

The changing face of adoptions in South African black communities: A Case of Jo'burg Child Welfare.

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Background

- The South African welfare system is faced with a situation in which vast numbers of black children are in need of care and protection with few same-race adoptive parents being available Louw (2009) and Freeman and Nkomo (2006).
- “Adoption is not seen as an option”, and children who have no lineage are believed to have “alien blood that can only bring problems.” (Mampela Ramphele, 1993)



- “Still, the fact remains—white couples are still more willing to adopt black babies, than black couples are Thinane-Epondo (2015)
- Blackie (2014) noted that, “black parents were not willing to enter into a formal legal adoption process with abandoned children. The idea was that the adopted children’s lack of connection with their ancestors would result in troubled and unfulfilled lives, and for the adoptive family, it would create problems amongst their ancestors”.



Area of study

- Jo'burg Child Welfare (JCW)
- One of the largest non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in South Africa serving neglected, abused, and abandoned children and their families (Wilson, 2006).



Objectives

- To assess whether adoption is culturally acceptable in black communities
- To explore the experiences of how the adopters are accepted by the community during and after adoption process
- To investigate the perceptions of adoption social workers on adoption by black families.

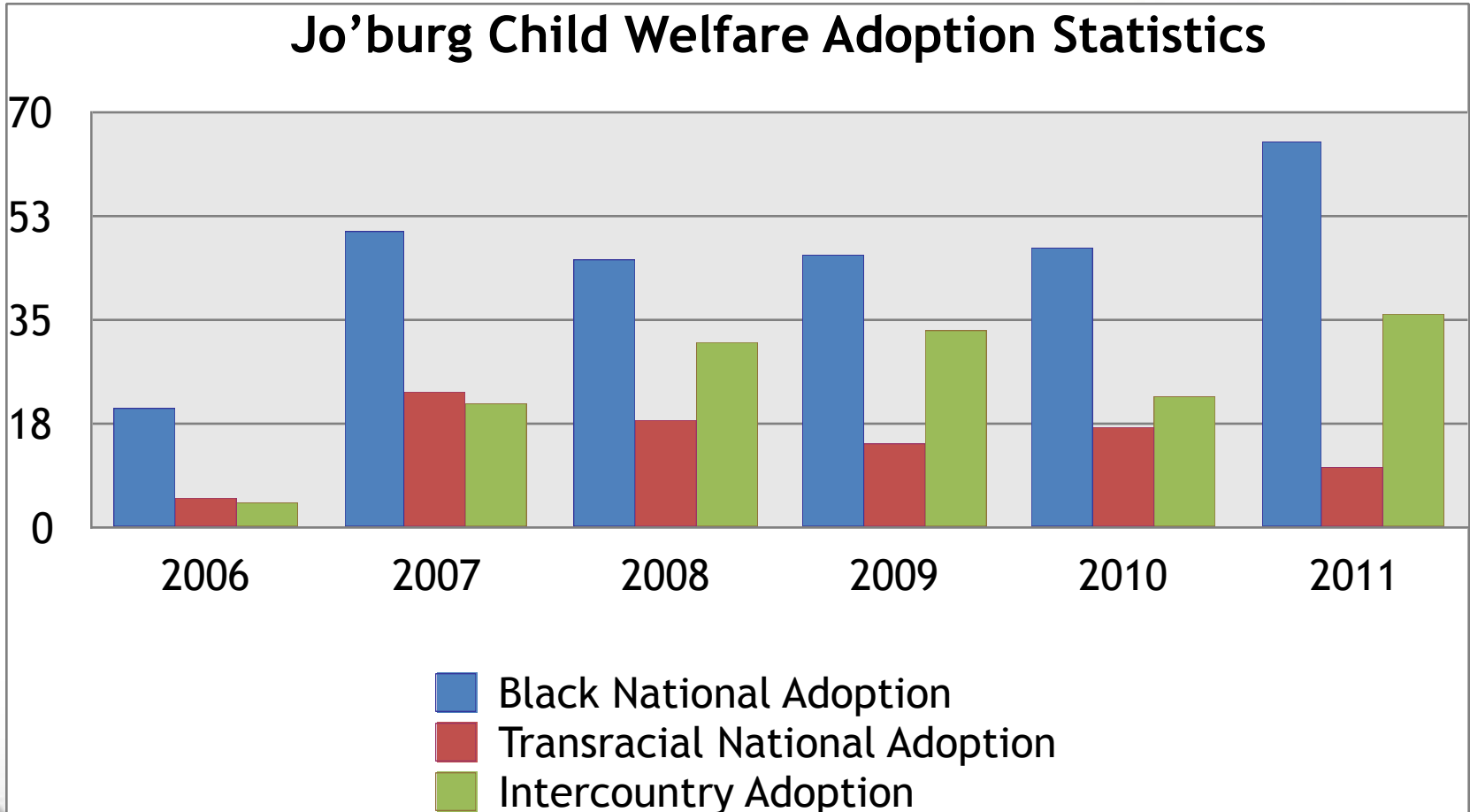


Methodology

- Qualitative research
- Purposive sampling
- Interviews



Findings



- At JCW National adoptions by black families has been high for the past ten years.
- Transracial adoption has always been very low and intercountry adoption has increasingly gained popularity.



Motivation to adopt

- **Couple M's** The couple is originally from Limpopo and they are of the Sipeedi Culture and their ages range between 45 and 50 years. Their response was:
 - *“We had two miscarriages and after that my wife could not conceive. We spent a number of years without a child and after that my mother told us to go and buy a child...buying in to her meant looking for a child where they keep children.”*

- **Same-sex couple, one partner is a Zulu man from Kwazulu-Natal and the other is a Sipeedi from Limpopo. The couple noted that:**
 - *“Well we could have chosen other forms of having children since we are a same sex couple. However, our families encouraged us to adopt a child because they saw that we love children.”*



- **A single lady from Limpopo also noted that:**
 - *“I have had fertility problems for the past 30 years, as such I have never been able to have my own child. My friend adopted with you before and she encouraged me to come here to adopt...I reside in Polokwane but distance cannot be a barrier for me, I really need a child of my own who I care show love and care.”*



- **Ms. F a single lady from Gauteng explained her motivations to adopt were simply to give back to the community, she said reported that:**

- *“My machine still works (womb) and I have an older daughter who is in High School, I am still young and I believe I can also give a good future to a child. My family accepts, they are very excited and cannot wait to meet the precious gift. Since I was a teenager I have always been wishing to adopt a baby boy and I believe this is the time to fulfil my wish.”*

Cultural integration for adopted children

- Respondent S who is a single and originally from Limpopo had this to say:
 - *“In our Sapedi culture adoption is not a new phenomenon. Families with no heirs usually marry a woman with children so that her children can become heirs. My parents recently did that in Limpopo, they married a woman with two boys and the boy shall be the heirs...they are now part of the family and they use our surname.”*

- **Mr. and Mrs M are originally from Free State and they now reside in Johannesburg.**
 - *“We have decided to name the child after my grandfather (husband’s grandfather). We shall also do a family ritual where all family members would be gathered and we introduce the child to the ancestors...the child is now ours in every way possible.”*



- A single lady from Kwazulu-Natal also adopted a baby girl noted that:
 - *“My parents are very happy and they love my baby so much. They have already started preparing for our traditional ceremony where we introduce the child to the clan and the ancestors.”*



Opening up about adopting and reactions from communities

- A married woman who resides in Soweto who is waiting for a baby had this to say:
 - *“I will not tell my neighbours, they are big mouthed. My family only has to know. These neighbours will spoil my baby when she grows up cause they will constantly tell her that she was adopted.”*



- A couple from Limpopo noted this:

- *“I was referred by a couple who adopted through you guys (Jo’burg Child Welfare). We are a community of more than 20 adopters and when we went back with our baby they threw a surprise welcome party for our baby. So to us it’s not a secret, most people know and they are very supportive of us.”*



- A single mother from Kagiso in the West Rand of Johannesburg had this to say:
 - *“I thought it was a good thing to do telling my neighbours but it later destroyed my relationship with my baby. They informed her first before me that she was adopted and since then my daughter has been uncontrollable.”*



- **A single lady from Venda but based in Pretoria noted that:**
 - *“My mother is very excited and she wants me to take the baby to Venda when I am done with the process but I do not want, I also want to enjoy my baby whilst she grows. My mother adopted a nine year old child from one of the Children’s Homes around home in Venda and the community has not given my brother any negative attitude neither to my mother.”*



Perceptions of social workers on adoption by black families.

- *“ I must say people out there do not really know what is happening. Since I was employed as an adoption screening social worker, basing on my case load only a handful of the adoptees are Transracial, and the rest of the families I screen are South African black families.”*
- *“Every month there are orientation meetings held at the organisation, in English, Zulu and Sotho. It is evident that a lot of black families are eager to adopt and most of them are very excited about the journey they would be starting.”*

- “ It is quite amazing that most of our clients are from Limpopo, and they come to adopt more than once. I believe lately black families have become more acceptable of adoption. However, they are still faced with secrecy...because most of them share the same race with the child they do not want to open up that they adopted the child.
- “ Limpopo and Mpumalanga black families are willing to adopt more but lately we are struggling to finalize the cases as it cost a lot to travel to those provinces.”

- “ I believe black families keep this department functional, because if they stop adopting we will definitely become irrelevant. Most of our children are black...Transracial adoptions have not be that much lately...so honestly we are really relying on our black families who come to give our children families to belong to.”



Conclusions

- At JCW adoption has become more acceptable by black families. Couples travel from all corners of South Africa to Johannesburg to adopt children.
- Adoption is no longer treated as a taboo in most black families. Traditional rituals to introduce children to ancestor are being performed for children, and children are being named after grandparents.

- **Family expansion is not defined by blood ties only, as adopted children are also fully integrated into families.**
- **Social workers believe adoption has become more popular among black families. However, families still find it hard to tell their children that they were adopted.**



Recommendations

- **National campaigns which brings awareness to all communities that families cannot be defined by bloodline only even in the black communities.**
- **Educating communities to be supportive of both adoptive parents and children , as they usually face prejudice in communities they come from.**



- **A policy be introduced which prioritizes placing children with adoptive parents instead of keeping children with no families in Child and Youth Care Centres or Unrelated Foster Care.**
- **Government should make the adoption services more accessible to all families so that couples do not have to travel for more than 500km to receive adoption services in Johannesburg.**

Family isn't
always blood. It's the
people in your life who
want you in theirs;
the ones who **accept**
you for who you
are. The ones who would
do anything to see
you smile & who
LOVE YOU
no matter what.

