

A Narrative Inquiry into the Adoption Experiences of Filipino Adoptive Parents

M. M. C. Malig¹, A. R. Arias²

School of Health Sciences, Mapua University, Makati, Philippines;

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100800978>

Received: 06 September 2026; Accepted: 11 September 2026; Published: 22 September 2026

ABSTRACT

Child adoption remains an understudied topic in the Philippines despite the growing need for permanent families among orphaned, abandoned, and surrendered children. While existing literature has largely focused on legal reforms, institutional procedures, and adoption outcomes, limited attention has been given to the experiences of adoptive parents themselves. This study explored the narratives of adoptive parents and how they constructed meaning from their adoption experiences through psychological, cultural, and systemic factors. Using a qualitative multiple-case narrative inquiry design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with adoptive parents who had undergone or completed the adoption process. Each participant's narrative was examined individually and then compared across cases to identify shared experiences, key turning points, and variations in meaning-making. Narrative analysis was employed to understand how participants interpreted their experiences over time. Findings revealed that adoption was often preceded by experiences of infertility, grief, delayed parenthood, or a personal desire to build a family beyond biological ties. Participants described psychological concerns related to attachment, parenting readiness, and child adjustment, as well as cultural pressures rooted in beliefs about blood relations and family legitimacy. Despite these concerns, critical turning points such as exposure to adoptive families, religious faith, supportive relationships, and meaningful interactions with their adopted children strengthened their commitment to adoption. Overall, the findings suggest that adoption is not merely a legal process but a deeply personal and socially situated journey shaped by psychological, cultural, and institutional influences.

Keywords: Adoption, Adoptive Parents, Narrative Inquiry, Meaning-Making, Philippines, Family Formation.

INTRODUCTION

The keywords “child adoption” yield a relatively limited number of media outputs, particularly within developing-country contexts. Empirical research examining the psychosocial narratives of Filipino adoptive parents remains relatively limited, particularly within the context of domestic adoption. This lack of academic attention is concerning, given that millions of children worldwide remain unadopted. Many of whom grow up without permanent homes to live in, consistent caregivers to look after them, or stable family environments to be nourished and supported (Apostol, 2024; Beltran & Enriquez, 2022; Pangan, 1999; Tarrajoa, 2007). Despite the magnitude of this social issue, child adoption continues to receive insufficient emphasis in both research and public policy discussions, resulting in the continued marginalization of vulnerable children.

Adoption may be considered among several prospective parties, but following through can somewhat be difficult and is otherwise short-lived. Several interrelated factors contribute to the growing population of unadopted children. One of the most prominent is overpopulation, which has become increasingly normalized and, in many contexts, largely unfelt by the general public. Rapid population growth, together with socioeconomic constraints, continues to place pressure on child welfare systems and the provision of permanent family care. Individuals often remain unaware of the extent to which their countries are already densely populated, leading to patterns of irresponsible consumption and reproduction (Goodwin, 2011). As a result, the number of children entering foster care systems, institutional facilities, or informal caregiving arrangements continues to rise, while the capacity of families and social institutions to absorb these children remains limited (Pangan, 1999). At the same time, global demographic trends reveal contrasting phenomena.

In countries such as South Korea, birth rates have sharply declined, largely due to younger generations choosing to delay or entirely forgo parenthood—a quiet but deliberate refusal of the traditional life course, so to speak (Chae Young Kim & Chung, 2024). These decisions are often rooted in concerns regarding financial instability, career prioritization, rising living costs, and fears surrounding the long-term responsibilities of raising children (Nargund, 2009). While such choices are increasingly viewed as rational and autonomous, they also contribute indirectly to shifting societal attitudes toward children and family formation, where having children is no longer assumed, but carefully weighed, or avoided altogether. Consequently, adoption is often overlooked as a viable or desirable alternative to biological parenthood (Lopes et al., 2025; Miall & March, 2003). Parenthood in a sense that adoption is treated as a last resort rather than a genuine choice, if at all, whereas biological parenting is perceived as the norm, the “inevitable decision”, and the “obvious”. The stigma surrounding adoption further exacerbates this issue. Children who are already placed in foster care or institutional settings are frequently perceived as problematic or emotionally damaged (Beltran & Enriquez, 2022; Pangan, 1999). Such stereotypes discourage adoptive parents and reinforce social narratives that devalue children who do not originate from traditional family structures. Over time, this stigma becomes deeply embedded, resulting in fewer adoption attempts and prolonged institutionalization for many children. Consequently, adoption may be overlooked or delayed despite existing legal mechanisms and child welfare needs.

In the Philippine context, these issues are particularly pronounced. The country continues to struggle with the aforementioned factors, alongside persistent socioeconomic inequality and limited access to comprehensive child welfare resources (Apostol, 2024). Within this setting, cases like child maltreatment remain deeply concerning, both within family settings, and closely intertwined with the adoption crisis, as many children who enter foster care or institutional facilities do so as a direct result of such experiences (Farradhisya Ririz Nabila & Akhmad Budi Cahyono, 2025). Despite the visible presence of orphaned, abandoned, or surrendered children, scholarly literature examining child adoption in the Philippines remains scarce. Hence, research that directly addresses the structural, cultural, and psychological barriers to adoption is notably limited, rendering the issue largely invisible within academic spaces.

While Philippine adoption research has documented procedural reforms and institutional challenges, fewer studies have examined how adoptive parents construct and make sense of their lived experiences throughout the adoption process. This absence leaves a critical gap in understanding the complexities of adoption decision-making and the challenges adoptive parents continue to encounter even after pursuing adoption. Ultimately, this study aims to reframe child adoption not as a secondary or stigmatized option, but as a critical social responsibility by examining and understanding the lived experiences of adoptive parents within psychological, cultural, and systemic contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Narrative psychology proposes that people make sense of their lives by organizing experiences into stories. Rather than viewing thoughts, emotions, and behaviors as isolated events, this perspective suggests that individuals construct narratives that give meaning to significant life experiences, relationships, and personal identities (McAdams, 2001). These personal narratives are shaped not only by individual experiences but also by cultural values, social expectations, and the contexts in which people live. Through storytelling, individuals interpret past events, understand their present circumstances, and imagine their future.

The present study draws from the principles of narrative psychology by exploring the lived stories of adoptive parents and the meanings they attribute to their adoption journeys. Through participants' narratives, the study seeks to understand how perceptions of adoption are formed, challenged, and transformed across different stages of the adoption process. This perspective complements the narrative inquiry design by emphasizing that the experiences shared by participants are not merely accounts of events, but reflections of how they construct identity, family, and parenthood within the sociocultural context of the Philippines.

State of Child Adoption in the Philippines

Child adoption in the Philippines is legally framed as a child-protection and permanency measure rather than a

service designed primarily for adults who wish to parent. This orientation is reflected in Republic Act No. 8552 (Congress of the Philippines., 1998), which established that the best interests of the child should govern all adoption decisions, and more recently in Republic Act No. 11642 institutionalized administrative adoption under the National Authority for Child Care, shifting jurisdiction away from courts and simplifying the adoption process (NACC, n.d.). The reform aimed to shorten processing time, reduce litigation expenses, and encourage more families to pursue legal adoption instead of informal caregiving arrangements (NACC, n.d.). Despite these improvements, adoptive parents continue to experience the adoption process as complex and demanding, as earlier procedural challenges—such as extensive documentation and prolonged timelines—remain embedded in how the system is perceived and navigated in practice (Congress of the Philippines., 1998).

Despite the legal advancements, the number of formally adopted children remains small relative to the population of children in need of permanent families. Many children stay in residential care institutions or foster care for extended periods, sometimes aging out of the system without being legally integrated into a family (Philippine Commission on Women, 1998). Scholars attribute this gap not only to administrative barriers but also to cultural attitudes toward lineage and kinship. In Filipino society, the concept of ‘dugo’ or blood relation carries strong symbolic and cultural meaning, often associated with inheritance, identity, and family continuity. As a result, adoptive parents may find themselves negotiating cultural expectations and questions of legitimacy, particularly when their decision contrasts with the more commonly accepted practice of informal kinship care (Blanco & Panao, 2019). While such arrangements provide emotional belonging, they do not always grant the child legal security, inheritance rights, or consistent long-term protection—factors that adoptive parents must actively consider and justify within their social environments.

Economic considerations also emerge not only as anticipated barriers but as lived realities throughout the adoption process. Even when administrative procedures become more accessible, adoptive parents often encounter financial demands related to documentation, psychological assessments, home studies, and post-placement supervision. These requirements may be experienced as both necessary and burdensome, shaping how parents evaluate their readiness and capacity to proceed (Parrocha, 2022). In addition, adoptive parents may experience anxiety related to formal assessments of parenting competence, reflecting a psychological dimension of the adoption process that extends beyond financial or legal concerns (Farr & Vázquez, 2020).

Stigma further influences how adoption is experienced within the Philippine context. Adoption has historically been associated with secrecy, infertility, or family “problems,” which can shape how adoptive parents approach disclosure and social interaction. Rather than existing solely as a perceived barrier prior to adoption, stigma is often encountered and managed in everyday interactions, including within extended family networks and community settings. Reports from adoptees regarding identity questioning and differential treatment (Brazil, 2024) highlight the broader social environment in which adoptive parents situate their decisions. Consequently, adoption is not only a legal or procedural undertaking but also a socially negotiated experience, shaped by ongoing interactions, cultural meanings, and community responses.

Psychological and Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Adoption

Adoption is not merely a legal act but a meaning-making process shaped by beliefs about family, belonging, and identity. In many societies, including the Philippines, parenthood is strongly tied to biological continuity, making adoption psychologically interpreted as a secondary or compensatory form of family formation rather than an equivalent one (Meyer, 2006). For adoptive parents, these cultural meanings are not only abstract beliefs but are often encountered and reflected upon throughout their parenting journey. Even among those who have chosen adoption, internalized notions of “real” parenthood tied to childbirth may surface in subtle ways, influencing how they understand their role and relationship with the child (Sigismondi, 2024). Research on family schemas suggests that people evaluate family legitimacy based on perceived naturalness and permanence, and biological ties are commonly viewed as more stable and authentic than social bonds (Holmes, 2020). As a result, adoptive parents may navigate concerns related to attachment, belonging, and emotional closeness, not only prior to adoption but also as part of their ongoing lived experience.

These concerns are reinforced by sociocultural expectations surrounding lineage and inheritance. In collectivist cultures, kinship networks structure identity and social roles; family membership determines obligations, authority, and belonging (Medina, 2001). Within the Filipino concept of *kapamilya*, blood relations are often assumed to guarantee trust and behavioral predictability, while non-biological ties are viewed as requiring validation through time and sacrifice (Fatalla, 2023; Haslanger, 2009). For adoptive parents, this creates a context in which they may actively negotiate their child's place within the family and broader kinship network, particularly when subtle distinctions are made between biological and non-biological relationships. Everyday language and social interactions—such as references to “*tunay*” or “*sariling anak*”—may reinforce these distinctions (Hwang, 2026), shaping how parents experience inclusion, legitimacy, and acceptance within extended family systems.

Attitudes toward disclosure further illustrate the interaction between psychological and cultural factors. While earlier practices emphasized secrecy to avoid stigma or preserve family harmony, contemporary perspectives increasingly encourage openness. However, adoptive parents often grapple with the decision of whether, when, and how to disclose adoption, balancing concerns about the child's psychological well-being with fears of disrupting attachment or introducing uncertainty into the parent-child relationship. These decisions are not static but are continuously interpreted and revisited as part of the lived experience of adoptive parenting.

Generational differences also shape how adoption is understood and experienced. Older generations may frame adoption as an act of compassion, while younger adoptive parents tend to approach it through the lens of child rights, emotional readiness, and trauma-informed care (Robert, 2020). Increased exposure to mental health discourse has heightened awareness of the potential challenges faced by adopted children, including histories of loss or maltreatment (Rhoads, 2024). For adoptive parents, this awareness can simultaneously foster empathy and intensify perceived responsibility, influencing how they experience and reflect on their role as caregivers. Thus, attitudes toward adoption are not only pre-existing beliefs but are actively constructed and negotiated through lived experience.

Barriers and Support Systems Influencing Adoption Decisions

The decision to adopt is rarely shaped by a single factor; rather, it emerges from an ongoing negotiation between perceived risks and available support. For adoptive parents, financial considerations are not only anticipated but are directly encountered throughout the adoption process. Expenses related to legal documentation, assessments, travel, and post-placement requirements are experienced as both practical demands and indicators of the process's complexity (Kempenaar, 2016). Even within systems designed to improve accessibility, these requirements may reinforce the perception that adoption is administratively intensive, shaping how parents understand and navigate the process (Blanco & Pano, 2019).

Informational uncertainty also plays a significant role, not only prior to adoption but as part of how parents experience the process itself. Many adoptive parents describe initial confusion regarding procedures, qualifications, and timelines (Harrington, 2006), and this uncertainty can persist as they move through different stages of adoption. In practice, gaps in accessible information contribute to a perception of adoption as bureaucratic rather than relational. Parents often rely on informal sources—such as personal networks, media representations, or online narratives—which may emphasize difficulties such as failed placements or adjustment challenges (Baxter et al., 2014). These narratives can shape expectations and emotional responses, making the process feel more daunting even as it is being actively pursued.

Social reactions further influence how adoption is experienced. In collectivist contexts, where family life extends beyond the nuclear household, adoptive parents often navigate the responses of extended family members and community networks. Concerns about equal treatment, insensitive disclosure, or questions of legitimacy may arise not only as anticipated fears but as lived social experiences that require ongoing negotiation (Yngvesson, 1997). Adoption thus becomes both a personal and relational process, shaped by interactions that extend beyond the immediate parent-child relationship.

At the same time, support systems play a critical role in shaping how these challenges are experienced and managed. Engagement with social workers, participation in preparation seminars, and connection with other

adoptive families provide opportunities for parents to reframe uncertainty and build confidence (Valentine, 2026). Hearing the lived experiences of others allows adoptive parents to interpret challenges as manageable and shared rather than isolating. Community validation also contributes to this process; when adoption is visible and normalized within social networks, it becomes more familiar and less ambiguous (Brooker, 2003; Valente, 1996). In this way, support systems do not merely provide resources—they transform how adoption is understood and experienced, enabling parents to navigate the process with greater assurance and meaning.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative multiple case narrative inquiry design to explore the lived experiences of adoptive parents in the Philippines and how these experiences are constructed, interpreted, and given meaning throughout the adoption process. Narrative inquiry is particularly suited for examining how individuals make sense of significant life events through storytelling, while a multiple case approach allows for the comparison of experiences across different individuals to identify both shared patterns and unique variations.

In this study, each adoptive parent was treated as an individual case, with clearly defined case boundaries limited to their experiences from the point of initiating the adoption process up to post-adoption adjustment. This boundary ensured that each case remained focused on the adoption journey as a temporally and contextually bounded experience, rather than general parenting or unrelated life events.

The unit of analysis was the individual narrative account of each adoptive parent, specifically focusing on how they described, interpreted, and reflected on psychological, cultural, and systemic factors encountered throughout the adoption process. These narratives were examined both within cases (to understand each participant's unique story) and across cases (to identify converging and diverging patterns in lived experiences).

A narrative orientation guided the study, emphasizing the structure, content, and meaning of participants' stories rather than fragmenting responses into isolated categories. Attention was given to how participants sequenced their experiences, the meanings they attached to key events, and how they positioned themselves within their narratives. This approach allowed the study to capture adoption not merely as a series of barriers or factors, but as an evolving and interpreted life experience.

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to share detailed personal accounts while providing enough flexibility to explore emerging storylines. Research reflexivity was practiced throughout the process to ensure that the researcher remained critically aware of personal assumptions, biases, and positionality. This involved maintaining reflexive journals, documenting analytic decisions, and continuously examining how interpretations were shaped, ensuring that findings remained grounded in participants' narratives.

The interview data were analyzed using reflexive narrative analysis, focusing on both the content (what was experienced) and the form (how experiences were told). This enabled the identification of key narrative-consistent language, story patterns, and meaning-making processes within and across cases, providing a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of adoptive parents.

Participants

Participants in this study consisted of adoptive parents residing in the Philippines who had completed the legal adoption process in the Philippines, and had already disclosed to their child that they were adopted at the time the data was collected. Their shared experience enabled meaningful cross-case narrative comparison, whereas their differing backgrounds enriched the understanding of multiple adoption trajectories.

For the purposes of this research, adoptive parents were defined as adults who had engaged in formal, institutionally recognized adoption processes, such as working with licensed adoption agencies, coordinating

with the National Authority for Child Care (NACC), completing home studies, or finalizing legal adoption. This distinction ensured that participants possessed direct, lived experience of the adoption process, rather than hypothetical or intended perspectives.

Individuals who had only expressed interest in adoption without initiating formal procedures were excluded from the study. By focusing on those who had undergone through the adoption process, the study was able to capture experience-based accounts of psychological, cultural, and systemic factors as they were encountered, navigated, and interpreted in practice.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring that each individual met the inclusion criteria and could provide rich, relevant insights into the adoption process. Recruitment was conducted through referrals, community networks, and connections with individuals familiar with adoption-related procedures. All participants were adults aged 18 years and above and capable of providing informed consent.

Given the qualitative and narrative nature of the study, emphasis was placed on depth rather than breadth. No fixed number of participants was predetermined; instead, data collection continued until sufficient depth and completeness of narratives were achieved to support meaningful within-case and cross-case analysis.

Three participants were chosen. The table below outlines the participant profiles in the context of their adoption details.

Table 1. Participant Profile

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Civil Status	Number of Adopted Child	Years Since Adoption
Maria	45	Female	Married	1 adoptive daughter	17 years
Daniel	Middle-aged	Male	Widower	2 adoptive children	Approx. 15-25 years
Robert	Middle-aged	Male	Married	2 adoptive children	Approx. 15-20 years

Instruments

Data were gathered using a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researcher to explore the lived experiences of child adoption among adoptive parents. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions organized around key areas such as understanding of adoption, motivations and hesitations, social and family reactions, financial and legal concerns, and emotional readiness for parenting an adopted child. Follow-up probes were prepared to clarify responses and encourage participants to elaborate on personal meanings and experiences. The guide was reviewed by a professional as a Licensed Psychologist, Mental Health Specialist, Psychotherapist, Counselor, and Life Coach for clarity and relevance prior to data collection and was written in a flexible manner so questions could be asked conversationally and adjusted depending on the flow of discussion. This allowed participants to freely narrate their perspectives while ensuring that core topics related to the research questions were consistently addressed across interviews. Lastly, audio recording devices were also used, with participants' consent, to accurately capture responses for transcription and analysis.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical standards for research involving human participants. Prior to any data collection, ethical approval was secured from the appropriate institutional Ethics Review Board (ERB) in Mapua University to ensure that all procedures comply with ethical guidelines. Furthermore, any form of dissemination or publication of the study's findings only pursued after full ethical clearance has been granted.

Prior to participation, individuals were provided with an informed consent form outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. All

participants were adults aged 18 and above and capable of providing informed consent independently. To ensure confidentiality, no identifying information was included in transcripts or reports; pseudonyms were used, and audio recordings were stored in a password-protected device accessible only to the researcher. Data were securely stored and will be disposed of for up to at least five years, in accordance with institutional data retention protocols.

Given the sensitive nature of adoption-related discussions, the study acknowledged the possibility of mild emotional discomfort, particularly when addressing topics such as infertility, family expectations, or parenting readiness. Participants were informed that they could skip any question, pause the interview, or withdraw entirely if they felt uneasy. The researcher maintained a supportive and non-judgmental stance, avoided intrusive questioning, and remained attentive to signs of distress. If necessary, interviews were gently redirected or concluded, and participants were provided with information on appropriate counseling or mental health support services.

Central to this study is the practice of reflexivity, recognizing that the researcher is not a neutral observer but an active participant in the research process. The researcher acknowledges holding prior assumptions that adoption is often perceived as complex, emotionally demanding, and influenced by sociocultural expectations within the Philippine context. Additionally, as someone academically engaged in psychological inquiry, the researcher may be inclined to interpret participants' experiences through psychological frameworks. To address these potential biases, the researcher engaged in ongoing reflexive practice throughout the study. This included maintaining a reflexive journal to document personal assumptions, emotional responses, and evolving interpretations during data collection and analysis. The researcher also remained attentive to power dynamics and positionality, particularly in how participants' stories were elicited and represented. Efforts were made to adopt a non-directive and open-ended approach, allowing participants to lead the direction of their narratives rather than steering them toward preconceived categories or expected responses. During analysis, reflexivity was practiced by continuously questioning interpretations and ensuring that findings were grounded in participants' accounts rather than imposed by theoretical assumptions or personal beliefs. This included revisiting transcripts, comparing interpretations across cases, and maintaining transparency through audit trails.

To further minimize harm, the study focused on participants' experiences of the adoption process rather than requiring disclosure of highly personal or traumatic details. No deception was employed, and participants were fully informed about how their responses would be used in the research.

RESULTS:

Table 2. Summary of Cross-Case Comparison

Narrative Dimension	Maria	Daniel	Robert
Meaning Attached to Children	Viewed children as blessings and as a calling	Viewed children as blessings and family creation	Viewed children as important part in rebuilding family
Religious Influence	Strong religious grounding	Strong religious grounding	Displayed no religious affiliation
Initial Emotional Concerns	Anxieties about adoption and parenthood	Anxieties about abandonment issues of the child	Anxieties about biological connection
Anticipated Social Reactions	Expected family hesitation/skepticism	Expected family hesitation/skepticism	Expected family hesitation/skepticism

Institutional Experience	Smooth Legal Process	Emotionally draining, but overall a Smooth Legal Process due to	Lengthy, but overall a smooth Legal Process
Sources of Fear during adoption process	Media/Books/Articles	Media/Books/Articles	Cultural assumptions about blood relations
Perceived Child Concerns	Temperament and health related concerns for the child	Temperament and health related concerns for the child	Emotional struggles with belonging and connection with the child
Outcome of Experience	Concerns did not deter adoption	Concerns did not deter adoption	Concerns did not deter adoption

The table above presents a summary of the cross-case comparison that emerged across the stories of the three participants. While each participant entered adoption through different life circumstances and personal experiences, several common patterns were observed throughout their narratives. Across all three accounts, children were consistently viewed as central to the meaning of family, although the significance attached to parenthood differed depending on each participant's personal journey. Similarities were also found in their initial emotional concerns, anticipated reactions from family and society, and the challenges encountered throughout the adoption process. At the same time, differences emerged in areas such as religious influence, institutional experiences, and the specific fears and concerns that shaped their decisions. Despite these variations, all three narratives converged on one important finding: although each participant experienced uncertainty, hesitation, or emotional challenges before and during adoption, none of these concerns ultimately prevented them from pursuing adoptive parenthood.

From Uncertainty to Parenthood. Maria is a middle-aged professional woman who once considered her career to be the central focus of her life. She has an adoptive 17-year old daughter and a younger biological daughter.

Before pursuing adoption, she and her husband spent several years attempting to conceive biologically, including undergoing fertility-related efforts that ultimately proved unsuccessful. Over time, the emotional exhaustion of repeated disappointment gradually shifted their perspective as a couple toward alternative forms of parenthood. Her introduction to adoption emerged through a colleague who had previously adopted a child, which made the process appear more tangible and possible. This is the start of their adoption journey.

What became particularly significant in Maria's narrative was the manner in which adoption entered their life. An occurrence they interpreted as a form of divine intervention. "Unplanned," she described it, but a sign with divine meaning. As Maria stated, "It felt like parang in a matter of ano, within a short period, maybe a one-month period, there were three babies [presented to us] na parang in a way, it's like it's a message from God, 'di ba?'"

Within this narrative, adoption and parenthood were framed not simply as decisions, but as blessings and callings.

Motherhood, in particular, emerged as something unexpected within Maria's life story. "She came uh unplanned, and sabi nga nila, 'A baby changes everything', and that's so true. It really, really shifts your perspective... Whether it's adoption or something else— biological or non-biological. Being a mom truly changes everything."

Their peers functioned less as persuasive influences and more as pathways that opened the possibility of adoption. As Maria explained, "It's not like we sought it out directly. It was something that, parang, it was offered. It was offered and then in from three different people, from three different sources. So parang it's like

a message.... They didn't push us one or another naman eh. I wouldn't say that. It was kind of, I guess, **created a pathway.** Or brought the opportunity to our doorstep, but the decision ultimately was still us.”

Within Maria’s experience, pursuing adoption was shaped through a combination of faith, personal agency, emotional uncertainty, and evolving perceptions of parenthood.

This shift in perspective revealed that becoming a parent and a mother gradually became the primary objective for them, even if adoption had not originally been an intended path. Over time, the hesitations surrounding adoption appeared to lessen throughout the process itself, and Maria eventually embraced adoption as a meaningful path toward motherhood. Notably, she described children as blessings and viewed her eventual adoption experience as emotionally fulfilling and transformative.

When asked about their hesitancy to proceed with adoption at the time, Maria shared her self-doubts. The transition toward parenthood brought with it fears, doubts, and hesitations. “Is this something I want to do? As I said at the beginning, **lifetime commitment to a complete stranger.** I cried at some point when I realized that, ‘Okay, this is it, we’re gonna do this’.... There’s also some fears ‘di ba? Parang is unknown. It’s a big, big commitment.” This moment represents a significant turning point within their adoption journey, illustrating the emotional weight and uncertainty attached to the decision.

Within a collectivist culture, biological parenthood is often regarded as the primary and more socially accepted option, positioning adoption as a secondary path pursued only when “all else fails”, for lack of a better term, such as in cases involving infertility or other circumstances. Maria doubts reveal this when she stated, “There would be people in my circle, some would say, **‘iba pa rin ‘yung tunay,**’ ganyan for example. I was worried about the child being judged because of you know, because of [the] nature. Of them being adopted, ganyan.”

Although concerns regarding criticism from family and society were acknowledged, these concerns ultimately did not waver their decisions. Instead, Maria described eventually finding peace and fulfillment in pursuing adoption. More importantly, after the adoption process became formalized, earlier hesitations within the family narrative appeared to diminish over time, often being reframed simply as part of the past. Maria stated, “I actually messaged my family members, my side and my husband’s side, and I sort of thanked them in advance for treating my daughter as if you know, no different from one of their boys or one of their nephews and nieces.”

Maria encountered moments of anxiety during legal assessments and evaluations, however, her financial stability and access to legal assistance allowed the process to proceed relatively smoothly.

When asked about going through the process of adoption, Maria stated, “We went through a legal process with court hearing and all of that stuff. I would say it was fairly easy on our account. **We were very lucky to have had a good lawyer** kaya it was a rather smooth-sailing sort of ordeal.”

From her perspective, adoption emerged as a transformative experience that contributed to her personal growth and development. Throughout her narrative, parenthood was not merely described as the act of raising a child, but as a process that reshaped her understanding of herself and her capacities as an individual. Adoption became the vehicle through which she experienced this transformation, allowing her to derive deeper meaning from both parenthood and family life. The process of disclosing her daughter’s adoptive status further reflected this growth, as it represented a deliberate effort to strengthen trust, openness, and connection within their relationship. This moment was particularly significant, illustrating how Maria embraced both the responsibilities and identity associated with adoptive parenthood while fostering a secure sense of belonging for her child. “I like to think I’ve become a better human being from the experience.... **Walang masama about being adopted, right?** Like you say it in a way that doesn’t um doesn’t uh have any uh, like as if it was bad news, right? **Because it’s [adoption] something to celebrate, right?**”

For Maria, the most notable moment in her adoption journey was telling their first daughter that she was adopted. This moment illustrates the complex emotional work involved in adoptive family formation, particularly in navigating a child’s developing understanding of identity, loss, and belonging. Rather than

avoiding difficult conversations surrounding adoption, Maria described allowing her daughter the space to ask questions, express grief, and process the reality of her origins. **"I saw her grieve. I saw her cry. I saw her ask questions about, you know, the birth parents, 'Why was I given up', etc. And she went through that, and I think that's a necessary step. Just like pag nawalan tayo ng pag nawalan tayo ng mahal sa buhay, or 'di ba, namatayan tayo, you have to grieve and in order to get past that, to move on.** So, I saw that happen with her, and mga two years ago or three years ago, she told me, **"Mom, I think you did a good job with my transition"**. She's doing very well. She's very uh comfortable in her own skin, she's a very mature young lady. So, uh, I think it was really the right advice that was given to us to manage the communication to her in a way na in the way that we were we tried to, in the way that we were advised to."

Her narrative suggests that adjustment to adoption was not viewed as the absence of emotional struggle, but rather as the ability to move through that struggle with support and open communication. This moment also tells us that adoption disclosure isn't linear. Not a single event but an ongoing developmental process, one in which emotional honesty, parental responsiveness, and age-appropriate communication contribute to a stronger sense of identity and psychological adjustment for the adopted child.

As a final message to prospective adoptive parents, Maria emphasized the importance of entering adoption for the right reasons. For her, adoption should not be driven by external pressures, societal expectations, or the perceived obligation to have children, but rather by a genuine desire to love, nurture, and build a family. Love must remain the foundation upon which the adoption journey is built, but equally important in Maria's narrative is the value of transparency. And adoption is not something to be mourned or concealed, but "something to celebrate."

Adoption as Mutual Belonging. Daniel is a financially established widower whose adoption journey was deeply intertwined with both love and loss. He has two adoptive children, a son and a daughter.

Before the passing of his wife in 2019, the couple had already openly discussed the possibility of adoption after recognizing the challenges they faced regarding biological parenthood, specifically that both of them had problems with fertility. Rather than treating adoption as a last resort, Daniel and his wife viewed it as a meaningful and intentional way of building a family together.

For Daniel, children represent the completion of marriage and family life. He expressed that what completes the marital journey is "having kids, be it biological or adopted." He emphasized that parenthood was central to their shared vision, stating that they were "kind of firm and clear on the objective of why you're getting into it." Children, in this sense, were not limited to biological ties but were understood as an essential realization of "family aspirations."

"We married late, we're both accomplished, we're both secured financially. So the next step is really to grow a family, and build a home, and really realize family aspirations. So we thought that will complete the journey of being husband and wife is having kids, be it biological or adopted." Grounded in strong religious beliefs, Daniel described children as blessings and interpreted adoption through faith, compassion, and shared purpose. Religious and spiritual guidance played a significant role in Daniel's adoption journey. He noted that decisions were made with "guidance also from elders, spiritual advisors," and that even adoption opportunities were facilitated through church connections. He described how friends from church introduced them to potential adoption pathways, framing the process as something providential. In reflecting on this, Daniel stated, "I would always stress the point also that in the scheme of things... **it's a divine intervention in having to be adoptive parents.**"

This perspective became even more evident later in the interview, where Daniel connected adoption to his broader religious worldview. "The fact that I'm able to connect the decision of adoption in a way Joseph and Mary were able to take care of baby Jesus... that's a real model for me and my wife in having to see a divine intervention in being adoptive parents." This displays the importance of religious associations, the beliefs and ultimately leading the way for the adoption process to begin.

Daniel also emphasized that comparisons between biological and adoptive parenthood eventually became meaningless. “We became parents as adopted parents, so it's useless to compare our experience with biological parents.”

As Daniel and his wife moved forward with adoption, they encountered varying reactions from family members. Although relatives were generally supportive, some encouraged them to wait longer or continue pursuing biological options. Daniel recalled that these suggestions never altered their commitment. “Our family members may not necessarily be totally supportive about it in terms of timing [at the time of adoption] ... but we were kinda dead set in saying, ‘no, we want it now.’” For Daniel, adoption did not represent the abandonment of biological hopes but rather an expansion of what family could look like.

“If we will be blessed with biological kids, then it will come naturally, and that will not get in the way of having to take care of adopted kids already in the family.”

One of the most significant turning points in Daniel's narrative emerged through his encounters with other adoptive families and adopted individuals. Meeting successful adults who had themselves been adopted challenged assumptions about adoption and reinforced his belief that family transcends biological connection. **“A parent is a parent, after all.** Being adoptive parents or adopted kids may end up being labels.”

This belief was further strengthened during his family's stay in Singapore. Exposure to a more diverse social environment allowed him to observe adoption being treated as an ordinary aspect of family life rather than a defining characteristic.

“Being adopted kids turned out to be just labels... it's always an option, but at the same time, it's not really an issue.” His comparison between the Philippines and Singapore revealed a broader reflection on societal attitudes. Daniel observed that more progressive communities tend to focus less on labels and more on the quality of family relationships.

The adoption process itself, however, was not without challenges. Although Daniel and his wife were financially secure enough to hire legal assistance, he recognized that the legal system remained lengthy and costly. He described the legal process as relatively manageable due to their financial capability and access to legal assistance, though he acknowledged that adoption may remain inaccessible and emotionally exhausting for many Filipino families without similar resources. He also recalled how repeated interviews and evaluations sometimes became emotionally difficult for his wife, particularly when discussions revisited sensitive experiences surrounding infertility and parenthood. Daniel's account of the institutional adoption process reflects both structure and burden.

He described relying on legal assistance due to financial capacity, stating, “we entrusted everything to the lawyers.” While this made the process more manageable, he also noted the high financial cost and variability in processing time, ranging from two years for the first child to ten months for the second. He also highlighted emotional strain within institutional requirements, particularly for his wife, who found the repeated interviews by DSWD “very draining” and emotionally repetitive.

Yet amidst these difficulties, Daniel remembered the profound support offered by his family, particularly his mother-in-law. Unlike biological parenthood, adoption offered no nine-month period of preparation. Suddenly, they were new parents responsible for an infant.

His mother-in-law stepped in immediately, helping them navigate the unfamiliar realities of caring for a newborn. This support transformed uncertainty into confidence and reinforced the communal nature of parenting within their family.

A particularly meaningful aspect of Daniel's story concerns how he approached conversations about adoption with his children. Unlike many adoptive families who delay disclosure, Daniel and his wife introduced the concept early and openly. Influenced by guidance counselors and educational resources in Singapore, they normalized adoption through books and everyday conversations. **“We never hide anything from him.”**

Fear in Daniel's narrative was less centered on adoption itself and more on the loss of his wife—the mother of a daughter who had already experienced separation from her biological parents. This layered experience of loss raised concerns about how his daughter might make sense of abandonment and attachment over time. While Daniel emphasized that he currently observes no significant signs of maladjustment and describes his daughter as a well-adjusted young woman, the possibility of underlying abandonment-related concerns remains present in his reflections. His narrative reveals an ongoing awareness that adoption, grief, and identity may intersect in complex ways, particularly as his daughter continues to grow and make meaning of her life experiences.

Daniel demonstrated strong awareness of the emotional and developmental implications for adopted children. He recognized that adoption may be interpreted by children as “abandonment,” and that identity formation could involve complex emotional layers. However, he also emphasized that his children are “very well-adjusted,” particularly his son, who was introduced to adoption early in life. He acknowledged ongoing reflection regarding his daughter, stating uncertainty about how early maternal loss may intersect with her understanding of adoption and identity.

Perhaps the most profound insight emerged when Daniel shifted the focus away from adoptive parents entirely. He stated; “It's not just the parents adopting the kids, but over time also and more about the **kids adopting the parents.**” Rather than positioning adoptive parents as the sole agents of the process, Daniel highlights the emotional work performed by adopted children themselves. In his view, adopted children carry the greater burden of adjustment because they are the ones adapting to a family, a home, and a life that they did not choose. He added; “**It's really the adopted kids who really lost someone or something of their life** and who would have to layer their life with another required adjustment.” For Daniel, this perspective remains largely absent from public conversations about adoption, which often focus exclusively on parental experiences.

Looking back, Daniel described adoption not simply as a legal process, but as one of the most meaningful experiences he and his wife shared together. Over time, he came to view adoptive parenthood as no different from biological parenting, emphasizing that family is ultimately formed through love, care, commitment, and shared lived experience rather than blood relation alone. “Being adoptive parents is really a label more than anything else to me... **I don't really treat the kind of parenting I have now any different just because I'm an adoptive parent.**” For Daniel, family is not determined by biology but by commitment, care, and shared life experiences. His narrative concludes with a message of acceptance and openness, emphasizing that adoption should not be viewed as a lesser form of parenthood. Instead, it is a meaningful and legitimate way of creating a family, one that requires not only the willingness of parents to adopt children, but also the courage of children to adopt a new life, a new home, and a new sense of belonging.

Finding Family Beyond Blood. Robert's adoption journey was deeply shaped by grief, loss, and eventual emotional healing. He has two adoptive children, the eldest daughter being 15, and the youngest 11.

Following the loss of a biological son and medical difficulties that complicated future biological pregnancies, he and his spouse gradually began considering adoption as a possible pathway toward rebuilding their family.

Initially, Robert shared carrying doubts about whether he could genuinely love a child who was not biologically related to him, reflecting cultural assumptions surrounding blood relations and parenthood. However, his perspective shifted significantly after meeting his adopted child for the first time, which he described as an immediate emotional connection that dissolved many of his earlier fears. “The first time you see the child is the turning point. For me, it just fits.” For Robert, children are not distinguished by biological origin but by relational experience. He consistently framed adoption as indistinguishable from biological parenthood, emphasizing that “it's the same as having a biological child.” His understanding of family is grounded in lived experience rather than genetic continuity. In his view, parenthood is not defined by origin but by presence, attachment, and shared life.

“Nothing felt artificial.” Although less doctrinally expressed compared to other respondents, Robert's narrative reflects a subtle moral and spiritual framing of adoption as a guided process. He described engagement in adoption forums and advocacy spaces, and positioned his experience as something worth sharing due to its perceived positive alignment. His openness to adoption appears grounded in a broader belief

system where acceptance and “taking the step” are part of life’s unfolding process rather than purely institutional decision-making.

Robert initially approached adoption with hesitation rooted in identity and biological expectation. “Very skeptical. You’re not really sure whether it’s something that you want to do because **there’s still the psychological thinking that it’s not your own flesh and blood.**”

He further expressed that the emotional uncertainty was mitigated by trust in his wife’s conviction: “My wife was quite sure she wanted to do it, so... if not for her, I probably wouldn’t have gone through it.” This tension reveals an early internal conflict between biological assumptions of parenthood and relational trust within marriage. Robert acknowledged that some older relatives appeared hesitant or less accepting of adoption due to traditional beliefs about family lineage, although outright opposition was minimal. His narrative further suggests limited external pressure from social circles due to their family’s status and independence. He noted that their decision was largely self-contained and not heavily contested:

“We are on our own, and we are respected from a stature standpoint, so nobody really... had an opposing point of view.” However, he acknowledged underlying generational skepticism: “They were skeptical... especially the older generation. They do have a different view of adoption.” This indicates that while overt resistance was minimal, subtle cultural hesitation remained present within extended family structures.

Robert described the legal adoption process as structurally demanding but manageable due to financial capacity. He emphasized the judicial system’s prolonged timelines:

“It’s long... there’s a court appointment and if you miss it, the next one will be another four months, five months.... It takes about two years for us... before we finished everything.” Despite describing the process as administratively heavy, he did not frame it as emotionally distressing, but rather as procedural waiting that required patience rather than psychological burden. And while he found the adoption process lengthy and occasionally frustrating because of institutional delays, he ultimately viewed these difficulties as worthwhile.

Later reflections also reveal a broader, retrospective awareness of societal misunderstanding and cultural stigma, particularly in non-urban contexts, where adoption may still be viewed as “taboo.”

Through his experiences, Robert came to understand family not as something determined by biology alone, but as something built through emotional attachment, responsibility, and unconditional care. He further demonstrated strong emphasis on identity formation and normalization for adopted children, highlighting transparency as essential. “Everybody knows they were adopted. We weren’t ashamed of it.” He also expressed awareness of cultural risks tied to secrecy, suggesting that silence can create stigma; “When you’re secretive about it... everybody goes to chismis... I think that makes it different.” Implicitly, Robert positions emotional security for children as dependent on openness, normalcy, and narrative clarity within the family system.

Robert’s final reflection reframes adoption as equivalently authentic to biological parenthood. His stance is not merely acceptance but advocacy: “I’m an advocate of it... the experience for me is positive. It’s the same as having a biological child.” And most significantly, he articulates a philosophical conclusion about the nature of adoption itself: “Nothing around it felt artificial or fake... it feels normal.” For Robert, adoption becomes not an alternative form of family creation, but a confirmation that family is fundamentally constructed through lived relational experience rather than biological origin. His narrative ultimately dissolves the boundary between adoptive and biological parenthood, reframing it as a socially constructed distinction that loses meaning within actual family life.

The table below presents a summary of the cross-case comparison that emerged across the stories of the three participants. While each participant entered adoption through different life circumstances and personal experiences, several common patterns were observed throughout their narratives. Across all three accounts, children were consistently viewed as central to the meaning of family, although the significance attached to parenthood differed depending on each participant’s personal journey. Similarities were also found in their initial emotional concerns, anticipated reactions from family and society, and the challenges encountered

throughout the adoption process. At the same time, differences emerged in areas such as religious influence, institutional experiences, and the specific fears and concerns that shaped their decisions. Despite these variations, all three narratives converged on one important finding: although each participant experienced uncertainty, hesitation, or emotional challenges before and during adoption, none of these concerns ultimately prevented them from pursuing adoptive parenthood.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the lived experiences of adoptive parents in the Philippines and how varying psychological, cultural, and systemic influences may have shaped their adoption journeys. Through narrative inquiry, each participant's account revealed a unique yet interconnected process of decision-making—one with emotional negotiation and turning points, as well as meaning-making. Examining the narratives individually allowed the study to capture the sequence of experiences and turning points that characterized each adoption journey, while cross-case comparison revealed recurring patterns regarding family, cultural stigma, emotional readiness, and institutional navigation.

Individually, the participants' narratives demonstrated that adoption was rarely an impulsive decision. Rather, it emerged gradually through deeply personal experiences that built into the foundation of choosing to become adoptive parents (Brodzinsky & Huffman, 1988; McKay et al., 2010).

Maria's narrative illustrated how adoption transformed from a distant possibility, into a meaningful pathway to motherhood (Park & Wonch Hill, 2013) after years of unsuccessful attempts to conceive. Her turning point emerged through exposure to other adoptive parents, which normalized adoption and made it emotionally imaginable (Brodzinsky & Huffman, 1988). Later, she formed an important meaning-making with children and parenthood altogether, suggesting that adoption was not the issue but rather the idea of parenthood. Daniel's narrative differed in that adoption was openly discussed early within the marriage and framed as an intentional form of parenthood rather than a last resort. His story reflected how religious faith and marital unity shaped confidence in the adoption decision (Belanger et al., 2008) despite external expectations surrounding biological children. The struggle lies with losing his life partner and not necessarily on adoption itself. Meanwhile, Robert's narrative was characterized by emotional hesitation and grief following the loss of their biological child. Unlike the others, he initially questioned whether emotional attachment to an adopted child would feel genuine. However, the moment he met his adopted child became a major narrative turning point (Harf et al., 2013), fundamentally reshaping his understanding of family and parenthood.

Psychological Hesitation

Across all narratives, psychological hesitation consistently emerged prior to adoption. Participants described fears related to emotional bonding, parenting readiness, and uncertainty about the child's future adjustment (Lee et al., 2018). Beyond these practical concerns, participants appeared to experience a process of anticipatory meaning-making, wherein they attempted to imagine themselves within the role of an adoptive parent before the relationship with the child had even formed (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003; Firouzian et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2018). Their anxieties reflected not only concerns about parenting competence but also uncertainty regarding whether emotional attachment could develop in the absence of biological ties (Brodzinsky & Huffman, 1988; McKay et al., 2010). Interestingly, these fears were largely hypothetical rather than experience-based. Once participants entered parenthood, these imagined concerns gradually gave way to lived relational experiences, suggesting that attachment was constructed through everyday caregiving, emotional responsiveness, and shared experiences rather than biological connection alone.

Cultural Rootedness

Cultural influences also strongly shaped participants' narratives. All participants acknowledged encountering social beliefs that privileged blood relations and biological lineage. Comments emphasizing real children or assumptions that biological parenthood remained preferable reflected the persistence of Filipino cultural beliefs surrounding *dugo* or blood relation, and family legitimacy. These findings support literature suggesting that collectivist cultures like the Philippines often attach symbolic value to blood relations, inheritance, and

biological continuity; oftentimes discouraging or delaying the adoptive decisions of parents who consider it in the first place (Blanco & Panao, 2019; Fatalla, 2023; Haslanger, 2009; Hwang, 2026). This suggests a deeply embedded, cultural and almost innate alarm that reminds these parents that their choices will have family members talking in spite of their decisions.

Nevertheless, this voice remains a voice, and not a trumpet on their decision making. Participants did not describe these beliefs as entirely prohibitive. Instead, their narratives reflected a process of negotiating and resisting such expectations. Rather than internalizing these cultural expectations, participants gradually renegotiated them through personal experience. Ultimately, cultural beliefs remained psychologically present throughout the adoption journey, but became increasingly less influential as attachment with their children strengthened. In this sense, lived experience appeared to supersede culturally inherited assumptions about what constitutes a real family.

Adoption as a Social Decision

With the collated narratives from several adoptive parents, this study suggests that adoption in the Philippine context is, and has long been, a social decision before it becomes a plan for parenthood. Before assumptions are made, however, it is important to clarify what is meant by this.

Social decision-making refers to the cognitive and emotional process of balancing one's own interests with those of others within a group or society (Soares et al., 2023). Participants demonstrated how personal decisions are often embedded within broader social contexts. Adoption was not evaluated solely according to individual desires but through anticipated family reactions, perceived social norms, and cultural expectations regarding parenthood. Even before receiving actual responses from relatives, participants had already imagined possible judgments, suggesting that anticipated social evaluation influenced emotional preparation as much as actual experiences did.

The Philippines has long valued traditional norms of parenthood and, for lack of a better term, legitimate parenthood. Within a collectivist culture, biological parenthood is often regarded as the primary and more socially accepted option, positioning adoption as a secondary path pursued only when all else fails, such as in cases involving infertility or other circumstances. Yet what is particularly notable in the participants' narratives is that despite these cultural and societal constraints, they ultimately refused to allow such perceptions to dictate their decisions. The participants remained highly aware of the misconceptions and stigma associated with adoption, but over time developed a stronger sense of certainty regarding their choice to pursue parenthood on their own terms.

Despite their prior and deeply ingrained awareness that they might face judgment from family members and society, this sense of cultural rootedness did not hinder their desire to become fulfilled parents, nor did it prevent them from pursuing adoption as a meaningful path to family formation.

Breaking Down the Stigma

Cross-case comparison revealed a shared narrative trajectory despite differences in personal histories. Initially, participants entered adoption carrying uncertainty shaped by cultural assumptions, emotional fears, and imagined difficulties. Throughout the process, however, exposure to adoptive parenting experiences, emotional connection with the child, and supportive relationships gradually transformed these perceptions. Adoption shifted from being perceived as an alternative or secondary form of parenthood into something normalized, relational, and emotionally authentic. This progression reflects a broader process of identity reconstruction (Grotevant, 1997; Von Korff et al., 2010; Von Korff & Grotevant, 2011). Participants gradually transitioned from viewing themselves as individuals considering adoption to embracing an identity as parents whose legitimacy no longer depended on biological connection. Consequently, adoption itself became less central to their identity over time, while the experience of parenthood became increasingly salient.

Concerns regarding criticism from family and society were acknowledged, but these concerns ultimately did not waver their decisions. Instead, participants described eventually finding peace, fulfillment, and confidence

in pursuing adoption. Across these narratives, participants recalled shared concerns and initial hesitation, but ultimately described experiences characterized by acceptance and strengthened familial relationships. More importantly, after the adoption process became formalized, earlier hesitations within the family narrative appeared to diminish over time, often being reframed as something far less significant than initially imagined. As Robert described, it eventually became their role as parents to educate those around them about adoption. Similarly, Daniel reported developing an even closer relationship with his in-laws, who eventually helped care for the adopted child, while Maria became a source of guidance and support for other prospective adoptive parents considering adoption themselves.

Adoption decision-making therefore cannot be reduced solely to individual attitudes or isolated barriers. Rather, adoption emerged as a socially and emotionally embedded process influenced by interactions between personal experiences, cultural narratives, institutional systems, and relational support.

Institutional Experiences

Institutional experiences further shaped participants' adoption journeys. Although all participants described the legal process as manageable overall, this experience appeared strongly influenced by socioeconomic capability and access to legal support (Testa, 2004).

Participants who possessed financial stability and lawyers experienced smoother navigation of the adoption system, while still acknowledging the emotional exhaustion, prolonged waiting periods, and bureaucratic demands involved. Institutional accessibility does not eliminate psychological stress associated with adoption procedures after all. More importantly, participants' stories revealed that institutional strain was not solely procedural; repeated interviews, assessments, and evaluations often reopened emotionally sensitive experiences related to infertility, grief, and parenting insecurity (Adnyani et al., 2026; Leake et al., 2019). Psychologically, these procedures functioned as more than administrative requirements. For participants with histories of infertility or child loss, institutional interviews occasionally required them to revisit unresolved emotions that had originally motivated their decision to adopt. This finding suggests that adoption assessments may inadvertently serve as emotionally activating experiences, highlighting the importance of providing psychological support alongside procedural evaluation (Sánchez-Sandoval et al., 2019).

Socioeconomic Limitations

While the participants argued that adoption has become more normalized within certain circles, such normalization still appears limited, particularly considering that the adoptive parents interviewed possessed the financial stability and resources necessary to support their decisions. Adoption itself is not a cheap commitment; rather, it reflects an intentional and highly planned form of parenthood. Consequently, it is unsurprising that the respondents gathered for this study were financially capable individuals. While this may not fully capture the experiences of lower-income Filipino families, it may still reflect the realities of many Filipinos who seriously consider pursuing legal adoption.

Ultimately, the narratives presented in this study demonstrate that while cultural beliefs, social expectations, and institutional challenges may shape the adoption journey, they do not necessarily determine its outcome. The adoptive parents in this study chose to move beyond these constraints, guided instead by a genuine desire to nurture, care for, and build a family. Their stories suggest that parenthood is not defined by biology alone, but by the enduring commitment to love, protect, and raise a child.

In the end, adoption becomes less about the absence of a biological connection and more about the presence of intentional and meaningful parenthood.

Implications for Psychology

One of the clearest insights to emerge from the participants' stories is that adoption extends far beyond legal documentation or administrative procedures. Their narratives reveal that adoption is a deeply personal process marked by periods of uncertainty, emotional adjustment, changing identities, and evolving family

relationships. While each participant arrived at adoption through different life circumstances, their experiences suggest that psychological support is valuable not only when difficulties arise, but throughout the entire adoption journey.

Before Adoption. Long before legal papers are filed, many prospective adoptive parents are already navigating emotionally significant experiences. For some participants, adoption followed years of infertility, unanswered questions, or the gradual acceptance that parenthood would take a different path than originally imagined. Others spoke of carefully examining their motivations and asking themselves whether they were truly prepared for the lifelong commitment that adoption entails. These narratives point to the importance of psychological readiness prior to adoption. Clinical psychologists are in a unique position to help individuals and couples process infertility-related grief, clarify their motivations, manage expectations, and prepare emotionally for the realities of adoptive parenthood. Rather than determining whether someone is fit to adopt, psychological services during this stage may help prospective parents enter the process with greater self-awareness and emotional preparedness.

During the Adoption Process. Participants also described the adoption process itself as emotionally demanding. Lengthy waiting periods, repeated interviews, legal uncertainties, and moments of self-doubt often became part of their stories. While some viewed these experiences as necessary steps, others recalled how emotionally exhausting it was to repeatedly revisit deeply personal experiences. These moments highlight opportunities for psychologists to provide supportive spaces where prospective parents can process uncertainty, regulate emotional distress, and develop healthy coping strategies while waiting for the adoption to progress. In some cases, family consultation may also be beneficial, particularly when extended family members hold misconceptions or reservations about adoption. Helping families navigate these conversations may strengthen support systems before the child officially becomes part of the family.

After Adoption. Perhaps the strongest implication emerging from the participants' narratives is that the adoption journey does not end once legal proceedings are completed. Several parents spoke openly about helping their children understand their adoptive identity, responding to questions about biological parents, and creating an environment where adoption could be discussed without secrecy or shame. Others reflected on concerns about grief, abandonment, attachment, and the long-term emotional experiences that adopted children may encounter as they grow older. These accounts suggest that post-adoption support is equally important. Clinical psychologists may assist families in fostering secure attachment, guiding developmentally appropriate adoption disclosure, strengthening parent-child communication, and providing family-based interventions when adjustment challenges arise. As children move through different developmental stages, psychologists may also serve as consistent sources of support in helping both parents and children make sense of new questions surrounding identity, belonging, and family relationships.

Taken together, the narratives in this study suggest that the role of the psychologist is not confined to assessment or crisis intervention. Instead, psychologists may become companions throughout the adoption journey—helping prospective parents make informed decisions, supporting families through periods of uncertainty, and continuing to walk alongside them as family life unfolds. In doing so, psychological practice has the potential to contribute not only to the well-being of adoptive parents and children, but also to the development of healthier, more resilient adoptive families.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that adoption agencies, psychologists, social workers, and policymakers continue strengthening public awareness initiatives that challenge misconceptions surrounding adoption and promote adoptive families as equally valid forms of family formation. Public education campaigns may help shift prevailing cultural narratives that continue to privilege biological parenthood over adoptive parenthood, thereby fostering greater acceptance of adoption within Filipino society.

Psychologists may assume a more active role throughout the adoption process. Prior to adoption, psychological services may focus on helping prospective adoptive parents explore their motivations, expectations, and emotional readiness for parenthood while addressing concerns related to infertility, grief,

family acceptance, and adoption-related anxieties. During the adoption process, psychologists may provide supportive counseling to assist parents in coping with the emotional demands of interviews, assessments, prolonged waiting periods, and the uncertainties inherent in the legal process. Following adoption, psychologists may continue supporting adoptive families through parent guidance, adoption disclosure counseling, attachment- and identity-related interventions, and developmental support as adopted children mature and begin to explore questions surrounding their origins and identity (Sánchez-Sandoval et al., 2019).

Adoption agencies and mental health professionals are likewise encouraged to develop psychoeducational programs and peer support groups that allow adoptive parents to learn from the experiences of other adoptive families. Consistent with the findings of this study, hearing the narratives of successful adoptive parents may help normalize adoption, reduce uncertainty, and provide realistic expectations regarding the emotional and practical aspects of adoptive parenthood.

Future researchers may further explore the lived experiences of adoptive parents from more diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, as the participants in this study were generally financially capable of navigating the adoption process. Studies involving adoptive parents from lower-income households, same-sex couples, single mothers and fathers, as well as adoptive parents from different cultural and religious backgrounds, may provide a broader understanding of adoption experiences within the Philippine context. Comparative narrative studies involving prospective adoptive parents, adopted individuals, biological parents who placed children for adoption, psychologists, and adoption professionals may also enrich current knowledge by capturing multiple perspectives across the adoption journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would also like to extend my appreciation to Agnes R. Agbayani, RPsy, Mental Health Counselor and Specialist, and Psychotherapist, for her time and expertise in validating the research questions and helping strengthen the direction of this study.

My heartfelt thanks go to my guidance counselors, Sir John and Ma'am Mina, for their encouragement, support, and constant reminders to persevere and complete this thesis. Their confidence in my abilities helped me stay committed to this journey, especially during its most challenging moments.

To my family, thank you for your unwavering love, patience, and support throughout my academic journey. Your belief in me has been a constant source of strength and motivation.

I am also deeply grateful to Najua, Jade, and Julianne, my colleagues and companions to this degree, for their friendship, encouragement, and shared experiences. I could not do any of this without sharing heartache and struggles with you both by my side, and for that, I am grateful.

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