

**Filipino Adoptive Families' Experiences:
A Qualitative Analysis of Disclosure and Adjustment Issues**

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Not known to many, adoption is a common practice even in ancient societies. Egyptian, Indian, Greek and Roman societies had practiced some form of adoption to meet the needs and interests of adults and society and not necessarily to look after the interests of the children. At present, adoption is seen as an option for birth mothers who may be too young or unprepared to raise a child, and for many childless couples who have been waiting to have a child of their own. For the adopted children, adoption is an alternative to being institutionalized or fostered by another family (Brodzinsky, Smith & Brodzinsky, 1998).

Whereas there are many studies on adoption in other countries, there is a dearth of published research on adoption-related topics in the Philippines. This study attempts to look into some of the issues experienced by Filipino adoptive families. In particular, difficulties in adoption adjustments, ways of dealing with these challenges, and factors that help them adjust to their adoptive family status are the issues explored in this study.

ADOPTED CHILDREN

Many studies have emphasized the comparison between adopted and non-adopted children in several areas of functioning, from academic adjustment to school behaviors, and peer and family relationships. They have looked into the behavior and adjustment problems (Brodzinsky, Schechter, Braff & Singer, 1984; Brodzinsky, Smith & Brodzinsky, 1998; Palacios & Sanchez-Sandoval, 2005). and psychological issues (Brodzinsky et. al. 1998; Grotevant, 1977; Juffer, Stams & IJzendoorn) of adopted children. However, many of these studies reveal consistent findings.

For the Filipino adoptees, what came out as significant in the study of Borja (1996) was the adoptees' tendency to be alone and to a lesser degree their propensity for aggression and fighting. Feelings of hurt, depression and uncertainty, coupled with thoughts of abandonment and low self-concept also emerged in the study. Likewise, *pakikitungo ng iba sa inampon* (the way people relate with the adoptees) and *kasiyahan sa nabuong kwentong-buhay* (happiness with one's life story) were found to have strong influences on the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of the 39 adoptees in his study.

The study on the self-concept of Filipino adolescent adoptees (De Los Reyes, 2002) shows that the adoptive status does not results in poor or negative self-concept. In that same study, qualitative analysis showed that family relationships and functioning, such as open communication on matters pertaining to adoption, can minimize the negative impact

of the identified psychological factors, namely loss or absence of knowledge of one's biological roots.

In her book, Carandang (1987) cited the adopted child's need to "question his or her identity...test his or her adoptive parents' love... find his or her natural parents" (p. 92) as important factor in the positive outcome among adopted children. She also emphasized the importance of family dynamics in understanding Filipino adopted children and in helping these children deal with their feelings.

A glimpse of the adoption practices in the country is likewise illustrated in the compilation of the adoption stories of 24 families in the book entitled, *24 Stories of Adoption* (2000). The 24 stories as shared by Filipino adoptive parents enable others to look into the lives of these families and how they experience adoption. The stories range from a couples' difficult pre-adoption process, to the ambivalence in the decision-making process, to seeing adoption as an awesome task, a miracle experience, and to the joy brought about by adoption. Each adoptive family in the book has its own story to tell.

ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Apart from studying the adjustment of adopted children, several studies have looked into family relationships among adoptive families. In his paper, Smith (2001) argued that it is not the adoption status that gives way to behavioral and attitudinal problems in youth and young adulthood but rather the feelings of the parent toward the child, whether positive or negative, that lead to feelings of being accepted or rejected. Moreover, Koehler, Grotevant, and McRoy (2002) explored the association between family relationships and the intensity of adolescents' thinking about their own adoption and birthparents. Pre-occupation with adoption or birthparents was related with levels of alienation, trust and communication with their adoptive mothers and fathers and overall family functioning. Furthermore, studies of Borja (1996), De Los Reyes (2002), McWhinnie (1967), and Rosnati (2005) consistently reveal the importance of family functioning and relationships in the adjustment of adopted children, validating Carandang's (1987) point regarding the adoptive parents' need to get "hooked to the testing and rejection game...parents need to be steady and reassuring" (p. 92). Borja talked about how adoptive parents' way of dealing with their adopted children influences the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of their children. He also found that disclosure is dealt with more positively by the adoptees when the adoption status is revealed by the adoptive parents. On the other hand, De Los Reyes was more explicit in her conclusion, saying that adoptive family relationships and communication style among family members buffer the negative impact of psychological factors on the self-esteem of adolescent adoptees.

Carandang (1987) further emphasized that aside from providing reassurance to their adopted children, adoptive parents need to set limits and consequences for their children's misdeeds. The last suggestion she cited in her book was the importance of involving the whole family in dealing with their feelings toward the adopted child.

A study of Rosnati, Ranieri, and Barni (2005) compared adoptive and non-adoptive families during the school age period in terms of the parents' marital relation, social support, role, well-being and the child's adjustment. The results of the study revealed that while adopted children show more behavioral problems than their non-adopted peers, adoptive families appear to have more resources in coping with the adoption challenges. For example, adoptive parents were found to have a better marital relationship, greater support from relatives and friends, more adequate parenting skills (i.e more authoritative than authoritarian), and a higher sense of well being than the parents of non-adopted children who were included in the study. According to Rosnati and her colleagues, these personal, relational, social and personal resources of adoptive parents can have a strong influence on child's adjustment.

Other family factors that have been researched include parenting qualities, from caregiving style, to expectations and emotional adjustment. Studies generally show that a warm and a positive attitude towards adoptees, realistic expectations, and satisfaction with adoptive parenthood are factors which influence adoption adjustment. Cadoret (1990) further mentioned that adopted children adjust better when their adoptive parents have less emotional problems and when there is no history of death or divorce within the adoptive family. Hoopes (1990) concluded that family relationships, communication about adoption, and parental attitudes about adoption are important factors that influence the identity resolution among adoptees. As Rutter (2005), Brooks (2005), Dalen (2005) and Brodzinsky et. al. (1998, 2005) pointed out, any adopted children, including those adopted internationally, show significant psychological recovery after removal from stressful depriving environments and placement in a good-quality adoptive family.

ADOPTION COMMUNICATION VERSUS SECRECY

Another important area in adoption is disclosure although it is not researched as much as other adoption related issues. One study looked into African American parents' stories of adoption disclosure (Alexander, Hollingsworth, Dore & Hoopes, 2004) suggested that the parents' way of handling disclosure seemed more intuitive than learned formally. In their conclusion, Alexander and colleagues stressed the importance of psycho-education regarding methods and timing of disclosure.

Furthermore, the same study of Alexander et. al. (2004) revealed that adoptive parents' responses to disclosure questions yielded the following themes: "efforts to prevent trauma to the child, respect for the child's differentness and birth history, developmental decisions in disclosure, children's questions as motivations for disclosure, and parents' feelings about disclosure" (p. 448). Another important issue stressed in the research was the need to help adoptive parents recognize that disclosure is an ongoing process, constantly reminding them to invite their adopted children to engage in a dialogue about adoption-related issues, without necessarily waiting for the children to take the lead.

When the children should be told of their adoption is a very critical question for adoption studies. Donovan (1990) proposed the following rules in disclosure "(1) do not tell unless

asked; (2) do not make excuses for the child's birth mother; (3) do not embellish the explanation; (4) tell the truth, but only when asked; and (5) do not try to make up for the past" (p.1). On the other hand, in the same journal where the article of Donovan was published, Macintyre (1990) wrote that disclosure of adoption at the appropriate time is critical, further, claiming that while "there is no particular right time for disclosure, there are inappropriate times" (p. 1). Inappropriate times include when adoptive parents are not ready to discuss the issue, when the child is told as part of an attack, or when there are external or internal crises going on in the family. Nonetheless, he concluded that the risks and stresses associated with nondisclosure are greater than any that might come out from disclosure.

For Weir (2001), disclosure was explained in terms of its multi-dimensional nature. In his study, he identified open communication patterns, social networks, internal/external family distinctions, motives, and tactics as essential dimensions in the adoptive parents'; disclosure programs. Based on the results of their study, Berger and Hodges (1982), on the other hand, suggested that the disclosure should occur between 4 1/2 to 13 years of age, allowing the adoptive parents to look into the child's circumstances and their own readiness for the disclosure.

In his dissertation, Borja (1996) wrote that finding out about the adoption had no significant impact on his respondents' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors as adopted children. What was more significant, according to Borja, was the manner the adoption was revealed to them. He further noted that there appeared to be a positive influence when the adoption issue was revealed by the adoptive parents themselves. Moreover, no significant relationship was found between knowledge of the reason for adoption and behaviors of adopted children. Carandang (1987) also pointed out that it is important for an adopted child to know about their adoptive status from their adoptive parents and not from other sources.

How adoptive parents communicate to their children is to be a large extent related to the idea of open adoption. In the past, adoption practice in United States was based on three principles: secrecy, anonymity, and sealing of records. This practice has changed over the years and adoptive families have begun to adopt more open stance with regards to adoption.

Studies on open versus closed adoption have looked into the impact of the level of openness on adoptive parents and children. In the study of Grovetant and McRoy (1998), as cited by Brodzinsky et. al. (1998), adoptive parents' behavior and attitudes varied by levels of openness. As summarized in that particular study, "parents in fully disclosed adoption communicated more with their children about adoption, displayed more empathy toward their child as well as toward the birth parent, showed greater acknowledgement of their child's interest in his or her background, were less fearful that their child would be reclaimed by the birthparents, were more confident of the parent-child relationship" (p. 85). In fully disclosed adoption, there is openness between parents and their adopted children in talking about adoption-related issues.

Brodzinsky and colleagues (1998) further related that the level of openness experienced by adopted children was not related to their satisfaction of openness, their curiosity regarding birth parents, and self-esteem. Younger children were described to be less curious about their birth parents than older children. Girls were likewise found to be more curious than boys.

On the other hand, Triseliotis and Hill (1990) concluded in their study that “evasiveness and secrecy employed by ‘substitute’ parents and caregivers tended to foster feelings of shame, guilt and abnormality” (p. 120). They further claimed that these feelings were aggravated by community attitudes, especially children raised in residential institutions.

Brodzinsky et. al. (1998) pointed out that research findings in this area vary, further claiming that “extreme styles at either end of the communication continuum—denial-of-difference at one end and insistence-of-difference at the other end—are less likely to facilitate healthy patterns of adoption adjustment” (p. 49). Moreover, they cited that various placement options, ranging from confidential to fully disclosed, may need to be considered and provided by adoption agencies, as there is no one type of adoption that best fits the needs and concerns of everyone.

This study, therefore, follows through the conclusion of Borja (1996), Carandang (1987), De Los Reyes (2002), Hoopes (1990) and Rosnati et. al. (2005) that family functioning in general is an essential component of the adjustment outcome of adopted children.

METHOD

A qualitative approach was used to look into the disclosure and adjustment issues of Filipino adoptive families. Semi-structured interviews with adoptive mothers (at times, with the adoptive fathers) were carried out in order to look into their issues related to disclosure, feelings and attitudes towards adoption, and factors that help them and their adopted children deal with adoption-related issues. Specifically, content analysis was used to identify emerging themes.

Participants

The participants were chosen primarily through convenience sampling. Given the difficulty of finding adoptive families who were open to talking about adoption-related issues, willing participants were identified through referral system of adoptive families and their support group. In this study, 32 Filipino adoptive mothers who have adopted children (17 females and 15 males) whose ages range from 8 to 17 agreed to be interviewed. These children are natural born Filipinos who were adopted legally by couples who are living in the Philippines. Children adopted through a process called simulation of birth, where adoptive parents registered their adopted child as their biological child, were likewise included in this study as this was a common practice in the Philippines. Of the 32 families, 11 adopted their children legally and went through

the process of simulated birth. Another inclusion criterion used was that the adopted children should have full knowledge of their adoptive status at the time of the study. The family structure of the 32 adoptive families is shown in Table 1, indicating varying family structure and circumstances.

Table 1. Family Structure Based on the Respondents' Position in the Family

Family Structure	Only Child	Oldest	Middle	Youngest	Total
Only Child	8	0	0	0	8
With Other Adopted Children	0	1	0	2	3
With Biological Children	0	2	0	10	12
With both adopted and biological Children	0	0	3	6	9
Total	8	3	3	18	32

Procedure

After agreeing to participate in the said study, the parents were asked to sign an informed consent letter, signifying their intent to participate and to allow the researcher to use the data for research purposes. The adoptive mothers were asked open-ended questions regarding disclosure and adoption communication issues, and their ways of dealing with adoption-related issues. Semi-structured interviews were employed based primarily on the guide questions formulated by the researcher. For the disclosure issue, the topics included: how did your child first learn about his/her adoptive status; what were the initial reactions of your child; how open is the family in talking about adoption-related issues; what were the usual topics discussed in the family; what were some of the questions asked by your children; and how did you respond to your children's questions? There were also questions about the factors that help them and their children deal with adoption-related issues. Specifically, the adoptive mothers were asked about their children's feelings about being an adopted child and their feelings about being adoptive parents. Other topics pertained to what adoptive parents consider to be most fulfilling part and the most challenging part of being an adoptive parent. There were also questions about what the parents considered as factors that help them and their respective adopted child deal with adoption-related issues. Some issues were not raised in the semi-structured interviews when these topics were discussed already when answering a different question. The parents' responses were recorded as verbatim as possible by the researcher. In some instances, a research assistant helped the researcher in writing down the responses of the interviewees.

Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was done to identify themes and patterns pertaining to disclosure and adjustment issues. First, the verbatim responses of each adoptive mother to each of the question were read at least two times. Summarizing content analysis, one of three techniques of qualitative content analysis, was the choice of analysis in this study. The responses to the open-ended questions were paraphrased where less relevant responses were skipped. Those with similar paraphrases were put together and further summarized until common categories or themes emerged. This kind of data analysis was done for each adoptive family. After looking into the patterns for each family, the data was then analyzed across cases. The data were taken together as a point of reference in order to identify relevant themes which in a way went beyond the single case and multiple case studies.

RESULTS

Common themes that emerged from their answers to questions about the adoptees' reactions when they first learned about their adoptive status, adoption-related topics discussed by the family, and factors that help adoptive parents and adoptees adjust to the adoptive status of the family are presented.

Disclosure Issues

Reactions to Disclosure

No big deal. The initial reactions upon disclosure seem to depend on the manner the disclosure was dealt (i.e. when and how the adoptive status was first revealed by whom). For more than ten of the respondents, no significant reactions or change in behaviors were observed by their adoptive after they were first informed of their adoptive status. To quote many parents, they described their children's initial reaction as "*wala lang*" (no big deal). Of the adoptees reported to have significant reactions, half of them were told about their status early on. For some, disclosure came when they were not aware of the meaning of adoption. The disclosure was described by their adoptive as a process. As such, no concrete changes were noticed by the adoptive parents.

Negative reactions. For those who were told about their status at a stage when they knew what being adopted meant, there were some reactions observed. Some of the usual reactions were crying, feeling of sadness, and getting hurt. A number of them were observed to have become quiet and withdrawn after finding out about their adoptive status. One adoptive mother mentioned that her daughter expressed anger towards her biological mother, feeling that she was abandoned ("*parang pinabayaan*").

One adoptee was described by her adoptive mother as puzzled and surprised when her adoptive status was first disclosed to her. Some initially take the disclosure as a joke until the truth sunk in. One extreme reaction was that of disbelief. That respondent even left the house and began talking about it indiscriminately with her friends.

Openness in discussing adoption-related issues

Open and frequent discussion. Of the 32 adoptive families, more than half admit to be open and comfortable in discussing the adoptive status of their children and other related issues. Openness, however, appeared to be defined differently by the different families. One group of adoptive parents said that they openly talked about adoption and most of the time, whereas another group claimed that their openness was initiated by the children themselves. For the first group, the parents admitted that they encourage talking about it even to the other children. For the latter group, they claimed that they do not talk about it unnecessarily and indiscriminately. Families with more than one adopted child were more open to discussion about adopted-related topics. Although one adoptive mother claims that her family is generally comfortable talking about adoption issues, they only discuss about adoption occasionally. Hence, openness can be looked at in terms of comfort in and frequency of discussion.

Infrequent discussion. However, there are adoptive parents who admitted some discomfort in talking about adoption issues. One adoptive mother says that although her child was told about her being adopted years ago, the family never talks about it. Some parents claimed that their children never asked questions about their adoptive status or other adoption-related issues.

The parents' descriptions of the manner the family discusses adoption-related topics validate the importance of looking into the variable *adoption secrecy* or adoption openness. The data indicates that different families vary in the manner they discuss adoption related topics. Some families show more openness whereas others are more cautious in discussing adoption issues.

Adoption Issues Discussed in the Family

Adoptive status of the child. The adoption topics discussed in the family can be categorized in three areas. The first area concerns the adoptive status of the child, i.e. that he or she has been adopted. This is usually the first stage of disclosure when adoptive parents talked about a different set of birth parents. For some parents who participated in this study, this meant preparing the adoption story of their child, i.e. how the child came into the lives of their adoptive family. For some adoptive parents, this first stage meant talking about the adoption when their child was still in infancy or toddlerhood. A number of parents prepared for this first stage, making sure that they and their children were ready for the disclosure. About five sets of adoptive parents, however, had to deal with this issue unprepared as their children learned about their adoption from other people, most of the time their neighbors.

After the disclosure stage, family discussion about adoption –related topics continues for most families, the frequency and seriousness of which depend on the comfort level and openness of both parents and their children. However, about three adoptive families in

this study did not reach this stage, primarily because they stopped talking about adoption after the disclosure stage.

Birth family's identity. For those who were described to be open and comfortable in discussion, some of the topics covered in the discussion can further categorized into two areas. The first area concerns the past, e.g. their birth family's identity and whereabouts. For example, the adoptees usually ask where their birth parents or birth mother lives, how they look like, etc. Other questions asked involve the circumstances of the relinquishment. Some children asked why they were given up and not the other children.

Worries about search and reintegration process. Another area usually brought up for discussion pertains to the children's anxiety about their future. For example, some children have expressed concerns about being taken back by their birth parents. Other question asked are "can I look for my birth mother?" and "are you going to give me back to her?"

FACTORS THAT HELP DEAL WITH ADOPTION- RELATED ISSUES

Love and acceptance of the family. When the parents were asked for three factors that helped their children deal with their being adopted, most of them identified love and acceptance of the family as the most important factor. For example, more than half of the participants acknowledged that "accepting my child as my own child" helped them adjust their being an adoptive family. Many also cited acceptance of family relatives (e.g. grandparents, cousins, uncles, and aunts) and friends as crucial to their adjustment.

Adoption openness. Another important factor cited by majority of the adoptive parents was openness in communication. Openness in communication, according to many adoptive mothers, is an essential ingredient that helped them and their adopted child deal with adoption-related issues. Being able to talk about their experiences as an adopted child to others who have similar experiences helps many adopted children deal with their situation. Adoption openness in the family helps the adoptees and the other members of the family become more open to other people outside the family. In general, adoption openness is considered to be an important factor that helps adopted children to adjust to their situation. This point further validates findings from other studies indicating that adoption secrecy may be a potential risk factor for adopted children.

Supportive environment. For the adoptive parents, support appears to be the most important factor. A number of adoptive mothers hinted about the importance of shared decision, open communication, and support between husbands and wives when it comes to adoption and related-issues. Support from other children, whether biological and or adopted children (if there are any), and from families of both paternal and maternal sides is also critical. The support of the family and relatives usually results to feelings of acceptance of the adopted children.

Another important source of support identified by many adoptive couples was from a support group comprised of other adoptive families. Many mentioned that this support group helped the families deal with adoption issues as they could seek help and support from one another. Seeking professional help was also mentioned by some adoptive families as an effective tool. Prayer and spirituality were also named as important strategies employed by some adoptive parents when dealing with difficult situations.

DISCUSSION

Adoption Openness versus Adoption Secrecy

The adoptive parents' qualitative responses to questions about their children's initial reactions after disclosure and the manner of discussing adoption-related issues point to the importance of openness in the family about the adoption issue. Many adoptive mothers who participated in the study acknowledged how openness help their children deal with adoption issues, indicating that adoption openness can be a protective post-adoption factor. For example, one mother said that whereas the family does not use the word "*ampon*" often, they are generally comfortable talking about their child's birth family. One mother even told her adopted son, "*yan ang bahay ng nanay mo dati*". One family even brought their adopted daughter to the institution where they got her when she celebrated her birthdays.

The adoptive parents' responses also indicate three important issues that are included in communication process. These topics include adoption circumstances (i.e. how and why was the child relinquished), birth parents' identity and whereabouts, and possible search process. For kinship adoption, (biological parent is a relative of either adoptive parent), talking about the adoption circumstances and birth parents is important. Bringing the child to her biological parents from time to time appeared to have been beneficial to the child and the family as well. As narrated by some adoptive mothers, their adopted child often became curious as to the identity, the physical appearance and qualities of their birth parents, especially their birth mothers. Questions such as, "*Ano ang itsura ng Nanay ko?*", "*May Kapatid kaya ako?*", "*Nasaan na kaya sila ngayon?*" "*Bakit ako ang ibinigay sa inyo?*" were raised by some of the adoptees. Many adoptive mothers claim that they openly answered these queries when they know the answer. Those families who had no problem with disclosure had less problems dealing with questions about birth family. For kinship adoption, these topics were easy to deal with. Those who went through legal adoption had legal documents to support their answers to their children's concerns. Apparently, there was a greater discomfort in answering these questions for families who went through simulated birth type of adoption.

This study highlights the importance of adoption openness among family members. The essential elements of adoption communication include early disclosure by parents and frequent discussion of adoption related issues. In many instances as well, many adoptive families stop talking about the adoptive issues after having discussed it for the first time. Adoption secrecy as opposed to adoption openness can be a risk factor.

In fact, Borja (1996) reported that when his respondents found out about the adoption, it had no significant impact on their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors as adopted children. What was more significant, according to Borja, was the manner in which the adoption was revealed to them and whether they were told about it by their adoptive parents or by somebody else.

Some of the topics brought up to the discussion table basically concern three areas, the adoptive status of the child (i.e. the adoption story of the child), the origin of the child (e.g. birthparents' identity and whereabouts), and anxiety about the future of both adoptive parents and adopted children (e.g. when adopted child asks about searching possibilities or about being given back to birth family).

Family Functioning

Family functioning is another key factor in the adjustment not only of the adopted children but of the adoptive families as well. Many adoptive mothers talk about family functioning in terms of the way they show their love and affection. (*'yung pagmamahal namin, sobra sobra'*) to their adopted children. Acceptance not only by parents, but by the siblings and other relatives (one mother talked about the way her adopted child is pampered and spoiled by her grandparents), is also crucial to the adjustment of their children. In sum, these different family functioning variables are important considerations in looking into the adjustment of adopted children, supporting what the researcher hypothesized.

In general, this study validates the importance of family relationships for Filipino families, adoptive or not. Family functioning is perhaps the single most important factor for Filipino adoptees, especially in terms of the acceptance and support of the adoptive parents, siblings and extended family members. This finding validates what De los Reyes (2002) found out that adoptive family relationships and communication style among family members buffer the negative impact of psychological factors on the self-esteem of Filipino adolescent adoptees.

The adoptive parents identified unconditional love and total acceptance of their adopted children as factors that have helped the latter adjust to their being adopted. Adoptive parents, particularly adoptive mothers, emphasized the role of openness. They unanimously reported that the love they have for their children, the same love and affection they have for their other children (for those who have either biological or adopted children), helps their children deal with adoption-related issues. For the adoptive parents, support from the spouse, other family members, relatives, and friends is crucial to their own adjustment process. Joining support groups for adoptive families, seeking professional help, and a deep prayerful life are some strategies that enabled them adjust to their current situation as adoptive families.

Social Support

Another important potential protective factor revealed in the data is the social support system for adoptive families. Aside from the support of immediate family members, support of relatives, friends, and a support group are found to be helpful by the adoptive parents. Thus, family functioning, particularly acceptance and support by both the immediate family members and close relatives, is identified as a significant factor that help adoptive families, parents and children alike, adjust better to their family situation.

Implications of Findings

Adoption communication and family functioning are found to be important factors that help in the adjustment of Filipino adopted children. This study has several implications in terms of understanding and dealing with adopted children and their families. First, this study confirms the importance of the family systems perspective in understanding the experiences of Filipino adopted children. In early adoption researches, adopted children are viewed differently from their non-adopted peers, seeing them as children more at risk for behavior problems than the latter. What this study highlights is the importance of family, particularly family functioning, in the adjustment of the Filipino adopted children. It is the family that matters after all, validating other adoption studies (Borja, 1996; De Los Reyes, 2002; Kohler, Grotevant & McRoy, 2002; Rosnati, 2005). Hence, it is best to view adopted children in the context of their family rather than looking at their experiences and behaviors rooted to their adoption status.

Implications for future researches on adoption issues are suggested. First, more adoption research on Filipino adopted children and adoptive families need to be done not only for theory advancement but also for the improvement of current adoption practices and beliefs. Without empirical studies to back up key points and observations, it is difficult to lobby for and seek improvements in the current adoption practices. With the findings in the study, suggestions for future research may need to consider the following points: a more representative sample, longitudinal studies, and the use of quantitative data analysis.

The findings in the study also provide some insights as to what kind of work or intervention may need to be planned for adoptive families. First of all, working with adopted children means working with their respective adoptive families. As consistently shown, the adopted children's feelings, thoughts and behaviors cannot be isolated from what is happening in the family. What the study highlights is to bring to the open family issues, particularly those related to adoption, in the counseling or therapy sessions. Corroborating the importance of adoption openness, counseling or therapy sessions need to be characterized by openness, especially in addressing issues related to adoption. Parallel sessions with both adopted children, adoptive parents and siblings, and at times joint sessions with family members, need to be planned. It is extremely important to look at adoptive family relationships from differently angles or perspectives.

As pointed out by Alexander and colleagues (2004) in their study of adoptive parents, there is a need to help adoptive parents recognize that disclosure is an ongoing process, constantly reminding them to invite their adopted children to engage in a dialogue about adoption-related issues, without necessarily waiting for the children to take the lead. This further validates the need to work with adoptive parents more purposively, preparing them not only in the disclosure but in handling other sensitive adoption-related issues, such as adopted children's desire to search for birth parents. Adoptive parents' fears, anxieties, and other concerns can also be intimated in therapy sessions.

Perhaps even before a child is brought to counseling or therapy, support group sessions in the form of talks or for a need to be made available for those who need help. Regular support group sessions can be held to address the difficulties and challenges of adoptive families. To tell or not to tell, when to tell, what and how to tell are some of the issues that can be looked into.

The developmental tasks of both adoptive parents and adopted children need to be considered as well. This entails that in clinical practice, it is essential to be fully aware of the developmental issues associated with a particular developmental stage, both in the context of natural development and adoption experiences. In this regard, another possibility that can be explored is to have a support group for adopted children at different developmental stages, early childhood, middle childhood, adolescents, and adults. Support group for siblings (i.e. the biological children of the parents) is also important. In many instances, their needs and concerns have been put aside as attention is given to the adopted children.

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