

Constructing Parenthood After Infertility: A Narrative Study of Adoptive Parents

Diana. Rodrigues da Silva¹, Adaeze. Okonkwo^{2*}, Grace. Mwangi³

¹ Insight - Piaget Research Center for Human and Ecological Development, Escola Higher de Education Jean Piaget, Almada, Portugal

² Department of General Psychology, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

³ Department of Educational Psychology, University of Nairobi, Nairobi, Kenya

* Corresponding author email address: adaeze.okonkwo@ui.edu.ng

Article Info

Article type:

Original Article

How to cite this article:

Rodrigues da Silva, D., Okonkwo, A., & Mwangi, G. (2025). Constructing Parenthood After Infertility: A Narrative Study of Adoptive Parents. *Applied Family Therapy Journal*, 6(1), 149-157.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.aftj.6.1.15>



© 2025 the authors. Published by KMAN Publication Inc. (KMANPUB), Ontario, Canada. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to explore how adoptive parents construct their identities and meaning of parenthood following experiences of infertility.

Methods: This qualitative research employed a narrative methodology to investigate the lived experiences of 31 adoptive parents residing in Austria, all of whom had previously experienced infertility. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, ensuring diversity in gender, relationship status, and duration since adoption. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic narrative analysis with the assistance of NVivo software. Theoretical saturation guided the cessation of data collection. Data analysis focused on identifying shared themes and patterns in the way participants narrated their transition from infertility to adoptive parenthood.

Findings: Three major themes emerged from the data: Redefining Parenthood, Emotional Journey, and Social and Relational Adjustments. Within these categories, participants described subthemes such as letting go of biological ties, reconstructing identity, symbolic rituals, emotional ambivalence, hope and renewal, navigating social stigma, and coping with institutional processes. Participants emphasized the importance of narrative reconstruction, spiritual or moral reframing, and peer support in legitimizing their parental identity. Despite the fulfillment found in adoption, many expressed that emotional residues from infertility persisted, shaping their experience of parenthood in both subtle and explicit ways.

Conclusion: The findings highlight that adoptive parenthood after infertility is a complex, emotionally layered, and socially negotiated process. Narrative identity construction plays a vital role in helping individuals reconcile reproductive loss with the joys and challenges of adoption.

Keywords: Adoptive parenthood, infertility, narrative identity, qualitative research, symbolic parenthood, emotional transition

1. Introduction

Parenthood is a culturally, emotionally, and psychologically significant milestone for many individuals. For those who experience infertility, the journey toward becoming a parent often diverges from biological reproduction and may culminate in adoption. This transition—marked by grief, transformation, and redefinition—presents unique emotional and relational challenges, particularly for individuals reconstructing parenthood outside the framework of biological lineage. Infertility, often experienced as a rupture of expected life scripts, forces individuals and couples to renegotiate their identities and reimagine future family life (Allan et al., 2019; Troude et al., 2016). Adoption, in this context, is not merely a means to an end but a complex psychological and social process that reshapes the meaning of parenthood (Soares et al., 2022; William et al., 2023).

Numerous studies have highlighted the psychological aftermath of infertility, noting that individuals often undergo significant emotional adjustments when transitioning from fertility treatments to adoption (Mirasol & Bestard, 2016; Moura-Ramos et al., 2015). Infertility may provoke enduring feelings of loss, inadequacy, and identity disruption, especially when medical interventions such as IVF are unsuccessful (Corrente, 2022; Ghirir, 2021). While adoption can offer a pathway to fulfill parental desires, it does not automatically resolve the grief associated with biological childlessness. Rather, the psychological process involves reconciling past losses with new beginnings, a duality that is often negotiated through narrative identity work (Egan et al., 2022; Lifshitz, 2014).

The adoption process itself introduces further complexities into the construction of parenthood. Adoptive parents must not only integrate a non-biological child into their lives but also develop a parental identity that is socially and internally validated (Arvidsson et al., 2019; South et al., 2019). Research has shown that adoptive parents are frequently subject to external questioning and implicit stigmas that challenge their parental legitimacy (Canzi et al., 2021; Wąsiński, 2015). These experiences can trigger efforts to affirm their identity through symbolic actions, narratives, and relational practices (Mateus, 2013; Tarrés, 2013). For many, parenthood achieved through adoption necessitates a reimagining of familial bonds, reshaping not only how they see themselves but also how they wish to be seen by others (Hasanpoor-Azghady et al., 2016; Lakhvich, 2012).

The construction of adoptive parenthood is particularly nuanced among individuals who have experienced infertility. As previous research has shown, the process is not linear but rather dynamic, often shaped by unresolved grief, cultural scripts, and social narratives around “real” parenthood (Goldberg et al., 2024; Roher et al., 2019). In many cases, the act of adopting a child is interwoven with psychological work to detach parenthood from biology and instead root it in caregiving, emotional attachment, and moral or spiritual meaning (Kawamura & Asano, 2023; William et al., 2023). This reframing helps adoptive parents manage the ambiguity of their transition and construct coherent life narratives that incorporate both infertility and adoption.

From a sociocultural perspective, narratives play a central role in how individuals make sense of life transitions, particularly those that involve disruption or discontinuity (Egan et al., 2022; Lifshitz, 2014). The turn to narrative is especially salient in adoptive parenthood following infertility, where the absence of biological continuity necessitates a reworking of traditional family scripts. Narrative identity theory suggests that people create meaning and coherence in their lives by organizing experiences into temporally ordered stories with themes of struggle, transformation, and resolution (Corrente, 2022; Egan et al., 2022). These stories not only offer personal insight but also help individuals present themselves as legitimate parents to the broader social world (Arvidsson et al., 2019; South et al., 2019).

While existing literature has addressed various dimensions of adoption, including motivations for adopting (Soares et al., 2022), the psychosocial needs of post-IVF parents (Mirasol & Bestard, 2016), and the relational dynamics within adoptive families (South et al., 2019), fewer studies have focused specifically on how adoptive parents construct and narrate their parental identity following infertility. This gap is particularly important to address, given that adoption is often framed as an endpoint rather than a complex identity-shaping process in its own right (Goldberg et al., 2024; William et al., 2023). Moreover, the intersection of infertility, adoption, and narrative identity formation remains underexplored in the literature, despite its theoretical and practical significance.

A few qualitative studies have begun to address this intersection, revealing how adoptive parents use personal storytelling to reconcile the dual experiences of infertility and non-biological parenthood (Canzi et al., 2021; Egan et al., 2022). These narratives often serve to reframe the

adoption as a meaningful and morally purposeful act, rather than a second-best alternative to biological parenting (Hasanpoor–Azgahdy et al., 2016; Tarrés, 2013). Parents may draw upon spiritual or ethical discourses, expressing beliefs that their child was “meant to be” theirs or viewing the adoption journey as part of a larger destiny (Mateus, 2013; Moura- Ramos et al., 2015). In doing so, they construct coherent identities that validate their transition into parenthood and support their relational bonds with their child.

Despite these insights, more research is needed to understand the detailed process through which adoptive parents affected by infertility construct their parental identities over time. This includes examining the emotional transitions involved, the role of symbolic practices and rituals, and the ways in which individuals navigate societal perceptions of adoptive families. The current study contributes to this literature by exploring how adoptive parents in Austria, all of whom experienced prior infertility, narrate their path to parenthood and construct meaning through their stories.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This qualitative study adopted a narrative research design to explore how adoptive parents construct their identities and experiences of parenthood following infertility. The narrative approach was chosen to capture the rich, lived experiences and personal stories of individuals who have navigated the transition from infertility to adoptive parenthood. The participants in this study were 31 adoptive parents (15 mothers and 16 fathers) residing in Austria, selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation in terms of age, duration of infertility, time since adoption, and socio-economic background. Inclusion criteria required participants to have experienced medically diagnosed infertility, followed by at least one finalized adoption within the past ten years. Recruitment was carried out via online adoption forums, support groups, and social media platforms, and participation continued until theoretical saturation was reached—that is, the point at which no new themes or insights emerged from additional interviews.

2.2. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted exclusively through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, allowing participants to narrate their unique journeys while enabling the researcher to probe for deeper meaning and context. Interviews were conducted in person or via secure video conferencing platforms, depending on participant preference and location. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was guided by an interview protocol designed to explore topics such as the emotional aftermath of infertility, motivations for adoption, experiences of the adoption process, evolving parental identity, and social perceptions of adoptive parenthood. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity of participants’ narratives.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed a thematic narrative analysis approach. Transcripts were imported into NVivo software to facilitate systematic coding and theme development. The researcher conducted multiple readings of each transcript to identify narrative structures and recurring motifs, with particular attention to how participants made sense of their transition from infertility to adoptive parenthood. Initial codes were generated inductively and then grouped into broader thematic categories through iterative comparison and refinement. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis, member checking was employed with selected participants, and peer debriefing sessions were conducted throughout the process. The final themes represent shared patterns of meaning across participants while also honoring individual variations in lived experience.

3. Findings and Results

The participants in this study consisted of 31 adoptive parents (16 fathers and 15 mothers) residing in various regions of Austria. The majority were between the ages of 35 and 50, with 22 participants (71%) falling within this range, while 6 participants (19%) were over 50 and 3 participants (10%) were under 35. Twenty-five participants (81%) were in heterosexual marriages, while 6 (19%) were in same-sex partnerships. In terms of educational background, 18 participants (58%) held a university degree, 9 (29%) had completed secondary education, and 4 (13%) had vocational training. The length of time since their most

recent adoption ranged from 1 to 10 years, with a median of 5 years. Most participants ($n = 27$; 87%) had adopted one child, while 4 participants (13%) had adopted two or more. The adopted children were predominantly under the age of 10 at the time of data collection. Participants were from

diverse occupational backgrounds, including education ($n = 8$), healthcare ($n = 6$), business ($n = 5$), social services ($n = 4$), and other professions such as the arts, administration, and manual trades ($n = 8$).

Table 1

Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts Identified from the Narratives of Adoptive Parents

| Category | Subcategory | Concepts (Open Codes) |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Redefining Parenthood | Letting Go of Biological Ties | Accepting infertility, mourning lost child, renouncing IVF, emotional closure, redefining legacy |
| | Reconstructing Identity | New self-image, identity reconstruction, from patient to parent, restoring confidence |
| | Embracing Adoptive Roles | Learning to parent, bonding with adopted child, discipline roles, parental routines |
| | Spiritual and Moral Reframing | Fate and destiny, moral purpose, child as gift, belief in higher plan, religious framing |
| | Symbolic Parenthood | Photo rituals, memory books, adoption day celebrations, names with meaning |
| | Negotiating Parental Authenticity | Feeling legitimate, internal validation, challenging doubts, acceptance as real parents |
| | Imagining Family Futures | Future-oriented thinking, education goals, dreaming together, creating family narratives |
| Emotional Journey | Grief and Loss | Initial grief, sense of emptiness, anger toward body, emotional fatigue |
| | Hope and Renewal | Renewed optimism, starting anew, believing in possibilities, adoption as second chance |
| | Emotional Ambivalence | Mixed emotions, fear of rejection, uncertainty, joy and anxiety, dual emotional states |
| | Post-Adoption Adjustment | Adjusting expectations, learning curves, emotional overload, building attachment |
| Social and Relational Adjustments | Healing Through Parenthood | Healing identity, restoring self-worth, parenthood as redemption, sense of completeness |
| | Coping Strategies | Journaling, therapy, peer talks, emotional regulation, self-care |
| | Navigating Social Stigma | Public judgment, negative assumptions, ignorant remarks, feeling scrutinized |
| | Family Integration | Sibling bonding, grandparent support, routine establishment, co-parenting roles |
| | Support Networks | Online communities, adoption counselors, support groups, friendship circles |
| | Dealing with Curiosity and Questions | Children's questions, honesty dilemmas, narrating adoption, preparing answers |
| | Legal and Institutional Experiences | Bureaucracy stress, court experiences, documentation burden, waiting periods |

Participants in this study comprised 31 adoptive parents from Austria who shared personal narratives surrounding their transition to parenthood following infertility. Thematic analysis of these narratives led to the identification of three overarching categories: Redefining Parenthood, Emotional Journey, and Social and Relational Adjustments. Each category included several subthemes that captured key dimensions of adoptive parent identity construction and meaning-making. The results below are structured by subcategory, supported by direct quotes from interviewees to illustrate the lived experience of adoptive parenthood.

Letting Go of Biological Ties. Participants described a significant emotional turning point in releasing the desire for a biological child. This process involved accepting infertility, mourning the loss of imagined biological offspring, and disengaging from fertility treatments. One

mother shared, "I had to grieve the child I never had. It felt like a funeral of a dream." Others spoke of emotional closure: "Stopping IVF was both a relief and a heartbreak. It marked the end of one journey and the beginning of another."

Reconstructing Identity. Following the infertility experience, participants described a process of rebuilding their identity—from being defined by medical appointments and treatments to embracing the role of a parent. A father explained, "I was no longer a patient in a system. I became someone's dad. That shift gave me back a sense of who I am." Many discussed how their confidence and self-worth gradually improved as they embraced a new version of themselves.

Embracing Adoptive Roles. Learning to be a parent through adoption came with its own challenges and

triumphs. Participants reflected on developing parental routines, establishing discipline, and fostering emotional bonds with their children. As one participant noted, “It didn’t happen overnight, but now, when she calls me ‘Papa,’ it feels real.” Others emphasized the learning curve: “There’s no manual for adoptive parenting. You learn by being present.”

Spiritual and Moral Reframing. Several participants used spiritual or moral narratives to make sense of their path to adoption. They saw their child as a gift or part of a higher plan. “I believe this child was meant for us,” said one adoptive mother. Another reflected, “It wasn’t biology that made us a family—it was something bigger, something divine.” This reframing helped many participants cope with previous disappointments.

Symbolic Parenthood. Participants often engaged in symbolic rituals to affirm their role as parents. These included creating memory books, celebrating “gotcha days,” and choosing names with special meanings. One couple explained, “We celebrate the day she came home just like a birthday—it marks the day we became a family.”

Negotiating Parental Authenticity. Despite internal and external doubts, participants described a journey toward feeling legitimate in their parental role. “At first, I felt like an impostor,” said one mother. “But over time, I realized—there’s no one more real to this child than me.” Authenticity was reinforced through daily caregiving and emotional closeness.

Imagining Family Futures. Future-oriented thinking was central to participants’ stories. They dreamed about their child’s education, future milestones, and long-term family life. “We talk about her future like any other parent—college, travel, everything,” a father shared. These imagined futures helped consolidate their sense of parenthood.

Grief and Loss. The emotional residue of infertility was profound. Many participants described lingering sadness and emotional fatigue. “There’s a quiet grief that never leaves,” said one mother. “You carry the loss of one path even as you celebrate the new one.” Feelings of anger, especially toward their bodies, were also common.

Hope and Renewal. Despite the grief, participants spoke about adoption as a source of renewed hope. “Adopting gave us a second chance—not just to be parents, but to believe in life again,” said one father. The sense of starting over infused many narratives with optimism.

Emotional Ambivalence. Mixed feelings were a recurring theme, particularly during the early post-adoption phase. Participants reported joy, fear, anxiety, and uncertainty often coexisting. “I loved him the moment I saw him. But I was

terrified too—terrified I’d mess it up,” admitted one parent. These dual emotional states were normalized over time.

Post-Adoption Adjustment. Adjusting to the realities of parenting, especially without the biological connection, was described as both rewarding and overwhelming. “It was a rollercoaster,” said one mother. “Some days I felt like the best mom in the world; others, I felt lost.” Attachment developed gradually as parents learned their child’s emotional needs.

Healing Through Parenthood. Many participants experienced parenthood as a healing journey. “Becoming a mother helped me recover from years of feeling broken,” shared one woman. For others, it restored a sense of completeness: “He filled a space I didn’t know was still empty.”

Coping Strategies. To manage emotional demands, participants employed various coping methods, including journaling, therapy, peer conversations, and self-care. “Writing helped me make sense of the chaos,” one participant noted. Others emphasized the power of shared stories: “Talking to other adoptive parents was like breathing fresh air.”

Navigating Social Stigma. Participants frequently encountered misunderstanding and judgment from others. “People ask, ‘Where’s his real mom?’—and it cuts deep,” said one father. Ignorant remarks and subtle biases were common, prompting many to develop strategies for emotional protection.

Family Integration. Building cohesive family dynamics, especially with extended relatives, required time and effort. “It took a while for the grandparents to stop seeing her as adopted and just see her as theirs,” said one mother. Establishing routines and co-parenting roles helped strengthen family bonds.

Support Networks. The role of community was essential. Participants highlighted the value of online forums, support groups, and professional counselors. “Without my adoption support group, I think I would have crumbled,” one participant shared. These networks offered validation and guidance.

Dealing with Curiosity and Questions. Parents had to navigate their children’s inquiries about their origins and adoption story. “She asked me, ‘Why didn’t my tummy mommy keep me?’—and I froze,” admitted one mother. Others prepared for these questions by crafting age-appropriate narratives. “Honesty with love—that’s our rule,” one parent explained.

Legal and Institutional Experiences. The bureaucratic side of adoption was often described as stressful and emotionally taxing. “The paperwork felt endless, and the waiting was brutal,” one father recalled. Some participants found court experiences empowering, while others found them dehumanizing: “It felt like we had to prove we were worthy of being parents.”

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to explore how adoptive parents construct parenthood after experiencing infertility, using a narrative framework to capture their lived experiences. Analysis of interviews with 31 participants revealed three overarching themes: Redefining Parenthood, Emotional Journey, and Social and Relational Adjustments. Each theme encompassed nuanced subthemes that collectively portray the multifaceted reconstruction of identity, meaning, and belonging as participants transitioned from infertile individuals to adoptive parents. The findings underscore that adoptive parenthood, especially following infertility, is not simply a legal or caregiving status—it is a deeply personal and symbolic redefinition of the self, shaped by inner transformation and social interaction.

One of the most prominent findings was the participants’ need to let go of biological ties in order to fully embrace their new parental identities. This involved not only grieving the loss of a biologically-related child but also disengaging from the mental and physical routines of fertility treatment. These findings align with earlier research demonstrating that unresolved infertility can complicate the psychological integration of adoptive parenthood, and that the emotional transition often requires individuals to symbolically “close” the chapter of reproductive loss before embracing a new narrative (Moura- Ramos et al., 2015; Troude et al., 2016). As in previous work, participants reported that infertility left a lasting emotional residue, even after successful adoption, suggesting that infertility is not simply a past medical event but an ongoing psychological reference point in the construction of parenthood (Corrente, 2022; Mirasol & Bestard, 2016).

Another important aspect of this transformation involved reconstructing personal identity. Participants reported a shift from perceiving themselves as “patients” or “failures” to developing confidence as capable and loving parents. This process echoes findings by Allan et al., who observed that the aftermath of IVF often leaves couples struggling with conflicted identities that persist even in early parenthood

(Allan et al., 2019). Similarly, research by Egan et al. underscores that adoptive identity formation in adulthood frequently requires reworking self-concepts that were once rooted in biological definitions of family (Egan et al., 2022). Participants in the present study found renewed self-worth through everyday parenting tasks, bonding experiences, and emotional investment in their children—practices that slowly replaced the void left by infertility.

The theme of embracing adoptive roles revealed how participants actively constructed a sense of legitimacy as parents, often in the face of societal doubts or internal insecurities. This process was shaped through bonding rituals, daily caregiving, and symbolic acts such as celebrating adoption anniversaries or creating memory books. These findings align closely with the work of Canzi et al., who showed how intercountry adoptive parents use storytelling and documentation to solidify their family identity during the first post-adoption year (Canzi et al., 2021). Similarly, Lifshitz emphasized the importance of institutional and symbolic recognition in reinforcing non-biological forms of parenthood, arguing that parental legitimacy is often built on social and moral foundations rather than genetic ties (Lifshitz, 2014).

The subtheme of spiritual and moral reframing further highlighted how participants made sense of their transition by invoking narratives of fate, divine intention, or moral purpose. Several participants described their child as “meant to be,” framing adoption not as a fallback but as part of a larger destiny. This is consistent with prior research indicating that moral and spiritual narratives help individuals reframe infertility as a transformative journey, and adoption as a purposeful act rather than a compensatory measure (Mateus, 2013; Tarrés, 2013). Hasanpoor–Azgahdy et al. also observed that infertile women in Iran often use spiritual frameworks to validate their adoption decisions and reduce societal stigma (Hasanpoor–Azgahdy et al., 2016). The present findings add to this body of knowledge by demonstrating how such reframing processes help solidify a coherent and emotionally resilient parental identity.

Within the category of Emotional Journey, the theme of grief and loss persisted even after the adoption process was complete. Participants spoke of a lingering sadness and emotional fatigue rooted in their prior struggles. This reflects the dual nature of adoptive parenthood after infertility: while it provides joy and fulfillment, it does not fully erase the psychological imprints of what was lost (Ghrir, 2021; Roher et al., 2019). Emotional ambivalence was also common, especially in early parenting stages, as participants balanced

excitement with anxiety, love with fear, and hope with uncertainty. These emotional contradictions are echoed in studies of post-adoption adjustment, where adoptive parents often struggle with competing emotions in response to the sudden life shift of becoming a caregiver (Arvidsson et al., 2019; South et al., 2019).

Conversely, the subtheme of hope and renewal captured the revitalization many participants experienced once the adoption was finalized. Adoption was described as an emotional rebirth, a “second chance” not only for the parents but also for their envisioned family future. This sense of renewal echoes findings by William et al., who emphasized that adoptive parents often articulate their stories through themes of growth and transformation, rather than deficit and loss (William et al., 2023). By engaging in coping strategies such as journaling, therapy, and participation in support groups, participants constructed emotional resources that supported their healing. Such findings reinforce the growing literature on the importance of peer support and emotional expression in post-infertility parenthood (Corrente, 2022; Egan et al., 2022).

The third major category, Social and Relational Adjustments, addressed how participants navigated public perceptions, family integration, and community support. Many shared that they had to actively confront social stigma and ignorance regarding adoptive families. Strangers’ questions about “real parents” or comments about the child’s physical dissimilarity often triggered emotional distress and prompted protective behaviors. These experiences are consistent with findings by Arvidsson et al., who noted that commissioning parents through surrogacy also reported frequent questioning that undermined their parental authority (Arvidsson et al., 2019). Participants in this study managed such challenges by reaffirming their legitimacy through symbolic parenting acts and strong emotional bonds.

Family integration and support networks were central to building a cohesive family identity. Participants reported varying experiences with extended family, some of whom initially expressed reservations but later embraced the adopted child fully. Others found solace in online communities, adoption counselors, and peer groups. These relational supports played a critical role in fostering emotional resilience and parenting confidence, echoing findings from South et al. on the protective role of relationship quality in adoptive couples from pre- to post-placement (South et al., 2019). The subtheme dealing with curiosity and questions highlighted the ongoing navigation

of children’s identity inquiries. Participants emphasized the delicate task of telling the adoption story in age-appropriate ways—an experience also documented by Canzi et al. in their analysis of adoptive parents’ narratives (Canzi et al., 2021).

Finally, the theme of legal and institutional experiences underscored the emotional burden of navigating adoption bureaucracy. Lengthy paperwork, court proceedings, and psychological evaluations were described as stressful and at times dehumanizing. While not always the focus of psychological research, these institutional hurdles form an essential part of the adoptive parenthood journey. The findings resonate with broader concerns in the literature about how systemic processes can either validate or challenge emerging parental identities (Lakhvich, 2012; Soares et al., 2022). Parents who experienced smoother legal transitions reported greater confidence in their role, while those who faced delays or scrutiny often felt emotionally vulnerable.

5. Suggestions and Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the sample was limited to adoptive parents residing in Austria, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other cultural or legal contexts where adoption practices and societal norms differ. Second, the data were collected through self-reported narratives, which are subject to selective memory, personal bias, and social desirability effects. While the narrative method is ideal for capturing lived experience, it does not allow for triangulation with observational or longitudinal data. Third, although diverse in gender and occupation, the sample lacked substantial ethnic, racial, and socio-economic variation, which may limit the applicability of the findings to more diverse populations.

Future research should consider comparative cross-cultural studies to examine how societal narratives, religious beliefs, and institutional frameworks influence the construction of adoptive parenthood across different countries. Longitudinal research is also needed to track the evolution of parental identity from the initial adoption process through different developmental stages of the child’s life. Moreover, including the perspectives of children in adoptive families could enrich our understanding of how shared narratives are constructed and maintained. Future studies could also investigate the specific experiences of adoptive parents in LGBTQ+ or single-parent households to

broaden the scope of identity construction and legitimacy formation.

Practitioners working with adoptive parents, especially those who have experienced infertility, should be trained to recognize the emotional complexities involved in transitioning from reproductive loss to adoptive parenthood. Support services should include narrative-based interventions that help individuals reframe their stories, along with structured peer support programs that offer validation and community. Adoption agencies and legal institutions must be sensitive to the emotional vulnerability of prospective parents and aim to create processes that are both thorough and humane. Lastly, educational efforts aimed at the public can help reduce the stigma surrounding adoption and promote broader definitions of legitimate parenthood.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for

ethical research involving human participants. The design of this research has been approved by the Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University, Shiraz Branch, under ethics code IR.IAU.SHIRAZ.REC.1402.153. All participants were fully informed that participation in this research was voluntary, and they had the option to withdraw at any time without penalty.

References

- Allan, H., Mounce, G., Culley, L., Akker, O. v. d., & Hudson, R. (2019). Transition to Parenthood After Successful Non-Donor in Vitro Fertilisation: The Effects of Infertility and in Vitro Fertilisation on Previously Infertile Couples' Experiences of Early Parenthood. *Health an Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health Illness and Medicine*, 25(4), 434-453. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363459319891215>
- Arvidsson, A., Johnsdotter, S., Emmelin, M., & Essén, B. (2019). Being Questioned as Parents: An Interview Study With Swedish Commissioning Parents Using Transnational Surrogacy. *Reproductive Biomedicine & Society Online*, 8, 23-31. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rbms.2018.08.001>
- Canzi, E., Molgora, S., Ferrari, L., Ranieri, S., Mescieri, L., & Rosnati, R. (2021). 'Writing About Our Adoption': A Qualitative Study on Intercountry Adoptive Parents' Narratives During the First Post-Adoption Year. *Adoption & Fostering*, 45(2), 122-137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03085759211003171>
- Corrente, M. (2022). Exploring the Personal and Professional Realities of Parenthood and Graduate Studies. *Ajer*, 68(3), 340-356. <https://doi.org/10.55016/ojs/ajer.v68i3.72163>
- Egan, M., O'Connor, A., & Egan, J. (2022). .re ating a New Narrative: A Theory of How Adopted Individuals Readjust Their Adoptive Identity in Parenthood. *Adoption & Fostering*, 46(3), 318-335. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03085759221112449>
- Ghrir, N. (2021). Transition À La Parentalité Et Fonctionnement Conjugal Chez Les Couples Infertiles en Tunisie. *European Scientific Journal*, 17(41). <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2021.v17n41p84>
- Goldberg, A. E., Silvert, L., & Farr, R. H. (2024). Family building Desires Among Adopted Adolescents With Lesbian, Gay, and Heterosexual Parents. *Family Relations*, 73(4), 2392-2414. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.13042>
- Hasanpoor-Azghady, S. B., Simbar, M., Vedadhir, A., & Amiri Farahani, L. (2016). Exploring the Challenge of Adoption From the Perspective of Iranian Infertile Women. *Journal of Client-Centered Nursing Care*, 19-26. <https://doi.org/10.32598/jccnc.2.1.19>
- Kawamura, E., & Asano, M. (2023). Changes, Differences, and Factors of Parenthood in High-Risk Pregnant Women and Their Partners in Japan. *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 23(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-023-05519-3>
- Lakhvich, Y. F. (2012). Infertility Resolution as a Factor of Adoption Adjustment. *Problems of Psychology in the 21st Century*, 1(1), 26-35. <https://doi.org/10.33225/ppc/12.01.26>
- Lifshitz, S. (2014). Neither Nature Nor Contract: Toward an Institutional Perspective on Parenthood Essay. *Law & Ethics of Human Rights*, 8(2), 297-333. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lehr-2014-0011>
- Mateus, E. F. (2013). OP0290-PARE Family Planning and JIA: Infertility and Parenthood. *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases*, 72, A152. <https://doi.org/10.1136/annrheumdis-2013-eular.495>

- Mirasol, E. C., & Bestard, J. (2016). Psychosocial Needs of Women and Their Partners After Successful Assisted Reproduction Treatment in Barcelona. *Reproductive Biomedicine & Society Online*, 3, 90-99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rbms.2017.04.001>
- Moura-Ramos, M., Gameiro, S., Canavarro, M. C., Soares, I., & Almeida Santos, T. (2015). Does Infertility History Affect the Emotional Adjustment of Couples Undergoing Assisted Reproduction? The Mediating Role of the Importance of Parenthood. *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 21(2), 302-317. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjhp.12169>
- Roher, S. I. G., Gupta, A. A., Gibson, B. E., Lorenzo, A. J., & Gibson, J. (2019). Adolescent Males' Understanding of Infertility as a Long-Term Effect of Cancer Therapy. *Journal of Adolescent and Young Adult Oncology*, 8(1), 49-53. <https://doi.org/10.1089/jayao.2018.0040>
- Soares, J., Ralha, S., Fonseca, S. M., Prego, J., & Barbosa Ducharme, M. (2022). Why and How Do Parents Decide to Adopt? A Study on Motivations and the Decision-Making Process in Becoming an Adoptive Family. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/k8g9y>
- South, S. C., Lim, E., Jarnecke, A. M., & Foli, K. J. (2019). Relationship Quality From Pre- To Postplacement in Adoptive Couples. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 33(1), 64-76. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000456>
- Tarrés, M. B. (2013). Being a Mother and Father in International Adoption in Spain: Towards the Child's Wellbeing. *Childhood*, 20(4), 507-520. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568212471403>
- Troude, P., Santin, G., Guibert, J., Bouyer, J., & Rochebrochard, É. d. L. (2016). Seven Out of 10 Couples Treated by IVF Achieve Parenthood Following Either Treatment, Natural Conception or Adoption. *Reproductive BioMedicine Online*, 33(5), 560-567. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rbmo.2016.08.010>
- Wąsiński, A. (2015). The Experience of Adoption in a Biographical Narration of Adoptive Parents. *Archives of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy*, 17(1), 59-67. <https://doi.org/10.12740/app/35028>
- William, E., Russell, W. L., & Wilson, A. (2023). Narratives of Parenthood: Experiences of Adoptive Parents. *JPRFC*, 26-34. <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.jprfc.1.4.5>

پژوهشگاه علوم انسانی و مطالعات فرهنگی
پرتال جامع علوم انسانی