derived from paradigms. As such the researcher has chosen to use a semi-structured interview format in order to gain as much information as possible from the participants. According to Flick (2018b) the use of semi-structured interviews gives the researcher the opportunity to ask each participant the same questions, however, if there is a certain comment made that interests the researcher there is a possibility to follow this question further with flexibility. Therefore, rather than ignoring the point and moving onto the next question, which would be the case in closed positivist research questions, follow up questions would be permitted (Richie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2013). Oliver (2003) points out however that this can cause some bias and difficulties for the researcher as bias might inform what new areas an interviewer might explore further and what might not. Bias and the position of the researcher will be considered within the ethics section of this dissertation.

The use of semi-structured interviews not only matches the methodological standpoint of the researcher, but the use of them also fills the needs of the research question (Barbour 2014). As the question for this research is looking at the lived experiences of adoptive parents a free-flowing interview style is needed so that the data and experiences, as lived, are rich and full of detail (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012). This is further supported by Bryman (2021) who describes semi-structured interviews as a method of interviewing participants with a number of focused

questions, but the researcher has the flexibility to ask different and further exploratory questions depending on the narrative. Punch (2014, p. 147) corroborates this view by suggesting that semi-structured interviews are used in order to show ‘understanding the complex behaviour of people without imposing any prior categorisation which might limit the field of inquiry’. This means that, as a result of the chosen methodology of a semi-structured interview the participants will be asked the same initial questions (see appendix 4), but then given permission to explore feelings and tell the aspects of the story if they wish. There are limitations to this approach to interviewing participants however, Richie, Lewis, Nicholls and Ormston (2013 p.191) outline that there is a skill to using unstructured interviews as there is ‘an onus on the participant to supply the context of the answer’, this means that participants may, as a result feel under pressure to perform and answer correctly. Barbour (2014 p.121) supports this view explaining that participants may feel at times that ‘the researcher is cast as the expert’. In order to counteract this the researcher will ensure that the participants are aware of the purpose of the research acknowledging that participants are the experts in their own lives and experiences (Richardson 2020). Another constraint of semi-structured interviews is the amount of data that can be produced. When the researcher is asking participants to tell their story there is a risk that some participants will provide great detail, whereas others may only provide a limited amount of information (Coe, Waring, Hedges & Day Ashley 2021). As a result of this approach the researcher will be hearing the story of participants in a narrative enquiry form of research, which is supported by Ford (2020 p.235) who states that narrative inquiry as ‘a phenomenological qualitative research methodology, examines individual human experiences—stories’. This method of data collection does have limitations including when considering the findings and conclusions of the research there may be a wealth of information with no common themes to discuss (Kumar 2014).

### **3.5. Analysis**

Williams (2021) attests it is important, within qualitative research, to ensure that analysis rather than description of the experience is conducted. In order to achieve this the researcher will use thematic analysis. According to (Braun & Clarke 2022 p.224) thematic analysis is used by qualitative researchers to enable them to be 'exploring, interpreting and reporting relevant partners of meaning across a dataset'. In order to do this, codes will be assigned to categorise the data collected and then, collate the data as to those categories (Clark, Foster, Sloan, & Bryman 2021). From here the use of these codes, which are linked to thematic words or sentences, will support the researcher be able to identify the themes and most impactful areas discussed within the data (Denzin & Lincoln 2013).

The use of thematic analysis aligns to the epistemology, methodologies and methods discussed above as, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2013), a constructivist paradigm is being outlined, that the data should be analysed in the same way. Flick (2018a) describes thematic analysis as that which notices and looks for the same words or experiences throughout the interview process with each participant. This again links to the epistemological standpoint of the researcher as finding patterns and assigning meaning to those patterns will be informed by what the participants say in interviews but also how the researcher interprets what has been said (Flick 2018a). This interpretation of the data however, as pointed out by Braun and Clarke (2006), can be considered a limitation of thematic analysis. Nevertheless, as the use of thematic analysis aligns with the research, as discussed above, the researcher will utilise thematic analysis to analyse the findings.

### **3.6. Ethics**

Ethics in research is one of the most important considerations (BERA 2018), this section will consider a number of elements within the ethical sphere in relation to the research. It will consider the position and possible bias of the researcher, the considerations around sampling of participants, define what informed consent is within the context of this research, and then implications for both the researcher and participant on the confidentiality and autonomy within the data collection and writeup of the research.

In order to be transparent (BERA 2018) the researcher must first set out their own position within the research. As a single adopter the researcher has their own experiences within the question posed, as do a number of the researchers' friends, family and wider circle. As such the researcher has, to some extent, experiences similar to participants (Mendez 2021). Mendez (2021) discusses the importance of being reflexive within research and, if aware of possible bias and these are considered, this means that the experiences of the researcher are less likely to impact the research. It is important to point out that, although adoptive parents go through the same process, as outlined above in the literature review (UK Government 2024), the personal experience of each adopter is different. The researcher supposes that these differences will be evident in the data, the researcher surmises that, different children and social workers involved in the process will inform the experience had by each individual. As outlined within the methods section of this paper, the narrative is different for each individual, even if the experience is the same (couples who adopt for example) (Ford 2020).

The experience of the adoption process and the question in hand of the researcher could lead to bias within the research. According to Israel (2015) bias can be present when a researcher is asking questions on a specialism they hold. Edwards and Mauthner (2003 p.21) suggest that

this bias ‘alter and inform the ethical dilemmas that we face as researchers’. Barbour (2014) recognises the importance of the researcher outlining their own firsthand experiences or their standpoint within the research as this will work towards a less bias result. Vickers (2003) supports this further by suggesting that, within social research, researchers tend to consider topics of importance to them so consequently a researcher is generally not unconnected to their research question. It is vital therefore that the personal narrative of the researcher does not become embedded or represented within the findings of the research (Sheehy, Nind, Rix & Simmons, 2005). Anderson and Morrow (2020) go on to support this view by explaining that the standpoint of the researcher is vital and that this needs to be outlined prior to and after the research is conducted. In order to do this the researcher has outlined their position as an adoptive parent above, but. will also ensure participants are also aware from the outset.

The transparency of the researcher with the participants is intricately linked to informed consent. There is a need for the participants to understand what is meant by their participation within the research and, what they have consented to. Israel (2015) outlines that informed consent is twofold. Firstly, for Israel (2015) informed consent is concerned with the understanding of what they are consenting to, and secondly that they then agree to take part in the research on a voluntary basis. This is developed further by Oliver (2003) who comments that informed consent outlines giving participants the information needed before taking part in the research. Oliver (2003) does go on however to discuss the importance of not overwhelming participants with information. In order to make sure that participants are fully informed of the purpose and intention of this research the researcher will outline this within the participants information sheet and consent form (see appendix 2 and 3). Through this information sheet and consent letter participants will have a clear understanding of what is expected of the researcher and the participants and the limitations of the research. This information will be sent to each



participant (whether single or couple adopters) so that each participant will consent to taking part in the research individually. Braun and Clarke (2013 p.118) support this approach by outlining that

‘participants should be given as much information... might be needed in order to make an informed decision about... want to participate in a study.’

Participants will, as a result of this be reminded of the information sheet and its content prior to starting the interviews and, be given the opportunity to withdraw from the research at this, and any other time.

The right for participants to withdraw their involvement will be made clear within the information letter, but also verbally with the researcher prior to and after completing the interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Clarke, Foster, Sloan & Bryman, 2021; Wengraf, 2001). This withdrawal of consent, at any time, will be without consequence for the participant, and will result in all information provided by that participant being deleted immediately. This deletion of participants information, should they choose to withdraw, is intrinsically linked to confidentiality within research. Gregory (2003) claims that without proper confidentiality consent would not be gained by a researcher. Barbour (2013) supports this by suggesting that all research is underpinned by confidentiality. This however is sometimes difficult to maintain, for example, as is the case of this research, confidentiality will be maintained at all times, unless there is a concern for safety for anyone. This means that, within the interviews, if a concern arises it will be the responsibility of the researcher to identify these with the participants and refer to safeguarding procedures (Alderson & Morrow 2020; Wengraf 2021). However, outside of safeguarding concerns confidentiality will be maintained. Kumar (2014) outlines confidentiality as the cornerstone of research and that, if participants personal information, narrative or details are shared or discussed, outside of the research that confidentiality has been

broken. Confidentiality is outlined as ‘a principle that allows people... to talk in confidence’ (Somekh & Lewin, 2011, p.26) that is, nothing will be shared outside of the interview process. Confidentiality therefore is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that no information about the participant is shared without the explicit permission of the participant, and in the format agreed by the participant. In order to ensure this is the case for this research all participants will sign an individual consent form (see appendix 3).

Anonymity, although closely linked to confidentiality is different (Wengraf 2001, Creswell & Clark 2018, Clarke, Foster, Sloan & Bryman, 2021). BERA (2018) recognises that, although autonomy is ideal within research, small scale research, or research within a small sample field means that participants might be recognisable to others. The identity of participants will be confidential at all times; however, this does not mean that participants will not be recognised as part of the research, especially if the research is accessed by others who are familiar to the participants. Participants might be recognised through the narrative and the experiences outlined within the findings. It is recognised by Clark, Foster, Sloan and Bryman (2021) that this is a difficult and precarious balance within research.

Sampling is one way to encourage the anonymity of participants (McNiff, 2017). Sampling will be discussed later in this research paper. Another way to do this is to ensure that from transcribing of interviews onwards that the researcher will be the only person who will be aware of which participants comments are being outlined at any point within the findings section (Somekh and Lewin, 2011). Through data analysis and coding (Creswell & Clark 2018) participants will be further anonymised. From data collection and transcribing through to the analysis of data participants will be given identifying codes that only the researcher will have access to. Punch (2014) outlines that this approach will ‘care for participants’ (Punch 2014 p.

43) which is of utmost importance to the researcher. Although no one, including participants will be aware of these codes, it is possible, through the use of direct quotes that participants will be able to identify themselves. All ethical considerations have been considered within an Ethics form which was signed off by the university's ethics panel (see appendix 1).

As a result of the data collection the researcher will have confidential information stored on the participants. The researcher has considered this within the ethics form (see appendix 1) and will ensure that all rules and regulations of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David with regards to data collection and storage (UWTSD 2022) in relation to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) are followed.

### **3.7. Conclusion**

This section of the research paper has been concerned with how the research proposal was developed. It has considered the methodological approaches of the researcher and the research question, which has then informed the method used to gather information. In the following stages of this paper the research and the findings will be discussed with conclusions and recommendations made as a result of said findings.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1. Introduction**

For the purposes of this research the participants were identified from the researchers own network and the networks of identified participants who had agreed to take part in the research. This approach links to purposeful sampling (Coe, Waring, Hedges and Day Ashley 2021; Creswell and Clark 2018; Punch 2014) which will be discussed further below. This means that the researcher had met many of the participants previously. Participants were found by word of mouth and from discussions around the research question with the researcher and the researcher's network. As a result of these discussions and posing of the possible research question, participants highlighted that they would be interested in taking part and might know others who also would be interested in sharing their stories (Anderson & Henry 2020). There were a number of possible participants who chose not to engage with the research sighting the following as reasons - it was not the right time for them, they were currently struggling with their adoptive children, and they did not feel any difference would come from taking part in the research.

The researcher interviewed participants who had already obtained an adoption order (AdoptSouth 2024). Participants had applied for the adoption order from between 10 weeks and 2 years. The reasons for the different timescales will be outlined below amongst the findings. According to Punch (2014 p.161) this form of sampling is known as 'purposive sampling'. This decision was made as, in order to fully explore the research question there was a need for the process to be complete. This decision is supported by Coe, Waring, Hedges and Day Ashley (2021) who outline that specifically choosing participants who have a lived experience and a clear understanding of the process, adoption in this case, is a pragmatic and logical way of sampling. This therefore ensures that, although participants are from the

researcher's network, the research is valid and credible due to the participants experiences (Kumar 2014; Creswell & Clark 2018; Coe Waring, Hedges & Day Ashley 2021). Clark, Foster, Sloan & Bryman (2021 p. 168) point out that this can be seen as 'sample bias', however as the research is specifically considering the lived experiences of adoptive parents this bias is acceptable for the research.

In order to offer the participants as much anonymity as possible they are from a range of local authorities and adoption agencies in both England and Wales; therefore, it will be difficult to be able to identify the specific areas they have adopted which means that both the participants and adoption authorities will be difficult to identify (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Eight adoptive parents were interviewed as part of this research, there are a mixture of single and two parent adoptive parents within the research to ascertain if the experiences would be different for these two demographics. All participants were asked at the end of the interview about a happy memory they had with their child and for all it included a time away from home, on a beach, on holiday or in the woods where they were able to be a 'normal family.' The participants commented that this is what they had always wanted from the adoption process.

For the purposes of data analysis, as discussed above, the researcher will be using thematic analysis to set out the data gathered.

Through this form of data analysis four themes emerged. These are

- Approach of Social Workers and the Consistency of Experiences
- Being the Perfect Parent
- The Legal Process
- Family Culture.

In the next sections I will explore the four themes above considering each one in turn. I will relate the findings to the literature review and then consider what the data means and what recommendations can be made in relation to that theme.

#### **4.2. Approach of Social Workers/ Lack of Consistency with Expectations**

The first theme within the research conducted considered the approach of social workers to the participants, and the lack of consistency with the expectations upon the participants. There were examples of supportive parent social workers and child social workers (Rutter and Brown 2020), however there are, as evidenced below, more cases of both sets of social workers approach not being supportive of the participants, and in some cases, the children either. When considering the lack of consistency of expectations there were discrepancies within experiences of participants with regards to the statutory social work visits and expectations to meet with birth families (Tadam 2021).

Participants commented that they were generally informed of the legal requirements of what was required of the social workers and adoptive parents during the assessment process and the period between the child moving in and the adoption order being granted (AdoptSouth 2024).

*they told us what to expect from them and how the process would work (P1).*

This links with the legal framework for adoption (UK Government, 2024) which sets out how and when the process of adopting children should be carried out. However, the experiences for participants of how these legal requirements were applied was often different. Two of the participants explained that social workers kept to the legal requirements, such as home visits and Looked After Child (LAC) reviews being held on time (Adoption and Children's Act 2002)

*we were visited when the social workers said they'd come, mostly by the child social worker but sometimes by our social worker, but we didn't mind who came (P6 and P5).*

Conversely all other participants cited that these legal requirements were not adhered to

*we were supposed to get weekly visits from the child social worker for the first four weeks, bimonthly for the next 6 weeks and then monthly until the LAC review officer agreed that these could be less. This did not happen for us which made checking in with social workers and asking questions of if we were doing the 'right thing' hard(P6).*

This is supported by another participant who stated that

*our visits were very close together, so when we had to be seen every week the social workers would come on the Friday and then the following Monday, we were told this is because we lived a long way away (from the placing authority) but this meant that the children were very unsettled for a long time, it would have been better if they had been more spaced apart – the children just couldn't settle (P7).*

When considering the power that social workers have over families (Wildling, 2024), this is a clear example of how the needs of the placing authority or social workers was taken into account rather than the needs of the family. This lack of consistency had a detrimental impact on the families who, at times, were in crisis themselves.

*sometimes our statutory meetings with the social worker were cancelled on the day or a different social worker would come, this made my child think they were going to be removed from my care, I remember one visit, when I had prepared my child for his social worker to arrive but mine did instead, they spent the whole visit climbing all over me and basically sitting on my head because they were so scared they were being removed (P8).*

This inconsistency is not outlined within the literature, all literature (Birrell & Gray 2017; Tedam 2021; Parker 2021; Walker 2018) available stated that the role of the social worker was to be consistent and to follow guidelines set out by the Adoption and Children's Act 2002, the UK Government (2024) and the policy of their individual placing agency. This however, is not the experience of the participants, even those who adopted from the same agency have had different experiences of social workers, Parker (2021) discusses the need for social workers to be resilient as their roles are difficult, which might result in inconsistencies, however policies

and legislation (Adoption and Children's Act 2002, UK Government 2024) state that inconsistencies should not exist.

This experience of difference with social workers was found when considering meeting with and contact with birth families. Where guidance (AdoptSouth 2024) suggests that adoptive parents, where possible, should meet with birth parents some were not allowed to as the

*birth mother threatened to "climb across the table and beat the shit out of me" (P8).*

Although this was one participant's experience, others were almost forced to meet them

*I felt bullied into meeting the birth family because I was constantly told "it's right for your child and the birth parent". I was told if I didn't meet the birth mother that my child would resent me when they grew up (P3).*

This form of persuasion was used throughout discussions with social workers according to participants and many commented that they were reminded constantly that the adoptive child was not legally theirs until hoops had been jumped through and all requirements were made (Adoption and Children's Act 2002). One participant commented that

*until that judge has signed that piece of paper that child is not legally yours, and you are reminded of that all the time. It feels like it's used as a stick to get you to do what they [social workers] want you to do (P2).*

This links again to the power outlined by Payne (2023) who discussed that social workers hold the most power within the relationships in which they are involved, be it with the children, birth parents or, in this case, the participants. It also links with the statutory and policy guidelines (Gov.uk 2024, AdoptSouth 2024) which states that, where possible, adoptive parents and birth parents should meet.



All participants within the research commented that there were a number of times within the process as a whole, but specifically during the period of time within the remit of the research that social workers, specifically the children's social worker, but sometimes their own, would speak to the participants in a derogatory or unhelpful way. This is discussed by Tedam (2021) who considers pressures on social workers to ensure the children are safeguarded and no mistakes are made. One participant specifically remembered their child's social worker, when they were discussing some of the difficulties they were experiencing, specifically with the challenging behaviour of the child, saying that

*this is what you signed up for, what do you expect. We did tell you it was hard (P2).*

When hearing this response to their concerns the participant parent felt that they would no longer be able to approach and speak to that social worker about what was happening in the home (Macleod, Storey, Rushe, Kavanagh, Agnew & McLaughlin 2021), and what other approaches they might take with the child in the future commenting to the researcher

*who do I go to if I can't go to the experts without being judged, and I felt judged every time I asked a question (P5).*

The participant pointed out that the support needed was an ability to discuss the concerns, behaviours and reasons behind behaviours in order to approach them differently. Other participants noted comments around the number of bump notes or attendances to the doctors or Accident and Emergency being unhelpful,

*my child is very clumsy and, at one point we were receiving at least 1 bump note a day from school. I was told I had to share these with the child's social worker, there was one review meeting that she asked about the bump notes in a way that made me feel like she was accusing me of not looking after my child properly – I felt like this a lot in the review meetings (P3).*

One participant outlined however how they felt supported by their own social worker (Rutter and Brown 2020), in an incident where their child was car sick in the car on the way to a mandatory appointment. When contacting both social workers explaining that they would not be attending the meeting the participant described how the child's social worker almost scolded the participant for not taking the child to the doctors and checking it was not anything more serious, whereas the participants social worker joked and said

*welcome to parenthood and cars. (P8)*

The participant parent remembered that this is what they needed to hear:

*it was nice to hear someone say I was a normal parent and not to overreact for once (P8).*

The experience above feeds into another area every participant discussed. Thompson (2016) outlines the importance of social workers learning from experiences and to use them within their practice, as evidenced by the experience above. This was in relation to having that one pivotal person who would help and support the family as a whole who made a difference. For the seven of the eight participants that person was a social worker – either the child's or their own. For the remaining participant it was the process that was outlined being followed which was supportive and helpful to them. All participants however mentioned that having a professional in other settings, such as schools, who understood the process also helped. All participants however explained in one way or another that having a

*good social worker helped with everything (P4).*

The reality of having a social worker who was 'good' made the process easier for many. When exploring this further generally responses from participants were the same, a good social worker was

*empathetic, supportive, gave us time, seemed to care about me as well as my child and made a difference in our lives by not simply going through the motions, they were non-judgemental (P7).*

Although this identification of what a good social worker was, who it was is different for the participants interviewed. For those who found their own social worker most approachable and supportive they commented that

*my child found seeing her very difficult, but it was good for me because she was there for me (P8)*

This observation was supported by another participant who stated that

*I felt she had all the time in the world for us, she was flexible, caring, and wanted the best for our family, we're still in contact now (P4).*

These participants also pointed out that their child's social worker was obviously remarkably busy and

*visits would be a tick box exercise where she was running through the motions not listening to me or my child (P6)*

This position of the social worker is supported by Jenson and Fraser (2016) who, as outlined within the literature review, discuss the need for social workers to ensure that the most vulnerable children in society are protected. One experience outlined by a participant that they had encouraged their child to tell their social worker how they felt but, the response from the social worker was that

*all adoptive children feel like that at one point or another (P1).*

The participant parent who pointed out the comment above felt that it was dismissive of the real feelings of the child and was as a result of her rushing out of the door rather than exploring the issues with the child (Weistra and Luke 2017). The participant went onto explain that this was not their expectation of what would happen, they stated that

*I expected my child's social worker to do social work with them, not just run in the house, check the rooms, look at the kids and then go again (P1).*

In contrast to this, those who found their child's social worker more supportive and present commented that

*they really spent time with my child to make sure they were settling in (P5).*

This difference in social worker availability had a real impact on the participants of this research, Parker (2021) discusses the pressures on social workers is high and that this might therefore impact the service the participants received. There is recognition, from all participants that it was in fact individuals who had an impact on them rather than the process itself. It was commented that

*I think its about that one person, not the process, without them I would have given up (P4).*

This was echoed by a number of participants. It was suggested that this one person was not always a social worker. For some participants it was a teacher or a health visitor, for others it was their own, or their child's social worker.

It is clear from this theme that the approach of social workers within the adoption field (either the child's or the adoptive parents) has a significant impact on the outcome and experience of the participants. Although there are legal and policy frameworks that need to be considered the approach of social workers, and the way in which the expectations of the participants were communicated varied considerably (Oliver 2010). This is in direct opposition to what was found out within the literature review where, according to AdoptSouth (2024) and UK Government (2024) there are strict process that must be followed by adoptive parents and placing authorities. This shows that there are placing authorities that, although align themselves with governmental legislation, produce their own policy to practice. However, it can be argued,

considering the views of participants above that, there are times these policies and legislations are being moulded to fit the social worker, rather than the now families, which means that families do not know what to expect during the process.

### **4.3. Being the Perfect Parent**

The second theme to be considered is the concept of the adoptive parents who felt that they had to either prove that they were or could always be a 'perfect parent.' Within this section the participants describe the need to fulfil everything that was set out by social workers in order to keep their children, jump through the hoops of all mandatory training and putting their own needs last when considering everyone else in the process (Weistra and Luke, 2017).

A number of participants discussed the warnings that were given throughout the application and assessment period, there were discussions on what was expected of the adoptive parents (UK Government, 2024), what they would have to do to prove themselves as

*good prospective parents (P2).*

This included, before the child is placed a number of training events such as preparatory training which included, but is not extensive: Paediatric First Aid, how to wean a child, attachment focused parenting and safeguarding training (AdoptSouth 2024). Participants recognised that this was an important part of the process

*we need to know about attachment disorders because we are told constantly our children will have one (P2)*

However, there were some observations by participants that some of this training was not relevant to them, for example

*why did I have to attend mandatory training on weaning a baby when I was approved to adopt from 3 years old?(P8)*

This training, according to some participants was seen as supportive and appropriate, if they needed it, however one participant commented that, for training generally,

*if it were truly supportive, I would have had bespoke training for me and the child I had been matched with, not being forced to attend paediatric first aid when I already had it through work... what a waste of time and money (P3).*

This was further supported by another participant who described the training as

*part of this is the expectation of you as an adoptive parent, and you have to meet it, not what support can we offer you as an adoptive parent (P2).*

This perception is not available in research and literature currently. There is guidance on what parents should be trained on (AdoptSouth 2024) however, this is for all prospective adopters and is not bespoke. Conversely one participant parent discussed some of the additional support they were offered once their child moved in (UK Government, 2024). They had access to psychologists and professionals who knew their children which made their experience

*easier because we could talk about our children with people who knew them and why they were behaving the way they were (P7).*

The support outlined above may have been beneficial to six of the participants who commented that they had to be

*perfect parents and get nothing wrong (P6)*

These participants felt this as, if they were not, the child would be removed from them (Weistra and Luke 2017). There was a fear amongst participants that asking for help would be frowned upon as, in the words of one participant

*you have to be resilient to fight for your child and if you're not then you won't be a good adoptive parent – this was the message I was given anyway (P1).*

Evidencing this included, for a lot of participants getting certain tasks done in timeframes such as registering their child with medical services and schools, however for many this felt like

double standards (UK Government, 2024). By this, many participants commented that, although they had to stick to timeframes, many of the children's social workers did not. One participant commented that

*we were told constantly that our child's social worker was busy which meant that some things were not done on time and we just had to accept it (P6),*

This constant busyness and discussion about how busy social workers were meant that for some participants they

*took on the pressures and stresses of my adopted child, my family, and the pressure from the social worker too – if I had a problem I found it difficult to ask for help because I didn't want to add to the pressure the social worker was clearly already under (P3).*

For many participants there was a feeling that they were being watched constantly (Macleod, Storey, Rushe, Kavanagh, Agnew & McLaughlin, 2021). This was either as a result of the home visits, LAC review meetings, doctor appointments, meetings with the school and social workers and also through check-ins with their own social workers. Although all participants understood the reasons for this, as outlined by one participant saying

*they need to make sure that the kids are ok, I get that, but no other parent gets this kind of scrutiny... not even their birth parents! (P6)*

Another commented that

*there were times I was feeling like I'm not doing a good job – but didn't know how I could do it without being further judged because I felt judged by everyone and everything else, because I wasn't perfect... who is?(P5)*

When struggling with feeling overwhelmed at the feeling of being a failure (Kohn-Willbridge, Pike & de Visser 2021), one participant explained that they did not feel attached to their child, where others in the family did, their child did not seem to want or need the participant for anything so they

*decided to become a practical parent as the emotions and pressures to be perfect were too hard (P2).*

It is clear that, from the experiences of the participants, they felt the need to follow all guidance and procedure given to them from social workers, even if the value was not recognised (UK Government, 2024). There are a number of incidents outlined above where participants felt they were being more closely monitored and judged than other parents, or birth families. A number of participants, who struggled to form an attachments to their child(ren), or felt it hard to manage the behaviour of their child(ren) felt they had nowhere to go to ask for support or guidance other than their social workers, or no one at all. This links to what was discovered within the literature review around adoptive parents being exhausted by the pressures of adopting a child (Macleod, Storey, Rushe, Kavanagh, Agnew & McLaughlin, 2021). There is a recognition in the literature review that adoptive parents must follow specific training and meet outlined specifications as set out by social workers (AdoptSouth, 2024), however, again these expectations were not consistent for participants, which is important for all (Baginsky, 2023). If guidelines and expectations are not consistent across all placing authorities there are chances for mistakes and issues to not be recognised.

#### **4.4. The Legal Process and Setting the Family Culture**

The third theme to be discussed is the difficulties experienced by a number of participants when considering the legal process, they were within and the statutory guidelines they were told to adhere to, whilst at the same time trying to formulate their new family and the culture of that family. As outlined above, according to the literature reviewed (UK Government 2024; Adopt South 2024 and Seymour 2019) and Krutzinna (2021 p.195) is

*'the legal process through which the state establishes a parental relationship... where there exists no previous procreative relationship'.*



However many of the participants found it difficult to navigate the policy restraints around things such as how and where to dress their children, where to read to them and how they would automatically do this as a new family. Kritzinna (2021) and Seymor (2019) both strongly outline the legal nature of the process of adoption, however this strict and robust system (UK Government 2024; Adoption and Children Act 2002) does not consider the experiences of the participants as outlined below.

One of the paradoxes that most participants brought up was the juxtaposition between being the child(ren's) parent, at the same time as not having full parental responsibilities. As a result of an adoption order not being in place, as discussed above, adoptive parents do not have a legal right over the decisions made for their child (UK Government, 2024). For example if participants did not want to give their child the flu vaccine would have to as the child was still considered as looked after by the local authority or adoption agency

*We had to vaccinate our child, even though we wouldn't have chosen to, to meet the requirements of social care – we were scared that if we didn't our child would be removed from us (P6).*

This requirement to meet the legal needs of the placing authority over the way in which the participants would have liked to have established their family was a running theme within this research.

*If my child was a birth child I could have done what I wanted when I wanted, instead I had to follow rules that felt unnatural to us as family like not being allowed to tell my child their bed time story in the bedrooms – we had to do that on the sofa (P5).*

Another example of this inability to treat the adopted child like any other child in the family was when one of the participants recalled signing a contract that outlined what they could and could not do once their child had moved in and before the adoption order. This contract included things such as not bathing with the child, lying in bed with the child or rough play and

*I wasn't even allowed to tickle my child; this had a real impact on the bond I was able to make with my child and our family life with this child that is not ours... this was at the same time as being told we had to look after our child as if they were ours (P3)*

There was no mention of this within the literature available or within the legal frameworks of the processes considered, as such it can be deduced that this was the policy of this specific authority rather than a legal or recommended framework to work within as set out by the UK Government (2024). There is a need for clarity within the process for adopters so that everyone can expect to be held to the same rules and regulations. Although participants understood the need for some of these restraints it has an extremely negative impact building the family life. These areas were discussed and outlined at the approval section of the process, but not within policy given to them.

Conversely two participants mentioned that they were given free reign over how they set the culture of their family. One participant said that.

*we were told that this is our family... do what you want. If you think its right to bath with your child... do it, if you think its right to lie in bed and read to your child... do it. This gave us the permission to be a family from the start (P1).*

Whereas the other explained that they were told to when it came to personal care and the general behaviours within the family home that they were to

*do what's right for your family (P7).*

This experience is in direct opposition to all other participants interviewed. Linked to this formation of a family was if a child had to go to hospital, although medical professionals were calling participants mum or dad, the participants were not able to sign any legal documents during the time considered in the research (UK Government 2024). This meant that social care would have to be contacted to approve any medical intervention (AdoptSouth 2024)

*this was done in the middle of a corridor, and I had to explain our circumstances over and over which I found hard (P3).*

This experience was echoed by a number of participants, whether at the doctor's surgery, dentist, library, school, and any letters as the child would not be allowed to have the participants family name until the court order is in place (UK Government 2024). One participant commented that, in order to try and minimise this, they would

*ask for all appointments to be called out in my name so that I didn't have to have the conversation over and over again, with my child and others, about my child having a different surname to me, I knew I shouldn't do it, but it made that part so much easier (P8).*

Another commented that, as they knew some of the teachers or doctors, they asked them privately to use the participant name rather than the given surname so that

*it would be easier for the kids (P4).*

This view of not being a 'normal family' further supported when a number of adoptive parents talked about being able to take their children away on holiday, rather than being able to book a last-minute holiday and make a decision themselves they would have to ask the child's social worker if they were allowed to go on holiday with their children before even considering it (Kohn-Willbridge, Pike & de Visser 2021).

All participants found building the culture and routines of a family difficult with the prescribed timeframes for meeting extended families hard

*we are family people, we visit our family every week, or they would come to us, it was so hard not to see them and introduce our child to them for weeks (P7).*

This was a running theme for all couple of the participants, with another commenting that

*a strong support network is a requirement of being able to adopt, but then, once the children move in you all of a sudden can't see your support network or introduce your children to them, it didn't make sense to me (P4).*

However, the single participants interviewed explained that

*the rules were bent for me, as I was on my own with a 4-year-old all the time, I was 'allowed' to introduce my child to our wider family sooner. I think the social worker realised that I needed to see my family and that my child needed to experience what being in my family would be like in real life, by real life I mean after the adoption order was in place (P8).*

This is in opposition of the legal frameworks as outlined in the literature review above (UK Government 2024) where there is guidance that states that families with new children having moved in should not introduce their wider families and networks to the child for a period of time (AdoptSouth 2024). Whereas, for all of the couple of the participants, they were told to keep to the time frames, even when their children had a birthday in that initial period

*we were told not to have a party and not to invite our family to celebrate with us (P5).*

Another aspect of this that was hard was for parents who had children (either their own birth families, or previously adopted) and their ability to see wider family.

*I found it difficult to choose between letting my other children see friends and family and my adoptive child not, or no one seeing them. I still don't think I got it right (P3).*

This is set out during the adoption process by the placing authority which outlines the roles and responsibilities of the adoptive parents, the local authority and the birth parents before the adoption order is granted (UK Government, 2024).

The decision to apply for the adoption order was a hard one for some participants and an easy one for others. Three participants applied for the adoption order after 10 weeks, one commented that

*there was no way I wasn't going to apply for the order so why would I wait (P8),*

Another stated that their decision was a practical one saying

*the LAC review officer was happy, social workers were happy, we were doing ok, so we put the order in (P6),*

This was again supported by another participant who commented that they

*I wanted the process to be over, I wanted to get to a 'normal family life' with my child and make my own decisions so I put it in as soon as possible (P5).*

Conversely, for those who waited there were a few varied reasons that are linked. There were two participants who commented that they were not ready to put in the application with one commenting that

*I hadn't bonded with my child, and I didn't feel ready to say they were mine (P2),*

Other reasons for not applying for the adoption order after 10 weeks were around their sited their own needs not being met

*I'd asked for support a number of times because I was finding the process and behaviour of my children hard, but, until I got the help, I didn't think it was a good idea to make it official (P4).*

For those who waited longest, it was the support available to their children, or lack thereof, that prohibited them from applying for the order, one participant mentioned that

*our social worker said not to put the order in until we got the emotional support for our kids – we didn't get that support, and still haven't, but it was getting too long so we applied anyway (P7).*

In support of this another participant commented that

*we had asked and asked for some support for our child, some life story work, some social stories, anything that would help him with his trauma, but we got nothing. We were told by our social worker we would be more likely to get the support if the children were still considered LAC so we would be even less likely to get the support if the order was in (P1).*

This lack of support for adopted children was a running theme throughout the research, and although post adoption support (AdoptSouth 2024) is out of the remit for this research every participant mentioned that it is difficult to get support for an adoptive child as they are now in permanence. One participant mentioned that

*just because my children are now legally mine, it does not mean that their trauma is any less than when they were looked after by foster carers who would have been able to access support easily (P1).*

This view was somewhat outlined by Walker (2018) who outlines that it is the decision of the local authority, LAC review officers and the adoptive parents as to when to apply for the Adoption Order. There is a concern for the researcher that applying for the Adoption Order is dependant on the issues raised above by the participants, rather than it being the right time for them as a family.

For the participants who adopted siblings there was a difference in what was expected of them, for example one of the participants were able to have their children share a bedroom, whereas the other was not. This was not down to the biological sex of the children, but it was the policy of one authority (AdoptSouth 2024) that all children should have their own bedroom and the other authority did not hold the same views, one participant commented that

*this isn't the case for families with biological children – why was it an issue for us? (P7)*

Finally, within this section is when the application for the adoption order is put in. The process is explained above in the literature review; however, it is important for context to mention that the adoptive parent and the adoptive parent's social worker do not attend the hearing, the child social worker and the birth family are able to attend (Adoption and Children Act 2002). This caused concern for the participants in this research

*I've spent a year trying to create a family, introduce my children to our wider family, friends and set up our lives together, get them settled in school, after school activities and then, people I've never met, who haven't seen us together, who have no idea how happy my child is, can all of a sudden decide I am not the right parent for this child, and return my child to the birth parents. Waiting for that phone call was the hardest thing I've been through without being physically present (P3).*

This sentiment was replicated with seven of the participants. Although rationally participants knew their child would not be removed and placed back with the birth families, they were always aware that the birth family could contest and that some children had been removed (Adoption and Children's Act 2002). One participant commented that

*I was always thinking, we've started to build the family and our child might be taken from us (P5).*

Four of the parents interviewed outlined that the birth parents for their children contested the adoption order (UK Government, 2024). This meant that the legal process was more drawn out and that it added pressure on the family, even though for one family they were not worried about the contest of birth parents as

*there was no way the children were going back to the birth parents, but this time was very stressful and there was no support for us as adoptive parents in this time (P4).*

This was echoed by all participants, no support was offered for any participant when they were waiting for the court order to be processed. This is in direct opposition to Rutter and Brown (2020 p.78) as outlined in the literature review have the responsibility to 'provide support, prevent harm and enable progress'. There is a lack of clarity through the interviews and the literature available as to the reasons for this.

The concerns and experiences outlined above are, in the main, as a result of the policy and legal frameworks set out by central government (UK Government, 2024) and then the policies it

informs in either the placing agency or local authority who has responsibility for the children in care. There is a need for these to be considered again and in a more conducive way that will support the formation of a forever family at the same time as safeguarding children, there is an absence of this in literature and research. When considering what was found in the literature review this ties in again with the process not being adhered to with all participants and the approaches of social workers within the field. It was highlighted above that, depending on which individual's social workers were informed the experience they had (Baginsky, 2023). Beyond this however, the issues and concerns raised by participants are not recorded within literature currently and therefore need exploring further. The literature available outlines the legal complexities of the adoption process (UK government 2024; Adoption and Childrens Act 2002) however, there is a concern within this research that the emotional support and practicalities of parenting and forming a new family within this rigorous and tight context is not considered or researched.

#### **4.5. Lack of Support for Adoptive Parents**

The final theme to be discussed within the research is that of the support offered to participant throughout the timeframe considered. Most participants outlined the feeling that they were not supported by the framework put in place to safeguard and develop their family, or the people within it (UK Government 2024; AdoptSouth 2024; Macleod, Storey, Rushe, Kavanagh, Agnew & McLaughlin 2021). Participants, as outlined below, felt that social workers did not always hear their concerns if they were communicated to them, neither did social workers notice that some of the participants were struggling. There were also concerns around the family and wider support networks that prospective adopters must evidence (UK Government, 2024) and then being able to see them at the beginning of the placement period.



All participants discussed the need for more support to be offered to them during the entire process of adoption from the interviews to produce your panel documents to when the children move in with them as the process was described as

*very intrusive and triggering (P4)*

All participants mentioned that there was training offered to them (AdoptSouth 2024), as part of the process – most of which is mandatory (as discussed previously) but that this, generally did not meet their needs as new parents.

Some participants pointed out that it was difficult to tell their social workers, or the children's social worker that they were struggling because they were, in the words of one participant

*scared that they would think I wasn't a suitable parent and take my child back off me (P3)*

This was a feeling that was replicated by another participant who said that

*I had to be strong and cope with everything, if not social care would think I wasn't a good enough parent (P5).*

On the other hand, one participant explained that they

*told my social worker everything, they needed to know how hard, violent, and explosive my life was with my child (P8).*

There were however two participants who cited no issues with behaviour or challenges beyond what a family who gave birth to their child would, however one participant recognised that this might

*be because when our child moved, they were totally reliant on us for everything and was not aware of what was going on, because they were a baby (P5)*

The other participant commented that

*the process was followed, in a timely manner and we knew what to expect from one month to another, that helped (P7).*

This lack of support and fear of repercussions is somewhat in line with the literature available (Kohn-Willbridge, Pike & de Visser, 2021; Weistra and Luke 2017), however there is a lack of depth to the literature available, perhaps as the questions asked in these research papers were not the right ones, or the context of the research is different.

Six participants explained that going from having no children in the house too having either a baby, or, in the case of many (six of the eight) participants children who were three or over, having a fully formed child moving in with them was a shock and difficult. One participant commented that

*all of a sudden, I had a toddler, who on the outside looked like any other toddler, but on the inside was confused, scared and angry. Going from no children in the house to that was very hard (P2).*

Another participant supported this opinion by expressing that

*my child was angry, they were old enough to know they were angry but not be able to say why. This meant we were exposed to a lot of violence and outbursts in the beginning that we, as parents, were just trying to live through (P6).*

A third participant stated that

*there was this child, who would hit me every time they were angry, and at this time, I didn't even like them, never mind love them, and it was so hard. I asked my social worker for help, and they said it was something everyone goes through. But that's not true is it, not everyone goes through that (P8).*

Although all these experiences were highlighted to social workers, a number of responses were the same as above, other participants remembered comments from either their own or the children's social worker that included

*we know it's hard, but it will get better... make sure you look after yourself... have you tried using PACE [Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy – a theory for therapeutic parenting] ... we did say this might happen (P4)*

One participant, in response to this being said to them commented

*how am I supposed to be therapeutic in my response when I'm being hit and screamed at, and how am I supposed to look after myself in that moment too – I have my child to look after (P1).*

This running theme throughout the interviews is supported by Macleod, Storey, Rushe, Kavanagh, Agnew and McLaughlin (2021) who discuss the difficult process adoptive parents have already encountered before the child has moved in.

During the interviews with the participants as soon as any of the eight participants mentioned their own needs or, outlined how hard an experience for them was, they would immediately bring the conversation back to their adoptive child(ren) observing that although the experience was hard for them, it was harder for their child(ren) with one claiming

*As an adopter I don't think about what I want or need, I think about my child first, always, in everything (P3),*

This was echoed by another when considering themselves in the process, they commented that

*I was deep in it, living it every day, I couldn't see anything past what was needed for my child. I had no idea what I might need to help me (P2).*

As a result of this a number of participants mentioned that perhaps this is when the participant is vocalising their concerns to social workers that bespoke support needs to be put in place, with one participant commenting that

*I just wish someone had listened to me, rather than using their visits as a tick box monitoring session, I needed help, and my social worker didn't help me (P1)*

This was echoed by another participant commented that it was not their social worker who checked on how they were feeling but a LAC review officer (UK Government 2024) who ended up asking

*are you ok? (P2)*

They went onto explain that

*I felt like, after a long, intrusive, and gruelling experience to get my child, and then things were not what I thought they would be when my child moved in, and they did not get any better, that I was just a number on a spreadsheet (P2).*

This was supported by another participant who commented that as result of someone else asking them that question the participant was able to be open and honest with how they were feeling, saying

*I got the support I needed, I wonder though, if my social worker had noticed or asked about me, if I would have needed as much support as I did (P7).*

Two participants explained that they felt supported by their social worker and all the training, and additional resources they were offered. What specifically supported these participants was things such as

*access to a psychologist who could help me to understand my child's violent outburst (P7)*

The second participant agreed that

*support groups and peers, set up by our adoption agency helped us a lot with the little questions (P4).*

These are practices that were not replicated throughout all experiences of participants, but just those who adopted through a specific agency. One participant pointed out that

*If the adoptive parent is better supported, then the adoptive child is better supported (P3).*

This lack of support for adoptive parents through the process is reflected within the literature review.

The final area, which all participants explained some support would have been beneficial to them is contact with birth families (Adoption and Children's Act 2002). This is not direct contact, as discussed earlier in these results, but writing to birth families to update them on how the children are and what they are doing, and then, also receiving letters in return (AdoptSouth 2024).

Five of the participants commented that they felt guilt when writing initially to the birth families, three participants however did not. Of those who did not feel guilty for having the children they commented that

*yes, the birth family obviously loved my child, but they couldn't look after them and the child is what is most important here (P2).*

Conversely those who felt guilt talked about how difficult it must be for the birth families to know that there is a child(ren) that they will not meet until they are eighteen, and how much that must hurt. One participant said

*writing that letter was one of the hardest things I've had to do, what do I put in it? how do I write it? what don't I put in it? It's so hard to explain what your child has been doing, without making it sound like the birth parents were awful and I'm perfect, and then not making to sound really hard, because why then should I have my child, and then put their minds at ease. It's just so hard. Some support would have been so good (P3)*

Another participant however, commented on the letter they received, they explained how the birth mother had

*requested that certificates and artwork of the children be kept for her, as if the children were going to be returned to her, it was harrowing to read (P1).*

For the participants who adopted younger children, they found it difficult to access and attend parent and toddler groups or play groups as they

*didn't know what I was supposed to do there, I all of a sudden had a baby but hadn't been to any anti-natal appointments or classes so I just didn't know what to do, I felt like everyone was looking at me like I knew nothing... because I didn't (P5)*

Another experience was remembered as

*I had a toddler who didn't sit still and sing and play, they tore around the place when everyone else's child was sat nice and calmly, I felt watched and judged by every other parent there (P1).*

Although this direct feeling was not experienced by participants who adopted older children, they did feel judgement and confusion when talking their child to school with one participant remembering.

*I was asked a lot why my child hadn't been in the school before and then, when it came to assembly celebrations and other parents weren't allowed to share videos or photos on social media, they would ask me what my problem was (P8).*

This was a common theme throughout the participants experiences.

As outlined by Kohn-Willbridge, Pike & de Visser (2021) and Macleod, Storey, Rushe, Kavanagh, Agnew and McLaughlin (2021) a number of adoptive parents do not ask for support once the children have moved into their homes, unless they are in crisis. This is evidenced further by the findings above. In the main, the participants spoken to did not ask for support when small issues arose in the family, this however meant, at times that the issues grew. According to the research above and Weistra and Luke (2017), when considering post adoption support, this is due to the stigma of asking for support, not wanting to look like they could not cope and not feeling their worries were bad enough, this is echoed again within the research above. However, there was no literature to validate or question the views and experiences of

the participants as outlined above. As a result of this it is hard to argue against these experiences of the adoptive parents.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

Throughout this research, it was clear that participant wanted nothing but the best for their children, and that, they were able to recognise that this is what social workers wanted too, however the way in which this was outlined to the participants of this research was vastly different, and, although many of the issues were the same, the response from those who were supposed to support participant through the process was not always helpful, thought out, practical or even child centred. It is clear, from the research, that participant constantly compare themselves to what they consider ‘normal families’ (families who are birth children only) and the experiences these children get compared to the children who move in with the families I spoke to. As all participants have had their children for at least 2 years there are a number of concerns and issues raised about post-adoption support available which somewhat aligns to the findings above, such as independent people to contact for support and the emotional drain of having a child who lives with trauma. However, this was out of the scope for this research. For all participants, no matter how hard the process was, and continues to be they commented that now they have their family somewhat established it was worth it, this can be summarised by one participant’s comments of

*the whole process was bloody hard, but its bloody worth it too (P3)*

In the next section I will be considering the conclusions and recommendations from the findings of this piece of research.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section each theme will be considered in relation to future practice and will give any recommendations for the future.

### **Approach of Social Workers/Lack of Consistency with Expectations:**

In general, there is a view from participants that the approach of social workers can have a detrimental impact on the experience of participant and families, and that this in turn has a negative impact on the parents themselves. There are many instances in the research conducted when social workers would minimise the feelings and concerns of participant leaving them feeling dismissed (Macleod, Storey, Rushe, Kavanagh, Agnew & McLaughlin, 2021). There are also a number of inconsistencies in regard to the expectations of adopters which were different to what is outlined in policy (UK Government, 2024). Participants felt, in general, let down by the process and support that was available for their children whilst waiting for the adoption order to be applied for and approved. As individuals' experiences were greatly influenced by who their social worker was and if they deemed them to be 'good social workers' it is recommended that

### **Recommendations**

*a model be devised which would supports social workers to have the same approach for all adopters.  
policies of individual adoption agencies and local authorities are more robustly and a more standardised linked to the legal requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.*

### **Being the Perfect Parent:**

All participants commented that they felt judged (Wildling 2024; Weistra & Luke 2017). There were a number of incidences where, in medical, social and educational settings participants would have to explain their situation repeatedly, often in communal areas. There were also



incidents which forced participants to have conversations with their child(ren) around their names being different (Adoption and Children's Act 2002).

There was also a feeling amongst participants that they had to be 'perfect' parents at all times, even if they themselves were struggling (Macleod, Storey, Rushe, Kavanagh, Agnew & McLaughlin, 2021). The participants felt that, when struggling with attachment with their child(ren) or the violent behaviour of their child they were expected to be able to manage this and accept it, rather than being offered the appropriate training and support for their child's needs.

#### Recommendations:

*Develop adoption informed practitioners within professional settings, this would include professionals from General Practitioners; Health Visitors; Paediatric Nurses; School Nurse; Emergency Department Staff; Hospital Staff; Speak and Language Therapist; Play Leader; Nursery Worker and Teachers what are specifically trained to know about the additional needs a child who is going through the adoption process might have by having an in depth knowledge on disorders and trauma informed behaviours.*

*More in-depth knowledge of the legal process so that adoptive parents would not need to explain the complexities of this period of time over and again.*

#### **The Legal Process and Setting the Family Culture**

There was a recognition that the legal process is needed to support and maintain safeguarding of the child(ren) involved in adoption (Adoption and Children Act 2002), however there was an identification that this did not meet the needs of the adoptive parent (Wildling 2024).

Adoptive parents have no say on the outcome in court, even though the child might have been living with them for up to two years or more. Adoptive parents have no legal responsibilities for the child during this time and (UK Government 2024), they will not have been part of setting up any support network groups as birth families may have been (e.g. anti-natal classes).

There was a view that, although most of the training on offer to participant was generally

suitable there were training events that were mandatory that were not, and then some training that would have been helpful.

Recommendations:

*Bespoke training be offered to adoptive parents, alongside some of the mandatory, that better meet their needs and the needs of the child(ren) they have been matched with.*

*Specialist support groups be set up for adoptive parents that replicate groups such as mother and toddler sessions so that adoptive parents are able to widen their support network in a setting they will not be judged, this means that a shared connection with someone who has similar experiences can fostered.*

**Lack Of Support for Adoptive Parents:**

Generally speaking, participants did not feel supported by their social workers (Oliver 2010; Macleod, Storey, Rushe, Kavanagh, Agnew & McLaughlin, 2021; Weistra and Luke 2017), neither did many participants feel they were able to speak to social workers honestly or openly for fear of judgement, removal of the child from their care or feeling the social worker did not have the time for them (Kohn-Willbridge, Pike & de Visser, 2021). There was a feeling that discussing the strain on marriages and attachment issues with the placed children, with social workers, might make the participants look incapable of parenting their child.

Recommendations:

*Independent support network to be set up, specifically for adoptive parents during this time period.*

*Mentoring programme of adoption experienced people – previous adopters to offer independent advice and guidance for adoptive parents.*

**Conclusion Comments**

There were a number of concerns and issues raised as part of the research that did not fit into the remit of this research, therefore further and more in-depth research is needed with a widening of the timeframes and those who are included within the research. It is the researchers proposition that a follow up piece of research is carried out with adoptive parents to consider the assessment, matching and placement period of adoption to gain an understanding of the

process for adoptive parents, and to outline any learning that can come from it. The researcher suggests that this research should also include social workers who represent both the children and the adoptive parents to gain their insights. I aim to do this by continuing to research in this field by undertaking a doctorate.

This research has shown that adoptive parents, through their lived experiences, as captured above, feel as if they are at the bottom of any priority list when they are trying to set up their new family and offer children a safe and secure home life. Through the recommendations above, there is a hope that the experiences of new adoptive parents will be better and that their experiences and decision-making abilities are improved.

I am to publish this research in the future to support the development of knowledge in this field.

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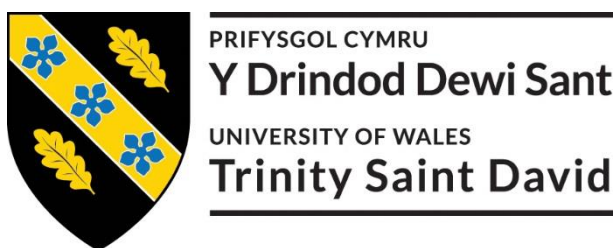
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## **7. APPENDICES**

## **7.1. Appendix 1: Ethics Form**

## **7.2. Appendix 2: Proposal Form**

### 7.3. Appendix 3: Consent Form



Rhif Adnabod Cyfranogwr:   
Participant Identification **CODE**:

**FFURFLEN GANIATÂD PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM  
CYFRANOGIAD**

Teitl Y Prosiect: / Project Title: Adoption: Is it worth it?

Enw'r Ymchwilydd / Name of Researcher: Katie Gardner

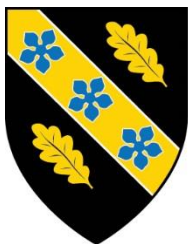
**Blwch Cychwynnol / Please initial box**

1	Cadarnhaf fy mod wedi darllen a deall y daflen wybodaeth dyddiedig 20.12.2022 ar gyfer yr astudiaeth uchod. Rwyf wedi cael y cyfle i ystyried y wybodaeth, gofyn cwestiynau, ac rwyf wedi cael ateb bodddhaol i'r rhain.	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 20.12.2022 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
2	Deallaf fy mod yn cymryd rhan o'm gwirfodd a bod croeso i mi dynnu'n ôl ar unrhyw adeg, heb roi rheswm.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.	
3	Deallaf y gellir defnyddio unrhyw wybodaeth a roddir gennyf mewn adroddiadau, erthyglau neu gyflwyniadau gan y tîm ymchwil.	I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, articles or presentations by the research team.	
4	Deallaf na fydd fy enw'n ymddangos mewn unrhyw adroddiadau, erthyglau neu gyflwyniadau.	I understand that my name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentations.	
5	Cytunaf i gymryd rhan yn yr astudiaeth uchod.	I agree to take part in the above study.	
6	Rwy'n cydsynio i gael fy ailgodi trwy dimau ac yn deall y bydd y	I consent to being recoded via team and understand the recoding will be	

	recordiad yn cael ei ddiarrio ar ôl cwblhau'r adroddiad	destroyed upon completion of the report.	
Enw'r Cyfranogwr Name of Participant		Llofnodwyd Signature	
Ymchwilydd Researcher		Llofnodwyd Signature	

<p>Cewch wrthod cymryd rhan yn yr astudiaeth hon. Cewch ddod â'ch cyfranogiad yn yr astudiaeth hon i ben unrhyw bryd. Os penderfynwch barhau'n ddiennw, bydd sicrhau hynny'n flaenoriaeth a chymerir pob cam ymarferol i guddio pwy ydych. Os yw'n well gennych fod yn anhysbys, ni fydd unrhyw wybodaeth yn eich enwi ar dapiau sain na thrawsgrifiadau o'r cyfweiliad hwn nac o unrhyw un arall. Ni fydd neb yn clywed unrhyw dapiau sain nac yn gweld unrhyw drawsgrifiadau heb eich cydsyniad o flaen llaw. Bydd deunyddiau a grëir yn sgil y cyfweiliad hwn neu unrhyw gyfweiliad arall yn aros yn gyfrinachol.</p>	<p>You may decline to participate in this study. You may end your participation in this study at any time. If you decide to remain anonymous, maintaining your anonymity will be a priority and every practical precaution will be taken to disguise your identity. If you prefer anonymity, there will not be any identifying information on audiotapes or transcripts of this or any interview. No-one will hear any audiotapes or see any transcripts without your prior consent. All materials generated from this or any interview will remain confidential.</p>
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<p>Ar ôl llenwi'r ffurflen, dychwelwch hi yn yr amlen a ddarperir (lle bo'n berthnasol). Rhoddir un copi i'r cyfranogwr a chedwir y gwreiddiol yn ffeil y tîm ymchwilio yn:</p>	<p>When completed please return in the envelope provided (if applicable). One copy will be given to the participant and the original to be kept on the file of the research team at:</p>
<p><b>ENW A CHYFEIRIAD YR YMCHWILYDD</b></p> <p>Katie Gardner C/O University of Wales Trinity Saint David College Road Carmarthen SP31 3EP</p>	<p><b>NAME &amp; ADDRESS OF RESEARCHER</b></p> <p>Katie Gardner C/O University of Wales Trinity Saint David College Road Carmarthen SP31 3EP</p>



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU

**Y Drindod Dewi Sant**

UNIVERSITY OF WALES

**Trinity Saint David**

Rhif Adnabod Cyfranogwr:  
Participant Identification  
Number:

**GANIATÂD CYFRANOGIAD**

20.12.2022

Teitl Y Prosiect: / Project Title: Mabwysiad a magu plant: a yw'n werth chweil?

Annwyl Gyfranogwr:

Fy enw i yw Katie Gardner ac rwy'n astudio yn Ysgol Dyniaethau.

Hoffwn i eich gwahodd i gymryd rhan yn fy mhrosiect ymchwil. Bydd y prosiect hwn yn anela at:

- Archwilio canfyddiadau rhieni sy'n mabwysiadu o ran y broses fabwysiadu.
- Clywed llais rhieni mabwysiadol a dysgu o'u profiadau.
- Rhoi llais i rieni sy'n mabwysiadu drwy gydol y broses fabwysiadu.
- Amlygu arfer da wrth gefnogi rhieni mabwysiadol trwy'r broses.
- Adnabod meysydd i'w datblygu o fewn y broses o fabwysiadu plentyn a'r gefnogaeth a gynnigir i rieni mabwysiadol.
- Nodi unrhyw ymchwil pellach posibl sydd ei angen o ystyried y rhiant mabwysiadol.

Drwy gymryd rhan yn y cyfweiliad, rwy'n gobeithio cael barn a phrofiadau byw rhieni mabwysiadol o'r broses fabwysiadu, yn benodol o ddiwrnod y lleoliad hyd at gytuno ar y gorchymyn lleoli

Cedwir pob holiadur yn gwbl gyfrinachol gan yr ymchwilwyr sy'n rhan o'r gwaith ac **NI** ryddheir unrhyw holiaduron unigol i'r cyhoedd. Mae hyn yn rhoi cyfle i chi ddweud eich dweud am eich rhaglen mewn fforwm cyfrinachol a dienw a gwneud gwahaniaeth o hyd. Mae cymryd rhan yn yr astudiaeth hon yn gwbl wirfoddol ac felly cewch roi'r gorau i lenwi'r holiadur ar unrhyw adeg.

Mae eich impute wrth ateb cwestiynau'r cyfweiliad, a ddylai gymryd tua awr, yn hanfodol i mi wrth ystyriad y broses fabwysiadu a sut y gellid ei gwella, yn ogystal â thynny sylw at arfer da.

Ar ôl inni ddadansoddi'r data o'r holiadur hwn yn ofalus ac yn fanwl, bydd croeso i chi gael copi o'n canfyddiadau os dymunwch.

Diolch ymlaen llaw am eich amser a'ch cyfraniad. Os bydd gennych unrhyw gwestiynau, mae croeso i chi gysylltu â ni pan fydd yn gyfleus.

Katie Gardner



Rhif Adnabod Cyfranogwr:  
Participant Identification  
Number:

**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION** 20.12.2022  
**SHEET**

Teitl Y Prosiect: / Project Title: Adoption and Parenting: is it worth it?

Dear Participant:

My name is Katie Gardner and I am studying in the School of Humanities.

I would like to invite you to participate in my research project. This project aims to:

- Explore the perceptions of Adoptive parents in regards to the adoption process
- To hear the voice of adoptive parents and learn from their experiences.
- Give adoptive parents a voice throughout the process of adoption.
- Highlight good practice in the support of adoptive parents through the process.
- Identify areas for development within the process of adopting a child and the support offered to adoptive parents.
- Identify any further possible research needed considering the adoptive parent.

Through your participation in the interview, I hope to ascertain the views and lived experiences of adoptive parents of the process of adoption, specifically from placement day to the placement order being agreed.

All questionnaires will be kept strictly confidential to the researchers involved and at **NO** time will individual questionnaires be released to the general public. This gives you a chance to express your views on your programme a confidential and anonymous forum and still be able to make a difference. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary so you can withdraw from the questionnaire at any stage.

Your impute in answering the interview questions, which should take around an hour are vital to me in considering the adoption process and how it might be improved, as well as, highlighting good practice.

After careful and precise analysis of the data obtained from this Interview, I will be happy to provide you with a copy of the findings at your request.

I thank you in advance for your time and participation. If any questions do arise, feel free to contact me at your convenience.

Katie Gardner



#### 7.4. Appendix 4: Interview Schedule

Code:



#### **Adoption: Is it worth it?**

As a student on the Equity and Diversity in Society Masters students I am conducting a piece of research into the lived experiences of adoptive parents from the day of placement to the adoption order.

The research will look at the stories of adoptive parents in two geographical areas considering their experiences and aims to outline some areas of development as well as identifying good practice.

#### **The interview will last for 15 - 60 minutes.**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for taking the time to engage with the study.

#### **CONSENT**

I have read the accompanying letter and consent form and am happy to consent to Participate in Adoption: is it worth it research with Katie Gardner as a student with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David:

I also understand that although the data from this study may be published, my identity will be kept confidential.

---

Name please print:

---

(Signature)

---

(Date)

<b>Code</b>	
<b>Organization</b>	

## INTRODUCTION

<b>Question 2:</b>
1. Tell me about your family

## PRIOR TO ADOPTION

<b>Question 2:</b>
2.1 What advice and/or support were you given prior to adopting?
2.2 Are you aware/were you made aware of the statutory guidelines for adoption? <i>Prompts:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What are they?</i></li> <li>• <i>How were you informed about them?</i></li> </ul>
2.3 What is your opinion on the statutory guidelines for adoption?

## BETWEEN PLACEMENT AND ADOPTION ORDER

<b>Question 3:</b>
3.1 Can you tell me about <b><u>your experiences</u></b> between your child(ren) moved in with you and you were given the adoption order

**3.2** Were there any difficulties during this time?

**Prompts:**

- *What were they?*
- *What went well?*

**3.3:** What support did your get during the adoption process between placement and adoption order?

**Prompts:**

- *Did you request the support or was it suggested to you?*
- *Was the support offered what you asked for?*
- *Who decided on what support was offered?*

**3.4** Was the support you received appropriate to your needs?

- *If not, please explain why.*

**3.5** Did the support during the adoption process match **your expectations?**

- *If not, why not- please explain*
- *For example this could include social care, family, friends etc*

**3.6** Do you consider that statutory guidelines were kept to in this time?

- *Of not – please explain why*

**3.7** What, if anything, would **further support you** prior or during the adoption process?

**WIDER REACH/ AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

**Question 4**

**4.1** Can you tell me **your feelings** in regard to the adoption process?

**4.2** How do you think **your needs were considered** or met throughout the process or adopting your child(ren)?

- *Please explain.*

**WIDER REACH/ AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

**Question 5**

**5.1** Can you tell me a happy memory you have with your family.

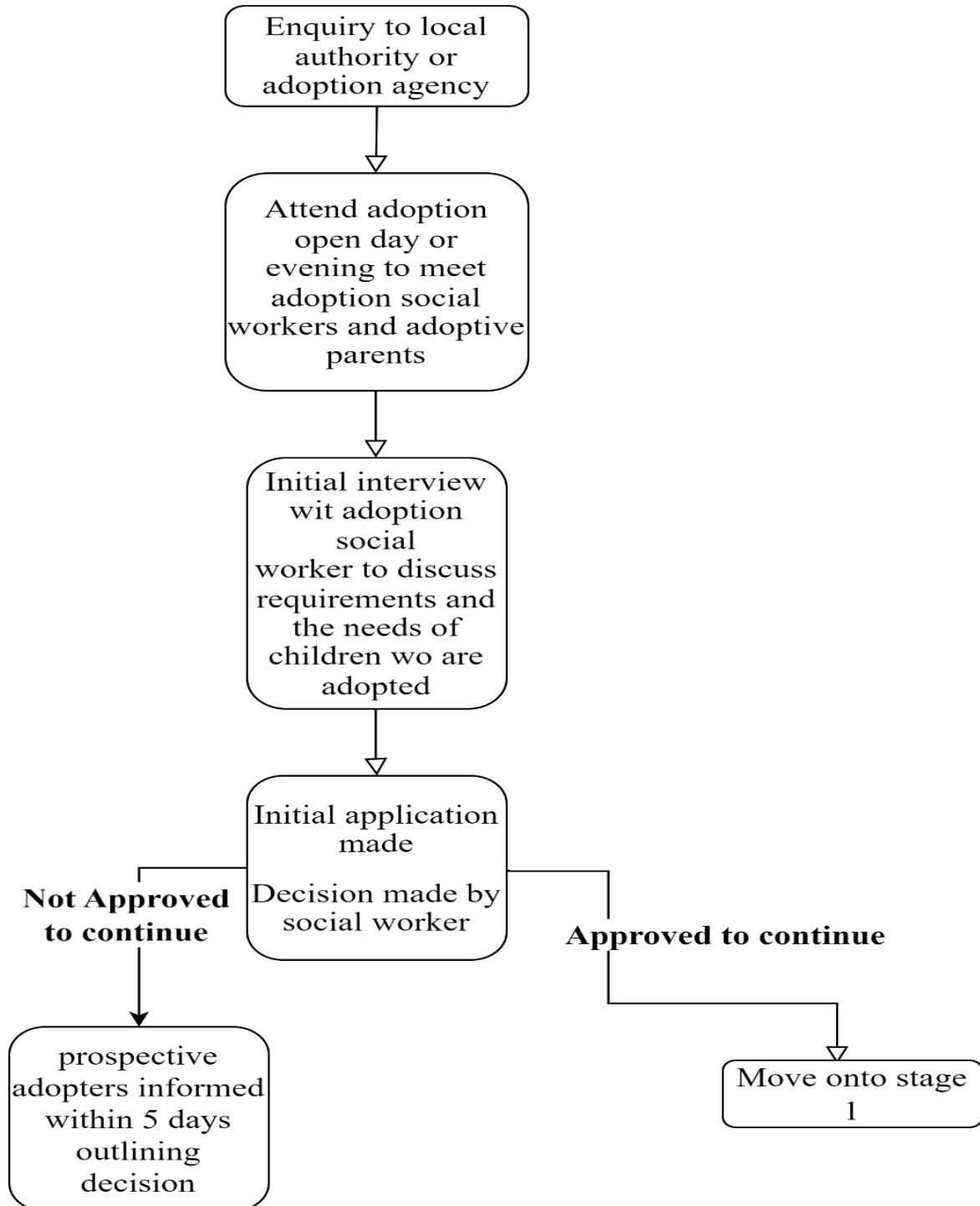
**6. Please outline any other comments you would like to make in relation to the research.**

**Many thanks for taking the time to be interviewed.**

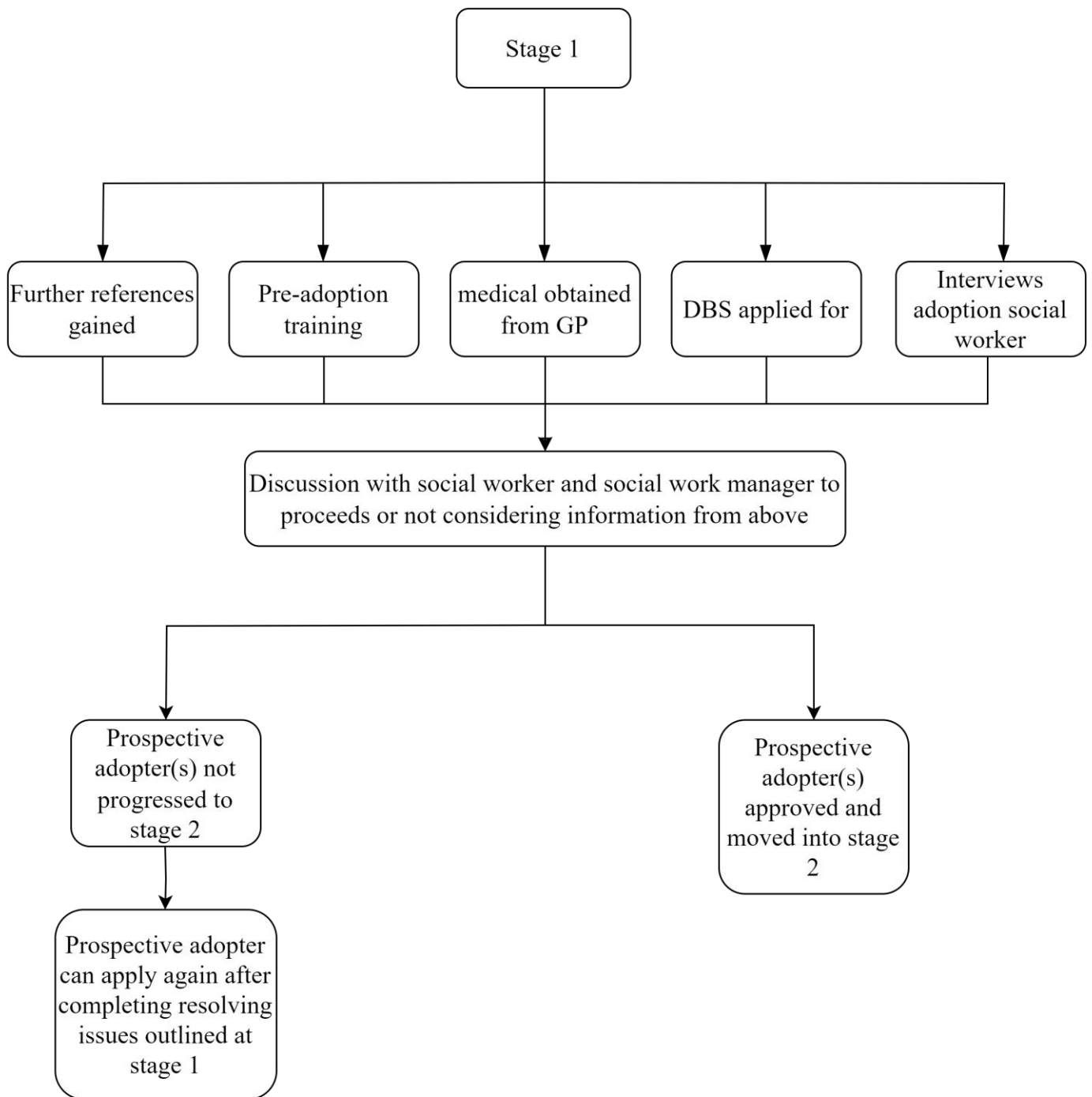
## 7.5. Appendix 7: Adoption Process Flowcharts

Based on AdoptSouth (2024)

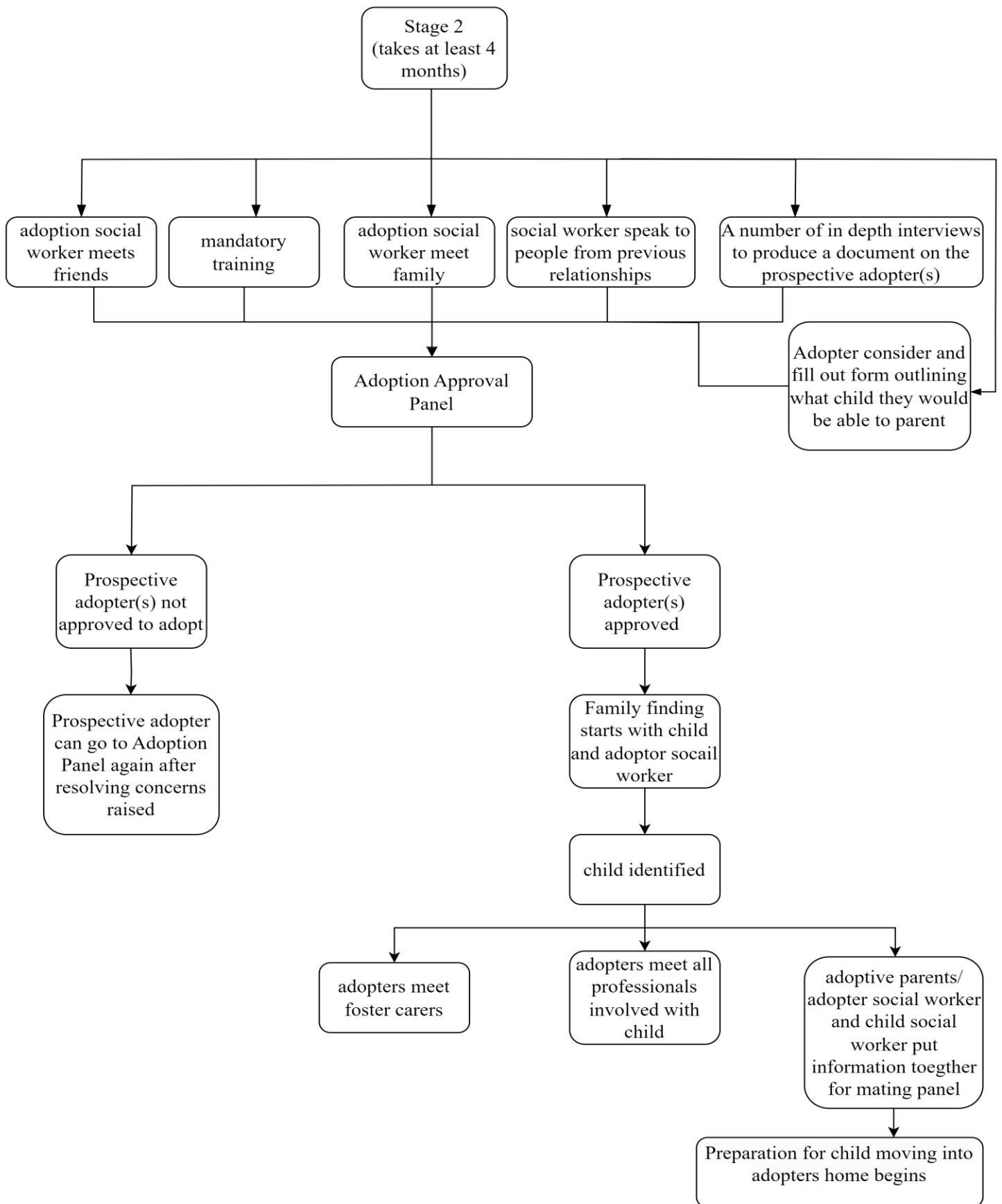
### Enquiries –



Stage 1 –



**Stage 2 -**



**From Preparation for child to move in –**

