



# ID: 72 Promoting resilient outcomes among internationally adopted children from child care institutes: Role of the life story

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## Background

- In India, every year approximately 4000 children are adopted from child care institutes and nearly 10% of these are international adoptions. All adoptions in India are confidential, and protecting the identity of children and families is paramount. The circumstances surrounding children's placement in child care institutes is often shrouded in mystery and unfortunate circumstances.
- Most transracial adoptees have little or no access to the pre-adoption stories of their adversity, and sometimes even personal objects and these become critically imperative when they attempt to search their birth families and connect with their background and cultural roots.
- Limited research on international adoptions of children in care is available from India, although insightful reports on the child care institutes and experiences of adult domestic adoptees are available.

## Objective

- In the present paper, we briefly trace the stories of three children who were adopted by overseas parents to identify some key factors that can promote resilient outcomes among these children.

## Methods

- The pediatric adoption clinic in the department of pediatrics in a tertiary care centre facilitates adoption of children from government run child care institutes.
- Extensive counseling of prospective parents and preparation work of children is undertaken by the team running and assisting in the clinic. The qualitative narrative methodology was used to explore how international adoptive families navigate the adoption process.
- Descriptions of the qualitative interviews and discussions regarding the families' experiences and struggles of adopting children from India are presented.
- The stories are based on the qualitative analysis of the interactions with the children and the adoptive families.
- Verbal consent was taken from all the families.

## Case Descriptions

### Case 1

- A 7-year-old girl was adopted by M, a single mother, and taken to the United States of America. Soon after her arrival, the child started to grieve the loss of her life in India.
- The mother contacted the institution to seek additional details about the child's early life and any favored personal item for 'keepsake' to remind the child of her pre-adoptive life that may facilitate her adaptation to her new life.
- Despite multiple efforts, the only information that the mother was provided was that the child had been transferred from another institute before her adoption.

### Case 2

- N, a 49-year-old single woman with a successful career as a psychologist, waited 9 long years post-registration before she finally adopted a 7-year-old girl from India. The preparation time of six months between reservation and placement was utilized by the institute and caregivers to prepare the child for her new home and these were well documented.
- The adoption, however, entailed both gains and losses for the child as she struggled to communicate in the foreign language. The mother placed considerable emphasis on teaching the child several multicultural skills and consciously promoted a positive bicultural identity
- A follow up done after three years post-adoption revealed that the girl was well adjusted.

### Case 3

- B and G, a married couple from Europe, opted for the adoption of a one-year-old male child due to infertility issues.
- The infant was regularly exposed to video calls of the prospective parents and rhymes in the language of the parents to encourage bonding and attachment. A chronicle of the child's developmental milestones and other playful activities was meticulously maintained as a key keepsake.
- The efforts made by the child care institute to record and share the child's life story book was greatly appreciated and valued by the parents when the final adoption took place at 18 months of age.

## Discussion and Conclusions

- Adoption of children is considered an important intervention for children who have suffered early loss and abandonment by their biological families. Although international adoptions pose a much-needed opportunity for growth and rehabilitation for children facing early adversity, at the same time it can be extremely challenging for both adoptees and adoptive parents.
- The 'life story book', as it is referred to, represents an honest depiction of the circumstances and life prior to the child's adoption. The potential advantages include helping children to understand their personal stories, remain connected to their cultural roots. The cases highlight the importance of preparation work for both prospective parents and adoptees and how early life experiences of children need to be documented, and willingly shared with the prospective families to promote a stable identity and sense of self.
- Maintaining a coherent and well-documented narrative of the child's pre-adoptive life and readily sharing these with the adoptive parents can foster positive ethnic identity and increased self-worth among transnationally adopted individuals.
- Adoption agencies should encourage and facilitate all activities that enhance attachment and creates emotional bonds between adoptive parents and the adoptees.



## References

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○ All authors have declared no conflict of interest