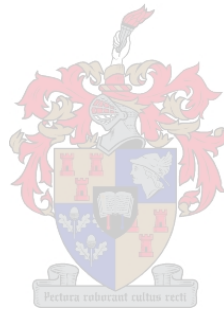


VIEWS OF SOCIAL WORKERS ON TRANS-RACIAL ADOPTIONS OF ABANDONED CHILDREN

by

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DECLARATION

By submitting this dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Dedicated to “the best and the worst of times”

-2013-

“Strength of character and resilience of the human spirit and soul, are never forged during the easy times of our lives, but rather through the fire and brimstone present during our darkest hours”

-Unknown

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SUMMARY

Thousands of children are being abandoned in South Africa each year, consequently entering the child-care and protection system. The Children's Act 38 of 2005, which governs all practices involving children in South Africa, clearly advocates for adoption as the superior form of intervention in cases of abandonment. Yet adoption continues to be one of the most under-utilised childcare practices in South Africa, especially by the black, majority population. This is unfortunately despite the fact that most of the adoptable children are from the black population group.

This study therefore aimed to investigate the views of adoption social workers regarding the practice of trans-racial adoptions of abandoned children.

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed for this study. A combination of exploratory and descriptive research designs was utilised as the framework for the research approach. Data was collected by means of a semi-structured interview schedule, which was conducted during personal interviews with social work professionals.

The findings of the empirical investigation revealed that according to the views of the social workers under-graduate social work training was largely inadequate in preparing social workers to work in the field of adoption. It was also found that social workers felt that the importance of permanency planning in all work with children was not comprehensively explored during under-graduate studies.

Findings further indicated that trans-racial adoption is viewed positively amongst adoption social workers, and is regarded as the far superior alternative to foster-care or institutional care for children who have been abandoned. It was however found that in cases of abandonment, adoption might be an under-utilised option amongst child-protection workers.

Children available for adoption were reported as being predominantly from the black population group, while it was indicated that the majority of parents wanting to adopt are from the white community. In line with this, it was noted that there are not many prospective adoptive parents from the black community. Of significance was therefore the finding that very few adoption organisations have active recruitment programmes focused on recruiting black adoptive parents, inevitably bringing trans-racial adoption to the fore.

One of the most important recommendations of this study is therefore that adoption organisations should develop and implement recruitment programmes, which specifically target prospective black adopters in an effort to increase the potential pool of black adopters.

In addition, the recommendations emphasised the importance of adequate education of social workers in order to ensure that the Children's Act 38 of 2005 is adequately understood and implemented in cases of abandonment. Ensuring that social workers move towards adoption as fast as possible in cases of abandonment can not only increase the chances of the child being adopted, but can also help to prevent developmental problems associated with institutional care.

OPSOMMING

Duisende kinders word jaarliks in Suid-Afrika deur hulle ouers verlaat (“abandon”), en betree gevolglik die kindersorg en beskermingsstelsel. Die Kinderwet 38 van 2005, wat alle praktiese rakende kinders in Suid Afrika reguleer, promoveer duidelik aanneming as die beste vorm van intervensie in gevalle van kinderverlating. Steeds bly aanneming egter een van die mees onderbenutte kindersorg praktiese in Suid-Afrika, veral onder die swart meerderheidsbevolking. Dit ten spyte van die feit dat meeste aanneembare kinders uit die swart bevolkingsgroep kom.

Hierdie studie was daarop gemik om die menings van aannemings-maatskaplike werkers rakende die praktyk van inter-ras aannemings van kinders wat deur hulle ouers verlaat is te ondersoek.

Beide kwantitatiewe en kwalitatiewe benaderings is toegepas vir hierdie studie. ‘n Kombinasie van ondersoekende en beskrywende navorsingsontwerpe is gebruik as die raamwerk vir die navorsingsbenadering. Data is versamel deur middel van ‘n semi-gestruktureerde onderhoud skedule wat uitgevoer is tydens persoonlike onderhoude met maatskaplike werkers.

Die empiriese ondersoek het bevind dat die maatskaplike werkers van mening was dat voorgraadse opleiding in maatskaplike werk grootliks onvoldoende was om maatskaplike werkers voor te berei vir werk op die gebied van aanneming. Daar is ook bevind dat maatskaplike werkers die standpunt huldig dat die belangrikheid van permanensie-beplanning in alle werk met kinders nie omvattend verken is tydens voorgraadse studies nie.

Verdere bevinding dui daarop dat inter-ras aanneming positief beskou word deur aannemings-maatskaplike werkers en dat dit by verre as die beste alternatief tot pleegsorg of institusionele sorg vir kinders wat deur hulle ouers verlaat is, beskou word. Daar is egter bevind dat in gevalle van kinderverlating die opsie van aanneming onderbenut mag wees deur kinderbeskermings werkers.

Daar is aangedui dat kinders wat beskikbaar is vir aanneming grootliks uit die swart meerderheids bevolkingsgroep kom, terwyl daar ook aangedui is dat die meerderheid van ouers wat kinders wil aanneem uit die wit gemeenskap kom. Daar is aangedui dat min van die prospektiewe aannemings ouers uit die swart gemeenskap kom. ‘n Betekenisvolle bevinding

was gevolglik dat baie min aannemings-organisasies aktiewe werwingsprogramme het wat daarop fokus om swart aannemingsouers te werf, wat noodwendig inter-ras aanneming na vore bring.

Een van die belangrikste aanbevelings van hierdie studie is dus dat aannemings-organisasies werwingsprogramme moet ontwikkel en implementeer wat spesifiek prospektiewe swart aannemers teiken in 'n poging om die poel van swart aannemers te vergroot.

Verder beklemtoon die aanbevelings die belangrikheid van voldoende opleiding van maatskaplike werkers ten einde te verseker dat die Kinderwet 38 van 2005 voldoende verstaan word en geïmplementeer word in gevalle van kinderverlating. Deur toe te sien dat maatskaplike werkers so gou moontlik beweeg na aanneming in gevalle van kinderverlating verbeter nie slegs die kind se kans om aangeneem te word nie, maar dit kan ook help om die ontwikkelingsprobleme geassosieer met institusionele versorging te voorkom.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 PRELIMINARY STUDY AND RATIONALE

1.1.1 Introduction

Child abandonment is a significant challenge being faced in South Africa, as thousands of children are being abandoned every year (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:2). Child Welfare South Africa indicated approximately 1900 children being abandoned in South Africa in 2009, and 2600 children being abandoned in 2011. In situations such as this, where a child is left without any form of adequate care, it is imperative that government systems be in place to protect the child from further harm (Connolly and Morris, 2012:20).

Alternative methods of childcare are therefore required when biological parents are unable or unwilling to care for their children. According to Rondell and Murray (1974:5) and Owusu-Bempah (2010:1) fostering and adoption are the two main mechanisms of alternative child care likely to be utilised.

Connolly and Morris (2012:81) indicate that in the majority of cases where alternative care is needed for children, only short-term care is required until the child can be reunited with his/her family. However, in cases where it is not possible to return the child to their biological families, longer-term care is needed, and for some children a permanent arrangement through the use of adoption may offer them the stability and security they need (Connolly & Morris, 2012:81, 93).

Adoption is the legal process by which the rights and responsibilities for a child are given up by one set of parents, and taken on by another (Owusu-Bempah, 2010:18). This definition is reflected in Chapter 15 of the South African Children's Act 38 of 2005, which is of value to consider for the purposes of this thesis (Children's Act 38 of 2005:74,82). Section 228 of the Children's Act, states that an adopted child is one who has been placed in the permanent care of a person in terms of a court order. It is then explained further by *Section 242* that a court ordered adoption terminates any parental rights and responsibilities of the parents giving the child up for adoption, and that the child will for all purposes be considered the child of the adoptive parent.

Despite what may seem to be a simple and straightforward definition, it should be noted that adoption is a complex and multifaceted concept, with political; human; and cultural aspects that need to be considered (Krause, 2006:1). Gerrand and Nathane-Taulela (2013:3) for instance draw attention to the fact that in South Africa, the high numbers of abandoned children being put up for adoption are due to a combination of social; economic; political and material circumstances. Such circumstances include “HIV/AIDS; widespread poverty and unemployment, constraints on availability of housing in urban areas, lack of access to services that enable people to maintain family life; teenage births; rape and unwanted pregnancies; and expectations that abandonment will secure a better future for the child”. Given the large numbers of abandoned children, as well as the vast array of reasons for abandonment, it has been highlighted that a major task faced in South African is that of having to secure permanent placements for all of the children who have been left without any form of familial care (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:1).

1.1.2 Legislative framework for adoption in South Africa

Throughout the years, several different legislative frameworks, relating to adoption in South Africa, have been developed. The *Adoption of Children Act 25 of 1923* was the first piece of legislation to regulate adoption in South Africa (Ferreira, 2009:24,24). It is of value to note that this Act did not prohibited trans-racial adoption, and that race or culture did not have to be considered prior to an adoption taking place.

The Adoption of Children Act was later replaced by the *Children’s Act of 1937*. The aim of this Act was broader than that of the previous Act as it attempted to address all issues relating to children, not simply adoption (Ferreira, 2009:27). As with the previous Act however, The Children’s Act of 1937 did not prohibit trans-racial adoption. Mosikatsana (1995) cited by Ferreira (2009:28) suggests that the exclusion of any reference to “race” in the two Acts mentioned, is because racism was already so deeply ingrained in all South Africans’ minds, that legislative intervention would not have been necessary.

The Children’s Act 33 of 1960, which came into operation on 14 April 1960, was the first Act to make any reference to race with regards to adoption in South Africa (Ferreira, 2009:28). Section 35(2), later to become section 35(2)(a), read as follows:

In selecting any person in whose custody a child is to be placed...regard shall be had to the religious and cultural background and ethnological grouping of the child and, in selecting such

a person, also to the nationality of the child and the relationship between him and such a person.

The *Children's Amendment Act of 1965* later added two further subsections to section 35(2). These subsections read as follows:

(b) Any illegitimate child whose classification in terms of the Population Registration Act, 1950 (Act 30 of 1950), is the same as that of his mother shall be deemed to have the same religious and cultural background and nationality as his mother and only relatives of the mother of any such child shall be regarded as being related to such child.

(c) A child shall not be placed in the custody of any person whose classification in terms of the Population Registration Act, 1950, is not the same as that of the child except where such person is the parent or guardian of the child.

Section 35(2)(c) of the Children's Amendment Act of 1965 therefore strictly prohibited trans-racial adoption in South Africa.

The *Child Care Act 74 of 1983* was the most recent Act regulating adoption in South Africa, prior to our current legislation. According to Ferreira (2009:34) this Act did not bring about any significant changes regarding trans-racial adoptions. Section 40 of the Act read as follows:

(a) Regard shall be had to the religious and cultural background of the child concerned and of his parents against that of the person in or to whose custody he is to be placed or transferred; and

(b) A child shall not be placed in or transferred to the custody of any person whose classification in terms of the Population Registration Act, 1950..., is not the same as that of the child, except where such a person is the parent or guardian of the child.

Section 40(b) was later repealed by the *Child Care Amendment Act 86 of 1991*, and in 1991 trans-racial adoption became legal in South Africa (Ferreira, 2009:35).

Our current legislation regarding adoption, *the Children's Act 38 of 2005* came into effect in June 2007 (Paleker, 2008:1). This Act consists of 22 Chapters and 315 sections, which comprehensively delve into every aspect of childhood in South Africa (Ferreira, 2009:36; Paleker, 2008:1). A comparison of adoption legislation in terms of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 and the Children's Act 38 of 2005, shows that The Children's Act is far more comprehensive. Simply on face value it can be noted that chapter 4 in the Child Care Act

(dealing with adoption) has only 11 sections, whereas chapter 15 of the current Children's Act (dealing with adoption) has 26 sections, excluding inter-country adoptions.

With regards to race and adoption, The Children's Act 38 of 2005 does not prohibited trans-racial adoption (Ferreira, 2009:37). Section 240(1)(a) stipulates that all relevant factors, including religious and cultural backgrounds of the child, the biological parents, and the prospective parents needs to be taken into consideration (Children Act, 38 of 2005:82). Race, is however, not listed as a factor that needs to be considered in adoption practices.

1.1.3 Adoption in South Africa

According to Gerrand and Nathane-Taulela (2013:1) and Mokomane, Rochat and The Directorate, (2012:347). The Children's Act 38 of 2005 advocates for adoption as the best form of alternative care in cases of abandonment. In fact, Section 157(3) stipulates that a young child who has been orphaned or abandoned by its parents must be put up for adoption (Children's Act 38 of 2005:71). Mokomane *et al.* (2012:347) further indicate that this support of adoption rests on the fact that adoption is more likely to provide the child with a sense of permanency than other forms of alternative care such as foster- or institutional care.

Despite a comprehensive legislative framework introduced by the new Children's Act (38 of 2005), Mokomane and Rochat (2010:11) and Mokomane *et al.* (2012:347) allude to the fact that very little research has been conducted on adoption in South Africa. Until recently, trans-racial adoption in South Africa was strictly prohibited (Harber, 1999:9). Subsequently, given the lack of research into adoption, little is known about whether changes to legislation; such as the legalisation of trans-racial adoption; have proved to be either effective or acceptable within social work practice in South Africa (Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:347).

It is noted that the numbers of court-ordered adoptions in South Africa are considered to be low relative to the large number of children in foster care (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:1; Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:348, 355; Mokomane & Rochat, 2010:vii). Mokomane *et al.* (2012:35) proposes that these levels and patterns of adoption are likely to be influenced by several factors including socio-cultural issues around lineage among African families and communities. The authors further indicate that according to the National Adoptions Register, white children were greatly favoured in national adoptions in South during 2004-2009 (Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:352). Adoption practices have been found to be under-utilised by black population group, who make up approximately 80% of the population of South Africa

(Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:352; Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:1). This is unfortunately despite the fact that the high numbers of children in the child care and protection system who are eligible for adoption are black (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:4; Harber, 1999:9).

With the above in mind it should be noted that the South African Children's Act 38 Of 2005 prioritises adoption of children within the same culture (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:4; Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:349). This is reflective of adoption practices in other countries such as the UK, New Zealand and Canada (Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:349). Consequently, the authors indicate that the majority of national adoptions during 2004-2009 were same-race adoptions.

1.1.4 Barriers to national, same-race adoptions within the black population of South Africa

Given the complex and multicultural makeup of South African society, same-race adoptions are rarely simple and straightforward (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:5). It has been noted that because of their beliefs concerning family formation, most black South Africans perceive the legal adoption process as being at odds with their cultural and ancestral belief systems (Mokomane, 2012; 355; 356; Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:6). Gerrand and Nathane-Taulela (2013:6) indicates that black South Africans regard adoption as a practice that severs the child's relationship with his or her family of origin and clan roots. This may result in uncertainty regarding questions of 'who the child belongs to' which could potentially negatively impact the child's identity development later on in life. Additionally, black women are under extreme pressure to prove their fertility, thereby meeting lineage requirements by having children (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:6). It is therefore not likely that these women will be willing to adopt a child that is not their own as this does not correspond with their beliefs on child-bearing.

Taking the above obstacles into consideration; Gerrand and Nathane-Taulela (2013:9) allude to the fact that adoption is a dynamic process, and one should be aware of the different ways in which the same goal can be reached. The goal of adoption is of course to ensure that the right of a child to be raised by a loving family, in a secure environment, is adequately met. An alternative method to same race adoptions that can therefore be considered is trans-racial adoption.

1.1.5 Trans-racial adoption

Historically, there has been strong opposition to trans-racial adoption in many parts of the world (Harber, 1999:9; Lee, 2003:713; Small, 1991:62; Simon & Alstein, 2000:37). In America for instance, such opposition was primarily led by the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) and by leaders of black political organisations, who described the practice as a form of genocide, which deprived the black community of its most valuable future resource – its children (Simon & Alstein, 2000:37). Both black and native-American groups were against trans-racial adoptions as they felt that white families would not be able to raise black or Indian children in an environment that would adequately provide for opportunity to retain ethnic identity. In support of this, the president of the NABSW, William T. Merrit, made the following statement in 1971: “Black children should be placed only with black families, whether in foster care or for adoption” (Simon & Alstein, 2000:37). The feeling was thus; that ethnicity, not permanency of placement, should be the number one priority when deciding on alternative care for children.

In South Africa, trans-racial adoption was forbidden by apartheid legislature for several years (Harber, 1999:10). With the fall of the apartheid regime however, trans-racial adoptive practices became a possibility. Yet, trans-racial adoption remains a controversial and complex area of childcare practice worldwide especially with regards to the adoption of black children by white families (Harber, 1999:10; Perry, 2011:855,856; Wainwright & Ridley, 2012:50).

In the existing literature on trans-racial adoption, the focus is predominantly on white parents (majority) adopting children from minority racial/ethnic groups (Lee, 2003:712; Small, 1991:63; Roby & Shaw, 2006:203; Wainwright & Ridley, 2012:50). Opinions about such adoptions vary significantly; some people viewing it as positive while others strictly object to the practice (Small, 1991:66, Roby & Shaw, 2006:203; Rondell & Murray, 1972:8, Wainwright & Ridley, 2012:50). Social workers working in the field of adoption are therefore often faced with difficult decisions when they have to “balance the needs of the child for permanency and stability with the potential for a match in terms of heritage and culture” (Connolly & Morris, 2012:105).

1.1.6 Psychosocial wellbeing

English authors, Hollingsworth (1998:100) and Wainwright and Ridley (2012:50), indicate that the question of whether white parents should adopt children of ethnic minority groups has

been shrouded in controversy ever since the practice increased considerably in the 1960s and 1970s. Hollingsworth (1998:100) goes on to note that most of the debate has been centred on whether trans-racially adopted children will be provided the opportunity to develop the racial or ethnic identities which are characteristic of their groups of origin.

Such ideas are also reflected in American literature (Simon & Alstein, 2000:39). William T. Merrit, the president of the NABSW, made notable claims regarding the psychosocial wellbeing of Black children being adopted by white parents. He asserted that these black children would suffer severe identity problems because white communities will not fully accept them, yet at the same time they will have no contact with black communities. Additionally, he stated that black children who have been trans-racially adopted are likely to not develop the needed coping mechanisms to function in a racist society. The fear is that these black children would develop “white psyches” (Simon & Alstein, 2000:39; 41)

In 1972, a group of native-Americans expressed their concerns about the identity development of trans-racially adopted Indians. They claimed that an identity crisis in adolescence is likely to be even more traumatic for this group, especially if their parents have not made an effort to expose them to their cultural heritage (Simon & Alstein, 2000:45).

Given the controversy, Wainwright and Ridley (2012:52) suggest that an important question for study on ethnic matching is whether children matched in this way experience better psychosocial outcomes in their childhood and adult life than those who are not. The authors note that research by Small (1982, 2000) and Thoburn, Norford and Rashid (2000) has indicated that ethnically matched placements encourage and nurture a positive black identity within black children, which is seen as central to their wellbeing (Wainwright & Ridley, 2012:52). Concurrently however, there is also research that suggests that trans-racial placements can be successful as well, in terms of psychosocial outcomes (Wainwright & Ridley, 2012:58; Connolly & Morris, 2012:18).

Discussions concerning trans-racial adoption have largely been centred on the question of whether a “white family in a racist society can provide the environment which will advance the psychological well-being of a black child” (Hollingsworth, 1998:107; Small, 1991:63, Wainwright & Ridley, 2012:52). Despite the availability of research on trans-racial adoptions however, there is a notable gap in South African literature in this regard. This is important because South Africa has an incredibly unique and complex cultural makeup. There is a need to determine whether adoption practices in South Africa are culturally relevant, and whether

trans-racial adoptions are a viable option of child-care. This knowledge base will help adoption social workers in their decision making process with regards to ethnic matching – whether it should be a “first priority consideration” or not.

Adoptive parents when making the decision to adopt trans-racially could also use such knowledge, or not. If they decide to adopt trans-racially, this research will assist them in orientating themselves within the unique challenge of becoming a trans-racial family.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND FOCUS

Literature confirms that there are thousands of children in South Africa entering the legal child-care and protection system (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:2). Most of these children are likely to be placed with foster parents, or be put up for adoption (Murray, 1974:5; Owusu-Bempah, 2010:1). Although adoption is prioritised by South African legislature, it has been noted that adoption practices have largely been under-utilised by Africans, who make up approximately 80% of the population of South Africa (Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:352; Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:1). This is despite the fact that the high numbers of children in the childcare and protection system who are eligible for adoption, are predominantly black (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:4; Harber, 1999:9).

Trans-racial adoption is therefore an option when it comes to securing permanent placement for children in need (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:9). Historically however, there has been strong opposition to trans-racial adoptions worldwide (Harber, 1999:9; Lee, 2003:713; Small, 1991:62; Simon & Alstein 2000:37, Children’s Amendment Act of 1965, S35(2)(b)). Wainwright & Ridley (2012:50) and Small (1991:66) confirms that the topic of ethnicity and adoption has long been, and continues to be, a controversial topic within childcare practice.

Despite a comprehensive Children’s Act (38 of 2005), Mokomane *et al.* (2012:347) allude to the fact that very little research has been conducted on adoption in South Africa. Little can therefore be known about whether the changes to childcare legislation, as discussed above, have proved to be effective or acceptable within social work practice (Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:347). This study has therefore attempted to fill this gap in South African literature on adoption.

Additionally, existing literature on trans-racial adoption focuses predominantly on white parents (majority) adopting children from minority racial/ethnic groups (Lee, 2003:712).

Trans-racial adoption in South Africa is however, a somewhat different phenomenon than in the rest of the world – that of white parents (minority) adopting children from the majority racial/ethnic groups (white parents adopting black children) or, White parents adopting from other minority racial/ethnic groups (white parents adopting coloured, Indian or Asian children). Trans-racial adoption in South Africa is therefore an important area of study as it is quite unique.

It was appropriate to make use of an ethnic-sensitive perspective in this study. When dealing with trans-racial adoptions, social workers will inherently be required to cross cultural and racial lines. An ethnic sensitive perspective was therefore appropriate as it requires social workers to be more attentive to ethnic, cultural and religious diversity among their clients (Sheafor, Horejsi & Horejsi, 2000:94). This perspective allowed for a critical review of adoption practices in South Africa in terms of the Children's Act 38 of 2005. A clearer understanding of the unique nature of trans-racial adoption practises in South Africa was therefore developed.

1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVE

The **aim** of the research was to develop an understanding of the views of social workers on trans-racial-adoptions in South Africa in terms of the Children's Act 38 of 2005.

The following **objectives** were formulated to achieve this aim:

- To explore the Children's Act 38 of 2005 in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the process of adoption in South Africa and the role of the social worker
- To describe trans-racial adoption from an ethnic sensitive perspective in order to develop a clear understanding of the challenges of trans-racial adoption.
- To investigate the views of social workers on trans-racial adoption practises.
- To present conclusions based on the data collected for the empirical study and give appropriate recommendations for future research and social work practice with regards to trans-racial adoptions.

1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.4.1 Literature review

De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delpont (2011:109) indicate several reasons for the importance of completing a comprehensive literature study. Firstly, the literature study serves as a theoretical framework for the study. Secondly, it provides an indication of how the study fits into already existing literature. The significance of the study is therefore further substantiated by the literature study as it can be reviewed against the backdrop of previous research. Finally, De Vos *et al.* (2011:134) states that the review of literature is aimed at developing a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of the problem that is being investigated.

In order to give a comprehensive overview of the topic of research, a literature review was therefore completed prior to the empirical study. It served as a justification for why the research is relevant and needed. Additionally, the literature review served to orientate reviewers of the study, within the existing literature on trans-racial adoption. Finally, the literature review demonstrated that the researcher was knowledgeable about, and understood, the issues related to the topic.

1.4.2 Research approach

This was predominantly a qualitative study, although quantitative elements were also incorporated into the instrument of data collection. (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:434).

De Vos *et al.* (2011:66) indicate that, in the human sciences, the use of both qualitative and quantitative elements in a single research project is often most effective for the investigation of real life situations. The authors further explain that “the two methods complement each other as the combination allows for a more complete and in-depth understanding and analysis of a complex research problem” (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:66). The study therefore drew on elements of both quantitative and qualitative approaches; resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

From a qualitative perspective the researcher is concerned with “describing and understanding human behaviour; naturalistic observation; and the subjective exploration of reality from the perspective of an insider” (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:433). The study therefore made use of the qualitative approach as it attempted to understand and describe the wellbeing of trans-racially adopted children. Furthermore data collected, which was obtained through detailed and in-

depth interviews, was primarily qualitative in nature as it focused on the subjective views of adoption social workers.

With reference to the quantitative element of the study, it is noted that the researcher is concerned with explaining and predicting human behaviour, as well as controlled measurement (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:433). In the quantitative paradigm the perspective of the outsider is what the researcher is interested in (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:433). With regards to the study, the quantitative element encompassed the use of close-ended questions; which were used to gain insight into the current trends within adoption as well as the views of social workers on trans-racial adoptions. Furthermore, the study was interested in the outsider perspective and therefore did not deal directly with trans-racially adopted children, but rather with the social workers that administer such adoptions.

1.4.3 Research design

Exploratory and descriptive research designs were selected for the study. Exploratory research is, according to De Vos *et al.* (2011:95) conducted in cases where the researcher hopes to develop insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or individual. The need for such research could, for example, arise out of a lack of information on a certain topic or area of interest (Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee, 2009:43; De Vos *et al.*, 2011:95). Alternatively, such research may be conducted in order for the researcher to get acquainted with a situation so that he/she can formulate a problem or develop a hypothesis. Furthermore De Vos *et al.* (2011:95) state that with regards to an exploratory study, the researcher is asking “what” questions. Such a research design was therefore appropriate for this study as it aimed to answer the question: “*what* are the views of adoption social workers regarding the practice of trans-racial adoption in South Africa”?

Bless *et al.* (2009:43) further indicates that exploratory research is usually used in cases where very little is known about the research topic. As indicated earlier; there is a lack of knowledge with regards to trans-racial adoptions in South Africa. In fact, research concerning adoption in South Africa in general is scarce. An exploratory design was therefore selected, as the study aimed to explore this topic in further depth. This design also corresponded well with the research approach.

When the researcher is purely interested in describing a particular phenomenon, descriptive research is used (Bless *et al.*, 2009:43). Although they differ from one another, De Vos *et al.*

(2011:96) indicate, that exploratory and descriptive research often blends in practice. “Descriptive research presents a picture of the specific details of a situation, social setting or relationship and focuses on ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions” (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:96). The use of this design in collaboration with exploratory research thus allowed for the development of new knowledge with regards to the topic of research.

1.4.4 Sample

A sample is a subset of the population in which the researcher is interested (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:223). For the purposes of this study, purposive and snowball sampling was used; which are methods of non-probability sampling. “In non-probability sampling the odds of selecting a particular individual are not known because the researcher does not know the population size of the members of the population” (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:231).

Purposive sampling is, according to De Vos *et al.* (2011:232), based entirely on the judgement of the researcher. The researcher selects a sample from the population that is composed of elements that contain the most characteristics or typical attributes that will best serve the purpose of the study (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:232). Purposive sampling is used in qualitative research, and it therefore correlated with the research approach selected (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:392).

Furthermore; this form of sampling was selected as it allowed for participants to be selected on the basis of characteristics selected by the researcher. It was therefore ensured that participants were able to provide the needed information for the successful completion of the study. The researcher did a internet search to find adoption organisations and social workers in the Western Cape. All adoption organisations and social workers were then contacted via telephone or email and invited to take part in the research. It should be noted that this sampling can unfortunately result in bias on behalf of the researcher. De Vos *et al.* (2011:392) therefore point out that the researcher should clearly identify and formulate pre-selected criteria for the selection of respondents.

The criterion for inclusion of the sample for the study was therefore the following:

Participants were:

- Social workers who are registered, practising social workers within the Western Cape area.

- Social workers who have been working in the specialised field of adoption (whether privately or at an organisation) for at least one year.
- Knowledgeable about the process of adoption.
- Involved in a trans-racial adoption.
- Proficient in speaking English and/or Afrikaans as the researcher did not have access to a translator and was therefore not able to adequately interview social workers of other languages.

With regards to snowball sampling; this is a “method of recruitment suitable for identifying study participants with very specific characteristics, rare experiences, or ‘hidden populations who may be difficult to identify with other recruitment methods” (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2011: 100). Snowball sampling involves asking a study participant if they know of anyone else in the area that meets the study criteria, and asking them to refer this person to the researcher. This method of sampling was appropriate for this study as many adoption social workers in the Western Cape often work together in an effort to achieve best placements. This method of sampling, in combination with purposive sampling, allowed the researcher to locate a larger pool of study participants who met the selection criteria.

Hennink, Hutter & Bailey (2011: 88) note that the “number of participants in a qualitative study is often small because the depth of information and the variation in experiences are of interest, so a large number of participants are neither practical nor beneficial”. The sample for this study was made up of 18 participants, as it was at this point that information saturation was encountered.

1.4.5 Method/instrument of data collection

The study made use of a semi-structured interview schedule during personal interviews. The interview can be regarded as a social relationship in which information is exchanged between a participant and the researcher (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:342). De Vos *et al.* (2011:342) indicate that in qualitative research, which is one of the approaches that was used for this study, interviewing is the predominant mode of data or information collection. Interviewing was therefore an appropriate instrument for data collection for this study.

De Vos *et al.* (2011:351) explains that researchers often make use of semi-structured interviews in order to gain an in depth picture of participants’ ideas and perceptions of a particular topic. This further contributed to the appropriateness of the selected instrument of

data collection, as part of the aim was to develop a better picture of social workers' views on their role with regards to trans-racial adoptions. According to De Vos *et al.* (2011:351-352), the method gives the researcher and the participant flexibility as the researcher is able to follow up interesting remarks and observations that emerge in the interview, giving a fuller picture of the topic. This instrument therefore allowed the researcher of the study to further question participants about interesting and relevant issues that emerged during interviews. This allowed for a more comprehensive data collection.

Bless *et al.* (2009:116,119) states “semi-structured interviews are very helpful in exploratory research where the research question cannot be narrowly defined”. The choice of the instrument for data collection therefore complemented the research design selected for the study.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are, according to Bless *et al.* (2009:352), “especially suitable when one is particularly interested in complexity or process”. The topic of research was a relatively complex one as each participant was likely to have had different views. Semi-structured interviews were therefore an effective instrument to use in order to better understand the different opinions.

1.4.6 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are two of the most prominent criteria for the evaluation of social research (Bryman, 2012: 46; 168). Quite simply reliability “is concerned with the question of whether the results of a study are repeatable”. In order to ensure reliability the researcher included the questionnaire used to interview participants as an appendix, to be utilised by other researchers who wanted to replicate the study. Furthermore, Bryman (2012:390) proposes that the concept of ‘dependability’ is commonly used as an alternative to reliability in qualitative research. Researchers are thus encouraged to adopt an auditing approach, which ensures that all phases of the research process are kept. Peers would then be able to act as auditors. The researcher thus transcribed all interviews with participants, which can be accessed upon request.

Validity “is concerned with the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research”. Another way of simply defining validity is “whether a measure of a concept really measures that concept” (Bryman, 2012: 168). For the purposes of this study the researcher

concentrated on face validity; that is, “when the measure apparently reflects the content of the concept in question” (Bryman, 2012: 170). This was done by means of a pilot study and in consultation with the research supervisor to establish whether the measure seemed to be getting at the concept that was the focus of attention.

1.4.7 Pilot study

A pilot study can be regarded as a small-scale trail run of all the aspects of the total data-collection process (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:237). Barker (2003:327-328) defines a pilot study as a procedure, carried out as a means of testing and validating an instrument. This is done by administering the instrument to a small group of participants from the intended test population (Barker, 2003:327-328). The participants of the pilot study should not participate in the main enquiry.

A pilot study was implemented before the main study took place in order for uncertainties in the research design to be clarified. The necessary modifications were then made. Two respondents qualifying for inclusion in the study formed part of the pilot study.

1.5 DATA PROCESSING PROCEDURE

1.5.1 Qualitative data analysis and interpretation

The purpose of conducting a qualitative study is to produce findings (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:397). Patton (2002) cited in De Vos *et al.* (2011:397) note that the purpose of qualitative analysis is to transform data into findings. Such an analysis would involve reducing large volumes of raw information, sifting significance from trivia, identifying significant patterns and subsequently constructing a framework that would allow for communication of key findings (De Vos, 2011:397)

Personal interviews were recorded using a voice recorder (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:404). The researcher allowed respondents the opportunity to express any discomfort with being recorded; indicating that hand written notes could be used as an alternative. No respondents expressed any such discomfort and all interviews were therefore recorded. In addition the researcher made use of field notes to record observations that were not picked up by the voice recorder.

Field notes and recorded conversations were transcribed soon after the interviews concluded. This ensured that the information was still fresh in the mind of the researcher.

Once all transcriptions were completed, time was dedicated to reading through all transcriptions, in their entirety, in an attempt to get immersed in the details and to make sense of the interviews (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:409). As the researcher read these transcripts, notes were made as the initial step in the process of exploring the data (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:409).

The researcher coded the transcriptions, identifying appropriate themes, subthemes and categories. This data is discussed in length, drawing on verbatim narratives of the participants, as well as comparing results to relevant literature.

1.5.2 Quantitative data analysis and interpretation

Although this was largely a qualitative study, it is necessary to briefly discuss quantitative data analysis and interpretation, as there were some quantitative elements in the data collection instrument. According to Rubin and Bannie (2005), cited in De Vos *et al.* (2011:249) quantitative data analysis can be regarded as the techniques used by researchers to convert data into numerical form, and to subject it to statistical analysis. Analysis allows the researcher to detect consistent patterns within the data.

Statistical analysis is, according to Monette, Sullivan and DeJong (2008:364) a method involving the assembling, classifying, tabulating and summarising of numerical data in order to obtain meaning or information. De Vos *et al.* (2011:249) elaborates here that data analysis alone does not provide the answers to research questions. Rather, answers are discovered by interpreting (to explain and find meaning) the data and the results De Vos *et al.*, 2011:249).

Quantitative data collected by means of the semi-structured interview was coded and represented in tables and figures. This allowed the researcher to interpret the data, identifying relevant trends in the findings. Where applicable, the conclusions and interpretations of the quantitative data were then compared to relevant literature.

1.6 CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

For the purpose of this study it is of value to clarify several key concepts referred to throughout this study. This section therefore aims to ensure that key concepts are understood within the context of this study.

1.6.1 Adoption

Adoption is a legal process in which a child's legal rights and duties towards the natural parents, and vice versa, are terminated and similar rights and duties are created with respect to the child's adoptive parents (Bowie, 2004:5; Owusu-Bempah, 2010:18; Simon & Alstein, 2000:23).

For the purposes of this study, the term "adoption" was used as defined in the Children's Act 38 of 2005:

Section (228): A child is adopted if the child has been placed in the permanent care of a person in terms of a court order that has the effects contemplated in section 242.

Section (242):

- (1) Except when provided otherwise in the order or in a post-adoption agreement confirmed by the court an adoption order terminates-
 - a. All parental responsibilities and rights any person, including a parent, step-parent or partner in a domestic life partnership, had in respect of the child immediately before the adoption;
 - b. All claims to contact with the child by any family member of a person referred to in paragraph (a);
 - c. All rights and responsibilities the child had in respect of a person referred to in paragraph (a) or (b) immediately before the adoption; and
 - d. Any previous order made in respect of the placement of the child.
- (2) An adoption order-
 - a. Confers full parental responsibilities and rights in respect of the adopted child upon the adoptive parent;
 - b. Confers the surname of the adoptive parent on the adopted child, except when otherwise provided in the order;
 - c. Does not permit any marriage or sexual intercourse between the child and any other person which would have been prohibited had the child not been adopted; and
 - d. Does not affect any rights to property the child acquired before the adoption
- (3) An adopted child must for all purposes be regarded as the child of the adoptive parent and an adoptive parent must for all purposes be regarded as the parent of the adopted child.

1.6.2 Trans-racial adoption

Trans-racial adoption is defined as the joining of racially different parents and children together in adoptive families (Silverman, 1993:104). Perry (2011:856) states that trans-racial adoption refers to the legal adoption of children by parents of another race, which may include international adoptions or adoptions involving any combination of races. Additionally, the author notes that the vast majority of the work on trans-racial adoptions has centred on the adoption of Black children by White parents.

For the purposes of this study, Trans-racial adoption was defined as the legal adoption of children by parents of another race – most often referring to the adoption of black children by white parents.

1.6.3 Psychosocial

Psychosocial refers to a person's psychological development in relation to his social environment (Louw & Louw, 2010:20). The Oxford English Dictionary (2009:1159) defines the term as relating to the interconnectedness of social factors and individual thoughts and behaviour.

The physical growth of a child is not only influenced by genetic-biological factors such as heredity, premature birth and medical problems at an early stage, but also a variety of environmental factors, such as the divorce of the parents, continuing marital conflict in the home, unemployment of the parents, and poverty (Louw & Louw, 2010:153). The authors notes that it is generally accepted that the stress resulting from such situations could have a serious effect on children's physical growth and health.

For the purposes of this study, the term psychosocial referred to the psychological wellbeing of trans-racially adopted children as their social environments influence it.

1.6.4 Racial identity

Rotheram and Phinney (1987:13) describe racial identity as a person's "sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behaviour that is due to ethnic group membership".

Racial identity will therefore, for the purposes of this study, refer to the aspects of a person's personality that have been shaped by their belonging a specific ethnic or racial group, and how this can be influenced by being raised in a family of a different race.

1.6.5 The Children's Act 38 of 2005

When referring to the Children's Act in this study, reference was being made to The Children's Act 38 of 2005, which came into effect in South Africa on April 1, 2010. The act gives effect to certain rights of children contained in the Constitution. The focus of this Act is; to set out principles relating to the care and protection of children; to define parental responsibilities and rights; to make further provision regarding children's courts; to provide for the issuing of contribution orders; to make new provision for the adoption of children; to provide for inter-country adoption; to give effect to the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption; to prohibit child abduction and to give effect to the Hague Convention on International Child Abduction; to provide for surrogate motherhood; to create certain new offences relating to children; and to provide for matters connected therewith (Children's Act 38 of 2005; 2010:1).

1.6.6 Abandoned

For the purposes of this study "abandoned" was defined as is in Chapter 1 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005:

- 1) 'Abandoned', in relation to a child, means a child who-
 - a) Has obviously been deserted by the parent, guardian or care-giver; or
 - b) Has, for no apparent reason, had no contact with the parent, guardian, or caregiver for a period of at least three month.

Abandoned children therefore include children who have obviously been abandoned at birth, as well as those children who have been abandoned by their parents in the child welfare system.

1.6.7 Ethnic-sensitive perspective

An ethnic sensitive perspective requires social workers to be attentive to ethnic, cultural and religious diversity among their clients (Sheafor *et al.*, 2000:94).

An ethnic-sensitive conceptual lens highlights the reality that clients served by social organisations are members of a variety of different ethnic groups, and therefore suggests that social work practice and service delivery therefore needs to be attuned to this reality. The authors go further to explain that social class, ethnicity, and religious beliefs have a significant impact on help-seeking behaviour and on whether a specific approach, or specific type of service will be perceived as needed, relevant, and useful. It has bearing on whether possible solutions make sense (Sheafor *et al.*, 2000:94).

This perspective was relevant to this study as it can provide social workers with a foundation from which to build when involved in trans-racial adoptions.

1.6.8 Cultural competence

Green and Leigh (1989) cited by Sheafor *et al.* (2000:94) define cultural competence as the ability:

To give aid or assistance to patients or client in ways that is acceptable and useful to them, because they are congruent with the client's cultural background and expectations. Cultural competence also refers to the service provider's ability to learn about the cultural context of a presenting problem and to integrate that knowledge into a professional assessment, diagnosis, and intervention.

For the purposes of this study cultural competence will therefore refer to social work practices that accommodate cultural expectations, as well as the ability of social workers to expand their cultural awareness and knowledge in order to provide culturally relevant services.

1.7 TIME SCHEDULE

The study was conducted from 8 February 2013 to 1 September 2014. The first draft of the proposal was concluded by 1 April 2013. The literature study chapters were completed thereafter and finalised by the end of March 2014. The data for the research was then gathered by means of a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. This was completed during April and May of 2014. The data gathered was then presented by means of an empirical study, which was completed by July 2014, after which the conclusions and recommendations were submitted. The final, edited version of the research report was submitted by the 1 September 2014 deadline.

1.8 RESEARCH AREA

Information for the empirical study was gathered during personal interviews with adoption social workers, working at several different adoption organisations (public and private) in the Western Cape area. For confidentiality reasons however, the names of the participants and organisations at which they work will not be mentioned.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1.9.1 Ethical clearance

De Vos *et al.* (2011:126) indicate that institutional ethics committees, or institutional review boards, at universities, research institutions and major welfare organisations are responsible for reviewing research proposals according to several strict guidelines and procedures. This process took place, and ethical clearance was granted, prior to the research being carried out (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:127).

This research study was carried out under the guidance and supervision of the Social Work Department at the University of Stellenbosch. The proposal was submitted to the Departmental Ethics Screening Committee (DESC) of the Department of social work for approval as low risk research in which the only foreseeable risk is one of discomfort or inconvenience.

Additionally, the researcher remained within the procedures and protocols indicated in the proposal, particularly in terms of any undertakings made in terms of the confidentiality of the information gathered. It was indicated that proposal would again be submitted for Departmental approval and DESC ethical clearance if there were any substantial departure from the existing proposal. This was however not necessary, as there was no significant deviation from the original proposal.

1.9.2 Ethical issues

The following ethical issues were identified as being relevant to this study:

1.9.2.1 Avoidance of harm

One of the most fundamental ethical rules to take into consideration in social research is that participants should not be harmed in any way (De Vos *et al.*, 115). According to Cresswell

(2003:64) the researcher has an ethical responsibility to protect their participants from any physical discomfort that may arise from participation in the research project.

This is a low risk study as the research participants will be social workers working in the field of adoption. Direct contact will therefore not be made with trans-racial adoptive parents or adoptees.

In order to ensure the emotional and physical comfort of all participants, the ethical issues of voluntary participation and informed consent (as discussed below) was be upheld. It was suggested that if an unexpected emergency situation revealed itself during the research, whether caused by the research or not, it would immediately be reported to the supervisor of the study and Departmental Chair for further advice. Fortunately however, no such situation occurred during the interviews.

1.9.2.2 Voluntary participation

De Vos *et al.* (2011:116) draw attention to the fact that participation in research should always be a voluntary decision, that is; no one should be forced to take part in research.

For the purposes of this study, participants were informed of the nature of the study and the topic that it is attempting to investigate. Participants were free to decide whether or not they wanted to take part in the research. During the interviewing process participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time.

1.9.2.3 Informed consent

Tying up with voluntary participation, De Vos *et al.* (2011:117) states that “obtaining informed consent implies that all possible or adequate information on the goal of the investigation; the expected duration of the participant’s involvement; the procedures which will be followed during the investigation; the possible advantages, disadvantages and dangers to which respondents may be exposed; as well as the credibility of the researcher’ is communicated to the participants”.

This study made use of written informed consent as suggested by Hakim (2000:143). De Vos *et al.* (2011:117) notes that researchers need to make an effort to ensure that accurate and complete information is provided in the 'written informed consent' form. This will ensure that

participants can make an educated and well-reasoned decision with regards to their possible participation (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:117).

Before every interview participants were provided with consent documents to be read through and signed. The original informed consent forms are being kept in a secured research file.

1.9.2.4 Confidentiality

Confidentiality implies that only the researcher should be aware of the identity of participants (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:120). For the purposes of this study the researcher knows who the participants are because personal interviews were carried out in order to gather empirical data. There is however, no way to link the quantitative questionnaires to specific participants as no personal identifying information was requested.

Upon completion of this study, all data collected is being kept safe in a locked cabinet.

1.9.2.5 Compensation

No compensation was provided to participants under any circumstances.

1.10 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Certain limitations of this study need to be recognised. Firstly the external validity is limited to generalisations within the Western Cape, as adoption social workers interviewed worked exclusively in this area. Similar studies would therefore need to be carried out in the eight other provinces of South Africa in order to obtain comprehensive insights into trans-racial adoption of abandoned children in South Africa. Secondly, none of the participants were from the Black population. Although this is largely due to the fact that few Black social workers appear to work in the adoption field (the sample was thus representative of the population), it is still noted that the perspectives of Black social workers could provide alternative insights to the research topic.

1.11 PRESENTATION

The research report includes of five chapters. **Chapter 1** represents the **research proposal**, which was submitted to the Departmental Ethics Screening Committee of the Department of social work for approval.

Chapter 2 addresses objective 1 on this study by providing a detailed analysis of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 as it is relevant to the practice of adoption in South Africa.

Chapter 3 focuses on the 2nd objective by exploring trans-racial adoption from an ethnic sensitive perspective.

Chapter 4 aims to meet objective three, and represents the empirical study which sought to investigate the views of social workers on trans-racial adoption in South Africa Finally,

Chapter 5 servers to meet the 4th and objective of this study by presenting the conclusions and recommendations for future social work practice with regards to trans-racial adoptions.

CHAPTER 2

ADOPTION PROCESS AND THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL WORKER ACCORDING TO THE CHILDREN'S ACT 38 OF 2005

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Adoption is not a new practise, and can in fact be traced back to the story of Moses; who was given up by his mother in order to ensure his survival and a better life (Ferreira, 2009:13; Lindsey, 1987:62; Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010:270). In Ancient Rome and Greece, adoption was viewed as a means of providing male heirs for families without sons. In such cases, issues of inheritance and the continuation of the family name were prioritised over the wellbeing of the child (Lindsey, 1987:62). Adoption practices have however, significantly changed since then, and are now strictly regulated by laws, which aim to ensure the best interests of the child (Children's Act 2005:18).

Adoption is a complex, legal process whereby children are permanently placed into the care of a family that is not their biological family; due to their biological family being unwilling or unable to care for them (Brumble & Kampfe, 2011:157; McRoy, Grotevant & White, 1988:1). British author, Marshall (2012:326) explains that, upon adoption, the parental rights and responsibilities of the biological parents become extraneous. Once adopted, the child is to be regarded as the legitimate child of the adoptive parents for all extents and purposes.

South Africa is currently faced with the immense challenge of dealing with a substantial number of children and babies being orphaned or abandoned (Administrator, 2001). The rising numbers of orphaned and abandoned children are due to an array of social, economic, political and material issues, including poverty; lack of family support; child abuse and neglect; rape; teenage pregnancies; unwanted pregnancies parental ill-health; HIV and AIDS; and family breakdown (Barn & Kirton, 2012:25; Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:3; Administrator, 2001).

When a child is, for whatever reason, left without parental or familial care, the child becomes the responsibility of the state and it is essential that some form of intervention takes place in order to ensure the child's right to be cared for is met. Adoption is one such form of

intervention that has been identified as a potentially beneficial option for children who have been orphaned or abandoned (Administrator, 2001; Mokomane & Rochat, 2010:vii).

This chapter will address the first objective of this study, which is to explore the process of adoption in South Africa, according to the Children's Act 38 of 2005. The chapter therefore begins by first providing a brief history of the development of legislation in South Africa, as it pertains to the child. The current policies and legislation that regulate adoption practices in South Africa are also mentioned. The care of a child, as it is related to adoption and as stipulated in the Children's Act 38 of 2005, is then explored. Attention shifts to the adoption process in South Africa, for both the biological parents and the prospective adoptive parents. Finally, the important role of the social worker in the adoption process is briefly discussed.

2.2 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTH AFRICAN LEGISLATURE AS IT RELATES TO ADOPTION AND RACE

As noted earlier, adoption has taken place throughout history, first informally, later becoming a practice regulated by laws (Ferreira, 2009:13). In order to understand adoption in South Africa, it is therefore of value to consider the historical development of South African legislation as it pertains to adoption. The following discussion will be a brief overview of the adoption legislature in South Africa, with a specific focus on trans-racial adoptions. Information discussed here is predominantly based upon one source, due to a lack of South African literature providing a comprehensive overview of the development of adoption legislature.

2.2.1 Customary law

Customary law dates far back into South African history, and prior to the colonisation of South Africa, is served as the only law applicable to the country (Ferreira, 2009:14). Customary law is the legal system governing the majority of black South Africans, ensuring their right to embrace their cultural beliefs (Ferreira, 2009:20). Embedded in the South African Constitution, South African courts are constitutionally required to apply customary law principles in all instances where it would be appropriate to do so (Constitution of RSA, 1996:1331; Ferreira, 2009:20).

Ferreira (2009:21) states that although having the same legal consequences, customary- and common-law adoptions are considerably different. Under customary law, adoption is a private

agreement, involving only the families concerned. The author explains that adoption under customary law is usually considered by those men who have no sons (or heir) to inherit their property and carry on the family name after their death (Ferreira, 2009:22). In such an instance adoption is therefore pursued as a means of providing a male heir to the head of the household. Ferreira (2009:23) explains that in such a case the man will seek to adopt a son from a family head within his own clan or family group. All ties to the biological family will be severed and the child will, for all extents and purposes, become part of the adoptive family. It is indicated that other reasons for adoption in traditional African cultures may include the strengthening of the adoptive family with more children; or if the adoptive child's biological family cannot afford to care for him/her.

As will become apparent later on in this study, the motivations for adoption under customary law differ significantly from adoptions under common-law. Under customary law the primary reasons for adoption are predominantly for the benefit of the adoptive parents, whereas under common-law law, the point of departure for any adoption is what would be in the best interests of the child.

Although an in-depth evaluation of customary law is beyond the scope of this study, it is of great value to briefly mention, as it serves to highlight the vastly different understanding that many black South Africans may have about adoption in comparison to white South Africans. According to literature, gaining a broader appreciation of how traditional adoptive practices in South Africa differ from the way adoption is practised in contemporary society, may allow for better insight as to why adoptive parents in South Africa tend to, more often than not, be white and therefore why adoption is being under-utilised by South Africa's majority population (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:2; Mokomane & Rochat, 2010:viii). Such an understanding is critical for this study if adoption is viewed through a culturally sensitive lens.

2.2.2 Adoption of Children Act 25 of 1923

According to Ferreira (2009:24) the Adoption of Children's Act 25 of 1923 was the first piece of legalisation in South Africa to regulate adoption practices. Roman-Dutch law, the principles of which provided a foundation for South African law, did not recognise adoption and no record of adoption in South Africa therefore exists prior to 1923. Informal adoptions (e.g. customary adoptions) were however still likely to have occurred. In 1923, when the

Children's Act 25 of 1923 came into effect, adoption was finally recognised as a legal practice in South Africa (Ferreira, 2009:14,19).

The exclusive purpose of this Act was to provide for the legal adoption of children, and therefore did not touch on any other issues regarding the care of the child. This Act did not explicitly prohibit trans-racial adoption. Race and culture were not factors that needed to be considered prior to an adoption being finalised; and technically it was therefore possible for trans-racial adoptions to take place. It is however noted that this was unlikely to have occurred, possibly due to racist ideals that flourished during the time of this Act being implemented (Ferreira, 2009:24,26). Although the Apartheid policy was only introduced following the general election of 1948, racial segregation in South Africa began long before, under Dutch and British colonial rule (Maylam, 2001:99). It can be deduced that racist ideals and practices were therefore not a new concept when Apartheid legislature was later introduced. The Apartheid regime was instead a means of making racist ideals and practices, already ingrained in people's psyches, law. Trans-racial adoption would therefore have been an unlikely consideration for most South Africans during these years, and legislation prohibiting the practice would have been deemed unnecessary.

2.2.3 Children's Act 31 of 1937

The Children's Act 31 of 1937 later replaced the Adoption of Children Act 25 of 1923. The aim of this act was considerably broader than its predecessor as it attempted to address all issues relating to children, not only adoption. As with the previous act however, there was again no reference to racial or cultural considerations that needed to be made before an adoption could take place. This would have been due to similar reasons discussed above. Society at large was inherently racist, and it was therefore likely to have been taken for granted that no one would consider adopting a child from a different race. Adoptions thus naturally took place within the same race without any need for legislative enforcement (Ferreira, 2009:26,27,28).

2.2.4 Children's Act 33 of 1960

The Children's Act 33 of 1960 came into effect on 14 April 1960, presenting a wider scope on issues regarding the care of a child than its forerunner. At this point in South African history, the Apartheid regime had already been in place for more than a decade. Several legislative

interventions enforcing racial segregation within society had therefore already been put in place. The Children's Act 33 of 1960 was however, the first Act to make any reference to race with regards to the practice of adoption in South Africa. As mentioned earlier, it had, up until now, been considered to be axiomatic that trans-racial adoption would not have taken place despite the fact that it was not necessarily illegal. With the enactment of this act however, trans-racial adoption was officially against the law (Ferreira, 2009:28). This is reflected in the extracts from the Children's Act 33 of 1960 below.

Section 35(2), later to become section 35(2)(a), read as follows:

In selecting any person in whose custody a child is to be placed...regard shall be had to the religious and cultural background and ethnological grouping of the child and, in selecting such a person, also to the nationality of the child and the relationship between him and such a person.

The *Children's Amendment Act of 1965* later added two further subsections to section 35(2). These subsections read as follows:

- (b) Any illegitimate child whose classification in terms of the Population Registration Act, 1950 (Act 30 of 1950) is the same as that of his mother shall be deemed to have the same religious and cultural background and nationality as his mother and only relatives of the mother of any such child shall be regarded as being related to such child.
- (c) A child shall not be placed in the custody of any person whose classification in terms of the Population Registration Act, 1950, is not the same as that of the child except where such person is the parent or guardian of the child.

Section 35(2)(c) of the Children's Amendment Act of 1965 therefore, for the first time, strictly prohibited trans-racial adoption in South Africa.

2.2.5 Child Care Act 74 of 1983

The Child Care Act 74 of 1983 was the most recent Act regulating adoption in South Africa, prior to the current legislation – The Children's Act 38 of 2005. According to Ferreira (2009:34) the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 did not bring about any significant changes regarding trans-racial adoptions. Section 40 of the Act read as follows:

- (a) Regard shall be had to the religious and cultural background of the child concerned and of his parents against that of the person in or to whose custody he is to be placed or transferred; and

- (b) A child shall not be placed in or transferred to the custody of any person whose classification in terms of the Population Registration Act, 1950... is not the same as that of the child, except where such a person is the parent or guardian of the child.

It can therefore be concluded that trans-racial adoptions were still strictly prohibited under the Child Care Act 74 of 1983. Adoptions would have only taken place within the same race.

When considering the relationship between race and adoption in South Africa, it is perhaps appropriate to also mention the financial aspect of adoption according to legislation. Regarding the financial means of the adoptive parents, it is necessary to refer to section 18, subsection 3(a) of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983. It is stated here that an adoption will not be granted to prospective adoptive parents if those parents do not have “the means to maintain and educate the child” (Child Care Act 74, 1983:22). Parents from lower-socio economic standing, which at the time were predominantly from the black and coloured communities, were therefore unlikely to be able to become adoptive parents solely due to financial constraints. The impact of this financial restriction on “who may adopt” is of significant interest when considering adoption through an ethnic-sensitive lens, and will be explored in further detail in the section to follow when the current legislation governing the adoption of children – The Children’s Act 38 of 2005 – is examined.

2.3 CURRENT LEGISLATION GOVERNING ADOPTION PRACTICES IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.3.1 The Children’s Act 38 of 2005

The current legislation regulating adoption in South Africa, the Children’s Act 38 of 2005, came into effect in June 2007. The formulation and implementation of this Act was a result of the proposition by the South African Law Reform Commission in 2002, that all legislation governing the care of children be redesigned, renovated, and codified in a single statute. The previous legislation governing the care of children, the Child Care Act 74 of 1983, had been formulated 14 years before the Constitution of South Africa was enacted in 1997. The reformulation and implementation of a new children’s act would therefore result in children being protected by an act that would be regarded as constitutional (Paleker, 2008:1).

2.3.1.1 Improved aspects of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 as it relates to adoption

The formulation and implementation of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 aimed to improve several aspects of childcare in South Africa. These improvements will be discussed in this section, specifically as it relates to the practice of adoption.

The Children's Act 38 of 2005 consists of 22 Chapters and 315 sections, and seeks to address all the fundamental aspects childhood in South Africa (Ferreira, 2009:36; Peleker, 2008:1). A comparison of adoption legislation in terms of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 and the Children's Act 38 of 2005 shows that The Children's Act 38 of 2005 is far more comprehensive (Ferreira, 2009:36). Chapter 4 in the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 (dealing with adoption) has only 11 sections, whereas chapter 15 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (dealing with adoption) has 26 sections, excluding inter-country adoptions. Simply on face value one can immediately recognise how much more comprehensive the Children's Act 38 of 2005 is regarding adoption than its predecessor.

The Children's Act 38 of 2005 provides, at the outset, a definition of adoption; clearly stipulates its purpose; and thoroughly defines which children should be regarded as adoptable – all of which was not specified in the Child Care Act 74 of 1983, yet evidently provides social workers with clear guidelines as to when adoption would be an appropriate option for a child in need of care and protection. Furthermore, the Children's Act 38 of 2005 greatly expands on the persons who may adopt, better reflecting South Africa's liberal and egalitarian ideals, by including single/unmarried people; gay couples; couples in a life-partnership; foster parents and biological fathers of children born out of wedlock (Children's Act 38, 2005:75, 76).

Other issues that were in fact covered in The Child Care Act 74 of 1983, such as consent to adoption; when consent is not needed and rescission orders, are now more clearly defined in the Children's Act 38 of 2005 – each under its own heading with specific and detailed sub-sections. Regarding the consent for adoption, the Children's Act 38 of 2005 requires the consent of both parents be given regardless of whether or not they are married. This provision allows for the opportunity for the father of an illegitimate child to claim his parental responsibilities – a provision not present in the Child Care Act 74 of 1983. If a mother has abandoned a child, efforts therefore need to be made to locate both the mother and father of the child before the child can be deemed adoptable.

2.3.1.2 Socio-economic standing and adoption

Discussions of adoption are often entwined with the socio-economic standing of the prospective adoption parents. This section therefore aims to explore the relationship between prospective adoptive parents' socio-economic situations and the likelihood of them being deemed fit adoptive parents.

Earlier, the financial restriction on “who may adopt” imposed by the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 was mentioned. It is important to recognize the changes to this limitation brought about by the Children’s Act 38 of 2005. Section 231, subsection 4 of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005, states that a person cannot be disqualified from adopting a child solely by virtue of their financial status. People who receive social security grants are therefore also eligible to apply for adoption (Children’s Act 28, 2005:77; Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:5). This completely eradicates the financial limitations imposed by the Child Care Act 74 of 1983, and opens the option of adopting a child to many more people. Frazer and Selwyn (2005:139), in exploring the various factors that influence the recruitment of adoptive parents, note however, that income; unemployment; poverty and poor housing are all factors that limit the pool of adoptive parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds. In addition, the inequality between the different population groups of South Africa needs to be considered here.

According to the analysis of income and expenditure of the South African population, there was an obvious disparity of income between the various population groups in the 2005/2006 data. While the black population group accounted for 79.4% of the population, they received only 41.2% of household income from work and social security grants. The white population group accounted for only 9.2% of the population yet received 45.3% of income. Furthermore, it is indicated that the lowest income bracket of the population is predominantly made up of members of the black population (93.2%). Correspondingly, the white population makes up 72.7% of the highest income bracket, with only 17% being from the black population (Lehohla, 2008:41). This information is represented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Share of household income within per capita household income deciles, by population group

Decile	Black African	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White	Total
	%	%	%	%	R billion
1	93,2	3,2	0,5	3,0	1,1
2	94,2	4,0	0,8	1,0	9,0
3	93,0	5,4	0,4	1,1	16,2
4	90,3	7,9	0,8	1,0	21,5
5	83,6	12,0	2,6	1,7	26,2
6	78,7	16,0	2,7	2,6	35,4
7	78,7	13,6	2,4	5,0	47,6
8	63,7	12,9	7,0	16,1	76,7
9	47,8	11,4	6,8	33,8	133,0
10	17,0	5,5	4,7	72,7	381,0
Total	41,2	8,6	4,8	45,3	747,6
Shares of Population	Black African	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White	Total
	%	%	%	%	million
Population	79,4	8,8	2,5	9,2	47,4
Households	76,8	7,8	2,5	12,8	12,5

Source: Lehohla, P. (2008:42)

From the above it can be deduced that, solely from a financial point of view, fewer black families may choose to adopt a child than white families because they may feel they do not have the financial means to care for the child. This is of course despite the fact that they would not be disqualified as adoptive parents simply for financial reasons. It is however understandable that people from lower-socio-economic standings may choose not to adopt because they feel they would not be able to meet all the child's material needs.

Additionally however, it is important to acknowledge that although a large majority of black South Africans are indeed victims of poverty, there is also a rising middle class within the black population (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:3). It is perhaps this group of people that need to be targeted by the recruitment efforts of adoption organisations if same-race adoptions, which are the preferred adoption placement in South Africa, are to be achieved.

2.3.1.3 Race and adoption

With regards to race and adoption, The Children's Act 38 of 2005 does not prohibited trans-racial adoption in any way (Ferreira, 2009:37). Section 240(1)(a) stipulates that all relevant factors, including religious and cultural backgrounds of the child, the biological parents, and

the prospective parents needs to be taken into consideration (Children Act, 38 of 2005:82). Race, is however, not listed as a factor that needs to be considered in adoption practices. It could therefore be assumed that it would be left up to the discretion of the social worker to make a unique decision for every individual adoption case in order to determine whether or not the best interests of the child will be served in a trans-racial adoption.

2.3.1.4 The best interests of the child

The “best interests of the child”, which will be discussed in further detail later, is of primary importance in all matters concerning the child (Children’s Act 38, 2005:18; Constitution of RSA, 1996:1255; Ferreira, 2009:36). Ferreira (2009:36) therefore notes that with the implementation of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005, it is imperative to determine whether or not the best interests of the child will be served by the adoption legislation that allows a child to be adopted by parents of a different race and/or culture. It is for this reason that the practice of trans-racial adoption, and adoption in general, should be viewed through a culturally sensitive lens, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

2.3.2 The Constitution of the Republic South Africa

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, was approved by the Constitutional Court on 4 December 1996 and took effect on 4 February 1997 (info.gov.za). It is the supreme law of the Republic of South Africa; no other law or government action can therefore surpass the provisions of the Constitution (Constitution of RSA, 1996:1243).

The Bill of Rights, found in chapter 2 of the Constitution, provides for all basic human, social and economic rights. Chapter 2, section 28 has specific relevance to this study as it outlines the rights of the child. Section 28, Subsection 1(b) stipulates that every child has the right to family or parental care; or appropriate alternative care in cases where a child has been removed from the family environment (Constitution of RSA, 1996:8). The practice of adoption, as outlined in the Children’s Act 38 2005, can therefore be considered Constitutional as it provides for the right of a child to have access to alternative care in cases where the biological family cannot care for the child.

It is further of vital importance to highlight Section 28, Subsection 2 of the Constitution. It is stated here that in all matters concerning the child, the best interests of the child is of

paramount importance. The “best interests of the child” standard is defined in further detail in section 7 of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005, which will be discussed later in this study.

Of further interest for this study is subsection 31, which stipulates that, every person has the right to embrace their cultural, religious and linguistic communities. People are afforded the right to enjoy and engage with their cultural roots in any way, as long as it does not oppose any of the basic human rights. Even a child who has been adopted trans-racially would have this right. Adoptive parents would thus have the responsibility of allowing their adopted children to be exposed to their cultural origins. Concerning issues regarding the child and adoption, the Children’s Act clearly correlates well with the South African Constitution.

2.4 CURRENT POLICY GOVERNING ADOPTION PRACTICES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Alongside the legislature governing adoption practices in South Africa, it is also necessary to discuss the policy documents that influence adoption. The White Paper for Social Welfare will therefore be explored below.

2.4.1 The White Paper for Social Welfare

A White Paper is defined as “a government report giving information or proposals on an issue” (Soanes & Stevenson, 2009:1646). The White Paper for Social Welfare focuses on key issues within the social welfare service system of South Africa requiring restructuring. It outlines the principles, guidelines, recommendations, and proposed policies and programmes to be implemented in order for a developmental social welfare system to become well established in South Africa (White Paper for Social Welfare of RSA, 1997:1,8). Several sections of the White Paper are worth mentioning when discussing legislature and adoption in South Africa.

2.4.1.1 Out of home care for children in need

Chapter 8, Section 1(22) of the White Paper for Social Welfare discusses out-of-home care. The White paper pinpoints the fact that there are high numbers of children in residential- and foster care, as well as thousands of abandoned children (White Paper for Social Welfare of RSA, 1997:61). The White Paper identifies adoption as being an under-utilised option for child care, while concurrently stressing that it is however one of the most cost-effective means of permanency planning for children in need of care and protection. According to the

White Paper for Social Welfare then, adoption would not only ensure permanency and stability in the lives of children who are without care, but also provides the state with a financially sustainable option for combating the problem of an increasing population of orphaned and abandoned children. In cases of abandonment, adoption therefore provides a financially superior alternative to foster care.

Section 1 (22) further indicates that at the time of the White Paper being formulated, adoption services were regarded as “fragmented between multiple entities and individuals, and not at all governed by accepted standards or guidelines” (White Paper for Social Welfare of RSA, 1997:61). It was stated that the system at the time was not adequate to meet the needs of abandoned children. The White Paper thus clearly called for an extensive reform of legislature governing the care of the child and adoption. It is therefore apparent why the development of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 was seen as an imperative task for the South African Law Reform Commission. The new Children’s Act should therefore serve to provide the practice of adoption with greater structure.

2.4.1.2 Adoption as a means of protection and prevention of harm to children

In addition, section 1(47) focuses specifically on adoption and defines it as a child protection and preventative service (White Paper for Social Welfare of RSA, 1997:66). The Integrated Service Delivery Model (ISDM) clarifies the concepts of preventative and protection services for children as follows:

10.2.1 Services to children

- *Prevention services*

Early childhood development (ECD) services include the establishment and registration of facilities for children under six years old, and the monitoring and evaluation of services. Social Development also works with cases that come before the family advocate

- *Protection services*

Child protection services are aimed at preventing the abuse, neglect and abandonment of children. Programmes are aimed at protecting and promoting the well being of children, especially those in difficult circumstances. These include services to children who are the victims and child labour and the commercial sexual exploitation of children; services to children affected and infected by HIV

and Aids; International social services including inter-country adoption and intermediary services in criminal court cases.

According to the above understanding of prevention- and protection services; **adoption** in cases of abandonment can be regarded as a **preventative** measure as it aims to ensure normal early-childhood-development for young children who would have otherwise grown up in the child-care and protection system. Furthermore, in cases of abandonment, if adoption of the child were carried out as soon as possible it would serve to **protect** the child from further psychosocial harm, promoting his/her overall wellbeing.

2.4.1.3 Permanency planning

It is of further importance to note that adoption is, according to the White Paper, a plan of permanency for those children whose biological families are unable to care for them (White Paper for Social Welfare of RSA, 1997:67). This point of departure corresponds with literature, which defines permanency planning as “an enduring family relationship that provides safety and well-being and offers the legal rights and social status of full family membership” (Casey Family Services, 2005:3). The purpose of permanency planning in childcare services is to ensure that the time spent in foster care is kept to a minimum. This is achieved either through reunification with the biological families or by means of adoption (McDonald, Press, Billings & Moore, 2007:6). It can therefore be concluded that from the outset permanency planning should include adoption as a possible intervention for a child in need of care and protection.

2.4.1.4 Areas of adoption in need of attention

Finally, four specific areas of adoption were identified by the White Paper as requiring attention. For the purposes of this study, attention will be given to two of those points as they pinpoint adoption as an alternative to foster care as well as highlight the importance of viewing adoption through a culturally sensitive lens respectively. The following extract, identified as being relevant to this study, highlights the third area of adoption identified by the White Paper as requiring attention.

Section 1 (47)

- (c) Subsidised adoptions will be considered as an alternative to foster child grants to families who require financial assistance.

(White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997:65)

Although the White Paper for Social Welfare was formulated in 1997, subsidies for adoptive parents are still not available. Foster grants are however still being extensively provided for. This is a critical area for attention, as South Africans in lower-socio-economic situations may potentially chose to adopt rather than foster if they received the same financial support which is received by a foster parent. Literature highlights adoption as the preferred type of placement ensuring stability for children who are without the care of a loving family (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:2). It could therefore be concluded that if adoption is to truly be prioritised over foster care, the government will need to look at ways of making this possible. Financial incentives, as identified in the White paper for Social Welfare, in adoption may provide a means of achieving this ideal.

The following extract, identified as being relevant to this study, highlights the fourth area of adoption identified by the White Paper as requiring attention.

- (d) Traditional systems of adoption will be acknowledged within the framework of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

(White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997:65)

Section 1 (47.d) links up well with chapter 2, section 23 of the White Paper. Chapter 2 stipulates several principles upon which social welfare practice needs to be based, section 23 specifically pinpointing the “appropriateness of services” as a key principle. It reads as follows:

23. Social welfare programmes, methods and approaches will be appropriate, will complement and strengthen people’s efforts, enhance their self-respect and independence and will be responsive to the range of social, cultural and economic conditions in communities. The sustainable use of human, material and the earth’s natural resources will be ensured for the benefit of future generations.

(White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997:12)

It can be deduced that the aim of applying such legislative provisions to social services involving children in need of care and protection is largely to ensure that interventions are culturally sensitive. The challenge of actually implementing such culturally sensitive ideals into adoption practices therefore needs to be recognised and methods of implementation need to be developed.

It is clear from the discussion above that current legislation advocates for adoption as a permanent option for children in need of care and protection, providing them with the

security, stability and permanency they otherwise would not have had. In addition there is a significant overlap between the various legislatures regarding adoption, bringing a degree of uniformity to the practice of adoption.

While exploring adoption through the lens of policy and legislature, it has been necessary to refer to a “child in need of care and protection” on several occasions. It would therefore be necessary to now explore the meaning of this term in more detail.

2.5 A CHILD IN NEED OF CARE AND PROTECTION

In the section that follows, the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 will be examined in further detail, specifically as it relates to the child in need of care and protection. Section 150 outlines the conditions under which a child should be considered to be “in need of care and protection” (Children’s Act 38, 2005:63). For the purposes of this study, attention will only be focused on subsection 1 (a), which states that any child who has been orphaned or abandoned without any visible means of support should be considered to be in need of care and protection.

2.5.1 Right to be cared for

Every child in South Africa has the right to be cared for. This fundamental right of the child is emphasised in the Children’s Act 38 of 2005. In fact, one of the objectives of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005, as stated in section 2(i), is to ensure that every child has family/ parental care; or, in cases where the child is removed from the family, appropriate alternative care (Children’s Act 38, 2005:18). This objective corresponds with the rights of children as stipulated in the South African constitution, section 28 (b) (Constitution of RSA 108, 1996:1255).

As will be discussed below, Section 7 of the Children’s Act details the considerations to be made when determining the best interests of the child. It is of value to consider here, section 7(1)(k) in relation to the objective stated above. This section states that when contemplating the best interests of the child, the need of the child to be raised in a stable family environment is paramount (Children’s Act 38, 2005:21). It is further stipulated that when this is not possible, the need of the child to be raised in a caring family environment is important to consider. Ferreira (2009:239) therefore emphasises the fact that the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 does not simply aim to provide a child who does not have a family, that is, a child who has been orphaned or abandoned, with an alternative family. Rather, the goal is to ensure a stable

and caring family environment for the child. Consequently, the aim is not to provide a family with a child, but to provide a child with a family. It is noted that in particular cases an inter-racial adoption may provide more stability and care than a same-race adoption, and would therefore be considered the superior option.

Additionally, several authors highlight the fact that the population of children who are in need of alternative care are predominantly black, yet adoption practices are underutilised by black South Africans (Bradley & Hawkins-León, 2002:433; Gerrand & Nathane-Tauela, 2013:1,4; Harber, 1999:9; Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:352). Trans-racial adoptions may therefore be the only option for some of these children if a sense of permanency is to be achieved in their lives. Examining which children would be considered adoptable, and therefore available for trans-racial adoption, is therefore the next point of departure.

2.5.2 An adoptable child

According to Section 230, Subsection 3 of the Children's Act (2005:75), a child is adoptable if:

- a. The child is an orphan and has no guardian or caregiver who is willing to adopt the child;
- b. The whereabouts of the child's parent or guardian cannot be established;
- c. The child has been abandoned;
- d. The child's parent or guardian has abused or deliberately neglected the child, or has allowed the child to be abused or deliberately neglected; or
- e. The child is in need of a permanent alternative placement.

For the purposes of this study focus will specifically be placed on section 230(c), which states that if a child has been abandoned that child should be considered to be adoptable (Children's Act 38, 2005:9,75). As mentioned earlier, if a parent has failed, for no apparent reason, to make contact with a child for 3 months, then that child should be considered abandoned and therefore adoptable. Deeming such a child as adoptable would be considered to be in the best interests of the child.

2.5.3 Best interests of the child

Several authors emphasise that when working with children, in any context, all around the world, the "best interests of the child" is of paramount importance and should be the primary

consideration in any decision regarding the child (Children's Act 38, 2005:18; Davies, 2011:50; Thoburn, 1988:19; Vandivere, Malm & Radel, 2009:3). In fact, Davies (2011:50,52) identifies the "best interests of the child" standard as being the foundation upon which all human rights legislature related to the care of the child is based. The Children's Act 38 (2005:18) and article 28 of the South African Constitution (Constitution of RSA 108, 1996:1255) therefore highlight safeguarding the best interests of the child as one of its main objectives.

With specific reference to adoption, section 230(1)(a) of the Children's Act, stipulates that an adoption can only take place if it is in the best interests of the child (Children's Act 38, 2005:82). Additionally, Section 240(2)(a) ensures that the court can only grant the adoption if the proposed adoption is in the child's best interest. Simply considering the best interests of the child may however, seem like a vague foundation upon which to base all decisions regarding children. This is perhaps why several authors note that determining the best interests of the child is not always an easy task (Davies, 2011:52, 53; Ferreira, 2009:119, 246; Thoburn, 1988:190). Perhaps for this reason, Article 7 of the Children's Act 38 (2005:20) provides an in-depth description of the factors to be considered when determining a child's best interests. Such detailed stipulations are an imperative resource for social workers in their decision making processes regarding children, as it provides them with a firm foundation upon which to base their decisions.

Article 7 lists a total of 14 factors that have to be taken into consideration when implementing the "best interests of the child" standard (Children's Act 38, 2005:20,21,22). By taking the factors listed in section 7 into consideration when determining whether or not a particular adoption would be to the benefit or detriment to the wellbeing of a particular child, social workers can thus ensure that each finalised adoption is in the best interests of the child. In addition to the role of the social worker, the final judgment call in terms of an adoption will be made by the courts, which are therefore trusted to consider all relevant factors pertaining to the best interests of the child (Ferreira, 2009:120,253). In cases of abandonment, the Children's Act 38 of 2005 seems to advocate for adoption as being in the child's best interests.

2.5.4 Child abandonment

Child abandonment is recognised as a controversial topic, as the idea of a child being deserted by his/her parents is likely to stir strong emotions. Children who have been abandoned are a vulnerable group; and it is therefore imperative when exploring the topic of children in need of care and protection; that child abandonment is discussed (Philpot, 2006:25).

2.5.4.1 Circumstances under which a child is considered to be abandoned

Section 1 of the Children's Act 38 (2005:9) defines the circumstances under which a child will be considered abandoned. Section 1(a) indicates that a child has been abandoned if it is clear that the parent or other caregiver has deserted the child. Section 1(b) goes further to explain that if a parent or other care giver has, for no apparent reason, failed to make contact with the child for a period of 3 months, the child should be considered to be abandoned. As already discussed, section 150(a) of the Children's Act identifies a child who has been abandoned as a child in need of care and protection (Children's Act 38, 2005:63).

Finally, it is critical to note that according to the Children's Act, section 230(3)(c), a child who has been abandoned in South Africa is considered to be an adoptable child (Children's Act 38, 2005:75). Adoption in cases of abandonment can therefore play a significant role in ensuring that the constitutional rights of these children; to have family or appropriate alternative care, are being met (Children's Act 38, 2005:18). It needs to be recognised that a child who is in foster care, whose parent or caregiver has failed to make contact with the child for no reason, should be considered abandoned. At this point it would have to be acknowledged that the goal of foster care, that is; reunification, has not been met. Such a child should thus be put up for adoption and not remain in foster care.

2.5.4.2 Legal aspects of child abandonment

Although laws concerning child abandonment differ from country to country, according to O'Donovan (2002:347), child abandonment is a crime in the majority of legal systems. In the *United Kingdom* for instance, child abandonment is considered a crime, and parents can therefore not lawfully give up their parental responsibilities in this way (O'Donovan, 2002:348; Philpot, 2006:26). In cases of an unwanted pregnancy, a woman in England can choose to have an abortion, yet she cannot refuse legal motherhood or "legally" abandoned her child (O'Donovan, 2002:360). Consequently, if the mother does abandon her child, she

may be prosecuted if the child suffers, or even be charged with manslaughter if the child dies (Philpot, 2006:26).

At the same time however, some jurisdictions do allow for a form of legal abandonment in which the mother remains anonymous (O'Donovan, 2002:347). In *France*, women are allowed to give birth anonymously, and for example leave their babies at hospitals (O'Donovan, 2002:348,360; Philpot, 2006:26). In the *United States* Safe Haven laws were enacted in the early 2000s in response to the high numbers of infants being abandoned or murdered (Sanger, 2006:753). The purpose of these laws is to offer mothers, who would have otherwise abandoned or murdered their infants, an alternative option – to drop their unwanted baby off at a designated location and then leave with no questions asked. Similarly, in *Germany*, there are “baby flats” or “baby flaps” where babies can be left by their mothers, without any identifying information (O'Donovan, 2002:348,365; Philpot, 2006:26). This ensures that the baby is “safely” abandoned and will not come to any harm, while also reassuring the birth mother that the child will be cared for.

In *South African*, anonymous child abandonment is illegal. Mothers found guilty of this crime may face a variety of criminal charges including concealment of birth and attempted murder. “Baby Safes” or “drop off bins” are also illegal, yet are frequently found in South Africa due to the dramatic increase of abandonment (Blackie, 2014:2).

2.5.4.3 Abandonment in South Africa

In South Africa, child abandonment is unfortunately becoming an increasingly more frequent practice (Admin, 2010; Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:2). After giving birth, many mothers abscond and leave their babies in the hospital; other babies are dumped on rubbish sites, in toilets or public parks – simply left to die. The number of babies and children abandoned in South Africa reportedly rose from 212 in 2008/2009, to being between 500 and 600 during 2009/2010 respectively. In September of 2009 the average number of abandoned babies in Johannesburg South Africa, increased from 10 or 12 per month to 15 per month (Admin, 2010). According to Naidoo (2010), Child Welfare South Africa reported that in 2009 the number of babies being abandoned annually in South Africa was as high as 2000. Gerrand and Nathane-Taulela (2013:2) indicate that this number rose to 2600 in 2011. Despite being an illegal practice, babies are still being abandoned at an exponential rate and unfortunately many of them die. Drop-off bins, although not intended to encourage

abandonment, is potentially a means of trying to ensure that abandoned babies who would have otherwise died, have a chance to survive.

2.5.4.4 Possible reasons for child abandonment

Admin (2010) proposes that child abandonment in South Africa is often a product of poverty and hopelessness. Naidoo (2010) seems to be in agreement with this statement and also points to socio-economic circumstances as greatly influencing child abandonment. It is therefore suggested that if these mothers were to receive the needed assistance, many would decide against abandonment (Admin, 2010). By inference then, there is much that can be done to overcome the problem of abandonment. If abandonment is a consequence of other social problems, it is exactly those problems that need to be tended to in order to work towards a society in which more children are being cared for by their biological parents. In addition to poverty and unemployment, Gerrand and Nathane-Taulela (2013:5) add to the list of reasons for increasing numbers of abandoned children. These include HIV/AIDS; family disintegration; teenage pregnancies; unwanted pregnancies; rape; and the expectation that abandonment will secure a better life for the child.

2.5.4.5 Consequences of child abandonment

Alongside the reasons for abandonment, it is also of course important to consider the effects that abandonment may have on a child. Philpot (2006:25) argues that children who have been abandoned face two considerable difficulties. These difficulties firstly include having a blank medical history, and secondly having to deal with the psychological trauma that often accompanies abandonment. It is recognised that having no medical history puts these children in a precarious position, as they will not know if they are at risk of any hereditary medical conditions. Adoptive parents may be less likely to adopt such a child, as they are not willing to commit to parenting a child who could potentially have physical or mental disabilities of which they were initially unaware.

Philpot (2006:24) goes on to explain that psychological problems caused by abandonment influences both the child and the biological parent. Mothers who abandoned their children may later struggle with feelings of guilt, anxiety and depression. By inference, due to these negative effects on mental health, child abandonment becomes a public health issue, thereby surpassing the field of childcare, impacting upon other areas of society as well. Additionally,

men who were abandoned as babies may have problems in their relationships with women, stemming from the hostility they feel towards their birthmothers.

For the purposes of this study it is also of value to note that children who have been abandoned are the least likely group of children to be adopted (Mokomane & Rochat, 2010:30). Numerous reasons are provided for this; including prospective parents potentially being apprehensive to adopt a child who has a history of abuse and neglect as these children may be more likely to suffer from emotional or behavioural problems. Once abandoned however, a child will normally end up being put up for adoption or will be placed in foster care.

2.5.5 Adoption and foster care

When biological parents are unable or unwilling to care for their children, alternative methods of childcare are required. According to Rondell and Murray (1974:5) and Owusu-Bempah (2010:1) fostering and adoption are the two main mechanisms of alternative child care likely to be utilised.

Connolly and Morris (2012:81) indicate that in the majority of cases where alternative care is needed for children, only short-term care is required until the child can be reunited with his/her family. However, in cases where it is not possible to return the child to their families of origin, longer-term care is needed, and for some children a permanent arrangement through the use of adoption may offer them the stability and security they need (Connolly & Morris, 2012:81,93). This would certainly be the case in situations of abandonment.

According to recent adoption statistics, released by the National Department of Social Development, there were 14 803 legal adoptions in South Africa recorded during the period of 1 April 2004 to 31 March 2010 (Administrator, 2001; Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:348; Yourparenting.co.za, 2013). Consequently, there were approximately 2400 adoptions each year. It should be noted however, that this number is considerably low when compared to other forms of alternative care such as foster- and residential care (Administrator, 2001; Yourparenting.co.za, 2013). Mokomane *et al.* (2012:349) indicate that the number of foster care grants being provided in South Africa increased from 195 454 in 2004 to 474 459 in 2009. In January of 2013 the total number of foster care grants in South Africa was 510 779 (SASSA, 2013:1). This trend appears to be similar in Britain, as Barn and Kirton (2012:25) note that a large majority of the children in care are placed in foster families. American

authors McDonald *et al.* (2007:10) suggest that in order to ensure permanency and stability in the life of a child who has been placed in foster care, planning should, from the outset; include plans for both reunification and adoption.

There are however, several possible reasons for foster care being favoured over adoption. One such reason is likely to be the fact that foster parents receive financial support by means of a foster-care grant, while adoptive parents do not (Mokomane & Rochat, 2010:ix, 33,41). Although the introduction of subsidies for adoptive parents has been discussed before, such as in the White Paper for Social welfare, it has not yet been implemented. People from lower-socio-economic backgrounds, who tend to predominantly come from black communities, may thus be more likely to opt for foster care than adoption. In line with the lack of adoption subsidies, another issue to consider is a perception that adoption is only an option for people of higher socio-economic standing. Such a misconception may have been brought about by the Child Care Act 74 of 1983, which excluded parents without the financial means of caring for a child, from being adoptive parents (Child Care Act 74, 1983:22). The current legislation, the Children's Act 38 of 2005, makes no such limitations however. Anyone with the desire to adopt, even if they are struggling financially, may do so. Such people may then decide to apply for means-tested social assistance (Children's Act 38, 2005:76). Adoption is therefore no longer an option only for the rich and this belief is therefore a fallacy.

American authors Bradley and Hawkins-León (2002:433), advocate for adoption as an alternative for children who have been permanently placed in foster care, as it is likely to provide those children with a more stable home environment. This ideal is reflected in the White Paper for Social Welfare, which advocates for more permanent forms of care for a child (White Paper for Social Welfare of RSA, 1997:61). Similarly, Thoburn (1988:23) indicates that permanence in childcare is advocated for, as it is more likely to provide the child with the love and care needed for healthy development. The author goes on to note that adoption has been a successful means of meeting the needs of those children who are unable to grow up with their biological families (Thoburn, 1988:76). According to Gerrand and Nathane-Taulela (2013:1) and Mokomane *et al.* (2012:347), The Children's Act 38 of 2005 supports adoption as a more permanent form of care for children who have been abandoned. In fact, Section 157(3) states that a very young child who has been orphaned or abandoned should immediately be made available for adoption (Children's Act 38, 2005:71). Mokomane *et al.* (2012:347) further indicate that this support of adoption is motivated by the fact that adoption is the form of alternative care, which is most likely to provide the child with a sense

of permanency. In cases where adoption is selected as the appropriate form of alternative care for a child in need of care and protection; the various types of adoption can be explored in order to determine which type is appropriate for the child in question.

2.6 TYPES OF ADOPTION

There are several different types of adoption and each couple or person will therefore need to decide which type of adoption will work best for him/her. Likewise, social workers will need to decide which type of adoption will best meet the needs of a particular child. Brief definitions of the various forms of adoption will follow below.

Related adoption, as the name suggests, is when the adoptive parents are in some way related to the adoptable child (Administrator, 2001). Such adoptions would include stepparent adoptions; adoption by a biological father who is not married to the mother; or adoption by family members such as aunts, uncles or grandparents (Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:350, Administrator, 2001). It can be noted that there may be varying levels of openness in such adoptions (Yourparenting.co.za, 2013). A **foster adoption** is when a parent who was previously the foster parent of a child decides to legally adopt the child (Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:350).

A **national adoption** would involve a situation in which both the adoptive parents and the adoptable child are South African citizens or have permanent residence in South Africa (Administrator, 2001). An **inter-country adoption** on the other hand, is regulated by the Hague Convention on Inter-country adoptions as well as Chapter 18 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Children's Act 38 of 2005:87; 109; Administrator, 2001). Inter-country adoptions are those adoptions where either the adoptive parents or adopted child are not South African citizens (Administrator, 2001; Yourparenting.co.za, 2013). Davies (2013:50) notes that inter-country adoption is likely to involve the adoption of children from the global south to the global north, or from the east to west and northern Europe.

Same race adoptions are those adoptions where the adoptive child and adoptive parents are from the same race (Administrator, 2001, Yourparenting.co.za, 2013). Alternatively, **Trans-racial adoptions** involve the adoption of a child who is from a difference race to the adoptive parents (Administrator, 2001; Bradley & Hawkins-León, 2002:433; Hollingsworth, 1999:444; Moos & Mwaba, 2007:1115; Yourparenting.co.za, 2013).

2.7 FORMS OF ADOPTION

Adoption may further be classified according to two different forms of adoption, closed or open adoption. The form of adoption is dependent on the type of contact that exists between the biological- and adoptive families after the adoption has taken place. The following section will explore close and open adoptions in further detail.

2.7.1 Closed adoption

In a closed adoption no identifying details of the biological parents or the adoptive parents are given to either party (Administrator, 2001; Vandivere *et al.*, 2009:54; Yourparenting.co.za, 2013). Lindsey (1987:34) explains that the purpose for this type of adoption was/is to protect the privacy of both the adoptive and biological parents. This view is supported by Ge, Natsuaki, Martine, Neiderhiser, Villareal, Reid, Leve, Shaw, Scaramella and Reiss (2008:529) who explain that closed adoptions were believed to protect the adoptive parents' right to privacy while at the same time allowing the biological mother to be protected against the stigma of having had an illegitimate child. In addition, the authors indicate that closed adoptions were also thought to protect the adopted children from societal derision. Similarly, Siegel (2013:43) addresses closed adoptions and indicates that between 1940 and the early 1980s adoption organisations in the United States avidly believed that preserving absolute secrecy and severing all ties with the child's biological family was crucial for the protection of the child's emotional wellbeing.

Siegel (2013:43) states that during the past thirty years, there have been significant changes in infant adoption practices. Ge *et al.* (2008:529) explains that with a decrease in the stigma attached to single-parenthood and illegitimate children; it became more commonplace for a degree of openness to exist between the adopting parties. Although it was previously believed that closed adoptions were in the best interests of the child, this notion has since been greatly disputed. Presently, it has therefore become the norm for there to be varying forms of openness in adoptions (Lindsey, 1987:34; Siegel, 2013:51; Siegel, 2003:409; Vandivere *et al.*, 2009:54).

2.7.2 Open adoption

An open adoption typically involves some form of contact between the birth- and adoptive families (Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010:276). Open adoption does not only refer to contact with the biological parents, but can include any members of the biological family (Ferreira, 2009:131; Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010:276). Such adoptions are likely to include a post-adoption agreement as stipulated in section 234 of the Children's Act 38 (2005:78). Ferreira (2009:131) notes that in cases where the background of the child is known, contact with the biological family can be arranged, granted that such contact will be in the best interests of the child.

2.7.2.1 *Opponents and proponents for open adoption*

Although open adoptions may be more commonplace today, historically, there has been much debate about open versus closed adoptions (Ferreira, 2009:129; Finley, 2008:1; Ge *et al.*, 2008:530).

Ge *et al.* (2008:530) list the arguments of people for and against open adoption. According to the authors, *opponents* of open arrangements feel that contact between the adopted child and birth parents will only serve to encumber bonding and attachment between the child and the adoptive parents. Furthermore, it is suggested that open adoptions will invoke feelings of insecurity about parenting abilities within the minds of adoptive parents as they feel less in control. Finally, the authors indicate that there is concern for the wellbeing of the birthmother, who will not be able to successfully grieve the loss of her child and therefore come to terms with the separation. Conversely, *proponents* of open adoption are of the opinion that adopted children can benefit from the information provided about their biological parents and origins. The adoptive parents have the opportunity of gaining information about the child's medical and mental health histories; their cultural backgrounds and the reasons the child was put up for adoption. It is believed that this type of information will help adoptive parents feel more, and not less, secure in their abilities to parent the adopted child. Finally, it is suggested that the open adoption arrangement will also be beneficial to the birth mother, as the knowledge that the child is being well cared for will help her in finding closure and moving on.

2.7.2.2 Open adoptions defined as existing along a continuum

Siegel (2003:416) points out that open adoption is not an easily defined concept, as there are differing views between people who write about the phenomenon, as well as different opinions between adoptive parents. Siegel (2003:43) therefore describes open adoptions as existing along a continuum. Open adoptions can therefore fall anywhere between minimal disclosure of identifying information through a third party (usually the adoption organisation), to full disclosure of all identifying information as well as on-going face to face contact between the adoptive and biological families.

In an earlier text Siegel (2003:416) defines this continuum in more detail. It is suggested that open adoption be viewed as being made up of four dimensions, namely type; frequency; timing; and participants. **Participants** would refer to the fact that the openness in adoption does not necessarily always include the birth mother as the birth family member with whom the adoptive parents would have contact (Siegel, 2003:410). Adoptive parents may have contact with any member of the biological family members, and this would constitute as openness within the adoption. **Timing** refers to the reality that the amount information shared or amount of contact had between the two parties may vary over time. Early on in the adoption there may tend to be qualitatively and quantitatively more information shared between the two parties than later on in the adoption. **Frequency** is relatively self-explanatory, referring to the regularity of contact between biological family members and the adoptive family. Finally, **type** indicates that the manner in which the two parties may have contact with one another may vary greatly. Contact can be anything from face-to-face meetings, letters or phone calls. Each of these dimensions can then be measured along a continuum, its position on the continuum constantly moving with time. The author explains that this definition includes a limitless spectrum of arrangements for contact that can be made. Palacios and Brodzinsky (2010:276) similarly mention that open adoptions differ according to the type, frequency and intensity of the contact between the various participants. Table 2.2 is however a personal attempt to represent the continuum proposed by Siegel (2003).

Table 2.2: Degree of openness in adoption

CONTACT BETWEEN ADOPTIVE-AND BIOLOGICAL PARENTS	DIFFERENT FORMS OF ADOPTION			
	Open	Semi-open	Semi-closed	Closed
Participants involved in contact	Biological parents and siblings	Extended family members such as aunts, Uncles, cousins, grandparents	Adoption organisation or friends of biological parents and family that have information to be shared	None
Type of contact	Face-face AND Letters/email/teleph one calls AND Full identifying information	Letters/email/telephone calls Photos Basic Identifying information	Letters/ photos shared via adoption organisation or other 3 rd party Basic identifying information	None
Frequency of contact	Regular, Very Often	Irregular, Now and again	At birth	Never

2.7.2.3 The need for openness to be tailored to each adoption case

Bridge (1994:147) asserts that, due to individual circumstances and preferences, contact should be specifically tailored to suit each person's situation. Louw (2003:256) and Ryburn (1994:75,99) therefore indicate that flexibility in open adoptions is key, as the frequency and duration of contact will vary, in accordance with the best interests of the child. Similarly, McRoy *et al.* (1988:125) and Siegel (2003:50) have suggested that no type of adoption should be regarded as superior to another, as each situation and family is unique. Siegel (2003:416) therefore appropriately indicates that social workers should facilitate openness in adoptions in the form of a post adoption agreement, ensuring the unique needs within every case are met. The Children's Act (2005:200) thus makes provisions for such a post-adoption agreement to be facilitated by adoption social workers.

2.7.2.4 Openness and abandonment

It is important to acknowledge that in cases of abandonment, open adoptions are of course not always possible (Ferreira, 2009:132). The unlikelihood of openness in adoption in cases of abandonment is due to the fact that biological parents of abandoned children are often

difficult to locate. If biological parents are often never found, “openness” in the adoption of the abandoned child will be impossibility, as no one will have any information regarding the biological parents. Therefore, despite an apparent shift towards open adoption, in cases of abandonment open adoptions will rarely be an option, due to the absence of identifying details of the biological parents. This could pose a potential problem for the adoption of abandoned children, as many prospective adoptive parents may be hesitant to adopt a child without any knowledge of their background (Banghan, Johnson & Liyao, 1998:473).

From the discussion above it should become clear that within any adoption, that there are three important parties whose needs and wants need to be considered – the biological parents, the adoptive parents and the adopted child. This is otherwise known as the adoption triangle.

2.8 THE ADOPTION TRIAD/TRIANGLE AND THE PROCESS OF ADOPTION

The adoption process is described by American authors McDonald *et al.* (2007:11) as consisting of various steps and stages. These steps and stages include “changing the case plan goal from reunification to adoption; terminating parental rights; identifying a resource family; trying placement in a adoption family; and finally the finalizing of the adoption”. It is necessary to realise that with the process of any adoption there are three different parties to be considered. Lindsey (1987:29) sheds light on the three different parties who are involved in the adoption process and therefore form the adoption triad or triangle. Adoption always begins with the **birthparents**, people who decide that they would not be able, or willing, to parent a child and therefore rather opt to place their child up for adoption. The **prospective adoptive parents** are the second party to be considered within the adoption triangle. The prospective adoptive parents may have decided to adopt for a variety of reason, including infertility. Finally, the third party within the triangle is of course the **child** who has been put up for adoption (Lindsey, 1987:34).

The concept of the adoption triangle illustrates the point that in each adoption case, the aim should be to meet the needs of all three parties, as each side of the triangle is important (Lindsey, 1987:38, O’Hara, 1988:25). Adoption social workers therefore have a unique task of working with three parties embarking on three very different paths. The process of adoption will therefore be explored as it relates to the biological parents and the prospective adoptive parents. Throughout this section it may be noted that many of the sources used are

Internet sources. This is due to the fact that there is a shortage of literature examining the process of adoption needing to be followed by the various parties of the adoption triangle.

2.8.1 The biological parents

The biological parents of course make up a crucial facet of the adoption triangle. Parents who are thinking of giving their child up for adoption often require a lot of support and guidance as it is a weighty decision that needs to be carefully examined in order to ensure it is the right decision for the particular parents. In the following section the process of adoption, as it relates to the biological parents will be explored.

2.8.1.1 Options counselling and decision of adoption

Options counselling plays a pivotal role in guiding the biological parents through the decision making process about whether or not adoption is the best route for them. When faced with an unwanted pregnancy, a birth mother may therefore decide to make contact with an adoption social worker (Administrator, 2001). Such a social worker may work for the government, or a private organisation that facilitates adoptions or otherwise provides services to pregnant women.

At this point the birth mother should be offered options counselling by the social worker. Such counselling should present the birth mother with all the options available to her – keeping the child, abortion, foster care, or adoption – so that she can make an informed decision regarding her unborn child (Administrator, 2001). The birth mother should thus be given the opportunity to weigh up the long and short-term legal-, financial-, physical- and emotional implications of all her options. Lindsey (1987:50,96) emphasises the importance of counselling for the birth mother, long before and after the adoption takes place, as it is often the birth mother for whom the experience is most painful.

It can thus safely be assumed that social workers and other health professionals can play a crucial role in supporting the biological parents at this time. Deciding to give up a child will more often than not be a poignant moment in the biological parents' lives, as it is a decision they will forever carry. If provided with the appropriate psychological counsel, the biological parents will have an increased probability of processing their decision in a healthy manner.

2.8.1.2 Consent to adopt provided by biological parents

Consent is the written permission to adopt a child, given by the biological parents or, in cases where there are no biological parents, by a guardian (Justice.gov.za, 2005). Section 233 of The Children's Act addresses the issue of consent for adoption. It stipulates that consent must be given by both parents, regardless of whether or not they are married (Children's Act 38, 2005:77; Justice.gov.za, 2005). In cases where there are no parents the child's guardian must give consent, and if the child is older than the age of 10, the child will also need to give consent (Children's Act 38, 2005:77; Justice.gov.za, 2005).

The biological parent has the right, according to section 233(3), to specify the name of a particular person they wish to adopt the child (Children's Act 38, 2005:77). The courts will then consider whether that person is a suitable adoptive parent according to section 231 (Administrator, 2001; Children's Act 38, 2005:75). The courts are very involved in this process, as a presiding officer must witness consent being signed by the appropriate person (Children's Act 38, 2005:77,78). Furthermore, the social worker has the obligation to counsel the biological parents before consent is given in order to ensure they fully comprehend the consequences of doing so (Children's Act 38, 2005:77).

According to Justice.gov.za (2005) the biological parent or guardian will need to complete a Form 61 in order to give the needed consent to put the child up for adoption. A child who is of age or maturity to give consent will complete a Form 62 (Justice.gov.za, 2005). These forms are not available online and would need to be obtained via an accredited adoption organisation or the Department of social development.

Section 236 of the Children's Act indicates under which conditions the consent of the parents is not required. Of significance to this study is section 236 (1)(b) which states that a parents' consent is not required in cases where the child was abandoned (Children's Act 38, 2005:79). Such a child should therefore immediately be put up for adoption, in accordance with the Children's Act 38 of 2005 as discussed earlier.

After giving consent for the adoption, the biological parents have a 60-day period within which they may change their minds (Children's Act 38, 2005:78; Justice.gov.za, 2005). During this time the child may already be in the care of the adoptive parents, or in alternative temporary care (Administrator, 2001). Withdrawal of consent will need to be done in writing and the parent or guardian will need to complete a Form 64 (Justice.gov.za, 2005).

Birthparents do change their minds, and this is one of the reasons why counselling is so important for both the birthparents and the prospective adoptive parents (Lindsey, 1987:124; O'Hara, 1988:17,19). Counselling for the birthparent can ensure that they make the correct decision, a decision they are most comfortable with, and therefore reduce the risk of them changing their minds later on (Lindsey, 1987:124,125). While counselling for prospective adoptive parents, will guide them through the grief experienced should a birthparent change their mind (Lindsey, 1987:124).

2.8.1.3 Health care and guidance for biological mother

If she has made the decision to put her child up for adoption, the birth mother may receive a variety of services aimed towards adequately meeting her physical and emotional health needs. Such service may include “medical and antenatal care, HIV counselling or treatment, or be accommodated in a home for expectant mothers”, depending on her specific needs. Furthermore, during this time, the organisation may advise the biological mother on her options regarding the selection of appropriate adoptive parents, determining the contents of the adoption plan/agreement, and the form of adoption (i.e. open or closed) she will want (Administrator, 2001).

It is clear that the social worker facilitating an adoption has the opportunity to walk a long path with the biological parents, as there are several details that need to be completed before an adoption can be finalised. However, things rarely happen as smoothly in practice as they are described in literature. Biological parents enter the adoption process at different times – some only after they have already given birth – and not everyone will be eager to receive counselling or guidance from the social workers, but will simply want to conclude the technical aspects of the adoption as soon as possible. Every case is unique, and social workers therefore need to be able to work with each case as it presents itself – providing the best service to the biological parents they possibly can.

2.8.2 Prospective adoptive parents

Parents wanting to adopt, the second important party in the adoption triangle, also require support and guidance throughout the adoption process. They are therefore an important facet of the adoption triangle to consider when exploring the adoption process.

The only way to legally adopt a child in South Africa is by working through an accredited adoption organisation or with the assistance of an adoption social worker (Administrator, 2001; Info.gov.za, 2007; Services.gov.za 2013; Yourparenting.co.za, 2013). Both the Adoption organisation, and the adoption social worker, will need to be functioning within the statutory accredited adoption system (Administrator, 2001).

Prospective parents are usually required to submit an application to their adoption organisation or social worker (Administrator, 2001, Yourparenting.co.za, 2013). It should be noted that different organisations often have different requirements for such an application and it would therefore be of value for an applicant to first make contact with the particular organisation in order to clarify their specific criterion for applications (Administrator, 2001; Yourparenting.co.za, 2013).

The following section will explore the process of adoption as it relates to the prospective adoptive parents in closer detail.

2.8.2.1 *Who may adopt*

Section 231 of the Children's Act 38 (2005:75) provides a list of persons who would be eligible to become adoptive parents (Children's Act 38, 2005:75; Info.gov.za, 2007). This list includes married persons, unmarried couples living together, single persons, divorced persons, step parents, widowers, foster parents and biological fathers who are not married to the biological mothers (Children's Act 38, 2005:75; Info.gov.za, 2007). The Children's Act does therefore not discriminate against any persons based on their existing relationships, or lack thereof. Section 231(2) explains that a prospective adoptive parent would need to be deemed a fit and proper parent, and properly assessed by an adoption social worker in order to become an adoptive parent (Children's Act 38, 2005:75).

It is important to acknowledge that the Children's Act 38 (2005:76) prohibits a person from being disqualified from adopting a child based on their financial status. If needed however, it may be recommended that social assistance in the form of a childcare grant be granted to the prospective parents (Children's Act 38, 2005:76; Info.gov.za, 2007). The perception that adoption is only for higher-socio-economic individuals is therefore a fallacy.

When the child is made available for adoption, Section 7 of the Children's Act 38 (2005:76) makes provision for foster parents and/or the biological father of the child to be considered as

prospective adoptive parents. If, after 30 days after being served with a notice by the sheriff that the child is adoptable, the biological father and/ or foster parents have not applied for the adoption, then it will be taken for granted that neither of those parties are interested in becoming the adoptive parents. Furthermore, Section 8 makes provisions for other family members of the child to be considered as prospective parents when that child becomes available for adoption (Children's Act 38, 2005:76). These provisions are in accordance with the objective of the Children's Act to promote the preservation and strengthening of families (Children's Act 38, 2005:18).

Finally, it is of importance, for the purposes of this study, to consider section 231(3) of the Children's Act. This section states that in the assessment of an adoptive parent, the social worker may take cultural and community diversity of the adoptable child and prospective parents into consideration during placement (Children's Act 38, 2005:76). By inference, it would be up to the discretion of the social worker to decide whether or not a trans-racial placement would be in the best interests of the particular child. It would therefore be fair to assume that in order to make such a decision, social workers need to be able to assess whether or not the prospective parents are willing and/or able to take on the responsibility of parenting a child from a different race. It could be deduced that social workers in this field would therefore have a responsibility of expanding their cultural competence. Social workers therefore have a responsibility towards cultivating a sense of cultural competence amongst adoptive parents so that the parents can, through increased self-awareness, make an informed decision regarding their willingness to adopt trans-racially.

2.8.2.2 Reasons for wanting to adopt

In order to gain a holistic view of adoption it is important to move away from the legal aspects of the practice, and shift attention towards considerations regarding the reasons why people decide to adopt (Yourparenting.co.za, 2013). People who opt to adopt a child do so for numerous reasons. Malm and Weti (2010:186-189) and Yourparenting.co.za (2013) highlights several such examples, including “philanthropic reasons; infertility; single people who have always wanted to be parents; a life-long desire to adopt or simply to increase the size of their family; prior connection to a specific child and prior exposure to adoption” .

Considering the reasons for adoption is an important step in the adoption process, as it will assist the social worker in establishing whether the proposed adoption is the best available

option for the prospective parents, and whether the adoption would be in the best interests of the child (Malm & Wetli, 2010:185; Yourparenting.co.za, 2013). In addition, Malm and Wetli (2010:185,203) explain that understanding the motivations of adoptive parents for wanting to adopt, can also assist adoption organisations in developing appropriate recruitment programs. Understanding why certain groups of people chose to adopt can guide adoption organisations in devising strategies of recruitment that target prospective adoptive parents' possible motivations and desires to choose adoption.

Infertility is perhaps an important area to explore when considering the reasons for adoption as infertility is laden with emotions that need to be dealt with before adoption can be explored. Fleming and Burry (1988:39) discuss the psychological impact of infertility, indicating feelings of "sadness; anger; frustration; inferiority; loneliness; guilt and fear" as emotions that people experiencing infertility often go through. McRoy *et al.* (1988:2) also note the potential trauma linked with infertility, as couples often have to deal with the painful reality of not being able to conceive.

It is of value to consider a study examined by Fleming and Burry (1988:39), in which the experiences of couples going through infertility were explored. Some couples felt that their emotional functioning had been negatively affected and that their marriages had suffered as a result; while others felt that the infertility had brought them closer together as a couple. Similarly, Mahlstedt and Johnson (1988:68) note that the emotional suffering experienced by some couples can often affect their overall well-being. American authors Malm and Weltli (2010:186) state that there is a lack of research focussing on infertile couples who chose to adopt and the consequent impact of infertility on the parent and family wellbeing. The authors indicate however that infertility itself, and the impact thereof on family wellbeing, has been well researched. Research results referred to by the authors, point towards both positive and negative outcomes of infertility on parenting abilities.

Infertility is clearly a complex issue that impacts on a couple's wellbeing in various ways. It is therefore clear why prospective parents are required to undergo fertility counselling prior to the adoption process. It is something that adoptive parents would have to deal with before they would be ready to begin engaging with the adoption process. It is therefore the social worker's responsibility, not only to provide the appropriate counselling or referral if necessary, but also to determine their readiness.

2.8.2.3 *The screening process*

All prospective parents will need to undergo a screening and preparation process, a process, which may again differ from organisation to organisation (Administrator, 2001; Info.gov.za, 2007; Yourparenting.co.za, 2013). The screening process will usually include orientation meetings; interviews with social workers, including interviews focusing on infertility, background, marriage, extended family support, parenting, finances, culture and home environment; full medical examinations; marriage and psychological assessments; home visits; police clearance; references and a preparation course (Administrator, 2001; Info.gov.za, 2007).

American authors Matthews and Cramer (2006:327) explain that although there are basic components that need to be included in all screening processes, each one will nevertheless be tailored to match the uniqueness of every prospective parent. In an attempt to simplify the often-overwhelming adoption process, Parent (2011) provides a 10-step list of what the screening process involves. This includes the following; “orientation session where all the details are explained, complete the application forms and return them to the organisation, complete a personal profile and return it to the organisation, apply for a police clearance certificate, undergo psychometric testing; an interview with a social worker, an interview with a panel of social workers; a home visit by a social worker, final approval, an finally waiting for baby to arrive”.

Such a screening process allows for the social workers to better get to know the prospective adopters as a family (Administrator, 2001; Matthews & Cramer, 006:327). The length of this process can take anything from four to six months, but differs from case to case (Info.gov.za, 2007). When the screening process has been completed, and if the prospective parents have been successful in their application, they will be placed on a waiting list of prospective adoption parents (Administrator, 2001; Yourparenting.co.za, 2013). The prospective parents may specify the “type of child” they are willing to adopt. Such specifications may include things such as race, age, sex, disabilities and medical conditions. The adoption organisations will then begin the process of matching the prospective parents with a suitable child (Administrator, 2001).

The final placement of a child in the care of adoptive parents is a legal process carried out by the Children’s Courts. Once the child has been with the adoptive parents for a period of time

and the social worker has assessed the adoption as being in the best interests of the child, the adoption is finalised through the Children's Court (Administrator, 2001; Yourparenting.co.za, 2013). The child has then, for all intents and purposes, become the legal child of the adoptive parents (Administrator, 2001).

It is apparent that the social worker plays a central role in carrying out the adoption process. The role of the social worker therefore needs to be explored in further detail.

2.9 ROLE OF THE SOCIAL WORKER

The role of the social worker within the adoption process is crucial as they are, according to the Children's Act 38 of 2005, the only ones who may facilitate adoptions and work with each component of the adoption triangle. Because of their central role, the role of the social worker will receive individualised attention in the section that follows.

2.9.1 Role of caseworker – persons allowed carrying out an adoption

It was mentioned earlier that only an accredited adoption organisation or adoption social worker is able to carry out the adoption process (Administrator, 2001). This is in accordance with Section 250(1) of the Children's Act which states that only certain people are allowed to provide adoption services, as well as section 1 (47) of the White Paper for Social Welfare which indicates that adoption is a specialised service requiring the expertise of accredited adoption social workers functioning within a statutory adoption system (Children's Act 38, 2005:86; Yourparenting.co.za, 2013; White Paper on Social Welfare, 1997:65). These persons include child protection organisations accredited in terms of section 251 to provide adoption services; adoption social workers in private practice accredited in terms of section 252; the Central Authority in cases of inter-country adoption; or a child protection organisation accredited in terms of section 259 to provide inter-country adoption services (Children's Act 38 of 2005, 86, 87; Yourparenting.co.za, 2013).

Administrator (2001) notes that during the screening and preparation process many adoption organisations are often criticised for all the bureaucratic procedures applicants have to go through. It is however pointed out, that it is the social worker that is completely responsible for making a decision about the child's future. The complicated and arduous process can therefore make sense when it is recognised as a necessity to ensure that the child is placed in the care of the most appropriate parents.

2.9.2 Role of counsellor for all parties of the adoption triangle

In terms of counselling, the social worker also has a key role to play in the lives of both the biological parents and the prospective adoptive parents, and perhaps later on in the life of the adopted child as well.

2.9.2.1 Counselling the biological parents

Initially, the social worker will provide the options counselling for the birth mother to ensure that she makes a decision about her pregnancy that she is most comfortable with, ensuring that she fully understands the consequences of adoption (Administrator, 2001). Additionally, the social worker will usually guide the biological parents in setting up a post adoption agreement in terms of Section 234 of the Children's Act (Administrator, 2001).

It was mentioned earlier that given the difficulty of adoption, it is incredibly important that the birth mother receive counselling, long before and after the adoption takes place as it is often the birth mother for whom the process is most difficult (Lindsey 1987:50,96). Most organisations should therefore provide on-going support to their birth mothers.

2.9.2.2 Counselling the prospective parents

Regarding the prospective adoptive parents, the social worker has a central role in the screening and preparation process (Administrator, 2001). As mentioned earlier, this process can take a couple of months and usually involves several counselling sessions including marriage and psychological assessments, as well as fertility counselling (Administrator, 2001). The social workers are therefore likely to walk a long path with the adoptive parents.

Farber, Timberlake, Mudd and Cullen (2003:176) acknowledge that the children available for adoption are often regarded as the most vulnerable group within the adoption triangle. They note however, that the prospective parents are also a considerably vulnerable group as they are confronted with several stressful situations unique to the adoptive parent. The authors identify several such situations, including having to tell other people about their decision to adopt; having to tell their child they are adopted; navigating potential relationships with the biological family; understanding their financial obligations as well as their parental rights and responsibilities and finally having to make the final commitment to adopt. In order to assist prospective adoptive parents, adoption organisations therefore need to offer orientation

programs that should help the parents to make informed decisions regarding their adoption (Farber *et al.*, 2003:175).

2.9.2.3 *Counselling the adopted child*

There are several possible reasons why an adopted child may return to the social worker at a later stage for counselling purposes. The child may have a desire to trace his/her biological parents, in which case pre- and post counselling would need to be provided as it will most likely be an emotionally charged experience. Additionally, an adopted child may struggle with identity issues associated with the fact that they were adopted. In such cases they may also be inclined to seek out the services of the social worker that initially facilitated their adoption.

2.9.3 Role of broker in legal proceedings

The role of a broker is to enable people to make use of the appropriate services by providing needed information and guidance (Johnson & Yanca, 2007:226). It has already been noted that adoption is a legal process and once again, the social worker has fundamental role to fulfil within the legal proceedings that need to take place. Working with the courts, the social worker needs to assist in identifying the identity of the biological parents as well as obtaining consent for the adoption from them (Administrator, 2001). In cases where the birth mother is a minor, the social worker will assist in the interactions with her guardians, as it is their legal responsibility to provide the needed consent (Administrator, 2001).

The social worker therefore acts as a constant liaison between all parties of the adoption triangle and the courts. Successfully taking on this role is likely to take a lot of pressure off both the adoptive and biological parents, as they have the social workers guiding them through a possibly daunting process.

2.9.4 Administrative role – Register for Adoptable Children and Prospective Adoptive Parents

RACAP is the Register for Adoptable Children and Prospective Adoptive Parents. The aim of keeping such a register is to keep record of adoptable children as well as prospective adoptive parents who have been deemed fit (Children's Act 38, 2005:76; Ferreira, 2009:271). This network therefore allows for prospective adoptive parents to be easily matched with adoptable

children. Ferreira (2009:271) is of the opinion that if this register is properly maintained, the speed of the adoption process will be significantly improved. The waiting period for both the adoptive children and adoptive parents will be considerably shorter. Social workers have the responsibility of maintaining this register.

2.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the practice of adoption in South Africa, as an alternative form of care for children who are not able to live with their biological parents. Through political and legislative reform South Africa has reached a point in which trans-racial adoption has become a possibility and a reality. In addition, the formulation and implementation of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 has provided social workers working in the field of adoption with greater structure and comprehensive guidelines in order to ensure the best interests of the child are being met with each adoption. Although foster care is still a widely used option of alternative care in South Africa, adoption has theoretically been identified as a preferred option ensuring permanency and stability in the life of the child. In cases of abandonment there should be no hesitation in making the child available for adoption.

A more in-depth understanding of the process of adoption has been developed, and the unique role of the social worker was identified. It is apparent that adoption is a multifaceted, complex process. The unique interests of three different parties need to be considered in each case, and it can therefore easily become complicated. Social workers are key role players in this process and as always have a responsibility to ensure they provide services to the best of their abilities.

In the next chapter trans-racial adoption will be explored from an ethnic sensitive perspective. A more comprehensive understanding of trans-racial adoptions will be developed and the challenges thereof examined.

CHAPTER 3

TRANS-RACIAL ADOPTION FROM AN ETHNIC SENSITIVE PERSPECTIVE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The dispute of ethnicity and race within the realm of adoptive practices is a longstanding one. Literature on trans-racial adoption has tended to predominantly focus on white parents (majority) adopting children from minority racial/ethnic groups (Lee, 2003:712; Roby & Shaw, 2006:203; Small, 1991:63; Wainwright & Ridley, 2012:50). Inevitably, opinions about such adoptions have varied significantly; some people viewing it in a positive light, while others strictly object to the practice (De Haymes & Simon, 2003:252; Kirton, 1998:7; Roby & Shaw, 2006:203; Rondell & Murray, 1972:8; Small, 1991:66; Wainwright & Ridley, 2012:50). Social workers working in the field of adoption are therefore often faced with difficult decisions when confronted with the questions of race and culture within adoption. They are given the monumental task of having to strike a balance between the child's need for permanency and stability, and their potential racial and cultural needs (Connolly & Morris, 2012:105).

According to Mokomane and Rochat (2010:20), approximately 1.7 million children in South Africa are adoptable. With regards to race, white children are more readily adopted in South Africa than their black, Indian and coloured counterparts (Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:351; Mokomane & Rochat, 2010:28). It is however indicated that this is despite the fact that the large majority of adoptable children are black. Furthermore, in contrast to the population of adoptable children, it is noted that within the population of prospective adoptive parents, the black community are largely under-represented (Mokomane & Rochat, 2012:354). In other words, the majority of children available for adoption are black, yet the majority of parents wanting to adopt are white.

In seeking a solution for this mismatch between "supply and demand", trans-racial adoption is often considered as an alternative option to same-race adoptions. McRoy and Griffin (2012:38) highlight that this is supported by the fact that many people consider it unacceptable that a child would be denied a happy home on the grounds of a same-race family not being available.

Clearly, issues of race and adoption are often inextricably intertwined. In a culturally and racially rich country such as South Africa, it is therefore crucial that social workers – the people responsible for implementing adoption policies and practices – develop a better understanding of adoption from an ethnic-sensitive perspective.

This chapter will address the second objective of this study, providing an in-depth description of trans-racial adoption in order to develop a clear understanding of the challenges often encountered by social workers and adoptive parents. Approaching trans-racial adoption from an ethnic sensitive perspective will be highlighted as an essential tool in achieving success within the practice of trans-racial adoption. Attention will also be given to the unique case of an abandoned child within the framework of trans-racial adoptions.

3.2 BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF TRANS-RACIAL ADOPTION

Historically, there has been strong opposition to trans-racial adoption in many parts of the world (Hansen & Pollack, 2007:4; Harber, 1999:9; Hollingsworth, 1999:443; Lee, 2003:713; Simon & Alstein, 2000:37; Small, 1991:62). According to Hollingsworth (2008:100) the topic of trans-racial adoption has been plagued by controversy since the practice significantly increased in the 1960s and 1970s. In America, such opposition was primarily led by the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) and by leaders of black political organisations, who described the practice as a form of genocide, which deprived the black community of its most valuable future resource – its children (Hansen & Pollack, 2007:6; Simon & Alstein, 2000:37). Both black and native-American groups were against trans-racial adoptions as they felt that white families would not be able to raise black or Indian children in an environment that would adequately provide for the opportunity to retain ethnic identity. In support of this, the president of the NABSW, William T. Merrit, made the following statement in 1971: “Black children should be placed only with black families, whether in foster care or for adoption” (Simon & Alstein, 2000:37). The feeling was thus; that ethnicity, not permanency of placement, should be the number one priority when deciding on alternative care for children.

Traditionally, the adoption of black children occurred within the black communities, without any input of outside organisations (Carter-Black, 2002:342,343). According to the authors, the cultural practice of these informal adoptions worked well for many years. The role of

private adoption organisations in the 1920s was thus solely to place white babies with white adoptive parents. It is reported that until the 1930s, child welfare services primarily operated according to policies of racial exclusion. When the child welfare system did eventually start providing services to the black community, it was only because of continued informal adoptions that the child welfare system did not immediately become overwhelmed. Hollingsworth (1998:105) notes that it was only in the 1950s, after World War II and the Korean War left many children without families, that cross-cultural and racial adoptions began to occur.

Decades later, in the 1960s and 1970s, social; political and economic changes greatly altered the face of adoption – the legalisation of abortion, use of contraceptives and less stigma attached to out-of-wedlock childbirth; all contributed to a decrease in the numbers of healthy white babies available for adoption (Carter-Black, 2002:343; Hollingsworth, 1998:105). The consequential mismatch between the large number of white parents wanting to adopt and the small number of white babies available for adoption is often pinpointed as one of the most prominent reasons for the upsurge of trans-racial adoptions (Carter-Black, 2007:343; Hollingsworth, 2008:100). Other possible motivations for the rise in trans-racial adoptions are those more altruistic in nature – white parents wanting to provide a child, who would have otherwise been in foster care or an orphanage, with a permanent home (Hollingsworth, 2008:100). A final reason provided by the authors is that white families are motivated to reduce racism by integrating their own families.

Whatever the reasons for adopting trans-racially however, the practise has long been cloaked by debates between groups for and against it (Hollingsworth, 2008:101). Later in the chapter, the specific arguments of both sides will be discussed in further detail.

3.3 TRANS-RACIAL ADOPTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

As discussed in the previous chapter, trans-racial adoption in South Africa was forbidden by apartheid legislature (Harber, 1999:10). With the fall of the apartheid regime however, trans-racial adoption became a possibility, yet remained a controversial and complex area of child care practice worldwide, especially with regards to the adoption of black children by white families (Harber, 1999:10; Perry, 2011:855,856; Wainwright & Ridley, 2012:50).

In the previous chapter it was confirmed that The Children's Act 38 of 2005 identifies adoption as the superior form of alternative care for abandoned children (Gerrand & Nathane-

Taulela, 2013:1; Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:347). Mokomane *et al.* (2012:347) highlights the fact that this support for adoption is grounded in the knowledge that adoption is more likely to provide abandoned children with the sense of permanency that they require for healthy development. Despite a comprehensive legislative framework supporting adoption however, court-ordered adoptions in South Africa are considered to be low when compared to the large number of children in foster care (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:1; Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:348,355; Mokomane 2010:vii). In fact, adoption remains the most underutilised childcare practice in South Africa (Mokomane & Rochat, 2012:355; Mokomane & Rochat, 2010:vii, 11; White Paper for Social Welfare of RSA, 1997:61).

Furthermore, according to the National Adoptions Register, national adoptions in South Africa during 2004-2009 mostly involved the adoption of white children (Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:352). In support of this statement, Gerrand and Nathane-Taulela (2013:4) explain that the majority of children being adopted are white children being adopted by stepparents. Additionally, adoption practices are said to be under-utilised by the black, majority population of South Africa (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:1; Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:352). This is unfortunately despite the fact that the high numbers of children in the childcare and protection system who are eligible for adoption are black (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:4; Harber, 1999:9; Blackie, 2013:2).

Moreover, rates of trans-racial adoptions are also reportedly low in South Africa. Mokomane and Rochat (2010:23) indicate that this may simply be a reflection of the policies of the Department of Social Development, which prioritises same-race adoptions. Similarly, Gerrand and Nathane-Taulela (2012:5) note that racial categorisation is still common in adoptive practices. This is of course despite the fact that there are no legal barriers to trans-racial adoptions stipulated in the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Mokomane & Rochat, 2010:23; Children Act, 38 of 2005:82). Additionally, although same-race adoptions are favoured, Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela (2013:4) note that there are few white, coloured or Indian children available for unrelated adoptions. In the rare instances of children from these races being available, they are quickly matched with adoptive parents of the same race who would be placed on the waiting list a long time before.

The findings above correspond with a recent study released by the National Adoption Coalition of South Africa, which indicated that during November 2013 there were approximately 297 unmatched parents on the Register for Adoptable Children and Parents.

190 of these parents were white and only 14 were black. Conversely, of the 428 unmatched children on the register, 398 were black and only 3 were white. It was further noted that most of the parents were seeking to adopt a child of the same race as themselves (Blackie, 2013:2).

3.3.1 Barriers to national, same-race adoptions within the black population of South Africa

Adoption practices in South Africa reflect a very euro-centric construct of adoption, possibly creating barriers to national same-race adoption within the black population as it is likely to differ significantly from the traditional understanding many black South Africans may have of the practice. As Gerrand and Nathane-Taulela (2013:5) point out, given the complex and multicultural makeup of South African society, same-race adoptions are rarely simple and straightforward.

Adoption is one of the most underutilised childcare practices in South Africa (Mokomane & Rochat, 2012:355; Mokomane & Rochat, 2010:49). The authors suggest that one of the reasons for this may be related to socio-cultural issues around lineage within the African community, which deems adoption unnecessary. Mokomane (2011:355) and Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela (2013: 6) indicates that black South Africans regard adoption as a practice that would destroy any connection the child might have had to his or her family of origin and clan roots. Consequently there would be confusion regarding what the surname of the child should be as well as to which clan he/she would belong. It is further noted by Mokomane & Rochat (2010:26, 50) that adoption practices are at odds with the African practice of ancestor worship. It is believed that adoption would not allow the children to maintain a connection with their roots, thus losing all ties to their ancestors, which could negatively impact their developmental wellbeing. It is therefore concluded that the key constituent of adoption- that of breaking all ties with the biological parents and family – may be in complete contrast to African social norms and cultural practices. The authors propose that it may well be this very process of legally severing all familial ties that has resulted in a lack of popularity of adoption within the African culture.

Additionally, a typical African family is by nature extended (Mokomane & Rochat, 2010:49). Therefore, if the parents of a child were to pass away, the uncle, aunty or grandparents would automatically take on the responsibility of caring for that child. A legal adoption may then be regarded as unnecessary. More than 90% of South Africa's orphans are reportedly being cared

for by their extended family members. Decisions concerning the care for a child are therefore not traditionally viewed from a legal standpoint, but from a cultural one. By inference, African communities therefore tend to show a preference for other forms of alternative care such as family fostering (Mokomane & Rochat, 2012:355). This type of childcare is often favoured as the sense of family love and support provided by kin is thought to often be in the best interest of the child (Mokomane, 2010:10). In cases of abandonment however, considerations of a preference for familial care would of course be slightly different as the origins of an abandoned child are unknown. When a child has no family to take care of him/her, the barriers mentioned above are perhaps no longer as relevant when considering the best interests of the child.

Finally, black women are reportedly under extreme pressure to prove their fertility by bearing a child (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013: 6). It is therefore not likely that these women will be willing to adopt a child that is not their own as this does not correspond with their beliefs on child-bearing. This issue is likely to directly influence the recruitment of black adoptive parents.

Taking the above obstacles into consideration, Gerrand and Nathane-Taulela (2013:9) allude to the fact that adoption is a dynamic process, and one should be aware different ways in which the same goals can be reached. The goal of an adoption is of course to ensure that a child has the opportunity to be raised within a stable environment by a loving family, as is their right (Children's Act 38, 2005:76; Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:9). An alternative method to same race adoptions that can therefore be considered is trans-racial adoption. When the concepts of race and adoption interact however, there are vastly different opinions regarding the importance of racial considerations in the adoption process.

3.4 PARADIGMS OF THOUGHT REGARDING ADOPTION AND RACE

When examining the issue of trans-racial adoption it is of value to consider the various paradigms of thought, which guide people's opinions and insights into the topic. Racial matching is the practice of facilitating foster care- and adoptions placements according to the race of the child and caregivers, ensuring that both parties are of the same race (Hansen & Pollack, 2007:4; Katz & Doyle, 2013:64). De Haymes and Simon (2003:251) note that, as

with trans-racial adoption, the practice of racial matching has been an issue shrouded in controversy.

De Haymes and Simons (2003:252:253) indicate that the support for trans-racial adoption is growing as a result of the mismatch between the high numbers of children of colour in need of care and the low numbers of same-race adoptive- or foster parents available. Similarly, McRoy, Oglesby and Grape (1997:88) explain that as the number of white prospective parents increase, the number of white babies available for adoptive decreases, and as a result, some adoption organisations are now encouraging white parents to consider trans-racial adoption. Approaches are bound to differ however, and it is therefore suggested that there are several paradigms of thought regarding race and adoption (Caballero *et al.*, 2012:10; Hansen & Pollack, 2007:7).

3.4.1 Racial-separatists or same-race paradigm

The separatists argue that people of colour need to remain within their racial group as racial mixing within families, including trans-racial adoption, can cause harm to those groups and individuals of colour (Hansen & Pollack, 2007:7). This corresponds with the same-race paradigm highlighted by Caballero *et al.* (2012:10). The same-race paradigm is based upon the belief that white parents cannot possibly be successful in raising a child of colour or equip them with the tools necessary to survive in an inherently racist society.

Approaching adoption from such a mind-set would of course result in trans-racial adoptions being deemed inferior in comparison to other forms of adoption. Concern for the child's wellbeing would rest on the premise that white parents could not provide the black adopted child with the tools necessary to develop a strong racial identity.

3.4.2 Colour-blind paradigm

Conversely, advocates of the colour-blind paradigm believe that racism is spurred on simply by making race an issue in adoption policy (Barn & Kirton, 2012:7; Hansen & Pollack, 2007:7). Instead of negatively impacting the wellbeing of individuals of colour, this group believe that society will benefit from integrative practices such as trans-racial adoption (Hansen & Pollack, 2007:7). Barn and Kirton (2012:29) note that because of the potential racism that would possibly be spurred on by racial matching, it could be incredibly harmful, both to black children awaiting adoption as well as the white parents being denied adoption in

cases where there are no white children available. In both cases, the authors do not specify what the benefits or negative effects of ignoring race or making it a priority is believed to be.

The colour-blind paradigm highlighted by Caballero *et al.* (2012:10) corresponds with that mentioned by Hansen and Pollack (2007:7), and takes on the stance that the needs of children are universal, and thus not influenced by race. It is therefore proposed that race is irrelevant and need not be a consideration in the adoption process.

This paradigm is quite liberal and at first glance may seem to be well suited to contemporary society. A total disregard of race within adoption could however be dangerous. If the best interests of the child are to be served, each adoption case should be appreciated for its uniqueness. There may be cases in which the race and culture of the child and the adoptive parents will need to be taken into consideration. If white parents are not willing, for whatever reason, to adopt a black child for instance, trans-racial adoption cannot be forced upon those parents simply because there happen to be black children available for adoption. In cases such as this, a colour-blind paradigm would be unethical, as it would not serve the best interests of the child.

3.4.3 Pragmatic paradigm

Finally, the pragmatic paradigm is described by Caballero *et al.* (2012:10) as a more post-modern approach. Proponents of this approach recognise that children may have individualised needs based on their cultural or racial backgrounds. Furthermore, they propose that the racial or cultural background of the prospective parent may or may not be important. This line of thought therefore acknowledges that each case is different and unique and should be approached as such.

Caballero *et al.* (2012:21) make an important point as they highlight the fact that looked after children are not a homogenous group. Some of them have very similar needs to the general population, while others may have additional, more complex needs. Within a pragmatic paradigm then, there is no universal right or wrong concerning the questions of race and adoption. What is in the best interests of the child will differ from case to case and race may or may not be an important consideration. In this vein, Barn and Kirton (2012:30) disagree that racial matching should be regarded as racist; simply warning that an overemphasis on race in adoption can lead to other important considerations falling to the wayside. The authors feel that while an overly rigid and strict adherence to racial matching may have negative

effects, race should still be given due consideration in each adoption case in order to ensure the best interests of the child (Barn & Kirton, 2012:30). Professionals working in the field of adoption therefore need to be sensitive towards issues of race and be encouraged to expand their cultural competence. This study therefore suggests approaching adoption from an ethnic sensitive perspective.

3.5 ETHNIC SENSITIVE PERSPECTIVE

An ethnic sensitive perspective requires social workers to be attentive to issues of diversity among their clients systems, with specific reference to ethnic, cultural and religious differences (Sheafor *et al.*, 2000:94). Use of this perspective is particularly helpful in cases where the background of the social worker differs greatly from that of the client being served.

The ethnic-sensitive perspective highlights the fact that clients served by social organisations are likely to be members of a variety of different ethnic groups, and social work practice and service delivery therefore needs to be attuned to this reality. It is further emphasised that social class, ethnicity, and religious beliefs often shape help-seeking behaviour. Whether or not a particular approach or specific type of service will be perceived as needed, relevant, and useful will therefore largely be determined by the cultural and racial backgrounds of clients. Considering social interventions through an ethnic sensitive lens will therefore allow social service providers to determine whether or not a possible solution to a particular social problem makes sense within a given context (Sheafor *et al.*, 2000:94).

If it is determined, with the use of an ethnic sensitive perspective, that a proposed intervention will not be acceptable within a particular cultural or ethnic context, the intervention may then be adjusted to better meet the needs of a particular group. This should be regarded as a particularly important task in South Africa given the multitude of cultures and ethnicities of the South African people.

Adoption is a form of intervention proposed for children who have been left without adequate parental, or family, care. In cases of abandonment, the Children's Act 38 of 2005 advocates for adoption as the primary form of intervention to be considered by social workers (Children's Act 38, 2005:75). It has however been well established that adoption practices are often at odds with the cultural beliefs of the black South African population (Mokomane & Rochat, 2010:50).

Taking on an ethnic-sensitive perspective towards adoption will allow social workers to understand the nuances of adoption that are perhaps in conflict with the beliefs of many black South Africans, thereby creating the opportunity to potentially adapt adoption to better meet the needs of the black population. Or at the very least, it will allow social workers to improve their cultural competencies, thereby empowering them to be able to promote adoption within black communities based upon a foundation of understating of how adoption is perceived by black South Africans.

Specifically concerning trans-racial adoption, social workers will inherently be required to cross cultural- and racial lines. The consequence of adopting an ethnic sensitive perceptive in the facilitation of trans-racial adoptions would be two-fold. Firstly, it would encourage social workers to consider the best interests of the child alongside their cultural, racial and religious needs in the adoption process in order to ensure that children are not unnecessarily uprooted from their cultural origins through adoption (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2012:1; Sheafor *et al.*, 2000:94). Secondly, it would help social workers to properly assess the abilities of the adoptive parents to successfully parent a child from a different race.

Approaching trans-racial adoption in an ethnic-sensitive manner therefore requires social workers to develop their cultural competence in order to provide services that meet the needs of their diverse client systems. The cultural competence of adoptive parents is also emphasised when viewing trans-racial adoption from ethnic-sensitive perspective, as it largely determines the parents' ability to raise their adopted child to have a strong racial-identity and be culturally aware.

Discussing trans-racial adoption from an ethnic-sensitive perspective thus predominantly focuses on the concept of cultural competence, of both the social workers and the prospective adoptive parents.

3.5.1 Cultural competence of social workers and adoption organisations

The National Association of Social Work formulated standards for cultural competence in social work practice in 2001. The NASW define cultural competence as “the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each” (NASW, 2001:11). The NASW

Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice (2001), details the ten standards for cultural competence that social workers are called to uphold in practice – these standards are represented in table from in Appendix C. Use of this table can assist social workers in being able to determine which areas of their cultural competence is up to standard, and which areas need to be improved in order to provide the best services to their clients.

Additionally, in an attempt to espouse an ethnic sensitive perspective in child and family care, Rotabi and Bunkers (2011:9) presents an approach grounded in Social Identity Theory, aimed at protecting the ethnic identity of children while also furthering family formation. According to Rotabi and Bunkers (2011:9) the approach is based on four principles.

The first principle is having staff at adoption organisations that are culturally competent and knowledgeable about cultural issues (Rotabi & Bunkers, 2011:9). **The second principle** is entwined with the first and is based on the idea that the staff members consistently deliver culturally competent services. Applying these two principles could clearly be helpful in guiding social workers towards successfully managing trans-racial adoptions in a culturally sensitive manner. Social workers and adoption organisations will be encouraged to make efforts to expand their own cultural competence; allowing them to better interact with client systems from various cultural backgrounds. Additionally, implementation of these two principles will ensure that the services provided are culturally relevant and therefore meet the needs of their diverse client systems. Finally, by focusing on expanding their own cultural competence, social workers will be better equipped in assisting prospective adoptive parents wanting to adopt trans-racially, improve their cultural competence as well.

The third principle is that social workers and adoption organisations needs to provide support to parents, enabling them to be cultural guides for their children (Rotabi & Bunkers, 2011:10). This principle allows for the concept of “the ability of adoptive parents to successfully parent a child from another race” to become of paramount importance. The education of parents on the identity needs of their children; and the provision of resources and support to be able to educate their children about their birth culture will be more readily available if this principle is upheld. Application of this principle will therefore result in parents being better prepared to take on the task of parenting a child from a different race. Whether or not they are willing to take on the challenge of adopting trans-racially will also become a more informed decision.

The fourth and final principal that would need to guide social workers and organisations in their work with trans-racial families is that of the best interests of the child (Rotabi & Bunkers, 2011:10). This is of course the principle upon which all decisions regarding the child are based, and it corresponds with the stipulations laid out in the Children's Act 38 (2005:18).

Applying these principles of cultural competence to trans-racial adoption will allow social workers to be more attentive to issues arising due to the differences in ethnicity, culture and religion between the adoptive- and biological families, thus adopting an ethnic-sensitive perspective (Sheafor *et al.*, 2000:94).

3.5.2 Cultural competence of adoptive parents

From the discussion above it becomes apparent that the cultural competence of prospective adoptive parents is an important area of consideration in trans-racial adoptions. A study completed by Klevan (2012:113) highlights this importance, emphasising that adoptive parents wanting to adopt trans-racially need to have adequate cultural competencies, or at least a passionate willingness to develop it. Vonk (2001:251) defines the cultural competence of parents adopting trans-racially as being made up of three distinct components, which will be discussed below.

The **first component** is **racial awareness**. Greene, McNutt and Lopez (1998) cited by Vonk (2001:249) defines racial awareness as a person's awareness of how "race, ethnicity, culture, language, and related power status" function within one's own life as well as the lives of others. Klevan (2012:113) notes that racial awareness is therefore being conscious of how race impacts everybody's life.

According to Vonk (2001:249) becoming aware of issues of racism is essential for the development of adoptive parents' racial awareness. The author therefore suggests that expanding one's self-awareness is a good first step for adoptive parents, and perhaps a starting point for training programs offered by adoption organisations. According to this first component then, prospective trans-racial adoptive parents would need to have a well developed understanding, or awareness, of race – both in general as well as how it relates to them as individuals. They would need to be able to acknowledge that a certain degree of racism does still exist, that being white has potentially shielded them from certain degrees of

discrimination. Such awareness would allow the parents to better manage those situations in which their adopted child may experience racism.

The **second component** of cultural competence for adoptive parents adopting trans-racially is **multicultural planning** (Klevan, 2001:113; Vonk, 2001:251). This refers to the practice of creating the opportunities in which trans-racially adopted children will be able to learn about, and engage with their culture of origin. Cultural socialisation will not happen naturally, as it would in families made up of members of the same race. Trans-racially adoptive parents will therefore need to make a conscious effort to create such opportunities for their children and for themselves (Klevan, 2001:113; Vonk, 2001:251).

Furthermore, the adoptive parents would need to be prepared to orientate their adopted child within their racial origins. The parents should be willing to create opportunities of learning for their children, so that the adopted child would not need to undertake this task on his/her own without the guidance of their parents. This is not an easy task and should not be underestimated by adoptive parents. Creating such learning opportunities for their adopted child will require meticulous planning and follow-through and will need to be carried out throughout the child's developmental years (Klevan, 2001:113; Vonk, 2001:251).

Finally, the **third component** of the adoptive parents' cultural competence is **survival skills**. Survival skills refer to a child's ability to successfully cope with instances of racism. Parents adopting have the responsibility of preparing their trans-racially adopted children to cope with racism. Survival skills thus entail the parents' ability to prepare their adopted child for racial prejudice. This could be a potentially challenging task for white adoptive parents as they would be less likely to have been victims of racism themselves. Adoptive parents are therefore encouraged to never minimise or ignore their child's experience of racism. Rather, they need to be willing to expand their racial awareness and gain an understanding of their child's cultural history. This will allow them to be able to guide their children in being able to navigate their way through such situations in a healthy way. This final component clearly relates to the first, as a parent who has made an effort to increase their own racial awareness would be better equipped to assist their child in managing racial prejudices (Klevan, 2012:1131; Vonk, 2001:25).

Vonk (2001:252) realises that it is important to be able to move from conceptual definitions of cultural competence to operational ones in order to allow the concept to become a tangible one that adoptive parents can learn to master. A list of tasks adoptive parents can undertake in

order to improve their cultural competence across all three domains was therefore suggested. This list is presented in table form in Appendix D. Going through this list of recommended tasks will provide adoptive parents with the opportunity of determining their level of cultural competence. Adoption organisations and social workers can likewise make use of this list of tasks in order to train prospective adoptive parents in developing their cultural competence.

It is clear that applying an ethnic-sensitive perspective to the practice of trans-racial adoption requires social workers to develop their cultural competencies. This will allow them to prioritise the cultural, racial and religious needs of the children they place by ensuring that the adoptive parents are willing to meet those needs of the child. Furthermore, adopting an ethnic-sensitive perspective in trans-racial adoptions requires social workers to develop the cultural competencies of the adoptive parents in order to ensure that the parents are able to successfully parent a child of another race.

In the effort towards encompassing the practice of trans-racial adoption within an ethnic-sensitive perspective, it is necessary to acknowledge the controversies that shroud the practice.

3.6 CONTROVERSIES WITHIN THE PRACTICE OF TRANS-RACIAL ADOPTION

Hansen and Pollack (2007:6) and Carter-Black (2007:347) explain that the controversy over trans-racial adoptions has persisted for almost 40 years, a common ground never quite being reached. The authors highlight several strands of the argument.

One of the most common debates is whether or not a child who has been adopted trans-racially will have the opportunity to develop normally on a social and psychological level (Hansen & Pollack, 2007:6). Opponents of trans-racial adoption are often of the opinion that black children, who are raised in a white community, by white parents, are more likely to develop racial identity problems than children adopted by parents of the same race (Carter-Black, 2007:345).

A second argument is based on equality. Opponents of trans-racial adoption propose that trans-racial adoptions allow child welfare service providers to avoid treating blacks as equals (Hansen & Pollack, 2007:6). The concern is thus that by removing the preference for in-race adoptions, efforts to recruit black adoptive parents will be reduced.

A third argument highlighted by Carter-Black (2007:348) is that trans-racially adopted children are likely to experience rejection from both black and white communities. The likely result of this type of rejection is trans-racially adopted children feeling that they do not fit in anywhere.

Reflective of those issues mentioned above, Barn and Kirton (2012:25) list the factors that, according to them, form the backdrop of the debates of trans-racial adoption – the large numbers of children of colour in alternative care and the supposed unavailability of black adoptive parents; concern about the child's racial and cultural identities; and the ability and cultural competence of adoptive parents to successfully raise their child of a other culture. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the arguments against trans-racial adoption, it is necessary to delve further into a few of these debates.

3.6.1 Adverse effects on racial identity development and psychosocial wellbeing

Patel, Williams and Marsh (2004:6) affirm that the cultural and racial identity of an adopted child is a topic over which there has been much controversy and debate. English authors, Hollingsworth (1998:100) and Wainwright and Ridley (2012:50), indicate that the question of whether white parents should adopt children of ethnic minority groups has been shrouded in controversy ever since the practice increased considerably in the 1960s and 1970s. The debate has largely been centred on whether trans-racially adopted children will be provided the opportunity to develop the racial or ethnic identities which are characteristic of their groups of origin (Hollingsworth, 2008:100). At the foreground of this debate is the question of whether a white family, in a racist society, is capable of providing a trans-racially adopted child with an environment which will encourage the advancement of their psycho-social well-being and the development of their racial identity (Hollingsworth, 1998:107; Small, 1991:63, Wainwright & Ridley, 2012:52).

Numerous studies have been undertaken to investigate the psychosocial outcomes of adopted children compared to other groups of children, such non-adopted children, children in foster care, or children in institutional care (Collishaw, Maughan & Pickles, 1998:57; Selwyn & Quinton, 2004:6; Simmel, Barth & Brook; 2007:336). Although findings of various studies do differ, generally; results indicate that children growing up in stable biological families will fare better psychosocially than adopted children; who will in turn tend to fare better than

children remaining in foster care or institutional care (Collishaw *et al.*, 1998:57; Simmel *et al.*, 2007:337).

The psychosocial functioning of trans-racial adoptees is however, a specific subgroup to be investigated. The debate concerning race, adoption and the wellbeing of the child is therefore one that stretches over many years. In fact, William T. Merrit, the president of the NABSW, made notable claims regarding the psychosocial wellbeing of Black children being adopted by White parents. He asserted that these black children would suffer severe identity problems because white communities will not fully accept them, yet at the same time they will have no contact with black communities (Simon & Alstein, 2000:39). Additionally, he stated that black children who have been trans-racially adopted are likely to not develop the needed coping mechanisms to function in a racist society. The fear was that these black children would develop “white psyches” (Simon & Alstein, 2000:41).

In order to explore the debate concerning the psychosocial wellbeing, and development of racial identity, of trans-racially adopted children however it is of value to consider it from several points of views.

3.6.1.1 Responsibility of adoptive parents

Klevan (2012:91) asserts that there is a growing body of literature showing that parents who adopt trans-racially do have the capabilities to positively influence their child’s racial identity. Additionally however, the author indicates that parents have been found to often minimise racial differences as well as the child’s experience of racism. This is significant because, as the author explains, the ability of a parent to positively influence the healthy development of their child’s racial identity largely rests on their knowledge of- and involvement with, the child’s cultural origins. Katz and Doyle (2013:66) emphasise that trans-racially adopted children are vulnerable to racial prejudice and it could therefore be potentially problematic if the adopted parents do not acknowledge the child’s experience of racism. By inference, it can therefore be said that parents wanting to adopt trans-racially need to be open and willing to expand their understanding of race and racism. Denial that forms of racism still exist will only serve to increase the likelihood of the adopted child struggling with their racial identities when they are confronted with racism. These findings suggest that if adoptive parents make efforts in improving their cultural competencies, then they should be more than capable of raising their trans-racially adopted child with a healthy cultural identity.

Beckett, Bredenkamp, Castle and Groothues (1999:23) therefore emphasise the fact that potential adopters need to appreciate their child's origins. If parents are able to place value on their child's racial heritage, their child may be more likely to adopt a positive attitude towards their cultural and racial origins. The authors pinpoint the fact that prior to adoption, an adequate assessment of the adopters' racial and cultural attitudes should be conducted. Social workers therefore have an important task of properly assessing the readiness and willingness of parents to adopt across racial lines, ensuring that the parents are not simply agreeing to trans-racial adoption in desperation of becoming parents.

3.6.1.2 Views of the adopted child

Regarding the importance of developing one's racial identity, it is of value to consider the views of the adopted child. A study completed by De Haymes and Simon (2003:261) found that trans-racially adopted children felt pressured by society in general to "choose" a racial identity, while at home they did not feel they needed to make any such decisions. In terms of race, it can therefore be concluded that adoptive parents are likely to create loving and accepting home environments, which differs somewhat from what is experienced in society at large. Furthermore, some of the participants in the study reported feeling some ambivalence regarding their racial identities, some even indicating negative perceptions regarding blacks.

The ambivalence is likely to stem from the difference in expectations regarding racial identity within the home and in the larger community. The child's navigation through the development of their racial identity may become confused by the different messages received within the home and within society at large. In addition, negative attitudes towards the black community are likely to stem from racial prejudices against the black community that have become somewhat commonplace and even normal in most societies. Trans-racially adopted children may tend to want to associate themselves more with the white community because globally there is a more favourable perception of the White community.

Parents adopting trans-racially thus clearly have a responsibility in positively orientating their adopted child within their cultural origins. In order for the adopted child to not reject their racial and cultural roots, adoptive parents should prepare them for the realities they are likely to encounter once they step into the wider communities. Instead of being ignored and denied, racial issues need to be discussed openly. Social workers are therefore left with the

responsibility of preparing prospective adoptive parents for these tasks of trans-racial adoption.

3.6.1.3 Views of social workers

Social workers are responsible for the facilitation of trans-racial adoptions and it is therefore necessary to explore their views regarding the practice. It is noted in the literature that the need to understand racism in order to raise a black child with a strong racial identity is also a reason for many professionals supporting same-race adoptions (Kirton, 1998:14). In a study investigating the views of social workers regarding ethnicity and adoption, the author found opinions differed across the racial lines of student social workers – with black social workers being more likely to strongly support same-race adoptions and white student social workers being more open minded about trans-racial adoptions.

Barn and Kirton (2012:34) eloquently identify why trans-racial adoption tends to be a controversial topic, by recognising that the practice “calls into questions people’s ideas of racial and ethnic boundaries, identity and belonging”. It is it therefore bound to stir different opinions about how white parents can successfully guide their black child in the development of their racial identities. Adoption social workers will need to clearly identify and define their own feelings regarding race and adoption if they are to successfully work in a field that requires them to guide others through their feelings and questions of race.

3.6.2 Sparse availability of black adoptive parents and difficulties encountered in recruitment efforts

In order to facilitate same-race adoptions for black children in need of care, there is of course a need for black adoptive parents. The numbers of black adoptive parents are however low. If same race adoptions are to be achieved, social work organisations are thus faced with the task of having to recruit adoptive parents from the black population. This may prove to be a challenging task, as Western adoptive practices do not necessarily correspond with adoptive practices in the black culture.

Traditionally adoption organisations worldwide have achieved success in their work with white families. The current population of children in need of care however, has changed from being predominantly white to being predominantly black (Gerrand & Nathane-Tauela, 2013:4; Harber, 1999:9; McRoy *et al*, 1997:97; Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:352). This is

reflective of the situation in South Africa, where the Register of Adoptable Children and Adoptive Parents indicates that there are 428 unmatched children available for adoption, 398 of whom are black and only 3 of whom are white (Blackie, 2013:2).

McRoy (1989) cited by Hollingsworth (2008:101) pointed out that the NABSW, in their stance against trans-racial adoption, stressed that there were more than enough black families willing to adopt black children. Adoption organisations were thus criticised for not making active efforts to recruit black families. The author explains that the practice of informal adoptive practices by the black community should be regarded as evidence of their openness to adopt. McRoy *et al.* (1997:89) likewise views the belief that black families do not want to adopt as a myth, despite the fact that many organisations find they have a significantly larger population of white prospective parents than black prospective parents. McRoy and Griffin (2012:44) propose instead that many adoption organisations struggle to recruit black families due to negative interactions between the child welfare systems and black communities in the past.

Another reason for failed recruitment efforts and the consequential unavailability of black adoptive parents suggested by McRoy *et al.* (1997:88); is that the majority of adoption social workers are white. Smith-McKeever and McRoy (2005:533) and McRoy *et al.* (1997:90) suggest that there is evidence to support the belief that organisations will experience greater success in their recruitment efforts, if the organisation has black members of staff, as well as if they specifically focus on placing black children with black families. In order to achieve same-race placements for black children, it is essential for adoption organisations to develop a deeper understanding of the motivations for black people wanting to adopt, as well as the characteristics of black adoptive parents and their experiences during the adoption process (Smith-McKeever & McRoy, 2005:533). Instead of immediately considering trans-racial adoption as the “solution” to the large numbers of black children in the public child care system however, McRoy and Griffin (2012:38) highlight the fact that efforts should instead go towards understanding the reasons why there are so many black children entering the public care sector, as well as how more black families can be recruited into the adoption system. McRoy *et al.* (1997:97) further suggest that culturally competent practices within an adoption organisation would include having both white and black staff and board members, flexible working hours and having reasonable or no fees accompanying adoptions.

American authors, Malm and Welti (2010:185), suggest that in order to tailor recruitment efforts to specific target groups, the underlying motivations to opt for adoption need to be identified. They explain that different people may opt for different types of adoption for various reasons. Understanding why specific parents may opt for certain kinds of adoption can assist adoption organisations to customize their recruitment efforts in order to tap into a larger pool of potential adoptive families. Additionally, British authors, Frazer and Selwyn (2005:145) emphasise the fact that misguided beliefs about the practice of adoption have led certain population groups to believe that they would not meet the requirements for prospective adoptive parents. The authors indicated that the false ideas people might have about what factors are emphasised in the assessment phase of the adoption process, include marital status; having a substantial income and above average housing facilities. Another factor mentioned as a barrier for the recruitment of black adoption parents is the fact that adoption practices are still essentially euro-centric. South African authors, Gerrand and Nathane-Taulela (2013:1) therefore emphasises approaching adoption from a culturally sensitive perspective as a means of better meeting the needs of the South African population.

3.6.3 Long waiting periods for adoptable children

The time between a child in need of care and protection being put up for adoption, and actually being adopted, can stretch on for an undefined period of time. This is due to several reasons, including the task of matching the child with appropriate adoptive parents.

It has been found that ethnicity is a factor influencing the period of time a child spends in the welfare system, waiting to either be put up for adoption, or to be reunited with their families (McDonald *et al.*, 2007:7). Generally, black children tend to encounter delays in the adoption process, waiting longer than their white peers (Barn & Kirton, 2012:25; Caballero, Edwards, Goodyer & Okitikpi, 2012:9). In their literature review of a study exploring the developmental outcome of children who have been internationally adopted, Welsh and Viana (2012:244,245) highlighted a link between the age at adoption, and children's development trajectories. According to the authors, studies have generally shown more favourable outcomes for children adopted at younger ages. Hansen and Pollack (2007:10) also indicate that delays in adoption could negatively impact a child's development. Time spent in institutional care was also positively associated with developmental difficulties. It has therefore been suggested that because black children spend more time as legal orphans, trans-

racial adoption could be regarded as a means of reducing the time these children spend waiting for adoption (Hansen & Pollack, 2007:2,17).

Hansen and Pollack (2007:16) found that in cases of trans-racial adoptions, finalisation of adoption occurred sooner after the termination of parental rights than for those children placed in-racially. The age of the children adopted trans-racially was also found to be significantly lower than those who waited for same-race adoptions.

John Bowlby's attachment theory is a good explanation as to why speed within adoption is often stressed as critical to the wellbeing of the child. Connors (2011:350) and Owusu-Bempah and Howitt (1997:199) explain that the attachment theory is centred on the premise that human beings are instinctively programmed to form attachments with others. What is critical to note here is that, according to the theory, our most important attachment relationships are those formed in infancy and early childhood. These would of course be the relationships experienced with parents or primary caregivers. The theory further proposes that a failure to experience positive, intimate attachment relationships early on in life significantly increases the likelihood that the person will experience severe emotional and behavioural problems later on, which is likely to negatively impact personality development (Owusu-Bempah & Howitt, 1997:199,200). In cases of abandonment, such negative effects can be exacerbated as the absence of a stable caregiver can result in the child not having an opportunity to form any healthy attachments early on in life. In fact Owusu-Bempah and Howitt (1997:200) list abandonment as one of the primary reasons why a child may be susceptible to experiencing insecure attachments. Simmel *et al.* (2007:239) notes that although attachment theory focuses on the relationship between the child and their primary caregiver, it is important to acknowledge that infants and children can form multiple attachments to other caregivers as well. The relationship that an adoptive parent forms with their child can therefore play a significant role in restoring healthy attachment styles in adopted children.

From the perspective of the attachment theory it becomes clear why advocates of trans-racial adoption may stress the importance of reducing the waiting time of adoption for children in need of care. Early adoption can contribute to healthy psychosocial functioning of children and if a trans-racial adoption can lead to the significant reduction in the waiting time it may well be in the best interests of the child.

In considering the best interests of the child in trans-racial adoptions, it is imperative for focus to eventually shift away from the controversies shrouding the practice. It is of value to rather give attention to those factors that can contribute to the success of a trans-racial adoption.

3.7 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUCCESSFUL TRANS-RACIAL ADOPTIONS

Instead of focussing efforts on the debate of trans-racial adoptions being right or wrong, resources rather need to go towards developing strategies to enhance the successful outcomes for adoptive families choosing to adopt across racial boundaries (Carter-Black, 2007:348). The various factors contributing towards successful trans-racial adoptions will be discussed below.

3.7.1 Support for prospective adoptive parents before and after adoption

Organisational support before and after adoption has been identified as a critical factor playing a role in the success of trans-racial adoption. If adoption organisations are to successfully support adoptive parents, it is therefore imperative that they not only support them throughout the adoption process, but that they continue to offer support and guidance long after the adoption has been finalised.

3.7.1.1 Support before adoption

The need to offer prospective adoption parents support and guidance during the initial stages of the adoption process has been well established. American author, Klevan (2012:100) conducted a study in which she explored the decision making process of adoptive parents, specifically regarding the race of their child. She mentions one couple that were originally open to adopting trans-racially, but later changed their minds after attending a trans-racial adoption seminar and then giving the decision more thought. In fact, according to the author, several participants identified institutional racial training as being essential in guiding them in the decision-making process regarding race and adoption (Klevan, 2012:112). These findings are essential to consider when exploring the role adoption organisations and social workers have to play in the preparation of adoptive parents.

Adoption organisations need to invest in designing training programmes specifically tailored for assisting parents in the decision making process of adoption. When deciding if they are willing to adopt across racial lines, parents may then be better equipped to make an educated

decision about whether or not they are capable and willing to take on the unique challenges of being part of a trans-racial family.

The same couple mentioned by Klevan (2012:100) reported that when they told their social worker about their decision to adopt a white child, the social worker and organisation refused to continue to work with the couple. They had reportedly “broken the trust” when they changed their minds. Such reactions from social workers are dangerous as it could potentially push adoptive parents into parenting roles that they do not feel comfortable with, which is evidently not the purpose of adoption as it would not be in the best interests of the child.

It is of further value to consider a study by American authors Vonk and Angaran (2003:53) in which they conducted an investigation in order to discover what the key aspects of training, received by prospective adoptive parents adopting trans-racially, are. Such training should ideally prepare parents to be able to help their adopted child develop a positive racial identity as well as to be able to navigate their way through issues of racism. The authors pinpoint the fact that although literature strongly suggests a need for specialised training for parents adopting trans-racially; little literature actually exists documenting this kind of organisation training. It was found that both private and public adoption organisations were involved in training for trans-racially adopting parents. Private organisations were however more likely than public organisations to offer this type of training. It was further noted that in cases where adoption organisations did provide training to parents adopting trans-racially, the training covered all three domains of cultural competence (which were discussed earlier).

Vonk and Angaran (2001:59) identify the various shortcomings of the training offered to parents adopting trans-racially. One such shortcoming was that of timing. It was noted that the majority of the cultural competence training occurred only before the placement was made. This allows the parents the opportunity to learn about the challenges of parenting a child from a different race, as well as making an informed decision about whether or not they are willing to meet these challenges. It was however suggested, that post-placement training is also needed in order to offer parents on-going support. After the adoption has taken place, issues of race finally become tangible and is no longer simply an abstract idea being discussed in training sessions. This was therefore identified as a crucial time to offer on-going support to parents as they are only now learning how to navigate their way through the task of trans-racial parenting. A final shortcoming identified by Vonk and Angaran (2001:60) is that many of the organisations offering training programs to parents adopting trans-racially, lacked

diversity among the trainers. It is suggested that people of colour could provide a more accurate perspective of the challenges of growing up in a multi-cultural society as well as how to deal with those challenges.

3.7.1.2 Support after adoption

It is vital that the need for on-going support, after the adoption has been finalised, be recognised by adoption organisations. In a study conducted by De Haymes and Simon (2003:258) in which they explored the support services available to families who had adopted trans-racially, several families reported feeling that they were not properly supported by social workers in their decision to adopt trans-racially (De Haymes & Simon, 2003:265). Parents specifically identified black social workers as being opposed to the decision of trans-racial adoption. Moreover, parents reported post-adoption services as being disappointing (De Haymes & Simon, 2003:266). This is especially noteworthy in light of the fact that these parents reported experiencing instances of racism due to their decision to adopt trans-racially.

The above is worrying in light of the fact that post adoption support has been found to be essential in assisting parents who have adopted trans-racially. Such support should include encouragement and access to resources that can assist them in developing their skills of cultural competence (Vonk, Lee & Crolley-Simic, 2010:246). Similarly, Carter-Black (2007:351) alludes to the fact that it is essential that the family opting to adopt trans-racially need to be prepared and ready for the commitment. Carter-Black (2007:362) explains that the black social workers in their study felt that if white families are willing and able to “make the commitment” of raising a black child, then they should be able to instil a healthy sense of racial identity. It would make sense then, that the social worker would have a key role to play here as the social worker will need to be the one who assesses how prepared and committed the adoptive parents are to adopt trans-racially.

In cases where the parents are not yet prepared, the social worker and organisation would have the responsibility of providing appropriate support to the family. Again, the cultural competence of the social worker is therefore also an important aspect to consider within adoption. The social worker working within trans-racial adoption will need to develop their own cultural competence if they are to develop it in others. Carter-Black (2007:366) therefore suggest that social workers receive comprehensive professional training in order to be more

efficient and effective in managing the overlap between child care and race both before and after trans-racial adoption take place.

3.7.1.3 The role of the organisation and the adoption social workers in providing support to prospective adoptive parents

Adoption organisations and adoption social workers inevitably carry the bulk of the responsibility of making the needed support available to adoptive parents, both before and after the adoption has been finalised. Klevan (2012:113) appropriately suggests that organisations need to define their own beliefs and mission regarding trans-racial adoption. This should be clearly communicated to social workers, which should receive special skills training in order to successfully facilitate trans-racial adoptions. Rotabi and Bunkers (2011:9) pinpoint social workers as being vital resources in reducing the risk of children losing their cultural identities in trans-racial adoptions. In other words, it is largely the social workers responsibility to properly assess the prospective parents' commitment to delve into the cultural heritage of their adopted child so that they may be able to contribute to the cultural socialisation of their child.

Simmel *et al.* (2007:248) also emphasises the role of social workers in assessing the readiness of adoptive parents. The author stresses that pressure to place children quickly should not cloud the assessment, preparation and training process of prospective parents. In addition, Sagar and Hitchings (2007:204) discuss the difficult task social workers have of orientating parents on the "type of child" that is available for adoption – that is; often children with troubled backgrounds. Of the social workers interviewed in their study, it was found that many were critical of the fact that prospective parents were often oblivious to the realities of the type of children available for adoption (Sagar & Hitchings, 2007:203). These findings correspond with that of Barn and Kirton (2012:25) who likewise take note of the discrepancy between the adoptive parents "ideal child" and what is in fact available.

The social workers therefore felt that if the training they (the social workers) received was improved, they would be better equipped to provide prospective parents with the needed guidance regarding the type of children available and the type of parenting that such a child would require (Sagar & Hitchings, 2007:203). In addition to professional training, the social workers in this study also felt that the parents needed to receive more in-depth training to ensure they are capable of meeting the unique needs of their child (Sagar & Hitchings,

2007:205). Although the social workers in this study stressed the importance of adoptive parents seeking post-adoptive services, they noted that these same parents do not seek help (Sagar & Hitchings, 2007:208). Social workers in the study attributed the reluctance of some parents to seek post-adoption assistance to fear of being judged, having the child taken away, or because their privileged background would make them ashamed to seek help from social workers who usually work with people of a lower socio-economic class. Efforts therefore need to be made to overcome the stigma attached to seeking post-adoption services, making it more acceptable and commonplace. A change in the way people think about adoption and adoption services thus needs to take place.

Finally, Farber *et al.* (2003:191) emphasize the fact that adopted children need to be allowed the opportunity to learn about and understand their cultural/racial roots. Adoptive parents are therefore identified as having to accept and engage with their adopted child's background. It is further explained that adoption organisations and social workers are left with the responsibility of having to prepare adoptive parents to make educated decisions regarding the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the child they wish to adopt. Support offered by adoption social workers and adoption organisations can therefore make invaluable contributions towards the success of a trans-racial adoption.

3.7.1.4 The role of the general public in providing support to prospective adoptive parents

Alongside the support discussed above, additional support from the general public regarding the decision to adopt can go a long way in strengthening an adoptive family. A study completed by Katz and Doyle (2013:67) investigated the attitudes and thinking patterns of the general public towards trans-racial adoption. The idea of trans-racial families tended to evoke more negative attitudes than same-race families (Katz & Doyle, 2013:62). The authors therefore concluded that adoption workers and organisations have a vital role to play in educating and preparing prospective parents about the negative reactions they may encounter as a trans-racial family (Katz & Doyle, 2013:76). Such racial awareness training is likely to be something that would need to form part of both the pre- and post-adoption services.

3.7.1.5 Support services as defined by policy and legislation

The policies and legislation guiding adoption practices do not provide any guidance on the topic of support services. The MEPA and IEP, which aims to remove barriers to trans-racial

adoption in America is reportedly silent on the topic of the support that should be provided to families who decide to adopt trans-racially (De Haymes & Simon, 2003:254). Similarly, the Children's Act 38 of 2005 does not give any indication that post-adoption support services are a necessity. Section 250 and 251 of the Children's Act simply indicates who is allowed to provide adoption services. Due to this lack of legislative guidance, social workers and organisations therefore need to take it upon themselves to formulate comprehensive support programmes if they are to ensure the success of many of the adoptions they manage.

3.7.2 Living in culturally integrated communities

Feigelman (2000) and McRoy (1982) cited in Klevan (2012:91) found that living in integrated communities can play a crucial role in assisting a trans-racially adopted child to develop a strong racial identity. Additionally, De Haymes and Simon (2003:266) identified a desire for community among adoptive parents – according to the authors; parents who have adopted trans-racially feel they receive the most helpful and relevant support from foster parents or other adoptive parents who have also adopted trans-racially.

A study by Klevan (2012:111) found that parents', who seamlessly stepped into the role of being adoptive parents to a child of a different race, were more likely than those parents who struggled to adjust, to live in integrated communities. Respondents of the study avidly supported the importance of living in an integrated community, as this had been an incredibly beneficial factor for their trans-racial families. Diversity of the community, access to birth culture of the child, and pre-existing friendships with people of other cultures was identified as important resources for parents adopting trans-racially.

Despite the potential benefits for trans-racial families living in a culturally integrated community, a study by Vonk *et al.* (2010:242) indicates that adoptive parents may be reluctant to do this. The study explored the cultural socialisation of families who have adopted trans-racially as well as internationally. It was found that methods of socialization *used most often* in both groups, are those that required the least contact with people of the children's race. The socialisation practice *used the least* was the one that required the greatest level of contact with the children's race – that is, living in a culturally integrated community. This indicates that although adoptive parents who adopt trans-racially may be eager to maintain a certain level of contact with their child's racial heritage, they may be reluctant to move into a community that is regarded as more integrated. These parents may even be

reluctant to interact with people of their child's culture on a daily basis or develop friendships with them. Such reluctance could potentially make it more challenging for both the parents and the child to fully grasp the child's cultural heritage.

On the other hand however, De Haymes and Simon (2003:260) found in a study of theirs that although most of their participants lived in integrated communities, they still experienced some difficulties such as feeling unsupported by the black population in the community. One of the adopted children in the study therefore suggested that parents adopting trans-racially should make an effort to learn about the communities they plan to live in before actually adopting the child (De Haymes & Simon, 2003:260). Such a response indicates that it is not simply a matter of living in a culturally integrated community, but rather the culture of the community itself – adoptive parents need to meet the specific people living there and make an effort to discover if the particular community would be welcoming and encouraging towards white parents adopting a black child.

Adoptive parents opting to adopt trans-racially cannot be fearful of forming connections, and establishing friendships, with people of other races and cultures. The importance of adoptive parents expanding their cultural awareness was mentioned earlier and it is brought to light here again. This discussion of living in a culturally integrated community not only highlights the benefits it holds for adoptive parents and adopted children alike, but also stresses that it goes beyond simply living in a integrated community. The parents need to make an effort to reach out to the people of that community, potentially before they even adopt.

3.7.3 Maintaining contact with child's culture

The responsibility of parents who adopt trans-racially to encourage and facilitate the cultural socialisation of their children in order to develop a positive racial identity is being stressed more and more frequently (Vonk *et al.*, 2010:227, 228). It is therefore an important area of exploration within trans-racial adoptions.

According to Haymes and Simon (2003:264) however, the opinions of adoptive parents seems to differ regarding the importance of maintaining contact with the adopted child's heritage. The authors made use of narratives from several participants in order to show these disparities (Hayme & Simon, 2003:262). The narratives of those parents who took on a more colour-blind paradigm suggest that they may be more reluctant to take on the responsibility of developing and maintaining contact with their child's cultural heritage. It is therefore possible

that a colour-blind paradigm may allow for an easy way out of an important task within trans-racial adoption. This is supported by Vonk *et al.* (2010:228), who indicate that although adoptive parents were initially encouraged to follow a colour-blind paradigm in trans-racial adoption, it is now clear that trans-racially adopted children require the help of their parents to develop positive racial identities in order to cope with discrimination. Being from a different culture and race, this can of course be a challenging task for any adoptive parent and Vonk, *et al.* (2010:228) therefore suggest that these parents need to develop their cultural competence by building bridges between their own culture and that of their adopted child.

The socio-genealogical connectedness theory is perhaps also of relevance here. This theory is an addition to attachment theory. It deals with the extent to which children identify with their natural parents' biological and social backgrounds, as a result of the amount of knowledge they have of their origins and roots (Owusu-Bempha, 2000:107; Owusu-Bempha, 1997:201).

An assumption of this theory is that the degree to which a child relates with their biological parents and roots of origin is directly dependant on the amount and quality of information about their parents they have access to (Owusu-Bempha, 1997:201). The idea is that the quantitatively greater and the qualitatively more favourable the information is, the greater the child's sense of connectedness will be. Alternatively, the quantitatively less or more damaging the information is, the less likely the child will be to associate him/herself with their biological roots, resulting in them having a superficial sense of connectedness.

Another key assumption of this theory is that the greater the sense of connectedness, the better adjusted the child will be. This information does of course not need to be provided directly by the parents, but in certain cases, such as adoption, can be provided or denied by a third party (Owusu-Bempha, 1997:201).

Clearly then adoptive parents have a responsibility to take on the vital task of culturally socialising their adopted child. The greater the effort on the part of the parents to gather information and expose their child to his/her cultural heritage, the greater the chances are that the child will have the opportunity to develop a strong cultural and racial identity. Vonk *et al.* (2010:245) therefore stress the important role that social workers have in preparing adoptive parents for the cultural socialisation of their children. The cultural awareness and competence of the social worker is therefore of paramount importance, as they can only guide adoptive parents in the task of cultural socialisation if they fully grasp its importance themselves.

3.7.4 Cultural competence of adoptive parents and comfort with decision to adopt trans-racially

Cultural competence of adoption parents is a key issue to explore before a trans-racial adoption can be finalised. In order for adoptive parents to successfully raise a child from a different race, they need to be fully aware of racial issues. In addition, parents wanting to adopt trans-racially need to have the knowledge to be able to make an informed decision regarding adoption and race that they may be comfortable with.

The cultural competence of adoption parents was discussed in detail earlier. As mentioned at 3.5.2, parental cultural competence is made up of three distinct parents – racial awareness; multicultural planning; and survival skills (Vonk, 2001:246). It was suggested that parental training based on developing these three areas of cultural competence has succeeded in increasing prospective parents' racial awareness and therefore increasing their ability to parent a child of another race. Adoption organisations could potentially better prepare parents for trans-racial adoption if they were to make use of a scale such as this for the development of various training programs for adoptive parents.

It is of further interest to note a study by De Haymes and Simon (2003:262). Of the adoptive parents who participated in the study, some claimed to be very aware of racial issues before adoption, while others reported only gaining such awareness after the adoption took place. Several of the trans-racially adopted children in this study however, indicated that their white parents did not always fully recognise the racism these children experienced in school. Some of the children felt their adoptive parents did not pay attention to issues of race and culture, resulting in the children lacking information and contact with people of the same race. In other cases, both the children and parents explained that through the adoption process they expanded their cultural awareness and acceptance.

In another study of interest, Klevan (2012:89) investigated how parents had come to the decision to either adopt in-racially or trans-racially, as well as their feelings about the decision after the adoption had taken place. In cases of trans-racial adoption, Klevan (2012:109) identified three different types of resolution among the adopted parents. The author defines resolution as “being comfortable with the race of the child, confidence in the ability to handle racial issues, and the ability to integrate the choice to adopt trans-racially into a sense of self” (Klevan, 2012:88). Parents defined as **resolved** were found to be comfortable with the community of their child's cultural origins. At the time of adoption these parents were aware

of racial issues, but felt that they were willing and able to take on the unique challenges of adopting trans-racially.

Two groups of **unresolved** parents were identified. The **first group** was resolved about their choice to adopt trans-racially, but unresolved about race as an issue in itself. This group of parents tended to adhere to a colour-blind paradigm regarding adoption; not paying much attention to the issue of race before the adoption. After the adoption they were therefore happy with the decision to adopt their child, but were now having difficulty coping with racial prejudices and differences within the larger community. The **second group** of unresolved parents were unresolved about both their decision to adopt trans-racially as well as race in general. It was highlighted that these parents had difficulty talking about race and tended to minimise their child's racial differences (Klevan, 2012:88).

These studies show that not all parents who opt for trans-racial adoption are aware of racial issues in the larger population. Those parents with a realistic and more accurate perception of race issues are likely to adjust to being a trans-racial family more easily. While those parents who are less aware of race issues before adoption, may experience more difficulties. The research by Klevan (2012:109) also alludes to the fact that not all parents choosing to adopt are fully aware of racial challenges that may accompany trans-racial adoption. It was suggested that a greater awareness of potential challenges from the beginning may help parents in making a more informed decision about race and adoption, one they are truly comfortable with and can motivate well.

3.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the topic of trans-racial adoption, highlighting the different debates that enshroud it. It should be clear that although there may not be any definitive answers, each adoption case should be regarded as unique, the needs of the "child in need of care" being made first priority. Social workers have a vital role in preparing and assessing prospective parents, as well as providing the needed support and guidance in the decision making process regarding the race of the child.

The ethnic-sensitive perspective was therefore highlighted as being a key constituent for the successful facilitation of trans-racial adoptions. It was recognised that adoptions facilitated from an ethnic sensitive perspective encourages social workers to develop their cultural competencies as a means of ensuring they are have the insight to be able to meet the cultural,

racial and religious needs of the children available for adoption when making placements. Developing their own cultural competence was also identified as a means of enabling social workers to help develop the cultural competencies of the prospective adoptive parents, which will empower them to be able to successfully parent their child of a different race.

It is recognised that although several research reports have explored the feasibility of trans-racial adoptions, little is known about the insights of the social workers that are responsible for overseeing these adoptions Carter-Black (2002:339,340). A gap in literature therefore exists regarding the individual views of child welfare professionals on policies regulating adoption. This is of course important, as it is the social workers that are responsible for the implementation of these policies. Gaining insight into the views of social workers on the topic of trans-racial adoption could play a significant role in resolving the enduring controversies on the topic.

In the chapter that follows the researcher will therefore be investigating the views of adoption social worker on trans-racial adoption in South Africa. Such an investigation should shed light on the opinion of social workers responsible for adoption, as well as how they implement policies concerning adoption and race.

CHAPTER 4

EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION ON THE VIEWS OF SOCIAL WORKERS ON TRANS-RACIAL ADOPTIONS OF ABANDONED CHILDREN

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The abandonment of children, identified as a sizable problem in South Africa, has resulted in large numbers of unwanted children getting caught up in the legal child-care and protection system (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:2). These children will inevitably be placed in some form of alternative care, with the hope that for the majority only short term care will be required until the child can be reunited with his/her family (Connolly & Morris, 2012:81). In cases where it is not possible to return the child to their families of origin however, longer-term care will be needed. A permanent arrangement through the use of adoption is therefore advocated for in cases of abandonment, as it may offer these children the stability and security they need (Children's Act 38, 2005:63,75; Connolly & Morris, 2012:81,93).

While considering adoption in South Africa, it is of value to note that the majority of children available for adoption are black, while the majority of prospective adoptive parents are white (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:4). Consequently, trans-racial adoption is an option when it comes to securing permanent placements for children in need of care and protection. Given the lack of South African research on adoption; the numbers of abandoned children; and the mismatch between the population groups of adoptable children and prospective adoptive children, it was deemed appropriate to conduct a study in South Africa exploring the practice of trans-racial adoption in cases of abandonment (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:1,2,4; Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:347, 352).

The following chapter aims to meet the third objective of this research study, as identified in chapter one. The views of social workers on trans-racial adoptions of abandoned children will therefore be discussed according to the results of the empirical study.

As was indicated in the first chapter of this study, the data collected will be analysed according to both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The procedure of data processing involved both the statistical analyses of numerical data by means of tables and figures, as well

as interpretations of narratives provided by participants. Data presented in this chapter was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews conducted with adoption social workers in the Western Cape. References to the literature study as provided in chapter two and three, and discussions regarding its relationship to the presented data, will also be provided. This will allow for appropriate deductions, regarding the identified themes, subthemes and related categories, to be made. The layout of this chapter is representative of the semi-structured interview schedule (see appendix A).

4.2 RESEARCH METHOD

In this section, an overview of the research method employed for the gathering of data toward the interpretation and analysis of the empirical findings will be presented.

4.2.1 Preparation for the investigation

The following section will provide a brief overview of the research methodology employed for the successful execution of the research study.

4.2.2 Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted as a means of testing the instrument of data collection. The data collection method was thus implemented with a smaller group of participants from the intended test population. This was done in order ensure that the instrument of data collection was both efficient and effective. Motivation for this type of preparation for the investigation is grounded in research literature such as De Vos *et al.* (2011:237) and Barker (2003:327-328) who indicate that a pilot study is a procedure carried out as a means of testing and validating an instrument.

For this study, a purposive selection of two respondents was utilised to test the data collection process. The necessary modifications identified during these interviews were then implemented accordingly.

4.2.3 Research sample

The sample group was be made up of 18 adoption social workers. All participants therefore had experience in the specialised field of adoption. The sample consisted of participants from

a variety of social work contexts, including social workers from government departments, NGOs, and private practices.

The criterion for inclusion of the sample group for the study was as follows:

- Participants must be social workers who are registered, practising social workers within the Western Cape area.
- Participants must be social workers who have been working in the specialised field of adoption (whether privately or at an organisation) for at least one year.
- Participants must be knowledgeable about the process of adoption.
- Participants must have been involved in a trans-racial adoption.
- Participants must be proficient in speaking English and/or Afrikaans as the researcher did not have access to a translator and was therefore not able to adequately interview social workers of other languages.

4.2.4 Research approach, design and instrument

A combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches was employed for the purpose of obtaining the aim of this study (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:434). Qualitative research is concerned with “describing and understanding human behaviour; naturalistic observation; and the subjective exploration of reality from the perspective of an insider” (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:433). The study was based on the subjective views of adoption social workers, which were obtained through detailed and in-depth interviews. Quantitative data was collected by means of close-ended questions, and is presented in this chapter in the form of tables and figures.

Moreover, a combination of exploratory and descriptive research designs was utilised as the framework for the research approach. The use of this combined research design allowed for the appropriate utilisation of both quantitative and qualitative design elements.

Finally, the instrument for data collection was a semi-structured interview schedule, designed by the researcher and conducted during personal interviews with social work professionals. A set of predetermined questions was formulated in line with the presented research problems, aims and hypothesized themes.

4.2.5 Data gathering and analysis

Data analysis is the process whereby the collected data is organised and interpreted in order to produce meaningful findings (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:249,397). Both quantitative and qualitative analysis was used to evaluate the data obtained throughout the study.

According to Rubin and Bannie (2005), cited in De Vos *et al.* (2011:249) quantitative data analysis can be regarded as the techniques used by researchers to convert data into numerical form, and to subject it to statistical analysis. The quantitative data is presented with the use of appropriate tables and graphs. Comparisons to relevant literature are made, allowing for a detailed analysis of the data collected.

As with quantitative studies, the purpose of conducting a qualitative study is to produce findings (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:397). Patton (2002) cited in De Vos *et al.* (2011:397) note that the purpose of qualitative analysis is to transform data into findings. Such an analysis would involve reducing large volumes of raw information, sifting significance from trivia, identifying significant patterns and subsequently constructing a framework that would allow for communication of key findings (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:397). The Qualitative data obtained during semi-structured interviews with the participants, is organised according to distinctive themes, sub-themes and categories. All the themes, sub-themes and categories are presented in table form before being discussed in further detail. The existing relationship between the data and that of the literature study presented in the previous two chapters are also be evaluated (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:402).

4.3 RESULTS OF THE STUDY

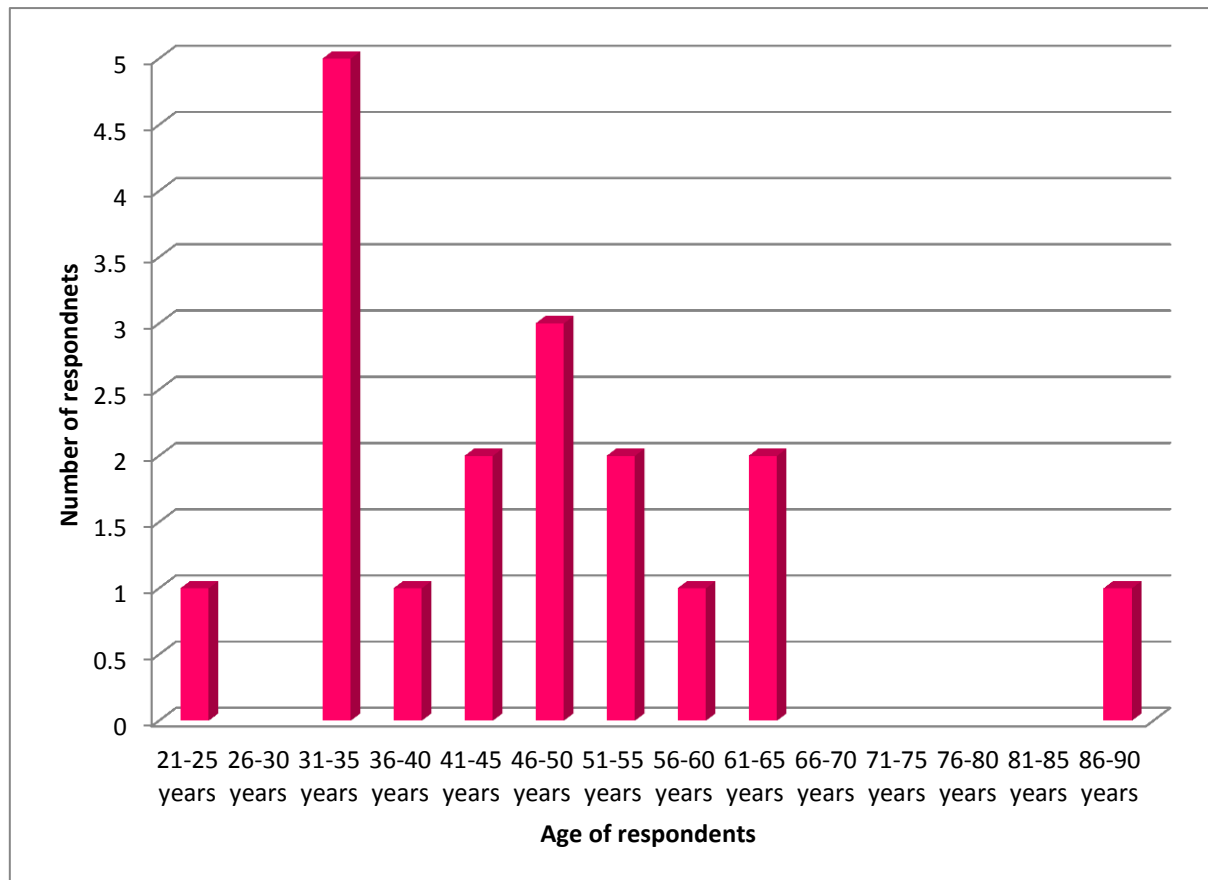
In the following section the identifying particulars of the respondents will be discussed. This will be done by means of quantitative data analysis and the use of various figures and tables.

4.3.1 Identifying particulars of respondents

The identifying particulars of respondents will be presented in terms of the age of respondents, years of experience as a social worker, years of experience as an adoption social worker, population group of respondent and the type of service provider the respondent works for.

4.3.1.1 Age of respondents

The respondents were asked to indicate their age. The results are presented in figure 4.1.



N=18

Figure 4.1: Age of respondents

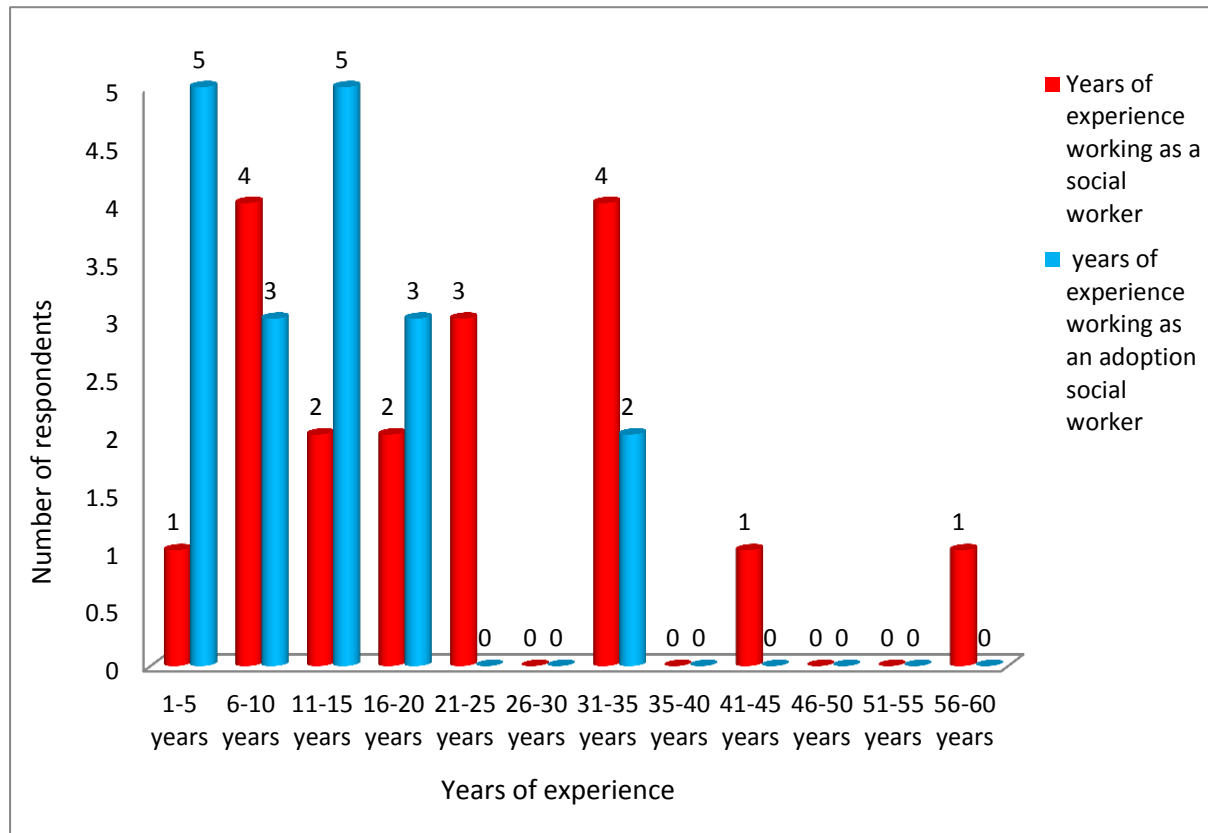
Most of the respondents (5=27.8%) indicated that they were between the ages of 31- and 35 years. Three (16.7%) respondents were between the ages of 46- and 50 years old. Two (11.1%) respondents indicated their age as falling within the age bracket of 41-and 45 years. An equal number of respondents (2=11.1%) specified that they were between the ages of 51- and 55 years, and 61- and 65 years. There was only one (5.5%) respondent between the age of 21- and 25 years. Similarly there was only one (5.5%) respondent for each of the following age groups: 36- to 40, 56-60 years, and 86- and 90 years.

Within this sample group, the ages of social workers working in the field of adoption was therefore quite dispersed. Figure 4.1 however clearly indicates that very few young social workers, below the age of 30, formed part of this sample group. This may be indicative of the fact that adoption is a specialised field for which special accreditation is required, therefore requiring younger social workers to first gain experience in generic social work before entering the field of adoption (Administrator, 2001; Children's Act 38, 2005:86). The majority of respondents fell between the ages of 30- and 65 years of age. It could therefore be deduced that at the age of thirty, most respondents who were interested in adoption, would have accumulated sufficient years of work experience in order to pursue their chosen field of speciality, only leaving adoption around the age of retirement.

Additionally, the variety of age groups making up the sample population is perhaps indicative of the fact that different age-related perspectives are being brought into the practice of adoption. In other words, the practice of adoption is not being determined only by older-, or only by younger schools of thought. A diversity of perspectives within the workforce may allow for more innovative thinking and problem solving concerning approaches to forms of child-care and adoption.

4.3.1.2 Years of experience

Respondents were asked to indicate the number of years they have been practising as a social worker, as well as the number of years they have been practising as an adoption social worker. Although these questions were asked separately in the semi-structured interview (question 1.2 and 1.3 respectively) they will be discussed together, allowing for appropriate evaluation of the data. The responses provided by respondents are captured in figure 4.2.



N=18

Figure 4.2: Years of experience

Concerning the years of experience in social work, the majority (15=83.3%) of respondents have between 6 to 35 years of work experience. With regards to the work experience of respondents in the field of adoption, the large majority (16=88.8%) of respondents indicated having between 1 and 20 years of work experience.

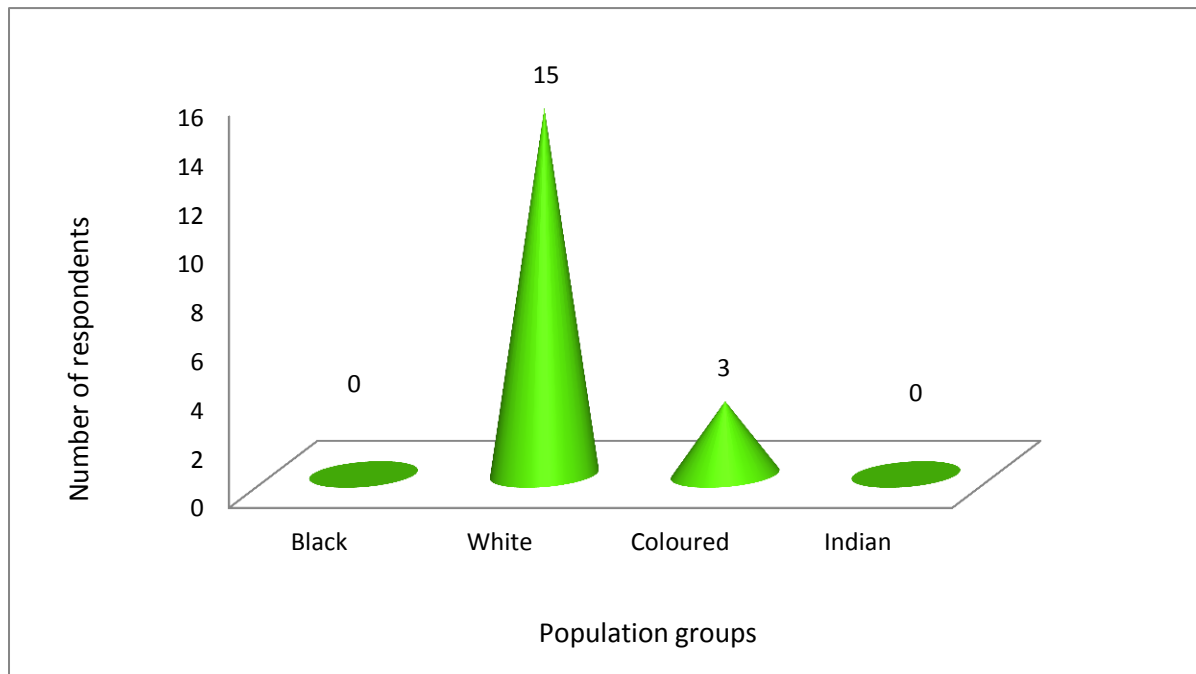
Figure 4.2 therefore indicates that while most of the respondents have between 6- and 35 years of experience in the social work field, most of them only have between 1- and 20 years of experience in the field of adoption. It can therefore be deduced that the majority of respondents first gained experience in other fields of social work before moving into adoption social work. Again this is indicative of the fact that adoption is a specialised field, often requiring social workers to work in more generic social work fields before being able to move into the field of adoption.

It should be noted that the Children's Act 38 of 2005 came into effect in June 2007 (Paleker, 2008:1). Approximately seventeen (94.4%) of the respondents were therefore implementing the Child Care Act of 1983 when they first started practising social work, and approximately thirteen (72.2%) respondents worked with the Child Care Act of 1983 when they first started working in the in the field of adoption social work.

The majority of respondents were therefore part of a significant transition phase within the field of social work. Although trans-racial adoption was legalised in 1991, the Children's Act 38 of 2005 brought about significant changes regarding children in need of care and protection as discussed in chapter two of the literature review (Ferreira, 2009:35). Specifically concerning adoption, Gerrand and Nathane-Taulela (2013:1) and Mokomane *et al.* (2012:347) highlight the fact that adoption was prioritised by the Children's Act of 2005. This new emphasis on adoption is one that required a change in mind-set amongst those respondents who had been working according to the old Child Care Act 74 of 1983 for several years.

4.3.1.3 Population group of respondents

The respondents were asked to indicate their population group. The results are represented in figure 4.3.



N=18

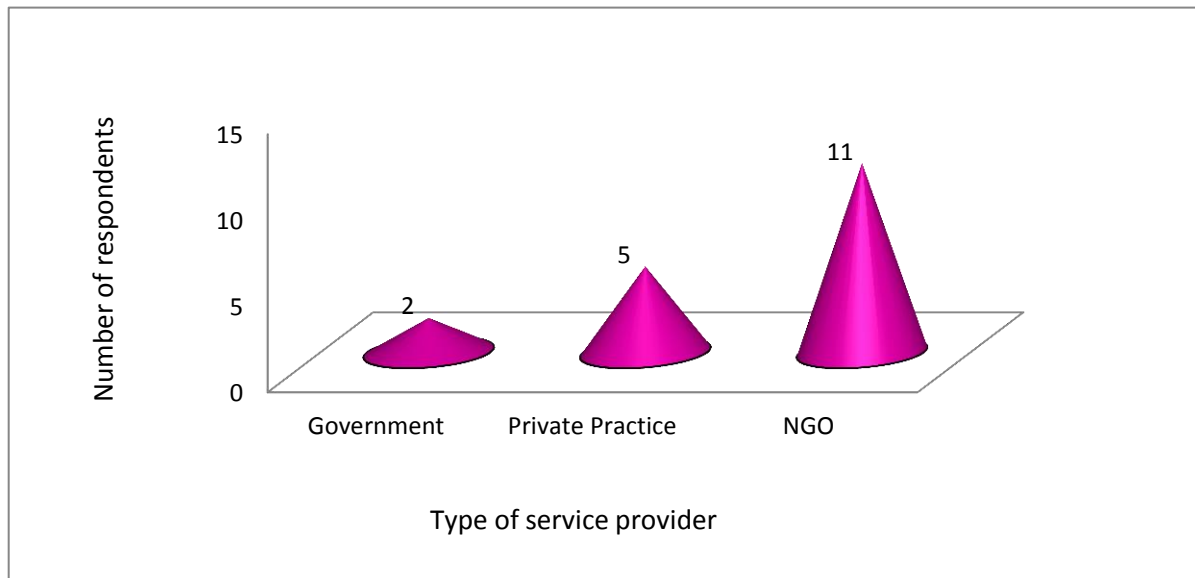
Figure 4.3: Population group of respondents

The majority (15=83.3%) of respondents indicated that they were from the white population group of South Africa. The minority (3=16.7%) of respondents were from the coloured population. None (0%) of the respondents in this study were from either the black or Indian population groups.

It is notable that no black respondents formed part of the sample group for this study. If this sample group is indicative of the larger population of adoption social workers in the Western Cape, then it is something that should possibly be addressed by adoption organisations as American authors McRoy *et al.* (1997:88); identified the absence of black adoption social workers as a reason for the unavailability of black adoptive parents. Literature further indicated that there is evidence to suggest that adoption organisations are likely to experience greater success in their recruitment efforts, if the organisation has black members of staff (Smith-McKeever & McRoy, 2005:533; McRoy *et al.*, 1997:90).

4.3.1.4 Type of service provider

Respondents were asked to specify the type of service providers they work for. The results are provided in figure 4.4.



N=18

Figure 4.4: Type of service provider

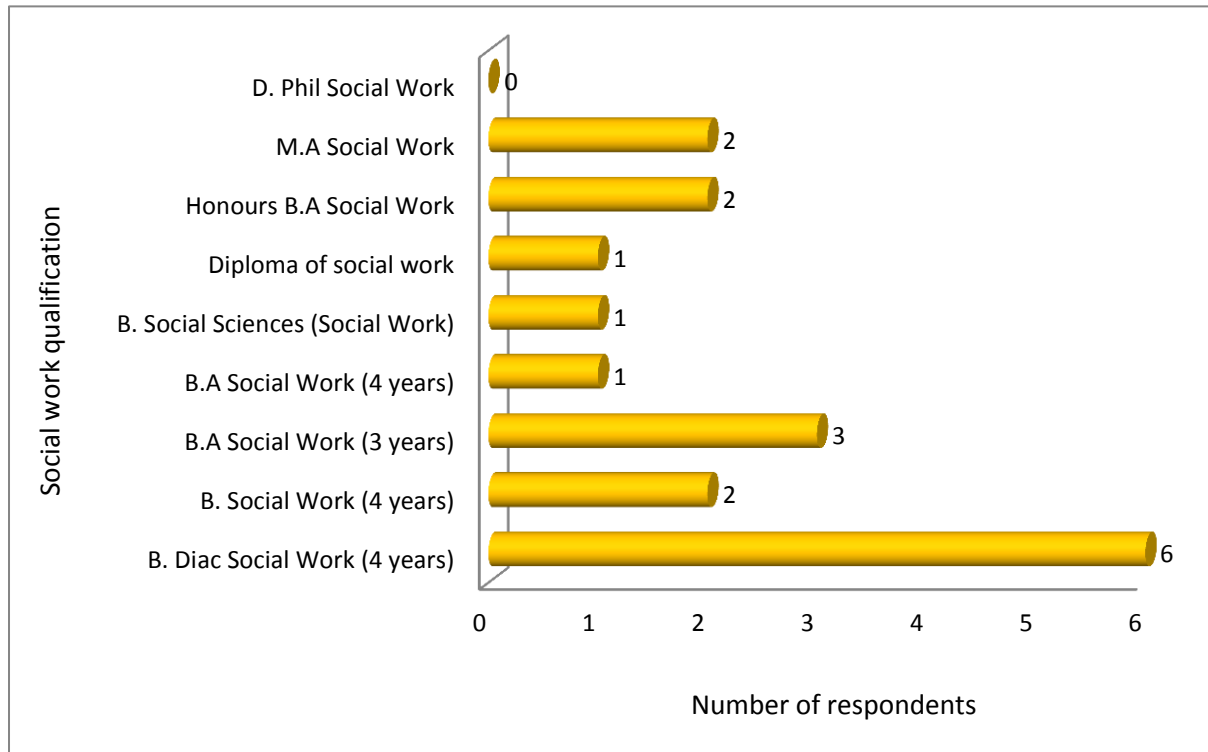
Figure 4.4 clearly indicates that most (11=61.1%) of the respondents work for non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Only five (27.7%) respondents work in private practices, and two (11.1%) of the respondents work for the government. Although all types of service providers offer adoption services, government services are clearly in the minority while NGOs are in the large majority.

4.3.2 Qualifications and training of adoption social workers

This section explores the social work qualifications and training received by the respondents. This was identified as a necessary topic to explore as it provides context to the foundations upon which the respondents' work in adoption is based.

4.3.2.1 Highest qualification obtained in social work

Respondents were asked to indicate the highest qualification they had received in social work. The answers provided are displayed in figure 4.5.



N=18

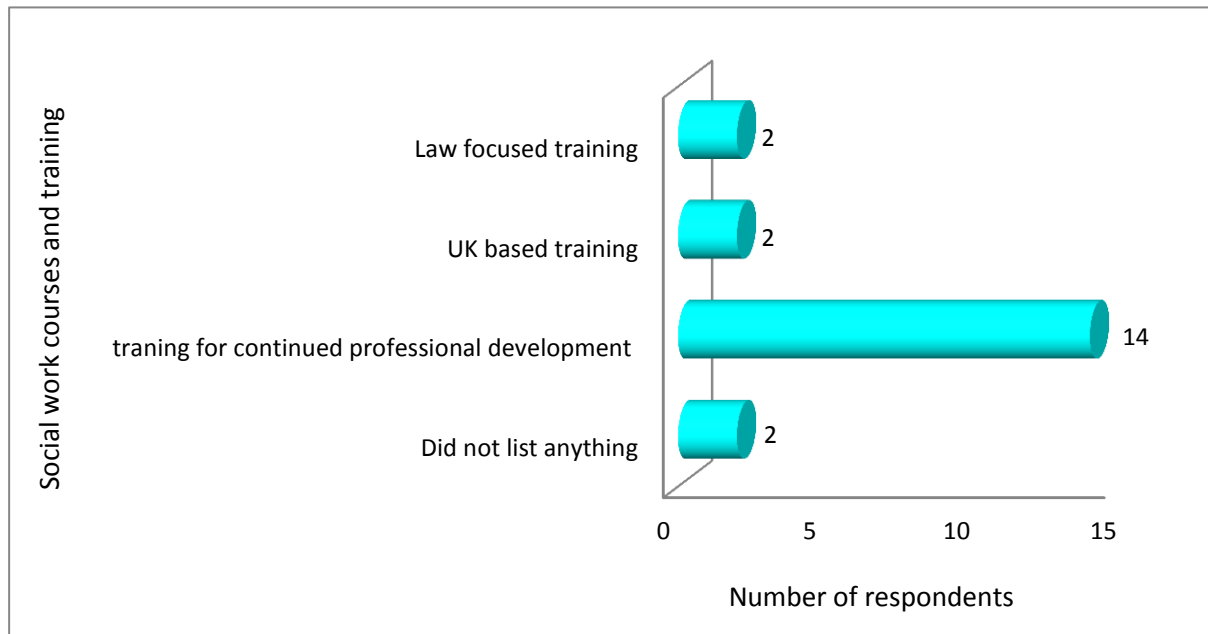
Figure 4.5: Highest qualification obtained in social work

The majority (14=77.7%) of respondents completed their undergraduate studies in social work. Only two (11.1%) respondents pursued further graduate studies and obtained an Honours degree in social work and another two (11.1%) respondents completed a Masters degree in social work. None (0%) of the respondents obtained a doctorate degree in social work.

The finding that the majority of respondents did not pursue postgraduate study could be indicative of the fact that working in the field of adoption in South Africa does not require any further formal training beyond the standard under-graduate degree in social work. It could be assumed that those respondents who did continue their academic careers would have done so more out of personal interest than necessity.

4.3.2.2 Other social work courses and/or training

Respondents were asked to list any other social work courses and/or training that they had received in addition to their university qualifications. Respondents listed a variety of different courses completed throughout their years of practising social work. The results are represented in figure 4.6.



N=18

Figure 4.6: Other social work courses and training received

Most (14=77.7%) of the respondents listed various courses that they had completed as part of their continued professional development requirements. Two (11.1%) respondents completed courses focusing on law and its relationship to social work practices. While working in the UK, two (11.1%) other respondents completed UK-based courses related to their social work practice. Two (11.1%) respondents did not list any other social work courses and/or training received in social work.

It is apparent from the data in figure 4.6 that after graduate or post-graduate training, the most prominent form of continued learning for respondents was training completed for the purpose of continued professional development. As the South African Council for Social Service Professions to take part in continued professional development requires all social workers, this finding is in line with the professional requirements of social workers. The specific courses completed for continued professional development that were listed by respondents included courses in; play therapy, pre-marriage counselling, life skills, prevention of domestic violence, family mediation, early childhood development, parenting skills programme, handling child abuse, HIV and AIDS training, managing grief and three days of annual adoption training. It would therefore appear that the continued professional development training completed by respondents was considerably broad in subject matter and did not necessarily focus on adoption.

It is noteworthy that none of the respondents indicated having undertaken any form of cultural competence training. This is despite the fact that cultural competence training was emphasised as being a crucial skill to be developed amongst adoption social workers all over the world (Rotabi & Bunkers, 2011:9).

Moreover, given the close relationship between social work and law in the field of adoption, it is noteworthy that only two (11.1%) of the respondents indicated having done any courses to further their knowledge and understanding of law in practice. Understanding the legislature and policies governing the practice of adoption in South Africa is essential for social workers if they are to adequately implement adoption interventions. Aside from ensuring a comprehensive understanding of legislature relating to children (such as the Children's Act 38 of 2005), adoption itself has been defined as a *legal* process in which the biological parents give up all rights and responsibilities towards the child (Owusu-Bempah, 2010:18). By inference, adoption and law are inextricably entwined and adoption social workers have the responsibility of expanding their knowledge of the legal processes relating to adoption.

4.3.2.3 Adequacy of social work education and training

Participants were asked to share their views regarding the adequacy of their social work education and training in preparing them to successfully work within the field of adoption. Three sub-themes and five categories emerged within this theme, and are highlighted in table 4.1

Table 4.1: Views of participants regarding the adequacy of social work qualifications and training received

THEME: Adequacy of social work education and training		
SUB-THEMES	CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY (%)
Lack of focus on adoption in education at the undergraduate level	Adoption focused education is inadequate at the undergraduate level	11 (61.1%)
Adequacy of social work training and/or courses completed after graduation	Social work training and courses are slightly helpful	7 (38.3%)
Adequacy of in-practice training	The most comprehensive training occurs predominantly in practice	10 (55.5%)
	Having good guidance in the practice setting is essential for positive learning	4 (22.2%)
	Specialised accreditation ensures learning	4 (22.2%)

(a) Sub-theme: Lack of focus on adoption in education at the undergraduate

This sub-theme explores the extent of adoption-focused education received by participants at the undergraduate level. Only one category emerged within this sub-theme, namely that the focus on adoption is inadequate at the undergraduate level.

(i) Category: Adoption focused education is inadequate at the undergraduate level

The majority (11=61.1%) of participants regarded their undergraduate social work training as being inadequate in preparing them for working in the adoption field. The following narratives confirm this view.

“You know what I believe is that qualifying from university etc., doesn’t really prepare you” (Participant Q).

“Through your qualification you don’t really deal much with adoption [laughs] at all... or statutory work for that matter” (Participant M).

Another participant, who suggests that their training was not only poor in terms of adoption, but also that training failed to focus on permanency planning for children, shares these views.

“Really somewhat lacking ... and not only regarding adoption itself. I found the social work degree that I did, was quite lacking in actually training social workers to consider and to really push for permanency.” (Participant J).

Based on the above views it can be concluded that graduate social work training was regarded as being largely insufficient in preparing the participants for their work in adoption.

(b) Sub-theme: Adequacy of social work training and/or courses completed after graduation

The second sub-theme identified was the adequacy of training received by participants after graduation. One category was identified within this sub-theme, and is explored below.

(i) **Category:** *Social work training and courses are slightly helpful*

Less than half (7=38.8%) of the participants identified the social work training and/or courses completed after qualifying as a social worker as being slightly helpful in better equipping them to work within the field of adoption. This is evident in the narrative of one participant.

“In a way good... but um... the one thing that I actually mostly use is the parenting skills programmes and also the family mediation... the others I don't use anymore”

(Participant H).

The narrative above highlights the fact that there is room for improvement with regards to the social work training and courses completed by social workers once they have graduated.

(c) **Sub-theme:** *Adequacy of in-practice training*

The third and final sub-theme identified, examines the in-practice training received by participants while practising in the field of adoption. Three categories are explored within this sub-theme.

(i) **Category:** *The most comprehensive training occurs predominantly in practice*

More than half (10=55.5%) of the participants suggested that the most comprehensive training in adoption takes place while actually working within the field. This is confirmed in the following narrative.

“My training was working as a social worker in adoption and observing and immediately interviewing... so I shadowed while in an adoption organisation. So that's the training I had” (Participant D).

Participants therefore felt that it was only once they started working in the field of adoption that they were really given the opportunity to learn about, and grasp the intricacies of, the practice of adoption.

(ii) **Category:** *Having good guidance in the practice setting is essential for learning*

Four (22.2%) of the participants specifically identified having a good supervisor, or dedicated senior social worker dedicated to training them, as being the key to their learning within the adoption field. The narratives below express this best.

“You learn by doing it...and especially through my former colleague, I sometimes say that all I know about adoption I learnt from her” (Participant R).

“I learnt a lot more in practice, alongside a senior social worker who guided me every step of the way” (Participant K).

Another participant elaborates further on the benefits of working with, and learning from, other dedicated adoption social workers while simultaneously highlighting the fact that not all social workers are being granted this opportunity.

“I am fortunate that I have started my adoption work here in an organisation which specialises in adoption, with people who are very knowledgeable about adoption and also about the law...so I am being trained all the time by people who understand the processes we need to follow. But a lot of social workers don't have that” (Participant I).

Hands-on, in practice learning is of course a necessity for all individuals within any line of profession if they want to succeed in their field. Years of experience is often revered in the workplace and rightly so. The finding above confirms that it is no different in the field of adoption social work, as participants have highlighted in-practice learning as being the predominant form of learning.

One participant however, raised the point that not all social workers are fortunate enough to be adequately trained by other social workers that are knowledgeable about the field of adoption. This view is noteworthy as it suggests that not all adoption social workers are assured of receiving comprehensive and adequate in-practice training, despite it having been identified as the dominant site for learning.

(iii) Category: Specialised accreditation ensures learning

Four (22.2%) participants mentioned that because adoption is a specialised field of social work, requiring formal accreditation as an adoption social worker, it is ensured that all social workers in the field would have received the needed training. This is brought to light by the following narrative.

“You need special accreditation to do adoption, so you need to work in the system...at our organisation for instance we have three days of training every year” (Participant N).

One participant highlighted the fact that belonging to the adoption coalition also assists adoption social workers in their training as they have the opportunity to network with, and learn from, other social workers in the field.

“...and then we are also part of the adoption coalition so we network there... so it’s on-going you know, where one learns from the other and so on” (Participant F).

Despite a general lack of formalised adoption training for social workers, adoption social workers in South Africa are required to be registered with the South African Council of Service Professions as an adoption social worker in order to practice adoption (Children’s Act 38 of 2005:86). This can be viewed in a positive light, as it should help to ensure that adoption social workers are able to provide up to date and good quality services to all members of the adoption triangle.

4.3.3 Child abandonment and adoption

This section aims to explore child abandonment in the Western Cape from the perspective of the study participants. Participants were asked to discuss how often they work with abandoned children, what the most common profile of abandoned children being placed by their organisation is, and to share their views regarding whether abandoned children are being put up for adoption or being placed in foster care.

4.3.3.1 Incidence of participants working with abandoned children

Participants were asked to indicate how often they work with children who have been abandoned. The three sub-themes and five relevant categories that emerged within this theme are highlighted in table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Views of participants regarding child abandonment in the Western Cape

THEME: Incidence of participants working with abandoned children		
SUB-THEME	CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY (%)
Participants never work with abandoned children	Participants work exclusively with disclosed adoptions	2 (11.1%)
	Not working with abandoned children is a choice	2 (11.1%)
Participants rarely work with abandoned children	Abandonment cases are not always referred for adoption by child protection workers	5 (27.7%)
Participants work with abandoned children all the time	Abandonment is common	1 (5.5%)
	Participant works with older children abandoned in foster- or institutional care	1 (5.5%)

(a) Sub-theme: Participants never work with abandoned children

The first sub-theme that came to the fore is concerned with the six (33.3%) participants who stated that they never work with abandoned children. Two categories were identified within this sub-theme.

(i) Category: Participants work exclusively with disclosed adoptions

Two (11.1%) of the participants explained that the reason they are not working with abandoned children is because they work exclusively in disclosed adoptions, where the child and biological parents are already known to the adoptive parents. In these cases the participants explained that they would not be working with abandoned children in the traditional sense (that is, a child abandoned at birth). The following narratives support this view.

“I only facilitate disclosed adoptions, so I am not working with abandoned children at the moment. Unless of course the child had been abandoned, but they are already in the care of the prospective adoptive parents, so we don’t get them as an abandoned child... so the classic abandonment cases we don’t work with” (Participant C).

“No not at all... I unfortunately only do disclosed adoptions” (Participant D).

It is therefore concluded that whether or not adoption social workers will work with abandoned children is largely dependent on the form of adoptions they facilitate. It is unlikely that those adoption social workers that predominantly work with disclosed adoptions will work with abandoned children.

(ii) Category: Not working with abandoned children is a choice

Two (11.1%) participants who work in private practice explained that it was because of personal preference that they decided to rather not work with abandoned children. This is reflected in the narratives below

“In my private practice I chose to not work with abandoned children” (Participant Q).

“I choose not to work with children who have been abandoned, because of all the red tape surrounding the process to be followed with them” (Participant K).

These narratives highlight the fact that some social workers may consciously decide not to work with abandoned children because the process that needs to be followed with abandoned children often becomes complicated.

The finding of this sub-theme that participants never work with abandoned children is not necessarily a reflection on the actual numbers of abandoned children in the Western Cape. Rather, the low incidence of working with abandoned children amongst the participants appears to stem from personal preference and the type of adoptions being facilitated.

(b) Sub-theme: Participants rarely work with abandoned children

This sub-theme explores the views of those participants who indicated that they rarely work with abandoned children. Two categories were identified.

(i) Category: child protection workers do not always refer Abandonment cases for adoption

Five (27.7%) participants explained that they rarely work with abandoned children because abandoned children are not always being referred to their organisations. It was explained that abandoned children are first referred to child-protection workers at a child welfare or child protection organisation for an investigation of abandonment to take place. Once declared

abandoned, it was stated that the child *might* then be referred to the adoption organisation. It was therefore suggested that the reason for the low numbers of abandoned children forming part of their caseload, is because of the process that needs to be followed when a child is abandoned. The following narratives further explain this.

“Not much at all... because what happens with abandoned children... the child will first go to the child protection team. They will then do a child protection investigation in terms of abandonment. If no parents can be found, it will sometimes come through to us. But it is not filtering through to us as much as it should. So some of those children are still being placed into foster care instead of straight to adoption” (Participant M).

“...You see not all the abandoned children always come to us immediately. It first goes to the case section and often gets lost there. So a lot of those children stay in foster care when they could've been adopted” (Participant P).

It is clear from the above narratives that in the experience of participants, abandoned children are not always being referred to adoption social workers because they are first referred to child-protection workers who could instead place the children in foster care. This possible result of the process that needs to be followed with abandoned children raises concern as the Children's Act 38 of 2005 clearly advocates for more permanent forms of alternative care, such as adoption, for those children who have been abandoned (Gerrand & Nathane, 2013:1; Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:347)

(c) Sub-theme: Participants work with abandoned children all the time

The following sub-theme examines the views of participants who reported that they work with abandoned children all the time. Two categories were identified in this sub-theme and are explored below.

(i) Category: Abandonment is common

One (5.5%) participant explained that he/she often works with babies who have been abandoned. This is confirmed in the following narrative.

“All the time... all the time. So there are... you have your babies who are abandoned...we have a lot of that, an overwhelming amount of babies being abandoned” (Participant I).

The view that there are many abandoned children, correlates with the literature which reports that the number of babies being abandoned annually in South Africa is on the rise, hitting an estimated number of 3500 in 2010 (Blackie, 2013:2).

(ii) Category: Participant works with older children abandoned in foster- or institutional care

One (5.5%) participant explained that the organisation makes an effort to not only work with babies who have been abandoned, but to also identify older children who have been abandoned in the child-care and protection system.

“The Children’s Act says ‘no contact for any apparent reason for a period of more than three months’. I would probably say even as many as 90% of our cases are that exact scenario. We go as far as... children who have been removed and placed into a children’s home or into temporary safe care or into foster care... and who’ve never had any form of contact whatsoever... for a period of three months, or six or twelve, or eighteen or six years...you know, no contact whatsoever with the biological parent” (Participant J).

This participant’s organisation therefore makes an effort to work with abandoned children who have been left to linger in the child-care system. What this way of working brings to light, is the need to work according to the Children’s Act and recognise that a child who is in foster care, whose parent or caregiver has failed to make contact with the child for no reason, should be considered abandoned and therefore deemed adoptable (Children’s Act 38, 2005:75).

The finding that the majority of participants do not often work with abandoned children is mainly related to the view that child protection workers, who are responsible for carrying out the investigation of abandonment, will not refer the child to the adoption organisations, rather placing the child in foster care. It is however acknowledged that child protection workers were not interviewed for this study and their point of view regarding the process they follow with abandoned children is therefore lacking.

It is therefore noted that the aim of this study was to investigate the views of adoption social workers, but that future research could aim to investigate the views of both adoption- and child-protection social workers as it would be valuable to compare their views regarding whether the foster care or adoption option is followed with abandoned children.

4.3.3.2 Most common profile of abandoned children worked with by participants

The participants were asked to describe the most common profile of an abandoned child that they or their organisation would have to place. The responses provided were extrapolated according to the theme, three sub-themes and six categories presented in table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Views of participants regarding the most common profile of abandoned children placed by their organisation

THEME: Most common profile of abandoned children placed by adoption organisations		
SUB-THEMES	CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY (%)
Age of abandoned children	Younger than six months	10 (55.5%)
	Older than six months	5 (27.6%)
Population group of abandoned children	Black abandoned children are in the majority	5 (27.7%)
	Some abandoned children are coloured	5 (27.7%)
Lack of background information	No medical history	2 (11.1%)
	Dearth of information results in placement difficulties	2 (11.1%)

(a) Sub-theme: Age of abandoned children

This sub-theme explores the views of participants who discussed the likely age of an abandoned child. The two categories identified within this sub-theme are discussed below.

(i) Category: Younger than 6 months

Ten (55.5%) participants indicated that abandoned children were likely to be young babies below the age of six months. The narratives provided confirm this.

“Most of our abandoned babies are new born... within 24 to 48 hours after being born. And you determine that because most of them still have their umbilical cords on” (Participant N).

“The biggest percentage of abandoned children at our organisation would be babies-new born” (Participant A).

Welsh and Viana (2012:245) highlight the link between the age at adoption and children’s development trajectories, suggesting that children adopted at younger ages tend to display more favourable developmental outcomes than those children who were adopted later in life. If babies who have been abandoned are put up for adoption as soon as possible, it is therefore likely to significantly benefit the child.

(ii) Category: Older than 6 months

Five (27.7%) of the participants indicated that the majority of their abandoned children would be defined as older children - six months and older. This is explained further in the following narrative.

“Age wise they would tend to be slightly older because they have gone through the child protection system first, so they are usually between eight – and eighteen months...because they don’t come straight to us from abandonment” (Participant M).

“Age wise it would be babies from 6 months onwards because that’s the only time it would be referred to us... we don’t get it initially – it’s first case work, so that the court can make a finding of abandonment and then it’s transferred to us for adoption” (Participant D).

It was noted that the reason for participants working with older abandoned children is due to the process that needs to be followed with an abandoned child, which is different from an adoption in which the biological family has given consent. In cases of abandonment at birth, an investigation of abandonment, usually carried out by child protection organisations, first needs to be conducted. Only after this investigation is concluded, and the child deemed adoptable, will the child be referred to an adoption organisation for adoption. According to the views of participants it would therefore appear that abandoned children who are first referred to child protection organisations will only be deemed adoptable when the child is already a couple of months old.

The two categories identified within this sub-theme are therefore slightly at odds with one another. Participants in the first category implied that when an abandonment case is referred to them, they would have the opportunity of placing younger babies into adoption. Participants in the second category implied that by the time child protection workers have referred an abandoned child to them for adoption, the child would already be a couple of months old. Regardless of the type of organisation to which an abandonment case is first referred however, an investigation of abandonment will always need to be conducted before the child can be deemed adoptable. It is therefore being suggested that the investigation of abandonment is carried out faster by adoption organisations than child protection organisations. Again it needs to be recognised that this is a one sided argument, as child protection workers were not interviewed for this study.

It is however of value to further investigate this proposed time difference in the process followed for abandoned children, as the age at which an abandoned child is deemed adoptable is recognised an important factor for the child (Welsh & Viana, 2012:245). Child protection workers and adoption social workers alike therefore need to work towards abandoned children spending the shortest possible time in the child protection system

(b) Sub-theme: Population group of abandoned children

This sub-theme explores the views of more than half (10=55.5%) of the participants who discussed the most common population groups of abandoned children. The categories identified within this sub-theme are explored below.

(i) Category: Black abandoned children are in the majority

Five (27.7%) participants indicated that the majority of the abandoned children they work with are from the black population group, as are supported by the narrative below.

“They are usually black babies” (Participant M).

(ii) Category: Some abandoned children are coloured

Five (27.7%) participants explained that although most of their abandoned children are black, several are coloured. The following narratives support this view.

“Some coloured babies, but mostly black” (Participant B).

“Majority are black, there are some coloured...no white” (Participant Q).

The narratives above indicate that participants predominantly work with abandoned children from the black population, followed by coloured children. The predominance of the black population amongst abandoned children corresponds with statements of Gerrand and Nathane-Taulela (2013:4) who indicated that the high numbers of children in the childcare and protection system who are eligible for adoption are predominantly black.

(c) Sub-theme: Lack of background information

This sub-theme examines the fact that abandoned children are often left with no background information, leaving the child with no knowledge of their biological roots. The two categories identified within this sub-theme are discussed below.

(i) Category: No medical history

Two (11.1%) participants highlighted the fact that one of the most detrimental issues arising from the absence of background information of abandoned children is the accompanying absence of any medical history. The narratives below shed light on this potential problem.

“Complete lack of knowing where you come from, complete lack of genetic information, complete lack of medical history” (Participant K).

“...if you get a baby where the mother signed consent, you will have medical background, you will have background on the mother, you know whether the child has been exposed to HIV or whether there was any chance of being exposed to syphilis. But not with the abandoned child” (Participant N).

The view of the participants that one of the major challenges faced by abandoned children is having a blank medical history correlates with literature, where it is highlighted that having no medical history puts these children in a precarious position as they will not know if they are at risk of any hereditary medical conditions (Philpot, 2006:25).

(ii) Category: Dearth of information results in placement difficulties

Two (11.1%) participants suggested that this lack of background information could lead to difficulties in placing the abandoned children. The following narratives support this.

“That is the sad part because you have minimal background information. I think it makes the adoption more challenging in terms of adoptive parents who don’t have any information” (Participant O).

“...a complete lack of knowing where you come from, um... very difficult to place, because you do not know what will transpire once the child is older” (Participant K).

The fact that a lack of background information may lead to difficulties in finding a placement for abandoned children is reflected by Mokomane and Rochat (2010:30) who state that abandoned children are the least likely group of children to be adopted. Similarly, Philpot (2006:25) suggests that adoptive parents may be less likely to adopt such a child, as they are not willing to commit to parenting a child who could potentially have physical or mental disabilities of which they were initially unaware.

4.3.3.3 Foster care or adoption option followed with abandoned children

Participants were asked to share their views regarding their experiences of whether abandoned children are being put up for adoption or being placed in foster care. Three sub-themes and six relevant categories were identified in this theme and are presented in table 4.4.

Table 4.4: The experience of participants regarding whether abandoned children are being put up for adoption or being placed in foster

THEME: Adoption or foster care option followed with abandoned children		
SUB-THEMES	CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY (%)
Option followed is related to the type of organisation	Child-protection organisations place abandoned children in foster care	16 (88.8%)
	Adoption organisations place abandoned children in adoption	6 (33.3%)
Reasons for foster care option being followed by child protection workers	Lack of education, knowledge and understanding about adoption	6 (33.3%)
	Not recognising that the children’s act advocates for adoption in cases of abandonment as being in the best interests of the child	6 (33.3%)
Consequences related to the foster care option being followed	Lack of permanency in the life of the child	3 (16.6%)
	Child becomes an older-hard-to-place children	2 (16.6%)

(a) Sub-theme: Option followed is related to the type of organisation

This sub-theme explores the views of participants who stated that whether an abandoned child is put up for adoption or placed in foster care is often dependant on the type of organisation who deals with the case. Two categories were identified within this sub-theme and are explored below.

(i) Category: Child-protection organisations place abandoned children in foster care

More than half (16=88.8%) of the participants suggested that child-protection organisations are more likely to place an abandoned child in foster care than adoption. The following narratives highlight this view.

“With the child-protection workers, they are still quick to do fostering and then forget about the rest of the process” (Participant B).

“Well... this does tend to be who you speak to. When I worked at [an organisation not specialised in adoption] as a general child protection worker, every child went for foster care... if you speak to adoption social workers obviously adoption is our huge focus” (Participant J).

“They [child protection workers] will more have the attitude that the abandoned children must go into foster care for a few years and then to adoption” (Participant N).

According to the views of the participants, child protection workers will often place abandoned children in foster care instead of adoption. This is despite the fact that the Children’s Act advocates for adoption in cases of abandonment (Children’s Act 38, 2005: 75). Literature notes that adoption is one of the most under-utilised child care practices in South Africa and participant views suggest that one of the reasons for the low numbers of adoption may be due to it is not being utilised by child protection workers outside of the field of adoption (Mokomane & Rochat, 2012:355, Mokomane & Rochat, 2010:49).

If participants feel that adoption is being underutilised in cases of abandonment by child protection organisations, then a possible option for adoption organisations is to reach out to those child protection organisations and discuss the benefits of adoption for those children.

(ii) Category: Adoption organisations place abandoned children up for adoption

Six (33.3%) participants explained that if the abandoned child were to come to their organisation or department, that child would definitely be put up for adoption. The following narrative confirms this.

“...within our organisation, all our abandoned children come for adoption. We don't believe that an abandoned child must be put up for foster care because what is the sense in that?” (Participant N).

“Our abandoned children are definitely only placed in adoption” (Participant R).

“Our organisation definitely tries to have the child rather placed in adoption than in foster care as it [adoption] is obviously better” (Participant P).

According to these narratives participants' organisations try to place abandoned children up for adoption as soon as possible.

(b) Sub-theme: Reasons for foster care option being followed by child protection workers

This sub-theme examines the views of participants regarding the reasons why child protection workers follow the foster care option in cases of abandonment.

(i) Category: Lack of education, knowledge and understanding about adoption

Six (33.3%) of the participants indicated that in their opinion a lack of education, knowledge and understanding of adoption largely influences the pursuit of foster care amongst child protection workers. The following narratives elaborate on this view.

“It's a lack of good management and understanding what adoption it... what fundamentally children need growing up” (Participant I).

“...during their student years there was no focus on adoption as another option, so if you do a children's court enquiry, you think of temporary- or foster care. But with abandoned children, in the first year they will see... nobody comes forwards and they STILL go on with foster care. Lack of information I think.... it comes back to the education” (Participant B).

“I don't think our child protection social workers are trained adequately in adoption, and I think it's underutilised.” (Participant M).

The Children's Act identifies adoption is a specialised field of social work, only to be practiced by accredited adoption social worker or organisation (Children's Act 38, 2005: 86). There is therefore a possibility that child-protection workers would perhaps not have a comprehensive understanding of the practice.

The Children's Act 38 (2005:9, 75) however clearly defines the circumstances under which a child should be considered abandoned, while also stating that a child who has been abandoned should be regarded as an adoptable child. The view that abandoned children are being placed in foster care instead of being made available for adoption is therefore noteworthy, as it is suggestive not only of a potential lack of understanding concerning adoption, but also of a misconception amongst social workers regarding the purpose of foster care. Foster care is aimed to provide **temporary** safe care to children in need of care and protection, with the end goal of **reunification** between the child and the biological family (Connolly & Morris, 2012:81). In the interim period before reunification occurs, it can be assumed that certain interventions would need to take place in order to prepare the family to properly care for their child. However, in cases where it is not possible to return the child to their families of origin, longer-term care is needed, and for some children a permanent arrangement through the use of adoption may offer them the stability and security they need (Connolly & Morris, 2012:81,93). Concerning abandonment cases, it would certainly be the case that reunification (the aim of foster care) would not be possible. Adoption would then surely be the plan of permanency that would most appropriately ensure best interest of the child.

(ii) *Category: Not recognising that the children's act advocates for adoption in cases of abandonment as being in the best interests of the child*

Six (33.3%) of the participants stated that advocating for adoption in cases of abandonment is in accordance with the provisions made by the Children's Act 28 or 2005. The following narrative supports this

"With the new children's act ... they made provision now for a child after three months to be adoptable if they were abandoned" (Participant H).

Another participant explained that the aim of this provision is to ensure that the best interests of the child are being met.

“...the act is about the best interests of the child and foster care never serves the best interests of the child if there is no possibility that this child can be placed back with his or her family” (Participant N).

According to the above narrative, advocacy for adoption of abandoned children finds its foundation in the principle of the ‘best interests of the child’s. The view that the Children’s Act advocates for adoption in cases of abandonment is in line with the Children’s Act, where it is stated that an abandoned child is an adoptable child (Children’s Act, 2005:9, 63, 71, and 75). It can therefore be concluded that the Children’s Act, which is one of the most important pieces of legislation regulating adoption in South Africa, encourages social workers to place abandoned children in adoption instead of foster care. If foster care is rather pursued it is therefore indicative of the fact that the social work does not recognise that the Children’s Act advocates for adoption in cases of abandonment.

(c) *Sub-theme: Consequences related to the foster care option being followed*

This sub-theme explores the possible consequences of placing abandoned children in foster care as opposed to adoption. The two categories highlighted within this sub-theme are explored below.

(i) *Category: Lack of permanency in the life of the child*

Three (16.6%) participants expressed the view that foster care would not provide the abandoned child with same sense of permanency that adoption would. The following narratives confirm this view.

“...if a child is abandoned and if no parents or family comes forward to claim the child within a certain time frame the court can declare this child adoptable. And my opinion is that that is the best alternative, because it provides permanency” (Participant O).

“To have the [abandoned] child rather placed in adoption than foster care is obviously better – the permanency in placement is a better option” (Participant P).

The view that adoption is more likely than foster care to meet the abandoned child’s need for permanency correlates with literature (Mokomane *et al.*, 2012:347). American authors therefore explain that the purpose of permanency planning in childcare services is to ensure

that the time spent in foster care is kept to a minimum (McDonald, Press. Billings & Moore, 2007:6, 10).

(ii) Category: Child becomes an older-hard-to-place child

Three (16.6%) respondents pinpoint the fact that if abandoned children are not put up for adoption as soon as they are deemed adoptable, they run the risk of becoming older within the child-care and protection system. The consequence of this is the abandoned child becoming an older-hard-to-place child. The following narrative supports this.

“...some presiding officers feel that an abandoned child must first be placed in a family for two or three years and then... then the child must go to adoption. The problem is that when the child is two or three the list of people who wants that child is a lot shorter than the list of people who wanted that child as a baby” (Participant N).

The narrative suggests that the younger children are when they are put up for adoption, the greater their chances are of being placed with an adoptive family. The participants within this category are therefore of the opinion that an abandoned child should be put up for adoption as soon as possible as a means of increasing the child's chance of being adopted. Time should not be wasted allowing the child to linger in the foster care system, as this time could be detrimental to the child's chances of being adopted.

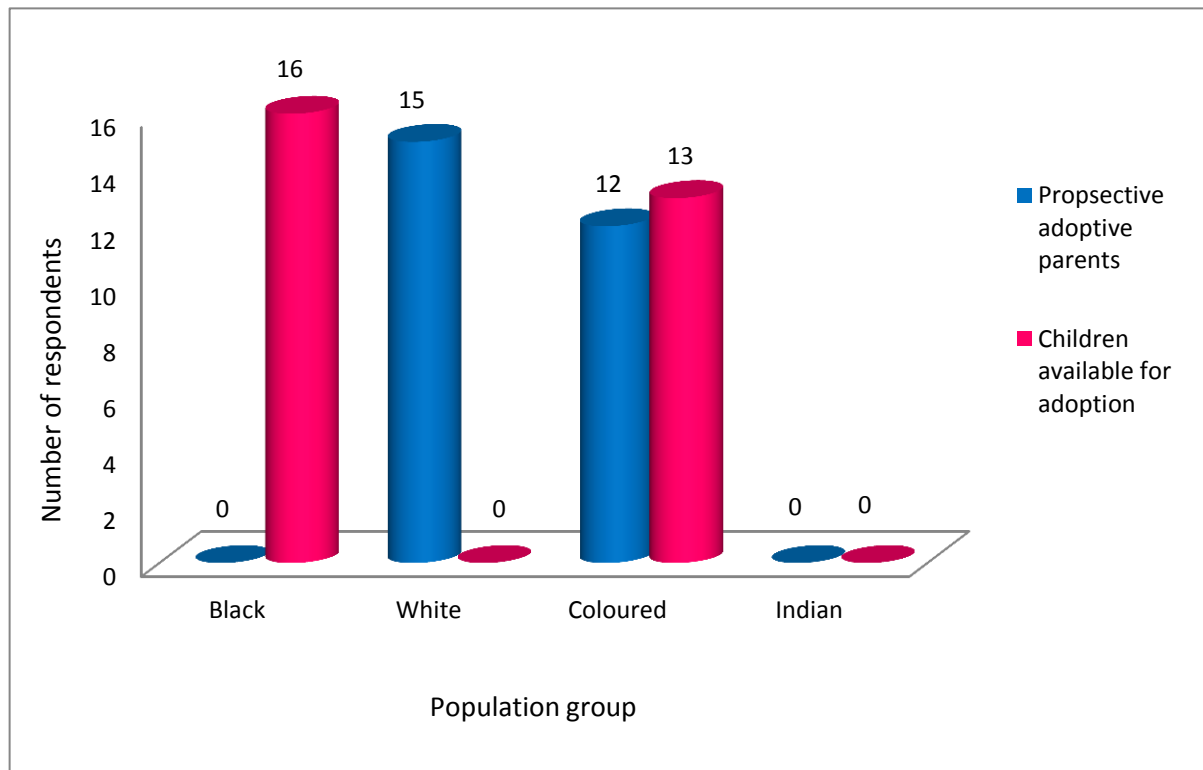
The finding that an older child is a harder to place child should be considered alongside literature which indicates that delays in adoption could negatively impact a child's development, as studies have generally shown more favourable outcomes for children adopted at younger ages (Hansen & Pollack, 2007:10; Walsh & Vianna, 2012:224).

4.3.4 The nature and process of adoption facilitated by the organisations

This section explores the nature and process of adoption facilitated by the nine adoption organisations included in the sample group. The views of participants regarding the population groups of clients involved in the adoption process, what the adoption process entails, and any barriers encountered during the facilitation of national same-race adoptions will be explored.

4.3.4.1 *Population group of parents wanting to adopt and children available for adoption*

Respondents were asked to indicate the population group of the majority of parents wanting to adopt, as well as the population group of the majority of children available for adoption. The respondents could indicate more than one option. The results are presented in figure 4.7.



N=18 *respondents could mark more than one option

Figure 4.7: The population group of parents wanting to adopt and children available for adoption

With regards to the prospective adoptive parents, most (15=83.3%) of the respondents indicated that the majority of their adoptive parents are white. Twelve (66.6%) of the respondents indicated that the majority of their adoptive parents are coloured. None (0%) of the respondents indicated black or Indian adoptive parents as being in the majority.

Concerning the children available for adoption, the majority (16=88.8%) of respondents indicated that most of their children available for adoption are black. Thirteen (72.2%) of the respondents revealed that most of their children waiting to be adopted are coloured. None

(0%) of the respondents indicated having a majority of white or Indian children available for adoption.

According to the above data it can be deduced that the numbers of coloured children available for adoption and the numbers of coloured adoptive parents balance one another out. The same cannot however be said for their black and white counterparts. According to table 4.7 it is clear that while the majority of parents wanting to adopt are from the white population group, the majority of children available for adoption are from the black population group. It can therefore be concluded that the numbers of prospective black adoptive parents do not match up with the numbers of black children available for adoption. Similarly, the numbers of white children available for adoption do not match up with the numbers of prospective white parents wanting to adopt. If children in need of a stable home environment are to be placed with permanent family, it therefore appears to be inevitable that trans-racial adoption would need to take place in South Africa.

Concerning the Indian population, none (0%) of the respondents indicated that the majority of their children available for adoption, or the majority of their prospective adoptive parents, are Indian. This does not mean that there are no Indian children waiting to be adopted, or that there are no prospective Indian adoptive parents. It is simply indicative of the fact that the Indian population does not represent the majority of either of the two groups highlighted in table 4.7.

The finding that there are not many black prospective adoptive parents strongly correlates with the literature where it was established that adoption is under-utilised by the black population of South Africa (Blackie, 2013:2; Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:1; Mokomane *et al.*, 2012: 352). This is despite the finding that the high numbers of children in the childcare and protection system who are eligible for adoption were identified as being black (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:4; Harber, 1999:9). Literature further confirmed the finding that there are very few white children available for unrelated adoptions (Blackie, 2013:2).

4.3.4.2 Services offered to biological parents

The respondents were asked to complete a table indicating which of the specified services they offer to biological parents considering giving up their child for adoption. The responses are recorded in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Services offered by respondents' organisation during the process of adoption for biological parents

Type of service provided	YES	NO
PRE-ADOPTION SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE		
Counselling Services (e.g. Options counselling, process and consequences of giving consent)	18	0
Guidance and support for important decision making (e.g. Open or closed adoptions; selection of appropriate adoptive parents, post adoption agreement)	18	0
Assistance in accessing needed external resources and services such as health care services, accommodation service in home for expectant mothers	12	6
OTHER: Discuss post-adoptive agreement; network with other organisations to make appropriate placements	2	0
POST-ADOPTION SUPPORT		
Liaison between biological- and adoptive family	16	2
Grief and loss counselling	15	3
Support groups	5	13
OTHER: If in-depth counselling is needed for the biological mother the adoption organisation will refer to appropriate professional; open door policy so the biological mother can always come back if they need help	4	0

N=18

From the above table it can be established that, concerning the pre-adoption support and guidance, all eighteen (100%) of the respondents indicated that their organisation offers counselling services, as well as the needed guidance and support for important decision making to biological parents. Just more than half (12=66.6%) of the respondents indicated that their organisation offers assistance to biological parents in accessing any needed resources and services. A total of six (33.3%) respondents therefore indicated that their organisations do not offer assistance to biological parents trying to access any needed resources and services.

It can therefore be concluded that counselling services, as well as support and guidance are viewed as imperative in ensuring the wellbeing of the biological parents is being. This finding corresponds with literature, which highlights the importance of biological parents receiving comprehensive counselling and guidance before the adoption process, in order to ensure that the parents are able to make an informed decision with which they are comfortable

(Administrator, 2001). Regarding the assistance offered in accessing needed external resources; literature indicates that depending on the needs of a birth mother she may receive medical care and treatment (Administrator, 2001). The data in table 4.5 however indicate that these additional services such as access to health care and accommodation is not necessarily a given, as all organisations do not directly offer these services. If they feel they would need access to such services, biological parents would therefore need to contact various adoption organisations in order to determine which one would best their needs.

At “other” (under pre-adoption services) two (11.1%) participants added that they would discuss post-adoptive agreements and network with other organisations to make appropriate placements. Taking on the responsibility of formulating a post-adoption agreement is in line with the Children’s Act, which indicates that that a post-adoption agreement, required in open adoptions to allow biological parents and adoptive parents to come to an agreement regarding the type and frequency of contact between the biological parent and the adopted child after adoption, would be facilitated by an adoption social worker (Children’s Act 38, 2005:78).

Pertaining to the post-adoption support, sixteen (88.8%) respondents indicated that they do liaise between the biological- and adoptive parents as necessary, with only two (11.1%) respondents indicating that their organisation does not do this. The majority (15=83.3%) of respondents specified that grief and loss counselling would be offered to the biological parents if the need arose, while three (16.6%) respondents indicated that their organisations do not offer such counselling. Most (13=72%) of the respondents indicated that their organisations do not have support groups for birth parents. Five (27.7%) respondents suggested that if the need arose they would offer support groups to parents, although presently there are no such support groups available.

The finding that most of the organisations offer grief and loss counselling to biological parents should be viewed in a positive light as literature stresses this as being imperative for the wellbeing of biological mothers (Lindsey, 1987:50,96). The finding that support groups are not readily available for birth parents indicates that counselling and support offered to these parents tends to take place in a one-on-one setting.

Finally, at “other” (under post-adoption support) four (22.2%) participants indicated that if in-depth counselling is needed the organisation would refer the mother to an appropriate professional who could provide the needed care. Furthermore, it was mentioned that the organisations often have an open door policy with biological mothers, so they can come back

at any time if they need help. The finding that adoption organisation embrace an open-door policy with their biological mothers is important as Lindsey (1987:50) emphasises that the adoption process is often a painful one for the biological mother.

4.3.4.3 Process of adoption for prospective adoptive parents

Respondents were asked to list the steps followed by their organisation in the process of adoption with prospective adoptive parents. A wide variety of answers were provided and answers were therefore grouped into six main sections, namely first contact; orientation; screening and preparation; matching; finalisation and placement; and post-adoption support. Where respondents went into more detail, subsections are provided.

It is noted that literature regarding the process of adoption for prospective adoptive parents was lacking. The available literature was however used to group respondents' responses into the appropriate sections. Answers provided by respondents are represented in table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Process of adoption for prospective adoptive parents

PROCESS OF ADOPTION FOR PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENTS	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
FIRST CONTACT	
Adoptive parents phone or email adoption organisation	2
Fee structure in sent to parent	1
Prospective adoptive parents are invited to an orientation session	2
ORIENTATION	
Information session – <i>the legal/statutory processes and emotional aspects of adoption are discussed</i>	7
After orientation parents confirm whether or not they would like to proceed with the adoption	4
Application forms provided and completed by prospective adoptive parents	5
SCREENING AND PREPARATION	
Needed Documentation – <i>completed application form, copy of ID; marriage and birth certificates; financial avadavat; proof of employment; police clearance; sexual offenders clearance</i>	11
References	6
Individual interviews	10
Couple interviews	6
Home visitation	12
Group preparation sessions/ workshop – <i>discussion points: heritage; possible backgrounds of biological parents; infertility; telling; possible profiles of children; openness in adoption</i>	6
Psychological assessments, personality tests, marriage assessment	9
OTHER: Motivations to adopt explored; Preferences regarding the type of child; adoptive parents set up a profile to be presented to biological parents; Explore relationship between child and biological parents (<i>open/disclosed adoption</i>); Post-adoption agreement; Interview with all members of adoption triangle (<i>open/disclosed adoption</i>); Online training course; adoption project; Multi-disciplinary team meeting to determine suitability; Christian organisation - <i>requires applicants to have strong affiliation with the church</i>	14
MATCHING	
Social worker presents match at internal panel meeting for approval	9
Social worker presents match at adoption panel for approval	8
Recommendation of approved adoption is to the courts	6
OTHER: Proposed match is presented to adoptive parents - <i>need to accept offer</i> ; Applicant applies at court and is added to waiting list - <i>placed on RACAP if trans-racial</i>	12
PLACEMENT AND FINALISATION	
All statutory work for legalisation of adoption is completed	3
Transfer of care – <i>child placed in care of adoptive parents</i>	2
POST-ADOPTION SUPPORT	
Post-adoption home visit	1
Support group	3
Aftercare - <i>are the coping well; is placement successful; appropriate attachment; access to needed resources; management of dealing with anxiety of being parents</i>	2

N=18

According to table 4.6, two (11.1%) respondents indicated that the first contact between the organisation and the prospective adoptive parents was likely to be via a telephone call or email. One (5.5%) respondent explained that the fee structure might then be sent to the prospective adoptive parents. Two (11.1%) respondents indicated that it was during this first contact that prospective adoptive parents would be invited to attend the orientation session offered by the adoption organisation.

The above highlights the fact that the only way to legally adopt a child in South Africa is by working through an accredited adoption organisation, or with the assistance of an adoption social worker (Administrator, 2001: Info.gov.za, 2007; services.gov.za, 2013; Yourparenting.co.za, 2013).

The second phase in the adoption process for prospective adoptive parents would then be the orientation. Seven (38.8%) respondents indicated that the orientation phase largely served as an information session for prospective adoptive parents, during which all the legal and emotional aspects of the adoption process would be explained. Four (22.2%) respondents explained that the prospective adoptive parents would then need to make a decision regarding whether or not they would like to proceed with the adoption process. Finally, five (27.7%) respondents indicated that it was during the orientation phase that parents would be given the application forms for adoption.

That prospective adoptive parents will be invited to an orientation session to learn about the adoption process, is confirmed in the literature where they explain that all the relevant information regarding adoption would be provided during these sessions so that prospective adoptive parents would be able to make an informed decision as to whether or not they would like to proceed with the adoption (Farber *et al.*, 2003:175; Administrator, 2001; Yourparenting.co.za, 2013).

After orientation, the screening and preparation phases would follow. Table 4.6 indicates that this is the longest phases within the adoption process. Eleven (61.1%) of the respondents explained that prospective adoptive parents would need to present all the necessary documentation for the adoption process to begin. Such documentation would include such things as the completed adoption application form, a copy of each parents, marriage and birth certificates, financial avadavat, proof of employment, police clearance and a sexual offenders' clearance. Six (33.3%) respondents indicated that the prospective adoptive parents would also need to submit character references from referees who could be contacted to vouch for the

applicants' abilities as a parent. Ten (55.5%) respondents indicated that applicants would then need to have individual interviews with the social workers, while another six (33.3%) respondents explained that applicants would then also need to undergo couple interviews with the social workers. Six (33.3%) of the respondents indicated that their organisation would facilitate group preparation sessions or workshops for prospective adoptive parents in order to better prepare them for the adoption. Nine (50%) respondents indicated that their applicants would have to undergo a combination of physiological assessments, personalities and marriage assessments. Finally, 14 (77.7%) of the respondents listed a variety of other factors that their organisation would address in the screening and preparation process. Amongst this list are the motivations to adopt, preferences regarding the type of child and the setting up of a profile of the prospective adoptive parents.

Respondent responses directly correlate with the literature where it was confirmed that the screening and preparation process is likely to include such steps as interviews focusing on infertility, family background, marriage, extended family support, parenting styles, finances, culture, home environment, full medical examinations, marriage and psychological assessment, home visits, police clearance, and references (Administrator, 2001; Info.gov.za, 2007).

After a thorough screening and preparation, once the parents have been approved for adoption, the social workers would move onto the matching phase of the adoption process. Nine (50%) of the respondents explained that they would present their proposed matches during an internal panel meeting for approval. Eight (44.4%) indicated that once internally approved, the proposed match would then be presented at the external adoption panel for approval. Once approved, six (33.3%) respondents indicated that the recommendation for adoption would then be sent to the courts for approval. Twelve (66.6%) respondents listed other steps that might occur during this phase, including the fact that the proposed match would also be presented to the prospective adoptive parents for approval.

Administrator (2001) noted that prospective adoptive parents might have specified the 'type of child' they are willing to adopt and that such specifications may include things such as the race, age, sex, disabilities and medical conditions of the child. It was indicated that based on any specifications indicated by the prospective adoptive parents, as well as information gathered during the screening process, the adoption organisations will then appropriately match the parents with a suitable child.

The next phase is then the placement and finalisation of the adoption. Three (16.6%) respondents explained that it is during this phase that all the statutory work for the legalisation of the adoption will take place. Two (11.1%) respondents indicated that the child would then be transferred into the care of their adoptive parents. The fact that the proposed adoption would need to be finalised by the courts correlates with the literature, which indicates that adoption, is a legal process carried out by the Children's Courts (Administrator, 2001; Yourparenting.co.za, 2013).

The final phase of the adoption process is then post-adoption support. One (5.5%) respondent mentioned that the organisation would conduct a post-adoption home visit in order to assess the success of the adoption. Three (16.6%) respondents indicated that parents would be invited to attend support groups. Two (11.1%) of the respondents explained that post-adoption support would include any follow up with the adoptive family to help ensure the success of the adoption.

It is apparent from the abundance of responses of respondents captured in table 4.6 that the adoption process is likely to differ organisation to organisation, as was suggested in the literature (Administrator, 2001; Youparenting.co.za; 2013). Despite such differences, Table 4.6 can however serve as a good indicator to adoptive parents as to what they could possibly expect from the adoption process.

4.3.4.4 Differences in process between same-race and trans-racial adoptions

Participants were asked to identify any differences in the adoption process for those parents adopting in-racially and those adopting trans-racially. The views of participants expressed in this theme are discussed according to the three sub-themes and five categories that were derived from the data and are presented in table 4.7

Table 4.7: The differences in the process between same-race and trans-racial adoptions

THEME: Differences between the process followed for same-race adoptions and trans-racial adoptions		
SUB-THEMES	CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY
No difference in the screening of parents	Screening is the same for trans-racial- and same-race adoptive parents	16 (88.8%)
Preparation and support of parents differs according to type of adoption	Racial awareness and openness of adoptive parents and their extended family members needs to be explored in trans-racial adoption	9 (50%)
	Trans-racial adoptive parents are educated on the importance of exposing their child to their cultural roots of origin	2 (11.1%)
	Trans-racial adoptive parents are encouraged to attend a support group before the adoption	2 (11.1%)
Legal process influences length of trans-racial adoptions	Register of Adoptable Children and Adoptive Parents (RACAP) leads to a longer legal process for trans-racial adoptions	3 (16.6%)

(a) Sub-theme: No difference in the screening of parents

This sub-theme examines the fact that there is no difference between the screening process followed with parents adopting in-racially and those adopting trans-racially.

(i) Category: Screening is the same for trans-racial and same-race adoptive parents

The majority (16=88.8%) of the participants stated that in terms of screening, the process is exactly the same for all prospective adoptive parents regardless of the population group of the parents or the adoptable child. The following narratives confirm this finding.

“Look the screening is exactly the same, I mean when we screen them we look at the same things” (Participant G).

“Our screening for all adoptive parents is exactly the same, there is no difference” (Participant N).

It can therefore be concluded that all prospective adoptive parents, regardless of whether they are opting for a same-race or trans-racial adoption, will have to go through the exact same screening process.

(b) Sub-theme: Preparation and support of parents differs according to type of adoption

Most (14=77.7%) of the participants explained that the preparation and support for parents adopting trans-racially will differ somewhat from the preparation and support offered to those parents adopting same-race children. Four categories are discussed below.

(i) Category: Racial awareness and openness of adoptive parents and their extended family members needs to be explored in trans-racial adoption

Half (9=50%) of the participants highlighted the importance of examining the racial awareness and openness of the prospective adoptive parents, as well as their extended family members, towards trans-racial adoption.

“...you simply stand still at their openness – for being part of an inter-racial family. The immediate family as well as the extended family...looking at their willingness, dealing with being an inter-racial family, discussing the extended family – preparing for inter-race adoption” (Participant B).

“...exploring do they know what they are in for, what do the extended family members have to say about adopting a Black child if they are for instance a White family” (Participant R).

The view that it is important for social workers to adequately assess the racial awareness of prospective adoptive parents adopting trans-racially is supported by literature (Beckett *et al.*, 1999:23; Klevan, 2012:100,112). From the above it can be concluded that it is equally as important to assess the openness and racial awareness of the extended family members.

(ii) Category: Trans-racial adoptive parents are educated on the importance of exposing their child to their cultural roots of origin

Two (11.1%) participants discussed the need to educate parents, who are considering adopting trans-racially, on the realities of adopting a child from a different race or culture as well as the importance of exposing their child to his/her cultural roots of origin.

“...go to quite a lot of trouble to have that heritage brought across... whatever that entails – the music, the food, the traditions that they have – all those kinds of things, they [the children] need to be exposed to it, to know about it... go to some trouble to ensure their child is exposed to it. So it’s a process of the training and assisting them

[the parents], supporting them you know - giving them advice about those kinds of things, that would be important” (Participant F).

“...to encourage the adoptive parents to be in touch with the child’s ethnicity of origin” (Participant C).

These narratives indicate that one of the important things to explore with parents, who are adopting trans-racially, is the need to continually expose their adopted child to his/her cultural roots of origin. It can be concluded that this is something that would not need to be covered with those parents who are adopting in-racially, as the child would be exposed to his/her cultural on a daily basis. This finding is also stressed in the literature, which emphasizes the fact that adopted children need to be allowed the opportunity to learn about and understand their cultural/racial roots (Farber *et al.*, 2003:191; Klevan, 2012:113).

(iii) Category: *Trans-racial adoptive parents are encouraged to attend a support group before the adoption*

Two (11.1%) participants highlighted the importance of exploring the benefits of attending a support group before making the decision to adopt trans-racially with adoptive parents during the preparation stages of the adoption process. The narrative below elaborates.

“Then invite prospective adoptive parents to attend those groups [post-adoption support group –the rainbow group] before they actually adopt; so that they can see... make a more informed decision” (Participant E).

The view that support groups would be a good place for prospective adoptive parents to seek advice from other parents who have adopted trans-racially is reflected in literature, where it is proposed that adoptive parents attending support groups would be able to give first-hand accounts to prospective adoptive parents, concerning what the experience has been like for them (Haymes & Simon, 2003:266). Prospective adoptive parents would then be more likely to be able to make an informed decision as to whether or not they would like to precede with a trans-racial adoption.

(c) Sub-theme: *Legal process influences length of trans-racial adoptions*

This sub-theme explores the legal process that needs to be followed for trans-racial adoptions. One category was identified.

- (i) **Category:** *Register of Adoptable Children and Adoptive Parents (RACAP) lead to a longer legal process for trans-racial adoptions*

Three (16.6%) participants mentioned the fact that the legal process for trans-racial adoption would be longer than that of a same-race adoption due to the fact that all adoptable children need to be placed on the Register of Adoptable Children and Adoptive Parents (RACAP) for 30 days before they can be considered for trans-racial adoption. The purpose of this would be to network with other organisations in order to ensure that no same-race placements are available as an alternative to the trans-racial placement. The fact that this would result in a longer legal process for trans-racial adoptions was therefore highlighted. The following narrative supports this finding.

“...so if you want to do a trans-racial placement, that child has to first be placed on RACAP for 30 days. This inevitably means that the process for a trans-racial adoption is 30 days longer for the child than a same-race placement.” (Participant N).

It is of value to note that despite the longer legal process, ultimately, the aim of RACAP is to keep record of adoptable children as well as prospective adoptive parents who have been deemed fit (Children’s Act 38, 2005:76; Ferreira, 2009:271). This network created by RACAP allows for adoptable children to easily be placed with appropriate prospective adoptive parents. Ferreira (2009:271) is therefore of the opinion that if this register is properly maintained, the speed of the matching will be significantly improved. The waiting period for both the adoptive children and adoptive parents will in fact essentially be shortened because social workers will be able to make appropriate matches more efficiently.

4.3.4.5 Challenges experienced by participants in national same-race adoptions

Participants were asked whether they have encountered any challenges or difficulties in facilitating national same-race adoptions with any of the population groups of South Africa. Based on the responses provided within this theme, two sub-themes and three categories were identified. These sub-themes and consequent categories are presented in table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Challenges and difficulties experienced by participants in the facilitation of national same-race adoptions

THEME: Challenges and difficulties experienced by participants in national same-race adoptions		
SUB-THEME	CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY (%)
Mismatch of supply and demand	Very few white children available for White parents wanting to adopt same-race	6 (33.3%)
	Difficult to achieve same-race placements for black adoptable children	6 (33.3%)
Cultural barriers encountered within the Black population	Adoption is not fully embraced by the black population	9 (50%)

(a) Sub-theme: Mismatch of supply and demand

Participants noted that same-race adoptions are often made difficult within the white and black population groups due to the mismatch of supply and demand. Two categories were identified within this sub-theme.

(i) Category: Very few white children available for white parents wanting to adopt same-race

Six (33.3%) participants noted that a difficulty in same-race adoptions is the reality that there are not enough white adoptable children available for the white parents who want to adopt a same-race child. The narratives below provide some insight into this reality.

“We get a lot of enquires from white families wanting to adopt white children, sadly not many white children are available for adoption” (Participant J).

“The only problem is we do not have any white children available for white parents” (Participant N).

From the above narratives it can be concluded that white couples that choose to adopt will more than likely have to consider adopting a child of a different race due to a lack of available white adoptable children. The finding that there are more white prospective adoptive parents than white adoptable children is confirmed by literature, where it is stated that in November 2013 there were approximately 190 unmatched white parents and only 3 white adoptable children on the Register of Adoptable Children and Adoptive Parents (Blackie, 2013:2).

(ii) Category: Difficult to achieve same-race placements for black adoptable children

Six (33.3%) participants highlighted the fact that there are not enough black adopters to match up with the number of black adoptable children available. The following narratives confirm this finding.

“There are not enough black people applying to adopt” (Participant P).

“It’s very hard to find black adoptive parents and it’s a problem because there are really a lot of black children on the Register for Adoptable Children and Adoptive Parents” (Participant G).

The finding that there are not enough black prospective adoptive parents available for the numbers of black adoptable children correlates with literature where it is stated that in November 2013 there were approximately 398 unmatched black children on the Register of Adoptable Children and Adoptive parents, and only 14 unmatched black prospective adoptive parents (Blackie, 2013:2; Mokomane & Rochat, 2010:20). This mismatch of supply and demand inexorably brings the practice of trans-racial adoption to the fore (Carter-Black, 2007:343; Hollingsworth, 2008:100).

(b) Sub-theme: Cultural barriers encountered with the black population

Another sub-theme identified, was that there are cultural barriers towards adoption within the black population. One category was identified and is discussed below.

(i) Category: Adoption is not fully embraced by the black population

Half (9=50%) of the participants highlighted the fact that adoption is not yet a fully accepted practice within the black community. It was suggested that this often results in not having enough black adoptive parents available for the number of black children available for adoption; making same-race adoptions for these children less likely. The following narratives support this view.

“Well the black community is really still problematic, adoption is not an option for them” (Participant F).

“Cultural barriers, definitely. I think in the black communities, the cultural barriers are the ancestors... will the ancestors accept this child, what is this child’s clan name

going to be because he is now from this community and now he's coming into my community... and that's very important for the ancestors” (Participant A)

“It's is very hard to find black adoptive parents, because somehow, in their communities, they don't embrace that concept of adoption... It's just not part of their culture. They don't accept a different surname very easily; there are a lot of issues with regards to combining families and their background and their beliefs... the whole issue of formal adoption is not really embraced by them” (Participant G).

The view that cultural beliefs within the black community are often at odds with the practice of adoption is confirmed in literature where it is suggested that the key constituent of adoption- that of breaking all ties with the biological parents and family – may be in complete contrast to African social norms and cultural practices (Mokomane & Rochat, 2010:26,50).

4.3.5 Recruitment of prospective adoptive parents

This section explores the approach taken by the adoption organisations towards the task of recruiting prospective adoptive parents.

4.3.5.1 The approach of adoption organisations towards the task of recruitment

Participants were asked how their organisations approach the task of recruiting prospective adoptive parents. Three sub-themes and six categories were identified within this theme, and are presented in table 4.9.

Table 4.9: Views of participants regarding the approaches used by their organisation to recruit prospective adoptive parents

THEME: The approach of adoption organisations towards the task of recruitment		
SUB-THEME	CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY (%)
Recruitment is deemed unnecessary	Organisations have enough prospective adoptive parents without recruiting	14 (77.7%)
Standard methods of recruitment used	Internet (organisation website and blogs)	9 (50%)
	Word of mouth	8 (44.4%)
	Awareness campaigns	11 (61.1%)
Limited recruitment efforts towards recruiting black adopters	Importance of actively seeking to recruit black adopters	2 (11.1%)
	Recruitment of black adoptive parents has proved too difficult	1 (5.5%)

(a) Sub-theme: Recruitment is deemed unnecessary

The majority of the participants explained that recruitment was largely deemed as unnecessary for their organisations. One category was identified in this sub-theme and is explored below.

(i) Category: Organisations have enough prospective adoptive parents without recruiting

Fourteen (77.7%) participants explained that they do not actively seek to recruit prospective adoptive parents because they have more than enough prospective adoptive parents approaching them to be screened for adoption. The following narratives support this.

“We get so many phone calls we actually don’t do any kind of recruitment. We usually get phone calls, or people wanting to know about adoption, and we see whether we can assist them and they come to orientation.... so we don’t actually go out and actively go look for parents” (Participant M).

“So there hasn’t yet been a need to... we have phone calls almost daily” (Participant I).

“We don’t really do marketing because people contact us” (Participant O).

The finding that most adoption organisations do not have any recruitment programmes suggests that recruitment is regarded as a task that is only necessary in cases where there is a dearth of prospective adoptive parents. This finding is noteworthy when the imbalance between the numbers of black adoptive parents and the numbers of black adoptable children is considered (Blackie, 2013:2). Moreover, it can be concluded that if most of the adoption organisations are not actively recruiting adoptive parents, more black adoptive parents will not be recruited. For black children to be adopted then, the most likely option would be trans-racial adoption.

(b) Sub-theme: Standard methods of recruitment used

Another sub-theme that came to the fore was the standard methods of recruitment that are used by adoption organisations.

(i) **Category:** *Internet (organisation website and blogs)*

Half (9=50%) of the participants identified the Internet (organisation website and blogs) as being the most prominent method of recruiting parents. The following narrative supports this view.

“Most of our parents come via the internet” (Participant N).

Although this is a necessary source of information, it is unlikely that it will be accessed by anyone besides those already interested in adoption. Organisational websites are therefore a good source of information for prospective adoptive parents considering adoption as an option, but is unlikely to promote adoption within the larger community.

(ii) **Category:** *Word of mouth*

Just shy of half (8=44.4%) of the participants suggested that word of mouth brings a lot of their adoptive parents to them. Participants expressed enthusiasm for this method of recruitment as they felt that adoptive parents are the best advocates for adoption.

“Probably our biggest catchment is actually through word of mouth. Families who have come to us before, a lot of our emails will say ‘I spoke to someone who has adopted through you’, or ‘I met this family (who had a Black child)’. So most of.. and that’s actually the kind of recruitment we love the most” (Participant J).

This may be one of the best methods of recruitment as it is likely to reach all population groups. Adoptive parents will be able to share their experiences of adoption with prospective adoptive parents, providing insight into whether or not it is something the interested couple would like to consider. This is however a passive form of recruitment on behalf of the adoption organisations as it does not require any effort from their side.

(iii) **Category:** *Awareness campaigns*

Another category identified by eleven (61.1%) participants was that when invited they would do awareness and recruitment campaigns at churches and radio. The following narratives support this.

“...talk on the radio – if they invite us, we don’t really go out to them, they invite us.”
(Participant B).

“When we get an invitation we do talks at churches” (Participant N).

Although a good method of recruitment, this would again appear to be a passive means of recruitment as participants explained that this would only be done in response to receiving an invite from the church or radio. The responsibility is therefore left up to others and not the adoption organisations.

Awareness would also be facilitated by means of pamphlets and/or newspaper articles to promote adoption. The following narratives support this.

“...putting down pamphlets at clinics” (Participant D).

“We recruit by all the normal means...we do it by newspaper” (Participant G).

Although a potentially out-dated method of promotion, this is likely to be effective as it may catch the eye of someone who had not considered adoption before, or else had not yet gone to the effort of exploring it as an option.

Finally, it was also highlighted that an organisation ARISE hosts an annual adoption conference, which is attended by various adoption organisations to promote adoption. The following narrative elaborates.

“...ARISE is a big organisation in Cape Town, they do a large adoption conference every year and then normally we do an exhibition there and we do some talks there”
(Participant N).

An initiative such as this is bound to encourage all adoption social workers and organisations to put in effort towards promoting adoption and the services they offer, hopefully recruiting adoptive parents in the process.

(c) Sub-theme: Limited recruitment efforts towards recruiting black adopters

A final sub-theme identified, highlights the limited recruitment efforts that exist for the recruitment of black adoptive parents. Two categories were identified.

(i) Category: Importance of actively seeking to recruit black adopters

Only two (11.1%) of the participants recognised the importance of recruiting black adoptive parents, highlighting what their organisations are doing to actively recruit prospective

adoptive parents within the black population. The narratives below elaborate on the need to recruit, specifically within the black population.

“Ok I think the first step...what we do is we go into the communities and we try to change the [negative] perception of adoption. Everywhere we go we will talk about what we do and hand out pamphlets and I think the... especially in some communities, especially in the black communities the perception still needs to change; that adoption is not a bad thing” (Participant A)

What is brought to light by this narrative is the view that many people within the black communities still have negative perceptions towards the practice of adoption. The participant expresses the view point that adoption organisations need to actively work towards changing these perceptions, stating that his/her organisation does this by going into predominantly black communities and talking about adoption; educating people about the motivations behind adoption; therefore creating a space in which adoption can be discussed.

Another participant discussed the fact that his/her organisation has employed a community worker from the black population group for the purpose of promoting the practice of adoption within the black population.

“Yes that is what we have done with this community worker... she is actually doing a marvellous job, honestly... and I think because she is also Xhosa speaking and black, they relate to her. So we hope that it will make a difference, but that is what we are actively doing within specific areas” (Participant F)

This narrative highlights the fact that one of the organisations has taken the initiative of employing a black community worker specifically for the task of recruiting adoptive parents within the black communities. It can be concluded that the employment of a black community worker has allowed the organisation to enter black communities in a non-threatening way and relatable way, which is likely to result in more successful recruitment.

The view that people within the black population often still look upon adoption in a predominantly negative light is confirmed in the literature. British authors, Frazer and Selwyn (2005:145), discussed the fact the black community often have misperceptions and misguided beliefs regarding the practice of adoption.

Furthermore, the fact that only one adoption organisation has taken the initiative of employing a black community worker raises concern, as it was suggested by Smith-McKeever and McRoy (2005:533) and McRoy *et al.* (1997:90) that adoption organisations are likely to experience greater success in their recruitment efforts if the organisation has black members of staff.

(ii) Category: Recruitment of black adoptive parents has proved too difficult

One (5.5%) participant highlighted the difficulty of recruiting black adoptive parents, indicating that the organisation had hit a proverbial wall in terms of seeking a successful method of recruiting within the black population.

“Oh well we don’t have any problem with that [recruitment]. The only trick is to promote adoption in the black areas...so at this stage we do not have an active process going for that, because it is quite difficult” (Participant N).

From the above it can thus be deduced that this particular organisation has, after several failed attempts, given up on the recruitment of black adoptive parents. Due to the fact that the task of recruiting black adoptive parents was experienced as ‘difficult’, the organisation has been left feeling dejected and unwilling to develop new methods of recruitment.

Although this may be understandable, it is of worth considering the stance of McRoy and Griffin (2012:38), who suggest that in order to offer an alternative to trans-racial adoption, efforts should go towards understanding how more black families can be recruited into the adoption system. Despite cultural barriers and difficulties encountered in the recruitment of black adoptive parents, it should therefore be prioritised by adoption organisations. The recruitment of black adoptive parents should not be overlooked on account of it having being proved to be a difficult task.

It is concluded that while a lack of black prospective adoptive parents makes same-race adoptions for black children difficult, the finding that there are no recruitment programmes in place to recruit black adoptive parents suggests that adoption organisations should put mechanisms in place to rectify the problem.

4.3.5.2 Views of respondents regarding the most common reasons for parents of different racial groups wanting to adopt

Respondents were asked to complete a table indicating the most common reasons that motivate adoptive parents, of different population groups, to adopt. The rationale for this line of questioning was based upon the view point of American authors Malm and Welti (2010:185), who suggested that in order to tailor recruitment efforts to specific target groups the underlying reasons to opt for adoption need to be identified. They explain that different people may opt for different types of adoption for various reasons. Understanding why specific parents may opt for certain kinds of adoption can assist adoption organisations to customize their recruitment efforts in order to tap into a larger pool of potential adoptive families. It was therefore identified as valuable to explore respondents' perception regarding the reasons why people from various population groups decide to adopt.

Reasons for adopting were divided into four main categories namely; desire to be a parent; philanthropic/Altruistic; prior exposure to adoption, and related adoption. Each main category was then divided into four sub-categories (Malm & Wetli, 2010:186-189). Participants could mark more than one reason for each of the population groups. The results are presented in table 4.10.

Table 4.10: The views of respondents regarding most common reasons for parents of different racial group wanting to adopt

REASONS FOR PARENTS TO ADOPT	White adoptive parents	Black adoptive parents	Coloured adoptive parents	Indian adoptive parents
1. DESIRE TO BE A PARENT				
a) Inability to have own child (Infertility; homosexual couple; single person).	18	13	17	7
b) To increase family size	12	4	6	3
c) Life-long desire to adopt	14	2	6	4
2. PHILANTHROPIC/ALTRUISTIC				
a) Prior connection to a specific child	11	6	7	4
b) To provide a needy child with a home	11	4	6	4
c) To reduce racism through TRA	2	0	0	1
3. PRIOR EXPOSURE TO ADOPTION				
a) Adopter was adopted	3	1	2	2
b) Adopter has family members who were adopted	5	1	3	2
c) Adopter has friends who have successfully adopted	12	1	7	1
4. RELATED ADOPTION				
a) Father of illegitimate child	5	4	6	3
b) Step-parent adopting non-biological child	16	7	13	4
c) Child of deceased family member	12	8	9	2

*Respondents could mark more than one option

N=18

According to table 4.10, specifically regarding white adoptive parents, the most common reasons for deciding to adopt was indicated by all (18=100%) of the respondents as being the inability to have their own child. More than half (16=88.8%) of the respondents indicated that the second most common reasons for adopting were stepparent adoptions. Fourteen (77.7%) respondents said that white parents are likely to adopt simply because they have had a life-long desire to adopt. Twelve (66.6%) respondents indicated that white parents are likely to adopt to increase their family size, because their friends have successfully adopted, and/or because they decide to adopt the child of a deceased family member. The other prominent reasons for adopting, within the white population was indicated by respondents as because of prior connection to the child (12=66.6%) and the desire of providing a needy child with a home (12=66.6%).

Concerning black adoptive parents, the most common reasons for deciding to adopt indicated by more than half (13=72.2%) of the respondents is the inability to have their own child. The second most common reason for adopting was reportedly because the adopted child is the child of a deceased family member (8=44.4%). Other relatively prominent reasons for adopting within the black population, was indicated as being stepparent adoptions (7=38.8%) and having a prior connection to the adopted child (6=33.3%).

Focusing on coloured adoptive parents, the most common reasons for adopting were again indicated by more than half (17 or 94.4%) of the respondents as being due to an inability to have their own child. The second most common reasons for adopting amongst adoptive parents of this population group, was identified by thirteen (72.2%) respondents as being step-parents adoptions. 9 (50%) respondents indicated that coloured parents were likely to adopt the child of a deceased family member. Seven (38.8%) respondents identified both a prior connection to the adoptable child, and having friends who have successfully adopted, as being prominent reasons for adopting. Six (33.3%) respondents indicated that increasing the family size; a life-long desire to adopt; to provide a needy child with a home; and being the father of an illegitimate child are all common reasons for adopting within the coloured population.

Finally, with regards to Indian adoptive parents, the most common reason for deciding to adopt was indicated by seven (38.8%) respondents as being the inability to have their own child. The second most common reasons for adopting within the Indian population was indicated as being a life-long desire to adopt (4=22.2%); having a prior connection to the child (4=22.2%); to provide a needy child with a home (4=22.2%) and step-parent adoptions (4=22.2%).

It is clear from the above that the most common reason for adopting for all population groups is the inability to have a biological child. It could therefore be concluded that adoption organisations would be likely to achieve success in their recruitment efforts if they were to tailor recruitment programmes around 'infertility' as a reason for adopting. It is however of value to consider that even though infertility was identified as the main reason for adopting amongst black adoptive parents; infertility within the black culture is a potentially sensitive topic. Black women are reportedly under extreme pressure to meet their lineage requirements, by proving their fertility by giving birth to a child (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2013:6). In this regard, adoption is at odds with the cultural beliefs of the black community and black women may therefore be reluctant to admit to their infertility. Adoption organisations would

therefore need to take great care in developing culturally sensitive recruitment programmes, thereby focussing on infertility as a reason for adopting in such a way that the cultural reservations concerning the discussion of infertility may still be respected.

It should be noted that the findings represented in Table 4.10 could effectively be utilised by adoption organisations in their development of appropriate recruitment programmes targeted at the various population groups. Exploring the reasons for adoption is a good place to begin when considering how adoption should be promoted within different communities.

4.3.6 Trans-racial adoption

This section examines the views of participants regarding the practice of trans-racial adoption in the Western Cape.

4.3.6.1 *Views of participants regarding the importance that race/ethnicity should play in the matching process of adoption*

Participants were asked to share their views regarding the importance that they feel race/ethnicity should play in the matching process of adoption. Three sub-themes and five categories were identified in this theme and are presented in table 4.11.

Table 4.11: Views of participants regarding the importance that race/ethnicity should play in the matching process of adoption

THEME: Views of participants regarding the importance of race/ethnicity in the matching process of adoption		
SUB-THEME	CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY (%)
Race/ethnicity is an important consideration in the matching process	Same race placements would be ideal as the aim is to minimise loss	10 (55.5%)
	Prioritising race and ethnicity in the matching process is in accordance with the Children's Act	3 (16.6%)
Trans-racial adoptions should be viewed in a positive light	Trans-racial adoptions are better than foster- or institutional care	10 (55.5%)
Important to consider cultural competence of parents when matching trans-rationally	Racial awareness and willingness of prospective adoptive parents to expose their child to cultural origins should be explored	5 (27.7%)
	Resolution of parents should be taken into consideration when matching	2 (11.1%)

(a) ***Sub-theme: Race/ethnicity is an important consideration when matching***

The first sub-theme recognises that race/ethnicity is an important factor to take into consideration during the matching process of adoption. Two categories were identified within this sub-theme.

(i) ***Category: Same race placements would be ideal as the aim is to minimise loss***

More than half (10=55.5%) of the participants stated that same-race placements would be the ideal placement for adoptive children, as it would minimise the losses experienced by the child. The participants thus stated that if possible, they would try and place their available adoptable children in same-race families. The following narratives confirmed this point of view.

“We really feel that if it is at all possible a child should be placed within its own background, within its own culture. So yes, I think that is the first thing we would look at when we match – is it possible?” (Participant G).

Another participant elaborates on this, providing reasons as to why race should be regarded as being important in the matching process of adoption.

“... the ‘norms and standards’ and also the ‘good adoption practice’ – one of the principles is ‘minimise the losses’. And that is what we really believe – there’s already the loss of biological family, so what will minimise further loss? – Place the child within his/her same culture... So we really look at; if we are going to place a child, where is this child going to experience the least loss.” (Participant A).

The fact that participants aim to minimise the loss experienced by the child by trying to place the child with a same-race family, correlates with the provisions of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 which stipulates that all relevant factors, such as religion and culture of origin, should be taken into consideration when matching a child with adoptive parents (Children’s Act 38, 2005:82).

(ii) Category: *Prioritising race and ethnicity in the matching process is in accordance with the Children's Act 38 of 2005*

Three (16.6%) participants allude to the fact that to prioritise race and ethnicity in the matching process of adoption is to work according to the Children's Act 38 of 2005. The narrative below sheds light on this point of view.

“Well ...I think I respect the act in the sense of minimising losses of the child... so as far as possible to try and place the child with the same race or same culture”

(Participant B).

“The [Children's] Act states that that you need to consider culture and race first”

(Participant D).

The view that race and ethnicity should be prioritised in the matching process of adoption is in accordance with the Children's Act, and correlates with literature which highlights that the need of a child to maintain a connection with his or her family; extended family; culture or tradition, needs to be considered when determining what is in the child's best interests (Children's Act 38, 2005:21).

Moreover, the prioritisation of race as indicated by the participants in this category reflects an ethnic-sensitive approach to adoption (Sheafor *et al.*, 2000:94). Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela (2012:1) emphasise that in order to ensure children are not unnecessarily uprooted from their cultural origins through adoption, adoption policies and practices need to be culturally sensitive; thus recognising that where possible children should be placed within the same race and culture in order to ensure that they are not being unnecessarily uprooted from their cultural roots.

(b) Sub-theme: *Trans-racial adoptions should be viewed in a positive light*

Another sub-theme that was highlighted focused on the fact that trans-racial adoptions are advocated for when same-race matches are not possible.

(i) Category: *Trans-racial adoptions are better than foster- or institutional care*

More than half (10=55.5%) of the participants expressed the view that when same-race adoptions are not possible, trans-racial adoption should be regarded as the best alternative. The narratives below support this view.

“It [same-race placements] would be fantastic if it was possible, but it’s simply not, and it is definitely better for that child to grow up in a home of people from a different race or culture than to be reared in a children’s home” (Participant P).

“So instead of those children staying in children’s homes, we then place cross-culturally or cross-rationally. I think in today’s society having a child grow up in a different culture is the lesser of two evils. If it is a choice between putting a child in a children’s home or being placed in a trans-racial adoption... then I’m going to place that child in adoption” (Participant M).

Trans-racial adoption is thus regarded as the better alternative, as opposed to being placed in a children’s home or in foster care. Several studies, which have aimed to investigate the psychosocial outcomes of adopted children compared to other groups of children, such as non-adopted children; children in foster care, or children in institutional care, support this view (Collishaw *et al.*, 1998:57; Simmel *et al.*, 2007:336; Selwyn & Quinton: 2004:6). Generally, findings showed that adopted children tend to fare far better than children remaining in foster care or institutional care as time spent in institutional care has been positively associated with developmental difficulties (Collishaw *et al.*, 1998:57; Simmel *et al.*, 2007:337; Welsh & Viana, 2012:244).

(c) *Sub-theme: Important to consider the cultural competence of parents when matching trans-rationally*

This sub-theme explores the view that the importance of race/ethnicity in the matching process of adoption stretches beyond attempts to make same-race placements. Participants explain that in cases where same-race placements are not possible and trans-racial adoption is being pursued, it is important to consider the cultural competence of the prospective adoptive parents.

(i) *Category: Racial awareness and willingness of prospective adoptive parents to expose their child to cultural origins should be explored*

Five (27.7%) participants highlighted racial awareness of prospective adoptive parents as being a key factor for consideration in the matching process of adoption. The narratives below support this idea.

“There can be no matching if the prospective adoptive parents are not open and have a huge insight into race and ethnicity being part of the child’s identity. Um... you cannot ignore that fact, you have to incorporate it into your general upbringing and understanding of a particular child” (Participant K).

“It’s important to me that when we screen adoptive families, that they know the importance of their adopted child knowing his/her heritage and where they came from, and being ok with the fact that they are black and you are white, and celebrating that.” (Participant I).

It can be concluded that when considering a trans-racial placement, it is important for social workers to evaluate parents’ racial awareness before the matching process can occur. This view corresponds well with literature as it has been emphasised that potential adopters need to appreciate their child’s cultural origins. If parents are able to place value on their child’s racial heritage, their child may be more likely to adopt a positive attitude towards their cultural and racial origins (Beckett *et al.*, 1999:23; Klevan, 2012:91). This emphasis on adoptive parents’ cultural competence is reflective of an ethnic sensitive perspective towards trans-racial adoption, which highlights cultural competence of prospective adoptive parents as a key constituent in ensuring that the adopted child is not unnecessarily uprooted from the cultural origins (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2012:11; Klevan, 2012:113; Sheafor *et al.*, 2000:94). Prior to adoption, an adequate assessment of the adopters’ racial and cultural attitudes should therefore be conducted.

(ii) Category: *Resolution of parents should be taken into consideration when matching*

Two (11.1%) participants stressed that it is important for the prospective adoptive parents to be at peace with the decision to adopt trans-racially. This is reflected in the following narrative.

“... I think the most important thing is if the parents don’t have any issues then most of the time the children don’t have any issues. But if there are any issues with the parents, or the family of the parents, the child will experience that more than other children” (Participant N).

Based on this view it can be concluded that it is important to evaluate the resolution of adoptive parents regarding the race of their child prior to matching. This concept of racial/cultural resolution of the adoptive parents is highlighted in the literature (Klevan,

2012:109). Parents defined as being ‘unresolved’ in their decision to adopt trans-racially may have difficulties in raising their child to have a strong racial identity. These parents tend to have difficulty talking about race and tended to minimise their child’s racial differences. In order to ensure that the prospective adoptive parents don’t have any “issues”, as stated in the narrative, social workers could therefore examine the level of resolution of the parents.

4.3.6.2 Views of participants regarding the challenges encountered in trans-racial adoption

Participants were asked to discuss any challenges they have encountered in the practice of trans-racial adoption. The responses were organised according to the theme, three sub-themes and five categories represented in table 4.12.

Table 4.12: Views of participants regarding the challenges encountered in trans-racial adoption

THEME: Views of participants regarding the challenges encountered in trans-racial adoption		
SUB-THEMES	CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY (%)
Challenges encountered by adoption social workers	Trans-racial adoption is misunderstood amongst child-protection social workers and magistrates	3 (16.6%)
	Lack of education and knowledge amongst social workers hinders trans-racial placements	1 (5.5%)
Racism encountered by adoptive parents	Racism within larger community	5 (27.7%)
	Racism from extended family members	5 (27.7%)
Cultural challenges encountered by adoptive parents	Cultural practices that are foreign to adoptive parents	2 (11.1%)

(a) Sub-theme: Challenges encountered by adoption social workers

Some participants shared their views regarding the challenges they (adoption social workers) had encountered in the facilitation of trans-racial adoption. Two categories were identified.

(i) Category: Trans-racial adoption is misunderstood amongst child-protection social workers and magistrates

Three (16.6%) of the participants mentioned that a challenge they are often confronted with is that child-protection social workers, as well as magistrates who are needed to finalise an adoption misunderstand adoption. The narratives below shed light on this particular challenge.

“...there are challenges around understanding trans-racial adoption, understanding what is in the best interests of children, and understanding that our legal framework allows us to move children towards adoption. And those are issues that we face, not only with local social workers who are responsible for the children that we work with, but also with the magistrates....” (Participant I).

This view indicates that possible misunderstanding of trans-racial adoption amongst social workers and/or magistrate, involved in the adoption process, towards trans-racial adoption has the potential of hindering a successful adoption from taking place.

(ii) Category: A lack of education and knowledge amongst social workers hinders trans-racial placements

One (5.5%) participant identified a lack of education and knowledge amongst social workers as a challenging factor that hinders trans-racial placements. The participant suggests that the result of this is that children end up lingering in the child protection system instead of being placed up for adoption. The following narrative supports this point of view.

“A lack of knowledge, education and theory regarding trans-racial adoption are sometimes hindering placements for what could have been positive outcomes. Our children’s homes are full of children who can be adopted that are not being released because organisations prefer the option of him/her lingering in foster care instead of placing trans-racially” (Participant K).

The view that a lack of education and knowledge regarding trans-racial adoption could hinder potentially successful trans-racial adoption placements from taking place emphasises a need adoption-focused education for those social workers that may be involved in the adoption process.

(b) Sub-theme: Racism encountered by trans-racial adoptive families

This sub-theme explores racism as a challenge encountered by adoptive families who have adopted trans-racially. Two sub-themes were identified and are discussed below.

(i) Category: Racism within the larger community

Five (27.7%) participants suggested that racism from the community at large is likely to be a challenge encountered by adoptive parents who have adopted trans-racially, as well as the adopted child. The following narratives showcase the views of participants as it relates to this category.

“I think in terms of the parents - it would be negative comments... um insensitive comments towards the child” (Participant C).

“...families will have people come up to them and say mean things or make comments, or be rude, because I guess there is a general lack of understanding in our population. So people can be really judgemental about White families walking around with a Black baby” (Participant I).

“I think obviously race is a factor... you know racial comments... I mean it's still very prevalent... (Participant J).

The views that racism is still a reality in South Africa, and that trans-racial adoptive families are likely to be confronted with the consequences thereof, was also highlighted in the literature as being a potential challenge for white parents who have adopted black child (Klevan, 2012:91). It is therefore important for adoptive parents to be culturally competent, with specific reference to survival skills (Klevan, 2012:113; Vonk, 2001:25). Survival skills entail the parents' ability to prepare their adopted child for racial prejudice. It is highlighted that this could be a potentially challenging task for white adoptive parents as it is unlikely that they would have been victims of racism themselves. Adoptive parents are therefore encouraged to never minimise or ignore their child's experience of racism. Rather, they need

to be willing to expand their own racial awareness and gain an understanding of their child's cultural history. This will allow them to be able to guide their children in being able to navigate their way through such situations in a healthy way.

(ii) **Category: Racism from extended family members**

Another category within this sub-theme highlights the negative attitudes of extended family members towards trans-racial adoption as a potential challenge for adoptive parents who are willing to adopt trans-racially. Five (27.7%) of the participants identified this category. The following narratives support this view.

"I think the extended families might still be a problem. Because sometimes people will say 'we don't mind, we just want a child, we long for having our own child'. But then the families are sometimes not so positive" (Participant R).

Another participant narrative provides insight into why the extended family may struggle to accept the idea of a trans-racial adoption.

"...It's a loss for the family that their family members cannot bear their own children. The family already have to deal with the fact that there will now be an adopted child. And then they find out, ok but there will not be a child of our own race or culture – so it's a loss again. And some of them are fine and some of them are not; and that is the challenge" (Participant B).

It was further noted that in cases such as this, where the extended family is not open to the idea of adopting a child from a different race, the adoption would not be processed and finalised. The following narrative confirms this.

"...if their extended family would be a problem, then we would not allow them to adopt trans-racially, we will stop that process" (Participant N)

A final participant narrative helps to shed light on why it is viewed as being essential that the extended adoptive family are supportive of the trans-racial adoption.

"...in the workshops, you explore– how would your family feel; if the family is not going to accept the child from a different culture, then don't adopt because the child is not only going to be a part of you, your child is going to be part of the whole family" (Participant D).

These views of participants indicate that support of extended family members is regarded as very important when parents are deciding to adopt trans-racially. It is concluded that acceptance from members of the extended family is regarded as being crucial to the healthy development of the child. This is confirmed in literature where it is indicated that the support of extended family members is a topic that should be explored during the screening process of adoption (Administrator, 2001; Info.gov.za, 2007).

(c) *Sub-theme: Cultural challenges encountered by adoptive parents*

Another sub-theme identified was the cultural challenges often encountered by adoptive parents who have adopted trans-racially as they attempt to bridge the gap between their own culture and that of their adopted child. Two categories are identified below.

(i) *Category: Cultural practices that are foreign to adoptive parents*

Two (11.1%) participants emphasised the fact that white adoptive parents are likely to encounter certain cultural practices that may be foreign to them. It was recognised that addressing such cultural practices is often challenging for white adoptive parents who have adopted a black child. The narratives below support this point of view.

“...questions about whether you as the adoptive parent will allow your adopted black son to be circumcised... to go into the bush. So I mean some of those things are so beyond the white people’s culture. So it’s difficult” (Participant Q).

“...do I raise the child in my own culture?’ It’s usually more the practical things of it. You know... must I send my little boy to the bush one day. You know it’s those kinds of things... do I have to do all those cultural things – we tell them they should expose their child to the culture so that they have the option to decide whether they want to know about their culture” (Participant M).

These views show that adoptive parents may be confronted with questions regarding the norms and practices of their adopted child’s culture of origin. Because some cultural practices may be considerably different to anything practiced in the parents’ culture, it can be difficult for parents to decide what practices they should expose their child. The view expressed above is that adoptive parents should expose their adopted children to their cultural origins so that children can make decisions for themselves regarding the importance of their cultural origins. This view corresponds with the second component of cultural competence for adoptive

parents adopting trans-racially; that of multicultural planning (Klevan, 2001:113; Vonk, 2001:251). Multicultural planning refers to the practice of creating opportunities in which trans-racially adopted children will be able to learn about, and participate in, their birth culture. Immersion into cultural origins of the adopted child is clearly something that the adoptive parents will need to do with their child. Exploring cultural issues such as those mentioned in the above narratives will then be something that the parents and child can discuss openly together.

(ii) Category: Difficulties exposing adopted child to their cultural origins

Two (11.1%) participants acknowledge the difficulties of exposing ones adopted child to his/her cultural roots. It is suggested that adoptive parents who do not have a lot of contact with other cultures may struggle to expose their child to his/her culture of origin.

“...tell the adoptive parents that they cannot ignore the adopted child’s culture and race... That is why it is so important for parents who adopt trans-racially...if they don’t mix with people of that race then the child is going to grow up in isolation.”

(Participant P).

“In trans-racial adoption it’s not always possible or easy for a child who has been adopted, to have contact with the community from which that child actually comes. One of the questions they would be asking when screening the White parents who are prepared to adopt Black children ‘what contact do you have, what contact will the child have with the racial group from which it comes’ difficulties” (Participant E).

The above views indicate that for adoptive parents to successfully expose their adopted child to their culture of origin, it is perhaps important for the parent to have friends of different cultures or simply have regular contact with people of a variety of cultural backgrounds. These views relates to findings of Feigelman (2000) and McRoy (1982) cited in Klevan (2012:91), who found that living in integrated communities can play a crucial role in assisting a trans-racially adopted child to develop a strong racial identity. Additionally, Klevan (2012:111) noted that parents’, who seamlessly stepped into the role of being adoptive parents to a child of a different race, were more likely than those parents who struggled to adjust, to live in integrated communities.

It therefore appears that adoptive parents opting to adopt trans-racially would need to recognise the necessity of forming connections, and establishing friendships, with people of

other races and cultures. They have a responsibility towards their adopted children to allow for opportunities in which they can interact with people of the same cultural origins. Such exposure will help the adopted child develop greater insight into their cultural and racial backgrounds.

4.3.6.3 The views of participants regarding factors that contribute to the success of a trans-racial adoption

Participants were asked to share their opinions regarding the factors that they felt would contribute to the success of a trans-racial adoption. Participant responses were organised into four relevant sub-themes and five categories in this theme, as indicated in table 4.13.

Table 4.13: The views of participants regarding the factors that will contribute to the success of a trans-racial adoption

THEME: The views of participants regarding factors that contribute to the success of a trans-racial adoption		
SUB-THEME	CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY
Adequate screening and preparation of prospective adoptive parents	Ensure that prospective adoptive parents are aware of what trans-racial adoption entails	5 (44.4%)
Expose adopted child to culture of origin	Interaction with culture of origin will benefit trans-racially adopted child	3 (16.6%)
Participation in support groups	Source of comfort and information for adoptive parents	5 (27.7%)
Racial awareness of adoptive parent	Abandoning a colour-blind approach	1 (5.5%)
	Elicit honesty regarding adoptive parents prejudices towards race	1 (5.5%)

(a) Sub-theme: Adequate screening and preparation of prospective adoptive parents

The first sub-theme to emerge was that adequate screening and preparation of prospective adoptive parents are essential for ensuring a successful trans-racial adoption. One category was identified and is explored below.

- (i) **Category:** *Ensure that prospective adoptive parents are fully aware of what trans-racial adoption entails*

Eight (44.4%) participants explained that thorough screening and preparation of prospective adoptive goes a long way in ensuring a successful adoption. The following narratives serve as evidence for this category.

“Proper preparation. It is so important that they [the adoptive parents] really know what they are in for” (Participant R).

“The parents should have maximum information on how to deal with it; the social worker must make sure that everyone is prepared for the trans-racial adoption, that they have the necessary knowledge. And that the parents are prepared for possible challenges that may arise” (Participant O).

The view that adequate preparation of adoptive parents can ensure that these parents are aware and well prepared for the realities of trans-racial adoption showcase the necessity for prospective adoptive parents to receive comprehensive support, focussing on issues of race and culture, before adoption. This view corresponds with that of Klevan (2012:109), who alludes to the fact that not all parents choosing to adopt are fully aware of racial challenges that may accompany trans-racial adoption. It is notes that those parents with a realistic and more accurate perception of racial issues in the larger community are likely to adjust to being a trans-racial family more easily. While those parents who are less aware of race issues before adoption, may experience more difficulties. It is therefore suggested that a greater awareness of potential challenges from the beginning may help parents in making a more informed decision about race and adoption, one they are truly comfortable with and can motivate well.

What also needs to be noted within this category is that none of the participants indicated that a standard training or preparation programme for trans-racially adopting parents exists. Although several participants mentioned that adequate screening and preparation is important it was never specified exactly what this training or preparation would entail. It would thus appear that there is no fixed standard of training that adoption organisation are required to offer prospective adoptive parents. Each organisation is therefore free to decide if they want to offer training at all, and if so what that training will consist of.

(b) Sub-theme: Expose adopted child to culture of origin

Another sub-theme identified was the importance of exposing a child, who has been trans-racially adopted, to their cultural origins. One sub-theme is identified and discussed below.

(i) Category: Interaction with culture of origin will benefit trans-racially adopted child

Three (16.6%) participants emphasised the importance of allowing an adopted child to have regular and positive contact with their culture of origin. The narratives below provide insight as to why this should be a priority for adoptive parents.

“...we have a huge responsibility to make sure that somebody is going to enable the child to have access to their culture and religion... I think somebody’s culture, background and language is essential to them. For any adopted child not to have that information could be quite difficult for them.” (Participant L).

“One thing is certainly to have social contact with black... or other...racial groups so that there is no feeling of separation between the race groups. For such interactions to be positive the attitudes towards the black person needs to be positive” (Participant E)

“...definitely that you don’t rear this child in isolation” (Participant P)

It can be concluded that the act of exposing a trans-racially adopted child to their cultural origins is regarded a key contributing factor to the success of a trans-racial adoption. This finding positively correlates with literature, as Farber *et al.* (2003:191) and Klevan (2012:91) emphasize the fact that adopted children need to be allowed the opportunity to learn about and understand their cultural/racial roots, as it can play a significant role in the development of a strong racial identity.

(c) Sub-theme: Participation in support groups

This sub-theme highlights the fact that referring trans-racial adoptive parents to support groups was identified as an important factor that could contribute to the success of a trans-racial adoption. The one category identified is explored below.

(i) **Category: Source and comfort and information for adoptive parents**

Five (27.7%) participants suggested that support groups for families who have adopted trans-racially could serve as a great source of information and comfort, contributing to the success of those adoptions. Through these support groups, parents have the opportunity to meet other families who have also adopted trans-racially. It therefore provides a platform for befriending others who are on the same journey, as well as serving as a place where parents can have their questions answered by others who have gone through the same thing. The narratives below illustrate the perspectives of participants.

“I would say the support groups are really working well... I think that is the most important - that you have a support group with the same... they experience the same difficulties and can provide guidance about how to handle different cultures and so on” (Participant H).

“And then of course the support group is important and has helped. It has helped because then adoptive parents meet other adoptive parents who have adopted trans-racially and they can learn from each other how to cope with challenging situations” (Participant C).

“I think parents need to make themselves quite available to support groups and go and find support groups and find a network of adoption parents... you can also speak to parents who have adopted trans-racially and who have dealt with little things” (Participant M).

The view that support groups for parents who have adopted trans-racially is important, is supported by literature as it is noted by De Haymes and Simon (2003:266) that there is a strong desire for community amongst adoptive parents. It was established that parents who have adopted trans-racially feel they receive the most helpful and relevant support from foster parents or other adoptive parents who have also adopted trans-racially.

(d) **Sub-theme: Racial awareness of adoptive parent**

The importance of racial awareness of adoptive parents as well as their willingness to acknowledge race as a factor impacting on a trans-racial family is the final sub-theme within this theme. The relevant categories are explored below.

(i) Category: Abandoning a colour-blind paradigm

One (5.5%) participant suggested that it is essential for a successful trans-racial adoption, that adoptive parents abandon a colour-blind paradigm. The following narrative confirms this point of view.

“...not to raise your children as colour-blind, to raise your children race and culture conscious... Learning to be advocates for your children and for adoption, and learning how to teach your children to actually respond in a healthy way to racism and how to actually dispel prejudice” (Participant J).

This view is supported by literature as the shortcomings of taking on a colour blind approach was also highlighted (Caballero *et al.*, 2012:10). Instead of disregarding race as being of no real consequence, it is suggested adoptive parents acknowledge that race and culture may affect their child’s development. Additionally, racial awareness and survival skills, two basic components of cultural competence of adoptive parents, are also being highlighted in the above narrative. It is explained in the literature that these components will allow adoptive parents to acknowledge race as a potential issue in adoption, and then to learn appropriate methods of dealing with those issues as they arise (Klevan, 2012:113; Vonk, 2001:25).

(ii) Category: Elicit honesty regarding adoptive parents prejudices towards race

One (5.5%) participant recognises that parents need to be honest about their prejudices regarding race if they are to have a successful trans-racial adoption. Eliciting brutal honesty from adoptive parents is highlighted as a factor that will assist them in being able to make the right decision about adopting same-race or trans-racially. The narrative below explains.

“...they need to honest and confront their own prejudices and fears and things like that... because everybody has prejudices you know, and one needs to be honest about them... and if they can confront them; either come to terms with them or come to the realisation that maybe they won’t cope with a child of another race, then that is a positive step” (Participant C)

This view is again suggestive of the degree of resolution of adoptive parents mentioned by Klevan (2012:89). Parents who have adopted trans-racially tend to be resolved or unresolved regarding race and their decision to adopt trans-racially. Adoptive parents, who are not honest about their racial prejudices before adoption, are more likely to be unresolved after the

adoption. This may cause unnecessary feelings of anxiety and guilt. Exploring these thoughts and feelings before the adoption takes place is therefore a vital pre-adoption task.

4.3.6.4 Further comments on trans-racial adoption

Respondents were given the opportunity to share any further personal comments regarding trans-racial adoption as an alternative form of care for children in need of care and protection in South Africa. Narratives providing further insight into themes and categories discussed above were identified by the researcher and are presented below. These narratives only serve to build on the discussions above and will therefore not be further analysed or compared to existing literature.

(a) Trans-racial adoption is not a choice in South Africa

One participant commented on the fact that trans-racial adoption in South Africa is not necessarily a choice as the reality is that the majority of adoptive parents are white while the majority of adoptable children are black. The narrative below sheds lights on this point of view.

“The thing is that TRA isn’t... it’s not a choice... it’s not ‘should we go for this in South Africa’. You know... are we in support of this or should we do something else? There isn’t anything else. There isn’t a choice. It’s what we have, and it’s about getting over it... people need to get over it and see children as children and people as people and that’s it” (Participant I).

This participant’s view is debatable in light of the finding that adoption organisations do not actively recruit black adoptive parents. Trans-racial adoption may be the only option for many prospective white adoptive parents, but trans-racial adoption should not be the only option for black adoptable children. Adoption organisations need to prioritise the recruitment of black adoptive parents in order to increase the likelihood of a black child being adopted by a black family.

(b) Trans-racial adoption is better than the alternative

The fact that adoption in cases of abandonment was better for the child than being placed in foster- or institutional care was again highlighted by several participants. This point of view is expressed well by the following narratives.

“I think it is a very positive move...it is preferable for a child to go to a loving family than to be left in an institution, or abandoned or whatever” (Participant C).

“I think that it is far better that a child have a home and family... a stable family who love and care about them... rather than multiple carers. Because that has a significant impact on a child’s development, their socialisation, the way that they function” (Participant L).

“... But it’s not possible [to make a same-race placement] then instead of having that child grow up in foster care or in a children’s home I would definitely place them in a TRA” (Participant P)

(c) Social workers fail to focus on permanency planning

One participant suggested that social workers should focus more on permanency planning when they work with children who have been abandoned. The following narrative further elaborates on this point of view.

“...social workers don’t think permanency. And even sometimes where the child was abandoned from the first day of birth and there has never been consideration of reunification. Social workers often don’t have the insight, or the training, or the capacity, or the supervision to have the insight to realise that surely there is a need here to look for something permanent.” (Participant J).

(d) The importance of recruitment

One participant recognised the need that exists within the adoption field for recruitment programmes to receive greater emphasis. The following narrative illustrates this.

“I really think that everybody in the adoption field should... you know there are a lot of people out there that we can maybe reach... that can still adopt. And I think we are all so busy with just dealing with what’s on the table, that maybe we could try and find more adoptive parents – through whatever means. Recruitment... more people, because there are a lot of adoptable children out there and I don’t know if we will move forward... RACAP stays full... so I think recruitment is really a big issue.” (Participant G).

4.4 CONCLUSION

In the introduction of this study it was confirmed that very little research on adoption in South Africa has been conducted. One of study objectives was therefore to fill this existing gap in South African literature, by focusing on trans-racial adoption of abandoned children. Alongside a comprehensive literature review, an empirical investigation was thus conducted. The views of adoption social workers were sought as a means of establishing the nature of adoption in South Africa.

This chapter served as an exposition of the empirical investigation conducted. The insights of adoption social workers regarding trans-racial adoption of abandoned children in South Africa are discussed at length with the use of verbatim narratives and appropriate comparisons to literature.

Study participants largely viewed trans-racial adoption in a positive light. Especially in cases of abandonment, trans-racial adoption was advocated for over foster- or institutional care. It was found that while the majority of children available for adoption are black, the majority of parents wanting to adopt are white. A shortage of black adoptive parents was highlighted and it was suggested that the black population has not yet fully embraced the practice of adoption. It was however noted that adoption organisations are doing very little to actively recruit black adopters, meaning that nothing is being done to increase the numbers of black adopters.

Furthermore, participants were of the opinion that abandoned children are not always being referred for adoption, often getting lost in the child-care and protection system.

The final study objective of the study will be addressed in the following chapter, which will examine the conclusions and recommendations of the researcher.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to explore the views of social workers regarding trans-racial adoption of abandoned children according to the Children's Act 38 of 2005. This was achieved through the implementation of four primary research objectives.

The first objection of this study was met in chapter 2, where the adoption process and the subsequent role of the social worker were explored. The second objective of this study was addressed in chapter 3 which examined trans-racial adoption from an ethnic sensitive perspective. Chapter 4 aimed to achieve the study's third objective by presenting the empirical investigation on the views of social workers on trans-racial adoptions of abandoned children.

The purpose of this final chapter is to present the conclusions drawn from the study and to make appropriate recommendations, thereby meeting the fourth objective of the study.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions and recommendations explored in this chapter are based on the findings of the empirical investigation, and are presented in a similar format to that of chapter 4, therefore following the sequence of the semi-structured interview schedule.

5.2.1 Identifying particulars of respondents

The majority of respondents were between the ages of 31 and 65 years of age. For all the participants, the years of experience as a social worker outweighed the years of experience as an adoption social worker. In light of the above, it can be concluded that because adoption is a specialised field within social work, most social workers within the field have gained work experience in other fields before stepping into adoption work. Once in the adoption field, it appears that most of the respondents remained within this field until the age of retirement. Moreover, the ages of adoption social workers are relatively well dispersed.

Regarding the population groups of respondents, the majority of respondents were from the white population group and the minority were from the coloured population group. There were no respondents from the black or Indian population groups.

Finally, with regards to the types of service providers; all respondents who participated in this study were adoption social workers, working for adoption NGO's; adoption departments within the government sector, or private adoption organisations. Services are predominantly offered by the NGO sector, followed by the private sector. Government-based adoption services are in the minority.

It is **recommended** that, with regards to the **identifying particulars of adoption social workers**:

- Adoption organisations should appoint more social workers from the black and Indian population groups so that the adoption work force better reflects the demographics of the Western Cape Province.
- The reasons for the significant absence of black adoptive social workers in the Western Cape, as well as the impact that this absence has on the numbers of available adopters from the black population group, needs to be further investigated.

5.2.2 Qualifications and work training

The majority of respondents completed an undergraduate social work degree, which is required to practice generic social work in South Africa. The few respondents who furthered their education by completing their honours or masters were in the large minority. It can be concluded that most respondents did not pursue further academic qualifications, as it is not required in order to practice in any social work field.

With regards to other social work courses and/or training, the majority of respondents listed a variety of courses that were completed in fulfilment of the requirements for continued professional development, as set out by the South African Council for Social Service Professions. A minority of respondents indicated that they had completed courses focused on law and its relationship to adoption. It was further noted that none of the respondents indicated completing any training focused on their skills of cultural-competence,

Concerning the adequacy of social work training, most participants felt that their undergraduate social work training did not prepare them for working in the field of adoption.

Less than half of the participants indicated that social work training and courses completed after graduation had been slightly helpful.

More than half of the participants identified in-practice, hands-on experience as being their predominant platform for learning. The need for formal accreditation as an adoption social worker, as well as the guidance from senior adoption social workers were identified as key tools for aiding learning in the work place.

With regards to the **qualifications and training of social workers**, and in the pursuit of professionalising social work, it is **recommended** that:

- Undergraduate social work education should focus more strongly on the importance of permanency planning in work involving children, emphasising adoption as an imperative consideration for when reunification efforts have failed.
- Culturally competent social work practice needs to be regarded as essential in all spheres of social work in South Africa, therefore forming a bigger part of both undergraduate- and in-service training.
- Post-graduate training in the form of a Masters or Doctorate degree should be incentivised within the social work profession by contributing to a social workers' career trajectory and therefore their financial earnings. This will encourage social work interventions to remain evidence-based and relevant.
- In addition to generic social work, it is suggested that various specialities within social work be recognised (i.e. Adoption social work, geriatric social work; medical social work; occupational social work; family and child welfare social work; forensic social work etc.).
- After graduating as a generic social worker, social workers should then be required to complete one year of community service, during which time they will be required to rotate through several of the social work specialities.
- Social workers wishing to specialise should then be required to complete a second year of community service. Under the guidance of an appropriate senior social worker, the specialising social worker will be required to complete a mandatory year of practical experience in the chosen field of speciality, as well as complete standardised tests and/ or training courses specifically tailored for that area of specialisation. The social worker will then register as a specialised social worker in the field of choice.

- After the one year of community service required for generic social workers, or the two years of community service required for specialisation, the training and/or courses completed for the requirement of continued professional development (CPD) points should be more specific by only being made available to those social workers for whom it has been deemed beneficial.

5.3 CHILD ABANDONMENT

With regards to the incidence of working with abandoned children, the majority of participants indicated that they never or rarely work with abandoned children. It was however established that the reasons for this low frequency of working with abandoned children was not necessarily indicative of the numbers of abandoned children in South Africa. Rather, the low incidence of working with abandoned children appears to stem from personal preference, form of adoptions being facilitated by participants, or because abandonment cases are not always referred for adoption by child protection workers.

The few participants who indicated that they often work with abandoned children recognised that abandonment is a common phenomenon, and that older children are often abandoned in institutional- or foster care.

Regarding the most common profile of an abandoned child, the majority of participants indicated that the children they work with would either be a new born, or 6 months and older. Moreover, abandoned children tended to most often be from the black population group. Participants further noted that one of the difficulties with abandoned children is the fact that there is no background information on these children often making placements harder to achieve.

The majority of respondents agreed that whether an abandoned child is placed into foster care or adoption is largely dependent on the type of organisation that manages the case. Almost all of the participants stated that abandoned children are usually placed into foster care by child protection organisations, while adoption organisations would rather try and place the child in adoption.

It was proposed by a few of the participants that a lack in knowledge and understanding of the adoption process amongst child protection workers was the main reason for why the foster care option is so often pursued by child protection organisations in cases of abandonment.

Furthermore, a few of the participants suggested possible consequences of placing an abandoned child in foster care. These consequences included the fact that the child would more than likely end up becoming an older-hard-to-place; and that the child would not have a sense of permanency in his/her life.

In terms of **child abandonment and its relationship to adoption**, it is **recommended** that:

- Both generic- and adoption social workers need to work towards freeing abandoned children from unnecessarily lingering in the child-care and protection system by advocating for adoption in cases where reunification is not possible.
- Before an abandoned child can be deemed adoptable, an investigation of abandonment needs to be conducted by a child protection organisation. A functioning networking system therefore needs to be established between adoption organisations and child protection organisations that will allow for abandoned children to immediately be referred to an adoption organisation once deemed adoptable by the child protection organisation.
- Social work organisations (e.g. Adoption- and child-protections organisations) need to address the root causes of abandonment, especially within the black population, by developing and implementing appropriate prevention interventions.
- Adoption organisations need to promote adoption as an alternative to abandonment, especially amongst the black population, where abandonment has been found to be most prominent.
- Social work organisations working with children (e.g. adoption organisations and child protection organisations) should educate their social workers regarding the fact that adoption in cases of abandonment is in accordance with the Children's Act 38 of 2005. In cases where reunification is not possible, the social workers should therefore move towards adoption as soon as possible.

5.3.1 The nature and process of adoption facilitated by the organisation

The majority of respondents indicated that most of their parents wanting to adopt are from the white population group, while most of their children available for adoption are from the black population group.

With regards to the **process of adoption** followed with biological- and adoptive parents, it can be concluded that although every adoption organisation follows its own unique process, the fundamentals appear to be the same. With regards to the biological parents most organisations will offer options counselling; guidance and support in important decision making; assistance in accessing needed resources; contact between the biological and adoptive families; and grief and loss counselling. The process of adoption for prospective adoptive parents involves the first contact; an orientation session; the screening and preparation; matching; placement and finalisation; and post-adoption support.

It was further established by the majority of participants that regardless of whether adoptive parents are adopting in-racially or trans-racially, the **screening process** would be exactly the same. Half of the participants stated that the difference in process occurs in the **preparation and support** received by prospective adoptive parents adopting trans-racially and those adopting in-racially. For parents adopting trans-racially, preparation and support will focus more on issues of race and culture. Topics explored may include the openness of the parents, as well as their extended family members towards adopting trans-racially; the racial awareness of prospective adoptive parents; and the importance of exposing their child to their cultural roots of origin. It was also indicated that parents considering adopting trans-racially may be encouraged to attend **support groups** before the adoption in order to help them make a final decision regarding race.

Additionally, parents adopting trans-racially should also note that the **legal process** would be slightly longer, as children will need to remain on the Register of Adoptable Children and Adoptive Parents for 30 days prior to being made available for trans-racial adoption. The purpose of this is to ensure that no appropriate same-race parents are available to adopt the child.

With regards to the **challenges encountered in national same-race adoptions**, more than half of the participants noted that there is a significant racial mismatch between the population groups of parents wanting to adopt and the children available for adoption. The reality in South Africa is that the majority of prospective adoptive parents are from the white population group, while the majority of adoptable children are from the black population group. It is therefore very unlikely that white parents will be able to adopt a white child. White parents who are adamant about wanting to adopt a same-race child are thus likely to

remain on the waiting list for an indefinite period of time. Moreover, the low number of black adoptive parents means that very few black children will be adopted into same-race families.

Half of the participants highlighted the fact that there are cultural barriers preventing the black community from fully embracing the practice of adoption. Participants highlighted the fact that many people within the Black community tend to regard adoption less favourably, because traditionally it is not part of their culture. The result is therefore that very few black adopters are available.

Concerning the **nature and process of adoption** it is **recommended** that:

- The cultural barriers and views of black South Africans relating to adoption needs to be further investigated in order to develop a deeper understanding for the lack of black adoptive parents.

5.3.2 Recruitment of prospective adoptive parents

The majority of participants deemed recruitment of prospective adoptive parents as an unnecessary task, due to the fact that they have more than enough prospective adoptive parents contacting them on a daily basis. It was established that the limited recruitment efforts that do take place include; organisation website and blogs, word of mouth, networking within the adoption coalition, pamphlets and/or newspaper and talking at churches or on the radio.

It was concluded that very few organisations actively seek to recruit adoptive parents from the black population group. This is despite the fact that participants confirmed a severe shortage of adopters from the black population group as being a challenge in achieving same-race placements for the abundance of black children available for adoption.

With regards to the main reasons why parents of different population groups decide to adopt, the inability to have one's own child was identified as the primary reason for adopting amongst parents of all population groups. Stepparent adoptions and adopting the child of a deceased family member were also pinpointed as a prominent reason for parents for all population groups deciding to adopt. 'Reasons for adoption' was highlighted as an important source of information for tailoring recruitment efforts to specific target groups. This knowledge can therefore help social workers to tailor recruitment efforts to specific population groups appropriately.

With regards to the **recruitment of prospective adoptive parents**, the following **recommendations** are made:

- Adoption organisations need to address the lack of black prospective adoptive parents by focusing on the development of appropriate recruitment strategies specifically targeted towards the recruitment of adopters from the black population group.
- Adoption organisations need to consider the appointment of black community- or auxiliary workers who can take on the responsibility of recruiting from within the black population group.

5.3.3 Trans-racial adoption

Concerning the importance of **race/ethnicity in the matching process** of adoption, the majority of participants felt that race and ethnicity should be regarded as an important factor of consideration during matching. Most participants agreed that if same-race placements were possible, then that would be the ideal placement as this would be in accordance with the Children's Act 38 of 2005 and would minimise loss for the child.

More than half of the participants agreed that in cases where same-race placements are not possible, trans-racial placements should be regarded as the far superior option in comparison to foster- or institutional care. Some of the participants further noted that the importance of race/ethnicity in the matching process of adoption stretches beyond attempts to make same-race placements. It was explained that in cases where same-race placements are not possible, it is equally as important to consider how the adoptive parents within a trans-racial placement will approach race/ethnicity. Racial awareness and resolution of prospective adoptive parents were therefore identified as key factors for consideration in the matching process of adoption.

Furthermore, the participants highlighted several challenges encountered in trans-racial adoptions. The view of a few of the participants was that child-protection workers and magistrates misunderstand trans-racial adoption, which was consequently identified as a challenge encountered by adoption social workers. It was concluded that a lack of education and knowledge regarding adoption amongst social workers and magistrate could lead to misconceptions about trans-racial adoption.

Regarding the challenges encountered by adoptive parents, participants identified negative attitudes of extended family, racism within the larger community and cultural differences as being the most prominent challenges. It was concluded that a trans-racial adoption would

rarely be processed if the extended family members were not accepting of it. Furthermore, with regards to cultural differences and racism experienced from the larger community, it was identified as imperative that the cultural competencies of adoptive parents be developed.

Finally, with regards to the **factors contributing to the success** of a trans-racial adoption, comprehensive screening and preparation of adoptive parents was highlighted as being a key constituent in ensuring the success of a trans-racial adoption. This places significant responsibility on the social workers, as it up to them to not only comprehensively prepare prospective adoptive parents for trans-racial adoption, but also to determine their readiness to adopt a child from a different race.

In reference to what the adoptive parents can do in order to ensure a successful trans-racial adoption, exposing the adopted child to their culture of origin was pinpointed as imperative. It was acknowledged that this is not always an easy task, and multicultural planning is therefore an important consideration for prospective adoptive parents. Additionally, parents are encouraged to attend support groups for parents who have adopted-trans racially. Attending such groups will provide the adoptive parents with a platform to network with other parents who have adopted trans-racially, to ask questions related to trans-racial adoption, and to allow their child to meet other children who have also been trans-racially adopted.

Concerning **trans-racial adoption**, it is recommended that **adoption organisations**:

- Reach out to child protection organisations and magistrates in order to educate them on why, when same-race adoption placements are not possible, trans-racial adoptions should be considered as a superior option to foster- or institutional care when reunification is not possible.
- Recognise that the cultural competence of prospective adoptive parents (racial awareness; survival skills and multicultural planning) should be a focal point in the screening and preparation for those parents wishing to adopt trans-racially. Adoption organisations therefore need to design and implement training programmes focussed on preparing adoptive parents for the realities of adopting trans-racially. It is then up to the discretion of adoption social workers to assess the readiness and willingness of prospective adoptive parents to adopt trans-racially.
- Adoption organisations need to strategize methods of promoting adoption (both same-race and trans-racial) within communities where it is not yet fully accepted.

With regards to **trans-racial adoption**, it is recommended that the **prospective adoptive parents and the adoption organisations**:

- Explore the concept of trans-racial adoption with the family and friends of the prospective adoptive parents before the adoption process begins. It is imperative for prospective adoptive parents to consider the environment that they would be bringing their adopted child into and to consider whether or not that environment would be conducive to the healthy development of their trans-racially adopted child.
- Openly and honestly explore the racial prejudices of the prospective adoptive parents before entering into a trans-racial adoption. Parents need to look beyond their own desires to be a parent in order to consider the best interests of the child and determine whether or not they are willing to go out of their way to meet the cultural and racial needs of their child.
- Carefully consider the task of multicultural training before adopting trans-racially. Strategies of exposing the adopted child to their cultural and racial origins should be developed before the adoption. Additionally, the parents need to acknowledge that, depending on the desires of the adopted child they will need to continue provided such opportunities throughout the child's developmental years.
- Prospective adoptive parents are encouraged to attend support groups as a means of networking with other parents who have adopted trans-racially, and a platform for having questions answered.

5.4 KEY FINDINGS AND MAIN CONCLUSIONS

There is a dire need for the in-practice social work training and education to be reformulated. This will ensure that all social workers, working in all fields of speciality, are knowledgeable and up to date with the best standards of practice within their field of specialisation.

With regards to adoption in cases of abandonment, it was the view of participants that adoption is an underutilised option by child-protection workers, who are more likely to place these children in foster care. This is despite the fact that the Children's Act 38 of 2005 strongly advocates for adoption in cases of abandonment. The alleged underutilisation of adoption by child-protection workers calls for adoption organisations to reach out to child-protection organisations and provide comprehensive adoption-focused training and advocacy.

Trans-racial adoption was advocated for by most of the participants as a good alternative to same-race adoptions. It was established that with comprehensive screening and preparation, adoptive parents would be more than capable of successfully raising a healthy child of a different race. Parents considering adopting trans-racially are however encouraged to be honest about their racial prejudices, to consider the environment they will be raising their child in (extended family and wider community) and to examine their willingness to expose their adopted child to his/her cultural and racial origins. Adoptive parents need to be realistic about the realities of adopting trans-racially and look beyond their desire to be parents in order to consider what would be in the best interests of the child. It is imperative that adoption organisations assist adoptive parents in developing their cultural competencies across all three domains, so that they will be able to provide for the cultural and/or racial needs of their child as the child grows up. Adoption social workers thus play an essential role in adequately preparing prospective adoptive parents for the role of parenting a child of a different race. Cultural competence training of social workers and prospective adoptive parents was therefore identified as being crucial for the success of a trans-racial adoption.

Despite trans-racial adoption being recognised as a positive form of intervention ensuring permanency and stability in the lives of abandoned children, it was found that efforts to increase the likelihood of same-race adoptions have fallen to the wayside. Most adoption organisations are doing nothing to actively recruit black adoptive parents. It is imperative that recruitment strategies directed towards the recruitment of prospective adoptive parents from the black population group be developed and more avidly prioritised by adoption organisations.

5.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

In light of the results of the investigation with regards to the views of social workers on trans-racial adoption of abandoned children, it is suggested that further research focus on the views of both adoption social workers and child-protection social workers regarding the process that is carried out with abandoned children and whether these children are being placed in foster care or adoption. This will give a more accurate indication of whether abandoned children, in accordance with the Children's Act, are being made available for adoption once an investigation of abandonment has been completed.

The reasons for the significant absence of black adoptive social workers in the Western Cape, as well as the impact that this absence has on the numbers of available black adopters, needs to be further investigated. Further research should also explore the factors that may lead to the successful recruitment of black adoptive parents. Such research could be used by adoption organisations in the development of appropriate recruitment strategies.

Finally, research could be conducted to investigate the views of young adults in South Africa who were adopted trans-racially. Trans-racial adoption was only legalised in South Africa in 1991 meaning that many of the adoptees have recently turned 18 or older. Such research could provide great insight into the success of trans-racial adoptions, and what could possibly be done to improve these adoptions.

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APPENDIX A: Semi-structured interview schedule**UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH****DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK****The Views of Social Workers on Trans-Racial Adoptions of Abandoned Children in
Terms of the Children's Act 38 of**

Researcher: L.S. Doubell

1. IDENTIFYING PARTICULARS OF RESPONDENTS

1.1. Age? _____

1.2. Years of experience as a social worker? _____

1.3. Years of experience as an adoption social workers? _____

1.4. Indicate your population group? *(Mark with X)

Black	White	Coloured	Indian	Other
				Specify:

1.5. Type of service provider *(Mark with X)

Government	NGO	Private Practice	Other: Specify

2. QUALIFICATIONS AND WORK TRAINING2.1. Indicate your highest qualification obtained in social work *(Mark with X)

Qualification	
Diploma in social work	
B.A Social Work (3 years)	
B. Social Work (4 years)	
B.A. Social Work (4 years)	
B. Diac Social Work (4 years)	
Honours B.A. Social Work	
M.A Social Work	
D.Phil Social work	

2.2. List any other social work *courses and/or training* that you have received.

2.3. In your opinion, how adequate was the above training (*number 2.1 and 2.2.*) in enabling you to successfully work within the field of adoption?

3. CHILD ABANDONMENT

3.1. How often do you work with children who have been abandoned?

3.2. Describe the most common profile of an abandoned child that you/your organisation has to place. _____

3.3. In your experience, are abandoned children being put up for adoption or placed in foster care? _____

4. THE NATURE AND PROCESS OF ADOPTION FACILITATED BY THE ORGANISATION

4.1 Of the adoptions facilitated by your organisation, from which population group are the majority of parents wanting to adopt and the children available for adoption?

*(Mark with X - can mark more than one)

	BLACK	WHITE	COLOURED	INDIAN
Prospective adoptive parents				
Child available for adoption				

4.2 Which of the following services are offered by your organisation in the process of adoption for *biological parents*?

	YES	NO
PRE-ADOPTION SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE		
Counselling Services (e.g. options counselling; process and consequences of giving consent).		
Guidance and support in important decision making (e.g. open or closed adoption; selection of appropriate adoptive parents)		
Assistance in accessing needed resources and services (health care; Accommodation in home for expectant mothers)		
Other: specify		
POST-ADOPTION SUPPORT		
Liaison between biological- and adoptive family		
Grief and loss counselling		
Support groups		
Other: Specify		

4.3 List the steps followed by your organisation in the process of adoption for *prospective adoptive parents*.

4.4 Discuss the differences between the process followed for adoptive parent's adopting in- racially and those adopting trans-racially.

4.5 Have you experienced any challenges/difficulties in facilitating national same-race adoptions with any of the population groups of South Africa?

5. RECRUITMENT OF PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENTS

5.1 How do you/your organisation approach the task of recruiting prospective adoption parents?

5.2 In your experience what has been the most common reasons for parents of different racial groups wanting to adopt?

*(Mark with X – can mark more than one)

	White Parents	Black Parents	Coloured Parents	Indian Parents
DESIRE TO BE A PARENT				
Inability to have own child (Infertility; homosexual couple; single person).				
Increase family size				
Life-long desire to adopt				
PHILANTHROPIC/ALTRUISTIC				
Prior connection to a specific child				
To provide a needy child with a home				
To reduce racism through TRA				
PRIOR EXPOSURE TO ADOPTION				
Individual wanting to adopt was adopted				
Individual wanting to adopt has family members who were adopted				
Individual wanting to adopt has friends who have successfully adopted				
RELATED ADOPTION				
Father of illegitimate child				
Step-parent adopting non-biological child				
Child of deceased family member				
OTHER				
Specify:				

6. TRANS-RACIAL ADOPTION

6.1 What is your view regarding the importance that race/ethnicity should play in the matching process of adoption.

6.2 What challenges are encountered in the practice trans-racial adoption?

6.3 Could you identify any factors that, in your opinion, would contribute to the success of a trans-racial adoption?

- 6.4 Do you have any further comments that you would like to share regarding trans-racial adoption as an alternative form of care for children in need of care and protection in South Africa?

APPENDIX B: Informed consent

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jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

**THE VIEWS OF SOCIAL WORKERS ON TRANS-RACIAL ADOPTION OF
ABANDONED CHILDREN IN TERMS OF THE CHILDREN'S ACT 38 OF 2005**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Lara Doubell** a Masters student from the Social Work Department at the University of Stellenbosch. The results of this study will become part of a research report. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a social worker working in the field of adoption.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The **aim** of the research will be to develop an understanding of the views of social workers on trans-racial-adoptions in South Africa in terms of the Children's Act 38 of 2005.

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following:

A semi-structured interview will be utilized to gather information confidentially. You need not indicate your name or any particulars on the interview schedule. The schedule will be completed during an interview conducted by a student-researcher.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Any uncertainties on any of the aspects of the schedule you may experience during the interview can be discussed and clarified at any time.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND / OR TO SOCIETY

The results of this study will inform welfare organizations and social workers of the appropriateness of trans-racial adoption practices in South Africa.

Trans-racial adoption will be analyzed in terms of its regularity, success and appropriateness; and this information could be used by social workers and welfare organizations for further planning in service delivery.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

No payment in any form will be received for participating in this study.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be

maintained by means of coding where each questionnaire is numbered. All questionnaires will be managed, analyzed and processed by the researcher and will be kept in a safe place.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so, e.g. should you influence other participants in the completion of their questionnaires.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENT-RESEARCHER

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

Dr. Marianne Strydom (Supervisor), Department of Social Work, University of Stellenbosch

Tel. 021-808 2070, E-Mail: mstrydom@sun.ac.za

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE
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The information above was described to me the participant by **Lara Doubell** in English and the participant is in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to him / her. The participant was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to his / her satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ [name of subject/participant]. [He / She] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX C: NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice

STANDARD	TYPE	EXPLANATION
1	Ethics and Values	Social workers shall function in accordance with the values, ethics, and standards of the profession, recognizing how personal and professional values may conflict with or accommodate the needs of diverse clients.
2	Self-Awareness	Social workers shall develop an understanding of their own personal and cultural values and beliefs as a first step in appreciating the importance of multicultural identities in the lives of people
3	Cross-Cultural Knowledge	Social workers shall have and continue to develop specialized knowledge and understanding about the history, traditions, values, family systems, and artistic expressions of major client groups served
4	Cross-Cultural Skills	Social workers shall use appropriate methodological approaches, skills, and techniques that reflect the workers' understanding of the role of culture in the helping process
5	Service Delivery	Social workers shall be knowledgeable about and skilful in the use of services available in the community and broader society and be able to make appropriate referrals for their diverse clients
6	Empowerment and Advocacy	Social workers shall be aware of the effect of social policies and programs on diverse client populations, advocating for and with clients whenever appropriate
7	Diverse Workforce	Social workers shall support and advocate for recruitment, admissions and hiring, and retention efforts in social work programs and organisations that ensure diversity within the profession
8	Professional Education	Social workers shall advocate for and participate in educational and training programs that help advance cultural competence within the profession
9	Language Diversity	Social workers shall seek to provide and advocate for the provision of information, referrals, and services in the language appropriate to the client, which may include the use of interpreters
10	Cross-Cultural Leadership	Social workers shall be able to communicate information about diverse client groups to other professionals

Source: NASW (2001:15-29)

APPENDIX D: Recommended questions for adoptive parents to ask in order to evaluate their cultural competence

Racial Awareness		Multicultural Planning		Survival Skills	
1	I understand how my own cultural background influences the way I think, act and speak	1	I include regular contact with people of other races and cultures in my life.	1	I educate my children about the realities of racism and discrimination.
2	I am able to recognise my own racial prejudice	2	I place my children in multicultural schools	2	I help my children cope with racism through open and honest discussion in our home about race and oppression
3	I am aware of stereotypes and preconceived notions that I may hold toward other racial and ethnic minority groups	3	I place my children with teachers who are racially aware and skilled with children of my child's race	3	I am aware of the attitudes of friends and family members toward my child's racial and cultural differences
4	I have examined my feelings and attitudes about the birth culture and race of my children	4	I understand how my choices about where to live affect my child.	4	I am aware of a variety of strategies that can be used to help my child cope with acts of prejudice or racism
5	I make on going efforts to change my own prejudice attitudes	5	I have developed friendships with families and individuals of colour who are good role models for my children	5	I know how to handle unique situations, such as my child's attempt to alter his or her physical appearance to look more like family members or friends
6	I have thoroughly examined my motivations for adopting a child of a different race or culture than myself	6	I purchase books, toys, and dolls that are like my child	6	I help my children recognise racism
7	I am knowledgeable of and continue to develop respect for the history and culture of my children's racial heritage	7	I include traditions from my child's birth culture in my family celebrations	7	I help my children develop pride in themselves
8	I understand the unique racial needs of my child related to his or her racial or cultural status	8	I provide my children with opportunities to establish relationships with adults from their birth culture	8	I tolerate no biased remarks about any group of people
9	I know that trans-racial adoptive parenting involves extra responsibilities over and above those of in-racial parenting	9	I provide my children with the opportunity to learn the language of their birth culture	9	I seek peer support to counter frustration resulting from overt and covert acts of racism toward my children, my family, or me
10	I have examined my feelings about inter-racial dating and marriage	10	I provide my children with the opportunity to appreciate the music of their birth culture	10	I seek support and guidance from others who have a personal understanding of racism, particularly those from my child's race and birth culture
11	I know that others may view my family as "different"	11	I have visited the country or community of my child's birth	11	I have acquired practical information about how to deal with insensitive questions from strangers
12	I know that my children may be treated unkindly or unfairly because of racism.	12	I have demonstrated the ability for sustained contact with members of my child's racial or ethnic group.	12	I help my children understand that being discriminated against does not reflect on personal shortcomings
		13	I seek services and personal contacts in the community that will support my child's ethnicity	13	I am able to validate my children's feelings, including anger and hurt related to racism or discrimination
		14	I live in a community that provides my child with same-race adult and peer role models on an on-going basis.		

Source: Vonk (2001:252-255)