

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The adoption process in single-parent families

Carolina Monteiro Biasutti^a, Célia Regina Rangel Nascimento^b

 Open access

^aMaster, PhD Student in the Graduate Program in Psychology, Federal University of Espírito Santo.

^bPhD Professor in the Department of Psychology and Development; PhD Professor of the Graduate Program in Psychology, Federal University of Espírito Santo.

Corresponding author

psicarinabiasutti@gmail.com

Manuscript received: September 2020

Manuscript accepted: February 2021

Version of record online: March 2021

Abstract

Introduction: Social changes that have occurred in recent decades regarding the organization of families and gender roles have legitimized and given visibility to family arrangements that diverge from the traditional model. It is therefore important to study single-parent adoptive families and their specificities.

Objective: To analyze the adoption process and the arrival of the child in single-parent families.

Methods: Four adoptive mothers and one adoptive father, aged between 31 and 56 years, with children aged zero to five years at adoption were interviewed. The interviews portrayed the motivation and adoption process, the expectation of the arrival of the child, and the experience of single parenthood. The Thematic Analysis framework was adopted to explore the data.

Results: The adoption was motivated by the desire to start or expand the family and exercise parenting. The time waiting for the arrival of the child was used for the emotional and financial preparation to receive the new member of the family, and fears and anxieties related to the adoptive process were experienced. The children's adaptation occurred in a short period and it was necessary for the participants to adapt their routine to the new family situation. In all cases, family support was observed.

Conclusion: The preparation for adoption benefited the parent-child adaptation process. The participation of the extended family as well as guidance from technical staff were relevant to the families.

Keywords: adoption, family, single-parent family, parenting.

Suggested citation: Biasutti CM, Nascimento CRR. The adoption process in single-parent families. *J Hum Growth Dev.* 2021; 31(1):47-57. DOI: 10.36311/jhgd.v31.10364

Authors summary

Why was this study done?

To learn about the single-parent adoptive families and their specificities based on the description and analysis of the adoption process and the arrival of the child in the families. There has been a considerable increase in the number of single-parent families in the Brazilian and worldwide scenario, however, only a few works have been developed about optional single parenthood, as in the case of adoption. In addition, knowing the challenges and rewards experienced by single-parent adoptive families may contribute to interventions aimed at these families during the process of adoption and adaptation with the children.

What did the researchers do and find?

A multiple case study was carried out through the interview of four adoptive mothers and one adoptive father whose children were adopted between the ages of zero and five years. It was found that adoption was a choice motivated by the goal of constituting and expanding the family and exercising parenting. In all cases, the adoption was considered successful, with adaptations and changes depending on the new family situation. The embracement and support of the extended family were relevant factors to the adoption process and for the organization of the routine of care of the families.

What do these findings mean?

The study strengthens a broader perspective of family, one that includes single-parent families and single-parent adoptive families. The results highlight the importance of investing in the preparation and monitoring of adoption as a facilitating aspect of this process and of the parent-child adaptation, as well as the relevance of the support network for single-parent families in their exercise of care.

INTRODUCTION

The advance of the industrial economic model, struggles for gender equality consolidated by the feminist movement, the entry of women into the job market, high divorce rates, the development of contraceptive methods, and changes in the values of society have contributed to a new social scenario in which new family models have become more representative in the Brazilian and global context^{1,2,3}. These changes, which occurred more pronouncedly in the end of the 1960s, brought transformations in the gender roles socially expected for men and women^{3,4}.

In this scenario of transformations, in addition to changes in gender roles in heterosexual nuclear families, new family arrangements emerged and gained visibility, such as those composed of childless couples, single-parent families, adoptive families, same-sex parent families, recomposed families, etc.^{1,2,5,6}. However, Santos *et al.*⁶ point out that the traditional family formed by heterosexual, monogamous and procreative marriage is still recognized in the social imaginary as the legitimate one. However, the authors analyze that to restrict family organization to a single model is to judge society through normative parameters, leading to creation of conflicts, prejudices, and stigmas against other arrangements.

A current concept of family is defined by the affections, proximity and intimacy between its members, by the constitution of affective bonds and emotional stability and the presence of biological and/or adopted children, beyond biological variables^{1,3}. This broader definition is also found in texts that guide national public policies aimed at families^{4,7}.

The needs and changes of society in relation to its understanding of family are evident in modifications of the Brazilian legislation over time^{4,8}. Legislation began to encompass contemporary needs within the scope of family law, also bearing in mind its role with respect to children and adolescents. An example of this is the laws that solidified adoptive affiliation, equalizing it to biological parentage⁹. The authors Oliveira Filho and Abreu⁹ highlight the changes that occurred over a hundred years in the Brazilian legislation of adoption, since the implementation of the Civil Code (1917), inserting

adoption as a legal practice in the country with the primary objective of satisfying the desire of families to have a child. This was so until the promulgation of ECA (1990) and the New Adoption Law (2009), which established laws to protect children and adolescents. Adoption became an exceptional measure, carried out with the purpose of providing a family for the child.

From these new understandings about family and adoption, there is an increasing demand for adoption by families with different configurations, such as single-parent, same-sex, recomposed families, and other arrangements². This highlights the importance of getting to know these realities better, also considering the experience of parenting. Families composed of a single caregiver are one of those arrangements that deserve attention in view of their growth over the years. A significant increase in single-parent families have occurred since the 1970s due to the social changes above mentioned, and more recently the changes in adoption laws worldwide, as well as the advent of artificial insemination^{5,10}.

In Brazil, data from the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD) from 1992 showed that single-parent families represented 13.9% of the existing compositions, increasing to 17.4% in the year 2009, presenting a growth of 3.5% in 17 years¹¹. This increase in representativeness has also been observed in the context of adoption. According to data from the National Adoption Registry¹², in 2012, while 88.1% of applicants for adoption were married or living in a stable relationship the remaining applicants, 11.9%, aimed to become a single-parent by adoption, 8.6% of whom were single and the rest were divorced, separated and widowed.

The changes brought about by the greater insertion of women in the labor market are also related to the growth of single-parent families. When investing in their own careers and postponing their family projects, some women decide to be mothers at an older age, without necessarily envisioning a stable love relationship^{13,14}. In these cases, the resources most sought by women to compose their families are assisted reproduction and adoption¹¹.

It also appears that changes in the conception and exercise of fatherhood paved the way for male single-

parent adoptions. Thus, although less common than female single-parent adoption, which, according to the National Council of Justice¹² correspond to 80% of the requests among single-parent adoptions in Brazil, male single-parent families have been growing. Men started to assume social roles that they did not used to play, valuing relationships such as father and son, not only as a provider, but as caregiver¹⁵. Thus, the desire to be a father is not linked to the presence or absence of a partner, as men can recognize themselves capable of exercising the role of fathers despite being single¹⁶.

Studies on single parenthood initially focused on the idea of deficit when it comes to single-parent families, differentiating it from the nuclear family, which was considered the appropriate arrangement to offer resources to children^{13,17}. Mannis¹⁷, however, developed a study in the United States that rejected this idea of normative family, considering single-parent families legitimate, and defended that they should be understood in their particularities. The themes that emerged in the interviews conducted in the research with ten women who opted for adoptive single parenting or biological affiliation on this family constitution were: the desire to care for a child; the social support of family and friends; the woman's mindset; the experience of love between child and mother; and finally, racial self-awareness, in cases of international and interracial adoption.

In a survey conducted in Brazil¹⁸ with single adoptive parents of both sexes, the authors discussed the challenges experienced in single-parent adoption. They were: the socioeconomic context; the existence or not of a support network; the prejudice against adoption by single men; the eventual need of hiring a nanny; and non-acceptance of the family at a first moment. Despite these difficulties, all participants reported satisfaction with the adoption, showing in their reports the emotion of exercising parenting and the love between parents and children. They praised patience and determination as essential to overcome the difficulties that appeared in the child's adaptation to the family, as well as the adaptation of the parents to the child. Finally, they considered psychological support before and after adoption to be essential in helping the adoptive parent to deal with adoption-related fears and anxieties.

Regarding the scientific study of single-parent families, it is observed that in many studies these families are not differentiated as to their different origins, that is, whether they result from divorce, widowhood or the person's own choice to exercise parenting alone¹⁹. There are very few articles addressing optional single parenthood^{5,20}.

It is also important to consider that the origin of the family structure results in different experiences for family members, which need to be understood. Studies on this family modality can contribute to broaden the understanding of the challenges and rewards present in single-parent adoptive families. Thus, the objective of this study is to analyze the adoption process and the embracement of the child by the single-parent family.

METHODS

This is a qualitative research that sought to know and describe the adoption process based on the participants' experience²¹. Thus, this was a multiple case study in which the researcher must consider complex and little explored social phenomena in the context of real life, aiming at deepening the knowledge and generation of new hypotheses²², which was an adequate approach for the present investigation.

The study was carried out with one father and four mothers, all single, aged between 31 and 56 years, in single-parent families residing in Grande Vitória, Espírito Santo. The participants, who did not have partners, adopted children who at the time of the interview were aged between three and twelve years, being two boys and three girls. As an inclusion criterion, these parents should have at least one adopted child aged 12 years or less, and the child must have been with the family for at least one year. The exclusion criterion was non-legal adoption of the child.

A semi-structured interview script was created based on a literature review. For this work, were used the responses given to the questions formulated to characterize the families and gather information about the process of adoption and arrival of the child in the family.

All participants were informed about the objectives of the study and signed an Informed Consent Form. The participants were interviewed individually at a location and time of their choice. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the Thematic Analysis framework²³. In the analysis, the results were organized into the following thematic categories: motivation, waiting, and preparation for adoption; adoption process and arrival of the child; adoptive single parenthood and experienced challenges.

The work presented here is part of a broader research with a project approved under number CAAE 44931415.7.0000.5542. The research was carried out in accordance with the rules established in Resolution 010/12 of the Federal Council of Psychology and in Resolution 510/2016, which establishes procedures for research with human beings in the field of Human and Social Sciences. In the description of the results, fictitious names were assigned to all participants and persons mentioned in order to guarantee the anonymity of the participants. It was established that the names of single adoptive fathers and mothers would start with the letter A, and that of the children with the letter C.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Motivation, waiting, and preparation for adoption

Four of the five participants described that the motivation to start the adoption process was the desire to exercise motherhood/fatherhood. In the case of one participant, a biological difficulty also contributed to this decision. In the case of two other participants and the male participant, despite having no biological impediments, they considered that the adoption would be, among the existing possibilities to have a child alone, the most appropriate.

[...] I was not seeking to be an adoptive mother because I cannot be a biological mother, I was being a mother through adoption because I wanted to be a mother through adoption. (Angelica)

Parenting begins with the desire to have a child, and this constitutes a life project²⁴. In the case of the single-parent families in this study, this desire was concretized through the choice for adoption, although they did not exclude the option of having biological children in their lives. Several authors point out that in past decades the motivation for adoption was primarily the couple's infertility, thus involving the issue of mourning for pregnancy, and consequently, mourning a biological child^{2,6,25,26}. However, in the last decades a change in this scenario was observed; although adoption still happens mainly due to couples' infertility, the adoption justified by the desire of having a child and being a father and mother has increased among families², as verified in the present study.

Only in the case of one of the participants, the motivation came after having establishing ties by living with the child, during affective sponsorship:

[...] I had no plans to adopt, after I met Carlos, it started to..., inside of me, the desire to have him as a son was born. (Ana)

The realization of the adoption after establishing a bond with the child also appeared in a study conducted in the United States, in which it was found that previous interaction with the foster child was one of the motivators for adoption, especially in late adoption²⁷. The authors described that among the adoptions that occurred in the United States in 2011 through the public child welfare system, 54% were adopted by previous foster parents, 31% by biological relatives, and only 15% by families registered for adoption without previously knowing the child. It should be added that the average age of children available for adoption in this system was 6.4 years of age, an age close to that of the child when it was adopted by the participant.

Regarding the preparation to receive the child, three mothers reported that from the moment they decided to adopt, they sought to plan and prepare to exercise motherhood and to welcome the child. In addition to the financial organization and the material environment, the participants mentioned that psychological and emotional preparation was necessary to receive and deal with the child.

One of the mothers considered that the adoption involved an earlier planning that was similar to that of artificial insemination, which made it possible to prepare the physical and psychological environment before the child's arrival. The other mothers, on the other hand, said that after the beginning of the process, the waiting time triggered a sensation that they considered as similar to pregnancy. This comparison was also reported by participants in the study by Cecílio and Scorsolini-Comin²⁸, in which four couples who underwent adoption described experiencing an emotional pregnancy, which is

a period of great expectation and anxiety for the arrival of the child.

Regarding the feelings aroused during the process and the waiting time, the participants reported fears, insecurities and anxieties both related to the adoption process and to their own skills to care for a child. Some aspects highlighted included the fear of not having enough financial resources and of not being able to take care of the child on their own; fear regarding the child's demands; fear about when the feeling of love would arise; fear of possible prejudices that the child could face due to their family arrangement; and also fear and insecurity about the effectiveness of the adoption process.

Despite the fears reported, the same preparation experienced by couples described in the literature on adoption was reported in this research by participants opting for single-parent adoption. In the case of a couple, when they choose to experience adoptive parenting, they make adjustments in their identity as a couple; they will no longer be composed of a dyad, and start embracing the idea of the expected child, accepting new social and psychological roles, responsibilities and material expenses to meet the child's needs^{24,28,29}. The participants described the expectation of preparing the environment to receive the child, involving both material planning and emotional preparation, when getting ready for parenting and for taking on the responsibility of raising a child as single parents. Thus, although the wait for the child's arrival was cited as a reason for distress, it can be considered that it provided the time for preparation for parenting, which can be a facilitating factor in the identification of the family with the child, upon its arrival³⁰.

The monitoring of the adoptive families by the judiciary technical team is also essential to reframe fears and anxieties, as well as to helping them to recognize the conscious and unconscious motivations that led them to adoption³¹. The long wait for the child and the slow legal bureaucratic process are highlighted as associated with negative emotions such as anxiety, anguish and uncertainty in the parents^{24,30,32,33}. These feelings were also mentioned by the participants of the present work.

Adoption process and arrival of the child

It was found that all participants started the adoption processes through the Childhood and Youth Courts, and this experience occurred in a unique way for each of the five participants. Two participants stated that they participated in an interview conducted by the technical team, and at this opportunity they could resolve their doubts about the adoption process and were asked about their desire to adopt, also going through a financial evaluation. One of them highlighted having been advised by the team about issues of possible racial prejudice for not having indicated racial preference in adoption, in addition to the difficulty in exercising motherhood as a single mother. The other participant expressed the team's concern about her age when entering the process, since she was 21 years old, and it was found that she received a greater number of visits by the technical team to her home.

According to the amendments made to the Statute of Children and Adolescents³⁴ by the New Adoption

Law³⁵, it was proposed that the placement in a foster family would be preceded by the preparation of applicants by the technical team provided in adoption or habilitation courses, and later, through the monitoring of families. Two participants reported that they participated in the adoption course developed by the technical teams as a specific preparation for the adoption process, and one mother reported that she started to desire a greater age in the child's profile after participating in the course. Two participants reported having participated in the courses after the adoption, as invited to give a testimony about their experience of adoptive single parenthood. Three participants considered that the course provided practical information and a moment to share stories and exchange experiences. Another participant, although not mentioning the course, worked in the area and was part of the technical team that carried out this activity in her district.

The follow-up of foster families by technical teams is considered relevant to provide guidance, answer questions in initial interviews and during the adoption process, and during the waiting period for the child's arrival^{31,36}. Although only two participants in the present study attended the course before the adoption, all reported having contact with this proposal, noting that this practice was performed in the routine of adoption process in the researched region. However, no participant reported having been followed-up in any way by the technicians after the insertion of the children in the families. It was observed that the adoption procedures were focused on guidelines for seeking a family for the child and preparing families to receive these children through adoption courses, however they have not yet reached the norms for follow-up after adoption.

The work of technical teams, scientific studies on adoption, and educational campaigns are considered fundamental for demystifying stigmas and stereotypes about adoptees and adoptive families. The explanations provided by the technical team, for example, have contributed to a greater availability of adoptive families choosing the profile of older children or a group of siblings³⁶, and have also contributed to the recognition of different family compositions, as is the case of single-parent adoption².

All participants reported that they sought the Child Welfare System frequently and said that this attitude was essential for them to have new information and to speed up the adoption processes. Three participants highlighted the need to hire a lawyer when the child appeared; two candidates were unaware of this need. However, one of them commented that after the child went home with the license to spend a holiday with the family, the bureaucracy previously faced ceased, and she herself had to seek the Childhood and Youth Court to request the custody of her son.

[...] and I had this license to spend the carnival until the final adoption came out, [...] nobody even formalized anything else, right [...] (Ana)

Three participants reported that they received a call from the Child Welfare System and were informed by the technical team about a child available for adoption. On

the other hand, the male participant was not contacted after completing the registration, and after a while he chose to seek help from a friend in another state to advance in the adoption. That was how he learned of the birth of a baby and sought the judge at the Forum to carry out the necessary procedures to adopt it. One week after returning home, the participant sought the Childhood and Youth Court in his region to legalize the adoption.

The adoption in the case of the male participant and the female participant who adopted the child after living with it for a while occurred more than eight years ago, thus, prior to the New Adoption Law³⁵, n° 12,010. In both cases the procedures were not carried out in accordance with the guidelines of the current law, since the two families entered the process in order to adopt a specific child. The other three participants who adopted more recently they did so through the new legal path established by the New Law³⁵, that is, they had to wait in a line for adoption.

After the child's arrival, feelings of anguish were pointed out regarding the completion of the adoption process. Three participants mentioned insecurity due to the length of the process, which caused the postponement of the moment of having the child's certificate in their names. They described the fear of the adoption not being completed and of the claim of the biological mother for the custody of the child.

The children's adaptation to the family was considered quick and without significant difficulties by the participants. Four of the five participants adopted their children as babies (in two cases the baby left the hospital for the foster family's home, and in two other cases the child was around one year old). The families pointed out that, for this reason, the adaptation occurred without difficulties, because the children did not have the experience or understanding of a previous reality.

[...] it seemed like she had been with us for years
[...] the adaptation was very smooth. (Alice)

Several authors point out that this is one of the factors that lead to a greater search for babies and more concerns about the adoption of older children^{18,29,33}. In this regard, it is considered that, especially in the adoption of older children who have experienced prolonged institutionalization, there is the initial challenge of adaptation between the family and the child and the acceptance of their past history²⁴.

In the only case of an older children adoption, the child's greatest adaptation was related to greater flexibility in relation to the rules imposed while living in the temporary home. For this, the mother said that she created another routine with her son, more gentle and affectionate.

The behavior of older children, which in some articles are cited as hindering the adoption adaptation process^{37,38}, were assessed by the interviewed mother as expected for child's age group. In her opinion, such behavior was unrelated to the adoption. Her evaluation was based on her previous experience with an older daughter.

All participants stated that they had gone through a moment of transition, in which the old routine was

modified to fit the new family situation. Regarding the time required for the initial investment in the relationship with the child, three participants highlighted the maternity leave as an important benefit, giving them time to build the new routine and establish bonds, favoring the adaptation of the family.

In a study that analyzed maternity leave as a right³⁸ the author emphasizes the maternity leave as necessary both in biological and adoptive affiliation. In the case of adoption, it was pointed out that an intense interaction between father/mother and child is essential, especially because the child already comes with a history of abandonment and institutionalization, and therefore needs to feel embraced and safe by these new figures.

It was evaluated that the strong desire on the part of the participants to start a family through adoption made it easier to accept the changes and adaptations that occurred after the child's arrival, and that these were expected with the arrival of a small child, even when care was not shared with another person.

A study was carried out in Spain with 214 families with children aged between three and ten years in order to investigate family quality and adjustment of children. Families of six different compositions were analyzed, including 39 single-parent families¹⁹. The authors found that, when the single-parent family had been formed as a result of the caregiver's desire to exercise parenting alone, these families had an extremely positive socio-cultural profile, which tended to guarantee the child's healthy development, without any losses associated with the family composition. One aspect that contributed to this assessment was the fact that the single-parent family arising from the caregiver's desire to exercise parenting did not experience the same stressors as single-parent families originating from divorce or widowhood, such as adjustments to financial conditions and marital conflicts, since there was a plan for receiving the child³⁹.

Communication with the extended family, to talk about the adoption, before starting the process was reported by all participants. While three families supported the idea and volunteered to participate in child care, the families of the male participant and the mother who made a late adoption (child over two years old) questioned their decisions. However, these participants were determined about their decision and only informed the family. In the case of the mother who already had a daughter, only the opinion of her daughter was a decisive factor to make the adoption.

However, it was found that even in the case of the participants who were questioned and faced resistance from the family, all welcomed the child as a member of the family group and participated at some point in the care of the child. Three participants said the routine developed with the child involved the continued support of the extended family. These three families, despite being constituted only by the mother and the child, had at least two caregivers, the second caregiver being generally represented by grandparents and aunts. The mothers reported that this adaptation occurred in a very natural way and that everyone was involved in developing a routine that would work for all family members.

The importance of an inclusive attitude towards the child by other family members was highlighted in another Brazilian study, in which the bonds between family and child in adoptive parenting were considered symbolic, making it necessary to legitimize the child's place as a member in the bosom of the family²⁵. The acceptance of the extended family and friends and the support provided by them during the period when the bonds are still being established are mentioned in the literature as facilitating factors for the construction of bond and for the child's adaptation to the new family^{25,36}, which was also pointed out by the participants in the present study.

Adoptive single parenthood and experienced challenges

The five participants talked about the challenges they faced to exercise parenting through single-parent adoption. Two of them highlighted that the very beginning of the adoption process was a challenge, from the moment that they recognized themselves capable and prepared to assume the responsibility of raising a child without the presence of a partner. Another participant thought that the challenge was to be prepared, both emotionally and financially, since in a single motherhood, all the responsibilities are on account of only one caregiver. This participant and two other mothers stressed the importance of the support network, which allowed responsibilities for the child to be shared with other family members.

[...] it was a challenge, for me to do this... to go and fight and gain this situation alone... (Arthur)/
[...] The challenge is to be prepared, and if you are prepared, as I told you, emotionally, financially... I don't know what it would be like without the support of my family... (Alice)

The male participant and one mother highlighted that in their evaluation they played roles of both father and mother, assuming the tasks socially considered as maternal and paternal.

Another aspect highlighted by the participants was the concern to ensure that their children had a representative of the opposite sex in their lives who could provide a male/female reference in their lives. Thus, the children's interaction with adults such as uncles, aunts, grandmothers, grandfathers, parents' friends, and even the ex-husband, was encouraged.

It can be inferred in this regard that, even though these participants recognized the single-parent family composition as a real possibility and capable of providing conditions for a healthy development for the child, the idea remained that some characteristics are specific to women and others are specific to men, being it is necessary to supply such demand through a relative or friend of the opposite sex, thus filling something that is missing in single parenthood. This concern is likely related to the prevalence of the belief that the nuclear family model is the most appropriate, because it is believed that this family constitution is successful and that child development is better in families composed of father, mother and child^{10,13}. As observed in the participants' report, research

shows that even among single-parent homes, the lack of the opposite-sex parent leads to the belief in impaired functioning of family dynamics^{10,40}. However, current studies do not support this belief, and although children may question whether there is no parent, the absence of a parent will not affect their healthy development^{19,39}.

Regarding experiences of prejudice, two parents, whose children are black, highlighted the existence of racial prejudice as a challenge. They were concerned with the possibility that the children would experience some sort of discrimination and that they would not be present to defend them. Another participant, whose daughter is also black, pointed out that she and her daughter never identified any situation of prejudice and/or discrimination.

[...] Against black people, I can tell you for sure there is prejudice and discrimination. [...] he has been in therapy for two years now, [...] even for him to know how he will counteract before this prejudice. But this is very real, regardless of whether he is my adopted son or not. (Ana)

The issue of interracial adoption and the need to work the child's understanding about the physical and ethnic differences present in the family are topics approached in other studies^{27,41}. The authors defended interracial adoption and highlighted the importance of parents recognizing the relevance of open communication between parents and children, so that issues such as prejudice could be addressed^{27,41}. In these cases, parents can collaborate with their children through two processes: cultural socialization, which would bring the child closer to elements of his or her original culture; and the child's awareness and preparation for facing racial prejudice²⁷. When parents are not aware of these issues, children may have difficulties in recognizing their place in the context they live, since they are not part of the white ethnic group, but neither can they recognize themselves as belonging to the Afro-descendant culture and ethnicity^{27,41}.

Based on the above considerations, it can be seen that the parents were attentive to their children's emotional needs, demonstrating to act, whenever possible, in order to prepare the child emotionally to deal with issues that they were facing or that they might face in the future, developing a repertoire of tools to strengthen their emotional strength.

Two participants found it uncomfortable that many people still see adoption as a form of charity, as if the child owed something to the parents. This was seen in the study by Valério and Lyra⁴², in a relative's evaluation, even after the children already being part of the family for nine years. In another study with adoption candidates⁴³, different understandings were observed in this respect associated with the variables sex and age. Male applicants between the ages of 20 and 30 pointed out the desire to help a child and make a difference in their life as a motivator for adoption, while female applicants over 46 years said that, for others, adoption was an act of charity, but for them it was the way to fulfill the desire for motherhood, as also verified in the present study.

Another issue mentioned concerns concepts present in the social imaginary^{26,44,45} that the foster families are less legitimate than biological ones, that biological inheritance overlaps with socialization during the child's development and that it would become a potential problem in the family due to its genetic inheritance. Three participants commented that they experienced prejudices in this regard. They said to have heard discriminatory comments mainly regarding the biological determinants and the character of the adopted child, which two mothers evaluated as a result of lack of information. The participants highlighted the need to inform people about what the adoption experience really is and to promote a reflection on the myths surrounding this subject. Thus, by participating in this research, they were able to act in order to contribute to the increase of information in this regard, with the expectation of favoring the reduction of the aforementioned prejudices and collaborating for the recognition of their families.

According to Grotevant and McDermott²⁷, scientific studies produced on the context of adoption have always emphasized the problems related to the adopted child and its adaptation to the family. Authors have shown that such problems reinforce the social stereotypes related to adoption, giving visibility only to the negative aspects and disregarding the discussion of the existing positive points. Therefore, it is important to further publicize cases in which adopted children have similar development to peers²⁷, or even the same ability to overcome, after adoption, the development delays associated with previous institutionalization⁴⁶. In this regard, it is suggested that projects be created to raise public awareness and to deconstruct stigmas created and perpetuated over time³¹.

For two other participants, the challenge faced by becoming mothers through single-parent adoption was related to the way society sees this family composition, as they recognized that there is a belief that a family should be organized according to the traditional model. Two participants said that there is a fear of discrimination. They pointed out several situations in which the child may be questioned by the fact of having only one parent, while two other participants, one male and one female, highlighted that they do not feel this discrimination, on the contrary, they reported that in their cases, single parenting was received with surprise, praise and admiration for others.

[...] the problem would be this very dubious social characteristic, of recognition, and at the same time of some criticism saying that the traditional family is preferred. (Angelica)/ [...] Everyone is very surprised in a positive way, 'Wow, I never saw that', 'Wow, how amazing, what a wonderful idea, you are very brave!' (Alice)

In another survey that addressed stigma and adoption in Spain²⁶ the authors argued that the social stigmas and the prejudices suffered in cases of adoption vary according to the configuration of each adoptive family, being two-parent (heterosexual or homosexual) or

single-parent. Thus, the stigma related to single parenting is accentuated by not being conventional, and thus being considered a risk factor for the child. There is a belief that the figure of the opposite sex as a reference for the child would be missing. The results of the Spanish study also demonstrated that parents who did not have biological children felt that their parenting capacity was questioned by society more intensely than that of adoptive parents who also had biological children. The authors analyzed that this belief is disseminated through common sense, that parents who did not have biological children did not access the instinct necessary to exercise adequate parenting.

Lamb³⁹ points to the fact that a large number of researches on single parenting have shown that most children and adolescents living this reality develop according to expectations, in addition to the fact that both the single parent, regardless of gender, is able to provide the child with the necessary care to promote adequate child development. Although prejudice exists in relation to different family compositions, researchers analyze that the construction of parenting can overcome the existing stigmas regarding biological ties and family arrangements, valuing the desire and frequency of the interactions between reference figures and the child, which is important for parenting^{47,48}.

This study aimed to analyze the adoption process and the reception of the child in single-parent families. It was considered that the expansion of the concept of family and greater visibility of different configurations also brought a new profile for adoptive families, which today can be composed of couples with biological children, same-sex couples, or even single people^{26,33}. In this sense, this study contributes to the gathering of information about the experience of people who chose to constitute their family and experience parenting through adoption without the presence of a partner, by constituting a single-parent family.

Regarding the adoption process, what motivated the adoption was the desire to build or expand the family, and to have the opportunity to experience motherhood/fatherhood, being this choice justified by the idea that

parenting and filiation take place through sharing and care practices. The study showed that the choice for adoption came after the participants evaluated whether they would have the necessary resources to take care of a child on their own, or with the participation of the extended family. There was also a preference for babies among the participants. The participants reported fears and insecurities about the adoption, as well as criticism regarding the slowness of the adoption process. The guidelines of the judiciary technical staff were considered relevant for single-parent adoptive families in the adoption process.

To receive the children, adjustments were necessary in the routine after the child's arrival, but the financial and psychological preparation prior to the child's insertion in the family environment proved to be a facilitator for the adaptation between parents and children. The fact that most of the adopted children were young may also have contributed to the fast adaptation. The participation of the extended family in the life of single parents was important to support parent's decision and help them in the care routine with the child. It was noticed that the presence of an effective support network for the families played a fundamental role for their good functioning and to face the challenges of adopting a child without a partner.

The experience of some prejudices reported by the participants demonstrates that, although the activism around adoption has gained strength today, much space still needs to be conquered so that society have greater knowledge and a more natural understanding of the adoption process and adoptive affiliation, as well as of the different family arrangements, such as that of single parent families. Among the limitations of the study, there is the fact that only the perspective of adults - mothers and fathers - was considered, but the perspective of the extended family that shares in the care or of the children were not investigated.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the funding provided by FAPES - Research and Innovation Support Foundation of Espírito Santo (Process 66609178) for the preparation of this research.

REFERENCES

1. Dessen MA. Estudando a família em desenvolvimento: desafios conceituais e teóricos. *Psicologia: ciência e profissão*. 2010; 30(SPE):202-219. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S1414-98932010000500010>
2. Silva PS, Silva EXL, Lopes RCS, Frizzo GB. Diferentes configurações familiares de candidatos à adoção: implicações para os processos de habilitação. *Estudos de psicologia (Natal)*. 2018(out./dez. 2017); 22(4):412-421. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22491/1678-4669.20170042>
3. Vieira LM, Bossardi CN, Gomes LB, Boze SDA, Crepaldi MA, Piccinini CA. Paternidade no Brasil: revisão sistemática de artigos empíricos. *Arquivos brasileiros de psicologia*. 2014; 66(2):36-52.
4. Souza MTC, Waquim BB. Do direito de família ao direito das famílias: a repersonalização das relações familiares no Brasil. *Revista de Informação Legislativa*, 2015; 52(205):71-86.
5. Rúbio MIJ, Pérez FV. Madres solteras por elección: representaciones sobrela fecundación sexual como vía de acceso a la maternidade. *Chungará (Arica)*, 2012; 44(4):717-731. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0717-73562012000400012>
6. Santos YGS, Scorsolini-Comin F, Santos MA. Homoparentalidade masculina: revisando a produção científica. *Psicologia: Reflexão e Crítica*. 2013; 26(3):572-582. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0102-79722013000300017>

7. Ministério do Desenvolvimento Social e Combate à Fome, Política nacional de Assistência Social - PNAS/2004, Brasília, DF. (2005).
8. Nascimento CRR, Araujo IC, Biasutti CM. O direito à convivência familiar a partir da adoção: ampliando o entendimento sobre a família. In Rosa EM, Avellar LZ, editors. Psicologia, justiça e direitos humanos. Curitiba: Juruá; 2017. p. 112-127.
9. Oliveira Filho ADC, Abreu DS. Cem anos de adoção: idas e vindas de crianças na legislação brasileira. In Cordeiro ACF, et al., editors. 30 anos, 30 ideias: reflexões e práticas sobre infâncias, adolescências e juventudes. Fortaleza: Expressão Gráfica e Editora; 2015. p. 155-162.
10. Rivas AM, Jociles MI, Moncó B. Las madres solteras por elección, ciudadanas de primera y madres de segunda? RIS, 2011; 69(1):121-142. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3989/ris.2009.06.27>
11. Alves JED, Cavenaghi S. Tendências demográficas, dos domicílios e das famílias do Brasil. [Internet]. 2012; 24:1-33. Disponível em: http://www.ie.ufrj.br/aparte/pdfs/tendencias_demograficas_e_de_familia_24ago12.pdf
12. Conselho Nacional de Justiça. (Brasil). Encontros e desencontros da adoção no Brasil: uma análise do cadastro nacional de adoção do Conselho Nacional de Justiça. (2013). Recuperado em 22 de maio de 2014. Disponível em: http://www.cnj.jus.br/images/pesquisasjudiciarias/Publicacoes/pesq_adocao_brasil.pdf
13. Agoglia IS, Torralbo HG. Monoparentalidades electivas en Chile: emergéncias, tensiones y perspectivas. Psicoperspectivas, 2015; 14(2):40-50. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5027/PSICOPERSPECTIVAS-VOL14-ISSUE2-FULLTEXT-541>
14. Jociles MI, Villaamil F. Madres solteras por elección: representaciones sobre la fecundación sexual como vía de acceso a la maternidade. Chungará (Arica), 2012; 44(4):717-731. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0717-73562012000400012>
15. Denardi AT, Bottoli C. E quando não é a mãe? A paternidade diante da monoparentalidade. Barbarói, 2017; 49:120-146. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17058/barbaroi.v0i49.5305>
16. Vieira EN, Souza L. Guarda paterna e representações sociais de paternidade e maternidade. Análise psicológica. 2010; 28(4):581-596. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14417/ap.376>
17. Mannis VS. Single mothers by choice. Family Relations. 1999; 48(2):121-128. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/585075>
18. Santos CP, Fonsêca MCSM, Fonsêca CMSMS, Dias CMSB. Adoção por pais solteiros: desafios e peculiaridades dessa experiência. Psicologia: teoria. prática. 2011; 13(2):89-102.
19. Oliva A, Arranz E, Parra A, Olabarrieta F. Family structure and child adjustment in Spain. Journal of Child and Family Studies. 2014; 23(1):10-19. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10826-012-9681-2>
20. Agoglia IS. Narrativas de mujeres que adoptan monoparentalmente en Chile: dispositivos de intervención y prácticas de resistencia. Revista de estudios sociales. 2018; 63(1):29-41. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7440/res63.2018.03>
21. Günther H. Pesquisa qualitativa versus pesquisa quantitativa: esta é a questão? Psicologia: teoria e pesquisa. 2006; 22(2):201-209. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0102-37722006000200010>
22. Yin, RK. Case study research: design and methods. London: Sage; 1984.
23. Braun V, Clarke V. Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 2006; 3(2):77-101. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
24. Palavecino C, Rodríguez P, Zicavo N. Vivencias de personas que optaron por la parentalidad adoptiva. Ciencias Psicológicas. 2015; 9(2):259-271.
25. Machado RN, Féres-Carneiro T, Magalhães AS. Parentalidade adotiva: contextualizando a escola. Psico. 2015; 46(4):442-451. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15448/1980-8623.2015.4.19862>
26. Rodríguez-Jaume MJ, Ruiz DJ. Estigma social y adopción internacional en España. ¿Es la familia adoptiva um modelo familiar menos auténtico que los basados en lazos biológicos? Papers: Recista de Sociología. 2015; 100(2): 211-236. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5565/rev/papers.2070>
27. Grotevant HD, McDermott JM. Adoption: biological and social processes linked to adaptation. Annual review of psychology. 2014; 65: 235-265. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115020>
28. Cecílio MS, Scorsolini-Comin F. Parentalidades adotiva e biológica e suas repercussões nas dinâmicas conjugais. Psicologia: ciência e profissão. 2016; 36(1): 171-182. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1982-3703003832015>
29. Morelli AB, Scorsolini-Comin F, Santeiro TV. O “lugar” do filho adotivo na dinâmica parental: revisão integrativa de literatura. Psicologia Clínica. 2015; 27(1):175-194.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/0103-56652015000100010>

30. Pena M. La integración de niños y niñas a familias adoptivas em argentina, conexiones legítimas. *Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Niñez y Juventud*. 2016; 14(1):445-461. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11600/1692715x.14130130415>
31. Huber MZ, Siqueira AC. Pais por adoção: a adoção na perspectiva dos casais em fila de espera. *Psicologia: teoria e prática*. 2010; 12(2):200-216.
32. Sequeira VC, Stella C. Preparação para a adoção: grupo de apoio para candidatas. *Psicologia: teoria e prática*. 2014; 16(1):69-78. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15348/1980-6906/psicologia.v16n1p69-78>
33. Gondim AK, Crispim CS, Fernandes FHT, Rosendo JC, Brito TMC, Oliveira UB, Nakano TC. Motivação dos pais para a prática da adoção. *Boletim de Psicologia*. 2008; 58(129):161-170.
34. Presidência da República (Brasil). Lei no 8.069, de 13 de julho de 1990. Dispõe sobre o Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente e dá outras providências [Internet]. Disponível em: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/LEIS/L8069.htm
35. Presidência da República (Brasil). Lei Federal nº 12.010, de 3 de agosto de 2009 [internet]. Lei Nacional da Adoção. Disponível em: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_Ato2007-2010/2009/Lei/L12010.htm
36. Queiroz ACA, Brito L. Adoção tardia: o desafio da garantia do direito à convivência familiar e comunitária. *Textos contextos*. 2013; 12(1):55-67.
37. Bicca A, Grzybowski LS. Adoção tardia: percepções dos adotantes em relação aos períodos iniciais de adaptação. *Contextos Clínicos*. 2014; 7(2):155-167. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4013/ctc.2014.72.04>
38. Segalin A. Serviço social e viabilização de direitos: a licença/salário-maternidade nos casos de adoção. *Serviço Social e Sociedade*. 2013; 115:581-594. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0101-66282013000300010>
39. Lamb ME. Mothers, fathers, families and circumstances: factors affecting children's adjustment. *J. Applied Developmental Science*. 2012; 16(2):98-111. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2012.667344>
40. Cúnico SD, Arpini DM. Família e monoparentalidade feminina sob a ótica de mulheres chefes de família. *Aletheia*. 2014; 43-44.
41. Rufino S. Uma realidade fragmentada: a adoção inter-racial e os desafios da formação de uma família multirracial. *Revista Katálysis*, 2002; 5(1):79-88.
42. Valério TAM, Lyra MCDP. A construção cultural de significados sobre adoção: um processo semiótico. *Psicologia e Sociedade*. 2014; 26(3):716-725. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0102-71822014000300020>
43. Giacomozzi AI, Nicoletti M, Godinho EM. As representações sociais e as motivações para adoção de pretendentes brasileiros à adoção. *Psychologica*. 2015; 58(1):41-64. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.14195/1647-8606_58-1_3
44. Maux AAB, Dutra E. Do útero à adoção: a experiência de mulheres férteis que adotaram uma criança. *Estudos de Psicologia (Natal)*. 2009; 14(2):113-121. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S1413-294X2009000200004>
45. Otuka, LK, Scorsolini-Comin, F, Santos, MA. A configuração dos vínculos na adoção: uma atualização no contexto latino-americano. *Journal of Human Growth and Development*. 2009; 19(3): 475-486. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7322/jhgd.19935>
46. Palacios J, Román M, Camacho C. Growth and development in internationally adopted children: extent and timing of recovery after adversity. *Child: care, health and development*. 2011; 37(2):282-288. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2214.2010.01142.x>
47. Gorin MC, Mello R, Machado RN, Féres-Carneiro T. O estatuto contemporâneo da parentalidade. *Revista da SPAGESP*. 2015; 16(2):3-15.
48. Góis, CA. O estranho e o fantástico: uma intervenção terapêutica em um caso de adoção. *Journal of Human Growth and Development*. 2005; 15(2): 111-118. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7322/jhgd.19763>

Resumo

Introdução: A introdução: Mudanças sociais ocorridas nas últimas décadas no que tange a organização das famílias e aos papéis de gênero, legitimaram e deram visibilidade a arranjos familiares que divergem do modelo tradicional. Assim, considera-se importante estudar a família monoparental adotiva e suas especificidades.

Objetivo: Analisar o processo de adoção e a chegada da criança nas famílias monoparentais.

Método: Foram entrevistados quatro mães e um pai, entre 31 e 56 anos, cujos filhos foram adotados com idades entre zero a cinco anos. As entrevistas abordaram a motivação, o processo de adoção, a espera e chegada da criança, e a vivência da monoparentalidade, e foram analisadas com o referencial da Análise Temática.

Resultado: A motivação para a adoção foi advinda do desejo de constituir ou ampliar a família e exercer a parentalidade. A espera pela criança foi um momento de preparação emocional e financeira para o acolhimento do novo membro e medos e ansiedades relacionados ao processo adotivo foram vivenciados. A adaptação das crianças ocorreu em curto período e foi necessário que os participantes adaptassem sua rotina à nova situação familiar. Em todos os casos foi verificado o acolhimento e apoio da família extensa.

Conclusão: A preparação para a adoção favoreceu o processo de adaptação pais-crianças. A participação da família extensa, bem como as orientações da equipe técnica foram relevantes para as famílias.

Palavras-chave: adoção, família, monoparentalidade, parentalidade.

©The authors (2021), this article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made. The Creative Commons Public Domain Dedication waiver (<http://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/>) applies to the data made available in this article, unless otherwise stated.