

THE AFFECT OF ADOPTION ON A COUPLE'S INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP



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(based on BHSc Honours research by Rochelle Mullenberg, supervised by Rhoda)

BECOMING A PARENT



... can be stressful!

- Impact on intimacy
- Disagreements about child rearing
- Costs associated with raising families
- Conflict over division of labour following birth
- Changing roles and work commitments

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BECOMING ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Factors unique to adoption:

- Overcoming trauma of infertility
- Stigma associated with artificial relationships
- Timing (and waiting)
- Costs associated with adoption processes
- Uncertainty associated with adopted children
- Lack of social support



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BECOMING PARENTS THROUGH ADOPTION

Most research in adoption focuses on the child, or on the relationship between parent and child.

Very little research considers the impact on a couple's intimate relationship after adopting a child.



- *How does becoming an adoptive parent affect a couple's intimate, marital relationship?*
- *What are the experiences associated with becoming parents through adoption?*

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PARTICIPANTS

COUPLE A:

- Together for 12 years
- Married in their late 40's
- Six years ago, adopted a 3-year-old child from Russia
- No other children
- The whole process took three years



COUPLE B:

- Chose to have children when wife was 45-years-old (husband was 55-years-old)
- Five years ago, adopted two siblings from Russia (a boy aged 5-years and a girl aged 7-years)
- The husband has three grown, biological children from a previous marriage
- The whole process took five years

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THEME #1

WOMEN DRIVE THE PROCESS

My husband initially was sort of like "Oh well, we can't have children, we won't bother." I was a little more determined. So I probably set the process going...I took the lead role...there were many times when my husband told me that he was just doing it for me.

[When] we met our child...that was a very big turning point for my husband...something changed in him.



Interestingly, when my husband met the kids, that was the time when he turned around. It wasn't until he had actually met them, and then he could identify with them. And from that point onwards, I felt a much stronger commitment.

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THEME #2

CHILD CEMENTS THE PARENT RELATIONSHIP

It's kind of pulled us together, which I find odd, because my whole childhood, I remember hearing my mother say, "You know people shouldn't have children to hold their marriages together." That wasn't our intention – it wasn't to hold our relationship together, but as a consequence, our relationship has probably strengthened.



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THEME #3

THE WAITING

And the process takes so long as well, and you think, well maybe fate is trying to tell me something here, we shouldn't be doing this, but it takes a huge amount of self-reflection I think, and determination to keep on with it... we were going to finally get the kids after five years of pursuing it.

...the worst bit was after...we had met the child, and we had to come back to New Zealand and wait for...a lot longer than we had anticipated. Yeah so that's traumatic.

Our relationship did deteriorate over those years of waiting, the anxiety was really, really difficult, I think for both of us...because we were much older, we were used to having life our way...being in control...so the waiting, waiting and delays and, you know...it's a rollercoaster ride – nothing's complete, nothing's sure.



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OUTCOMES

COUPLE A =

the marriage was
strengthened as a result
of adopting

COUPLE B =

the relationship has
deteriorated as a result of
adopting

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IMPLICATIONS

There is a need to
look at not only
the outcomes for
the child, but also
the health of the
relationship.

Support systems are
needed for adoptive
parents to negotiate the
unique challenges of
becoming parents
through adoption.

Men and women appear to have
different experiences of adjusting
to parenthood through adoption,
which suggests different methods
and timings of support services
are needed.

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AS A PILOT STUDY,
MUCH MORE RESEARCH
IS STILL NEEDED, WITH
LARGER SAMPLES AND
GREATER DIVERSITY OF
ADOPTIVE FAMILY
CIRCUMSTANCES.



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