



Adoption Stakeholders' Perceptions of Sharing Adoption Information with Adoptees: The Case of Nigeria

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Declaration

I OKIKE, JULIANA KOFOWOROLA, declare that this is my work except where reference is made. This work has never been submitted for a degree at this or any other University or institution of higher learning.

Signature.

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CERTIFICATION

We certify that this work was carried out by Mrs Juliana Kofoworola Okike in the Department of Social Work, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Botswana.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated first and foremost to God Almighty who makes all things possible

And

My loving husband Dr Ezekiel U. Okike, and son Emmanuel Chukwunonso Okike.

ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

ACRWC African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

APA American Pregnancy Association

CBS News division of American television and radio service CBS.

CBO Community Based Organization

FBO Faith Based Organization

FCT Federal Capital Territory

HCPCCR I-A Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in
Respect of Inter-Country Adoption

HIV Human Immunodeficiency virus

ICA Inter-Country Adoption

IRB Internal Review Board, University of Botswana

PPG Public Perception Group

RSA Republic of South Africa

STP Segmented Triad Pyramid

SWG Social Workers Group

TRA Trans-Racial Adoption

UCH University College Hospital

UK United Kingdom

UNCRC United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNDESA/P United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population

UNESCO United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF United Nations International Children Emergency Fund

USA United States of America

USDHHS United States Department of Health and Human Services

WA-ACA Western Australia the Adoption of Children Act

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ABSTRACT

Child adoption is about the provision of families for children who cannot be cared for within the families into which they were born. It is also about experiencing parenting in which people legally assume the role of parents in respect of a person who is not their biological child. The current adoption practice in Nigeria is closed adoption, and as such, concealment of adoption information from the child is the norm.

Concealing adoption information from adoptees is a practice that has generated many problems in adoptive families that negatively affects both the adoptee and the adoptive parents, leading to disruption of the adoption process, particularly in Nigeria. These problems present a challenge to adoptive parents, and hence, the need to address the issue of communicating adoption information to adoptees in a normative and timeous manner that should lead to a more successful adoption.

The objectives of this study were: to examine perceived factors contributing to concealment of adoption information by adoptive parents from their adopted children; to identify the perceived possible implications of concealing adoption information from adoptees; to explore possible methods of sharing adoption information with adoptees; and to examine the perceived challenges of sharing adoption information with adoptees. The study was based on two theoretical frameworks: social constructionism and ecological system theories.

The study adopted a qualitative approach in the primary data collection using interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary analysis. Secondary data were collected from relevant existing documents, periodicals, and internet and bibliographic data base sources. A total of 35 participants, consisting of fifteen (15) interviewees, and twenty (20) other participants who formed 2 focus group discussions participated in the study. The study setting was South Western Nigeria, using Lagos and Oyo states. These states were selected using a purposive sampling approach. Both states were considered central to the study in terms of access to relevant information, stakeholders, institutions and ethnic diversities. Specifically, the narratives and opinions of respondents helped to explain why people conceal adoption information from their adopted children and the effects of concealment and sharing adoption related information. The data were coded

under themes based on the objectives of the study.

Findings of this study revealed that people concealed adoption information from their adopted children due to societal perceptions towards adoption, cultural values relating to rearing of adopted children, cultural beliefs on communal values, individual fears and misconceptions, scarcity of information on adoption from adoption agencies, and confidentiality factors. The possible implications of concealment included emotional problems such as adoptees getting depressed, being demoralized, being devastated, being traumatized and manifesting violent behaviours on hearing about their adoption status from third parties. There were also, social implications including withdrawal syndrome, and loss of self-esteem. It emerged from findings that the possibility of sharing adoption information depended on societal views. There were more views in support of the need to share adoption information with adoptees than those who said the information should not be shared. The views that adoption information be shared were anchored on the fact that it could help the emotional stability and early adjustment of adoptees which could cement the adoption, and minimize the problems which could arise from concealing the information. The views that adoption information should be concealed were based on the fear that it might create instability in the child's relationship with adoptive parents.

Sharing the information is the foundation of love and care and a good relationship between the parents and the child. This could make the child more appreciative of the parents than becoming violent on hearing about his/her adoption. Thus, love, care and a good relationship between the parents and the child should be the foundation for the sharing of adoption information.

The study findings provide enough evidence of the need to share positive adoption information with the adoptee, as well as the need for a policy statement on the issue. In addition, far reaching policy recommendations are made including: government involvement through comprehensive adoption policy; government and non-government backed public enlightenment adoption campaign; and recommendations for social work practice and professionals. Lastly, a framework for sharing adoption information with adoptees is proposed in this study.

Keywords: Adoption, Adopters, Adoptees, Adoption Communication.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Universally, child adoption is about the provision of families to children who cannot be cared for within the biological families. It is also about experiencing parenting in which people legally assume the role of parents in respect of a person who is not their biological child (Douglas and Philpot, 2003; Ibrahim, 2013). Under the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), adoption is recognized as one of the forms of alternative care for children who have been temporarily or permanently deprived of their families' care and for children who are unable to remain in their familial environment. Brodzinsky and Pinderhuges (2002) and Palacio and Brodzinsky (2010) support the belief that adoption has great benefit as a form of alternative care for young children who live and remain in neglectful or abusive homes or in long term foster or institutional care or with parents who are unwilling or unprepared to care for them. According to Eke, Obu, Chirowa, Adimora, and Obi (2014:188-195), adoption "plays the role of legal placement of a homeless child in a childless home". However, it is not always the case that the child is homeless or the adoptive parents childless. The child's original home may be unsuitable, and the adoptive parents may have children of their own or other adopted children. Every child needs a home, a good environment, and a stable and loving family which is the best place for effective development (Douglas & Philpot, 2003).

However, an area that has mostly been neglected in research on adoption, especially in the African context and particularly in Nigeria, is that of communicating to the adoptee information about his/her adoptive status. This brings about many challenges and

complications in the lives of adopted children and the adults who parent them (Juffer & Van IJzendoorn, 2005; Keys, Sharma, Elkins, Jacono & McGue, 2008). It is vital for an adopted child to know his/her origin and identity as, without this, his/her self-esteem is undermined, and resolution of loss becomes complicated (Brodzinsky, 2006). The purpose of this study therefore was to examine issues around concealment of adoption information by adoptive parents and its implications for the adopted child, as well as the dilemma of sharing adoption information with the adopted child on the part of the adoptive parents and its effects. The study also explores the best approach to communicating adoption information with adoptees for them to grow up knowing about their adoptive status from their adoptive parents in a positive manner. This is essential to prevent them learning from a third party later in life as this could have negative consequences. The problem of concealment of adoption information from an adopted child has been a major issue of concern in the adoption process, particularly for those adopted as babies and attaining the age of adolescence or even adulthood unaware of their adoptive status. Blomquist (2012) argues that there are adopters who assume that, because it is not an important issue to discuss the adoption with their children, it is not an important issue for the children as well. This assumption could easily harm adoptees as they might develop psychological problems if they obtain this information from a third party later in life. This contention is further supported by Feast and Howe (2000) who stated that, when an adoptive parent avoids talking about the adoption to the adoptee, the levels of impaired psycho-social functioning of the latter may increase. This suggests that adoptees may suffer psychological problems, traumatic experiences, depression, and maladjusted behaviour as a result of the lack of communication of adoption information by the adoptive parents. If

this should be the case (i.e concealing the information), how then can sharing of adoption information help in resolving the problem?

Stakeholders such as adopters, adoptees, and birth parents, all benefit from the process. For instance, adopters have the joy of parenting a child. Oladokun, Arulogun, & Oladokun (2009) assert that adoption, as an alternative strategy in the management of infertility, brings succour to the affected couples. Similarly, the adoptee benefits by having a caring, permanent home, while the birth mother may be grateful that her relinquished child is being cared for in a loving family. However, the greatest beneficiary is the adopted child who is loved and cherished by everyone involved in the adoption process. This is the basis of child-centred adoption which is in the best interest of the child (Triselliots and Sherimen, 1997; Welbourne, 2012). Holmes (1993) argues that adoption policies should be child-centered in that the child's interests are superior to those of the adoptive or birth parents. In this regard, whenever there is a conflict between these interests, those of the child should prevail. This has become a global concern in that the adoption of children should be in their best interest and paramount in the adoption process and practice. The United Nations (UN) has also lent support through the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, article 21) which states that adoption practices must be guided by the child's best interests. This international policy guides the practice of domestic adoption (within the country of origin) or inter-country adoption (from one country to another through an inter country arrangement). This is also the concern of other international organisations and treaties such as UNICEF and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The dignity of the child must be respected at all times (UNICEF, 2007). Article 20 of the African Charter states that 'Parents or anyone responsible for the child must always

act in the best interest of the child' (ACRWC, 1990). In essence the child's best interests should be paramount in any adoption arrangement.

A child-centered perspective focuses on a child's needs and best interest, care, support, and well-being. Hence, there must be an understanding of what influences a child's growth and development, how they attach to caring adults in their lives, and what impacts their ability to grow and develop into well balanced adults. It also includes supporting and maintaining the child's rights, understanding adoption from the child's perspective and in relation to his personal experience as a member of the adoptive family, and the impact it makes on his life (Neil, 2011). The benefits of child-centered adoption include the fact that the child knows that he/she is loved and cherished by everyone involved in his/her adoption, especially when they are guided by an appropriate policy which is subsumed in the best interest of the child (Triselliotis & Sherimen, 1997).

Sharing of adoption information with the child and their awareness of being adopted has been an area that has not always been given sufficient attention in the adoption processes, practices, and policies. Until recent years, when some adoption practitioners and professionals began to advocate for an open adoption process allowing the child to have contact with his/her biological family, closed adoption practices had largely been in place (Grotevant, 2000). Concealing adoption information from the adopted child has also been the practice in many African societies, especially Nigeria. This practice, with its frequently negative consequences for children, is often associated with the concept of closed, secret or confidential adoption.

Historically, closed adoption practices could be traced back to the first half of the twentieth century. Before then no emphasis was placed on hiding the origin of the adopted

child because adoption often involved consenting adults (United Nations Department of Economic & Social Affairs, 2009). With this practice, secrecy, anonymity, and the sealing of records became statutorily required as standard adoption practice. For instance, in the United States and many other countries, such as Australia, the need to protect adopted children from the stigma attached to their presumed illegitimacy was probably the main reason for governments to order the concealment of the adopted child's origin (United Nations Department of Economic & Social Affairs, 2009). In Western Australia, the Adoption of Children Act of 1896 was amended in 1921 to restrict access to the records of adopted children. This measure was presumably taken to protect the interests of the child, the birth mother, and the adoptive parents. In the Soviet Union, the adoptive parents were authorized, according to the Family Code of 1968, to modify the date of birth of the adopted child by six months in order to hide the child's biological roots, not only from the adopters' family but also from friends (Bernstein, 1997). Thus disclosing information on the origin of an adopted child became a cause for criminal prosecution and penalty (United Nations Department of Economic & Social Affairs, 2009).

However, the act of concealment of adoption information from the adopted child is clearly a violation of the rights of the child and a denial of his/her 'best interests'. A child has a right to information about his/her identity and to freedom of expression (Article 13 of UNCCR 1989). In the past children have been the subject of policies which were aimed at facilitating adult purposes of adoption but in more recent times they have begun to be seen as individuals with a history which is a part of their identity and which should be protected by right (Douglas and Philpot, 2003)

It appears that the presumption that the adopted child is being protected from the stigma of illegitimacy as the reason for hiding the information from the child about his/her adoption may indeed not have considered the best interest of the child. Moreover, the child, as the centre of adoption, and his/her best interests, must be paramount and, as such, any decision made in relation to him must include the sharing of adoption information about his/her adoption status without concealment. The 21st century is an age spanning boundaries and barriers. Nothing is secret, even the most classified documents of government have been hacked, and Wiki leaks continues to reveal what otherwise would have been confidential documents. According to Blomquist (2009) adoptees want to know the truth about themselves, their background, and the circumstances that surround it. This information should be made available and accessible to those people with respect for their emotional wellbeing. The adopted child is no exception in this regard. Muller and Perry, (2001; 2008) argue that it is wrong for adoption to cut people off from their roots. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that in today's information age, records are no longer secret anywhere in the world. For instance, Bose Oyo, a baby abandoned with a six inch nail in her head and dumped in a bush in Ibadan, Nigeria in 1995, was picked up and brought to a child welfare centre. She was later adopted by the wife of the then Oyo State Governor, and Bose grew up as a member of the governor's family (name withheld for security reasons) and never got to know her true mother even though she knew of her adoption. Another example of an abandoned baby saved through adoption is the case of Michelle Rooney after being dumped in a bin in 1968 in East London. The dustbin baby Ms Rooney was adopted by a policeman. When she was growing up, the story of her abandonment piqued her interest and, despite her happy childhood, Michelle began to search desperately

for clues about her past, particularly the identity of her mother. Eventually, through DNA test she was matched with a cousin on her father's side. She eventually met with her natural father who admitted he had several short-term relationships in 1968 but could not remember any of the names of the women he slept with and hasn't got a clue who her mother was (Dailymail.co.uk). There are numerous such cases of abandoned babies whose lives have been saved through adoption (Pilot Newspaper, April 24, 2015; Nigerian Tribune, Friday Sept 9, 2016).

Forest (2003) argues that there is need for adopted children to know about their origins while adoptive parents need to know how to address these issues. He further explained that, to satisfy young children of six to seven years of age, there is need for a limited amount of information which will enable them to know more about themselves by gaining a fuller picture of their origins. This suggests that the earlier the information is given to them the better, but there is need to adapt the process to the age of the child, rather than simply concealing adoption information from the child which could create more problems than revealing the information. As adoption should be child centered, any information that would be of benefit to the adopted child must not be kept from him or her. Welbourne (2002) suggests that, in the case of information that is difficult for the child to comprehend or that will damage his or her self-esteem or identity, the agency should evaluate the circumstances and reach a decision on an appropriate course of action. According to Brozinsky (2011) disclosure of adoption information should be part of a process. It is the responsibility of the adopter to take the initiative in explaining, discussing, and sharing relevant information without waiting for the adoptee to ask questions (Triselliots, Shireman & Hundileby, 1997)

Statistically, there were 233,934 statutorily adopted children worldwide between 1999 and 2011; of this figure 67,415 were males and 146,516 females. Furthermore 66,630 adoptions were from China (Info Graphics Mania, 2011). In Africa there are estimated 51million orphans of which 41,000 (0.8%) have been adopted (Mail and Guardian, South Africa, 2014). In 2012, there were an estimated 58 million orphans as a result of war, famine, and disease in Africa. Nigeria has 11.5 million orphans (ibid). One solution to the plight of the numerous orphans is adoption. By 2013 the estimated number of adoptions in Africa was 21,402 whereas over the same period the number of African children adopted in the US was about 63,400, which exceeded the number adopted in Africa by Africans (ibid). Although 15 African countries, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mali, Rwanda, Seychelles, Senegal, South Africa, Swaziland, and Togo are signatories to the May 29, 1993 Hague Convention on Adoption, the statutory adoption rate on the continent is low. Countries like Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Liberia which have the highest US adoption rate each are yet to sign The Hague Convention on Adoption As more people are accepting and resorting to adoption it becomes imperative for further research investigating the issue of sharing adoption information with adopted children to be conducted.

In order for the process to be positive, there is need to understand the stages of child development as children's perception and understanding differs according to their age and cognitive skills. For instance, skills of a 2-3 year old are different from those of a 10 year old child. Hence the sharing of adoption information with adopted children should be guided by such considerations. As is the practice in many parts of the developed world, in particular, professionals such as social work practitioners, child psychologists, counsellors,

and relevant stakeholders should be charged with the responsibility of preparing prospective adoptive parents for the task of communicating with the adopted child. The adoptive parents have to be helped to develop the knowledge, understanding, and skills needed to handle the discussion (Feast and Howe, 2000).

1.2 Background to the Study

Adoption in Nigeria started with the idea of couples or individuals taking children into their households on the understanding that they would be regarded as guardians or foster carers without legal implications as biological parents had the right to reclaim their children (Chukwu, 2012; Ibraheem, 2013). The first legislation on child adoption in Nigeria was enacted by the Eastern Region of the country in 1965. The Eastern Regional legislation on adoption is presently in force in the following states - Anambra, Imo, Ebonyi, Abia, Enugu, Rivers, Cross River, Akwa Ibom, and Bayelsa. In 1968 an adoption law was promulgated for Lagos, and since then it has undergone at least three amendments. Subsequently, other states of the old western region, namely Ondo, Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ekiti, Edo, and Kwara followed with their own child adoption laws. To the contrary, states in the northern part of Nigeria which are predominantly Muslim are controlled by Islamic religious law, the beliefs of which do not favour child adoption. Ironically, the largest number of adoptable children in dire need of care and protection come from the North. These children are found all over the country as street urchins and beggars, exposed to all kinds of abuse, danger, and criminal influences (Chukwu, 2012). Even though there is no adoption law in the Northern part of Nigeria, informal adoption is practised (Ibraheem, 2013). Uzodike (1991) argued that adoption might never be a subject for Federal legislation in Nigeria because Moslems are likely to oppose it on religious grounds.

In 2003 the National Assembly enacted The Child Rights Act. The aim of this Act was to provide comprehensive and uniform legislation on the rights and welfare of children throughout the country and also to declare that its provisions supersede any other statutory provisions on the same subject matter (Chukwu, 2012). Thus, the only source of adoption law in Nigeria is legislation. Annexed to the Act was the explanatory memorandum which sets out the rights and responsibilities of a child in Nigeria and provides, inter alia, for a system of child justice administration, care, and supervision (Ibrahim 2013). Specifically, Part XII makes far reaching provision for the regulation of adoption throughout Nigeria. This includes the following: all states should provide services and facilities to enhance child adoption practices; prospective adopters should make application to a court of law; there must be a consenting parent/guardian to adoption (the person who relinquished the child for adoption); that those with compelling reasons to be adopted can be adopted through sanctions by a court of law. The Act prohibits payment to facilitate the adoption of a child. Furthermore, an adoption register must be maintained to record child adoption activities within a court of law and no adopter or any other person shall facilitate the re-adopting of an adopted child except when sanctioned by a court of law. A periodic visit to every child adopted under the Act must be maintained at the time of initial placement to ensure their wellbeing before the adoption is finalized and the child is permanently placed in the adoptive family (Child Rights Act, 2003). There also exists a system of child administration and children's rights implementation committees at all levels of government (Tayudeen, 2013). However, according to Iphay (2007) and Chukwu (2012), the most important provision of the adoption law is the fact that the welfare of the child to be adopted is given paramount consideration and not the adopting parent.

It is important to note that in both the Act and the policy on adoption in Nigeria, there is no provision for disclosure of adoption information to the adoptee. Hence, there is no requirement for an adoptee to be informed of his/her adoption status. In Nigeria the adoption process, in practice, is confidential and hence closed, in which case information about the child is sealed and lodged with the adoption agency. In some cases, the agency may not even have detailed information or any information about the child especially if he /she was abandoned. For instance, in some communities in Nigeria, it is not uncommon to find babies abandoned on the streets, near a hospital, in the gutter, near a brothel or beside a children's home or institutional care centre (Iphey, 2007). The attention of government security agents such as the police is usually drawn to babies found abandoned and they would subsequently be taken to the Department of Social Welfare. The Department would arrange for the placement of such babies in appropriate residential/institutional care, hence prospective adopters may adopt them (Iphey, 2007; Nigerian Pilot April 24, 2015).

The issue of parents sharing adoption information with the adoptee arises after placement, which is often neglected during the preparation process. Consequently, it becomes necessary to examine Nigerian adopters' knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions on the issue of adoption. Culturally, an average Nigerian would prefer to adopt a child related by blood to them than a child who has no blood relationship with them. Some cultures in Nigeria, for instance, the Igbos and the Yorubas hold the belief that adopting a stranger means bringing a bastard (child) into the family. Thus, in terms of awareness, studies suggest that 80% of Nigerian respondents are aware of adoption practices but not many people become involved since kinship adoption is a common practice in the country (Aniebu, & Aniebu; 2008).

Kinship adoption is an informal system which has its origins in the extended family system where a person can adopt a child related by blood (or by close acquaintance) without the services of an adoption agency. In this practice, there is always mutual agreement between the adopter and the birth parents prior to placement. The adopted child in this case knows about his/her adoption and his/her background, and can return to his birth parents, much like the foster care system where a child returns to his/her birth parent when and if it is deemed acceptable. This informal type of adoption is fast becoming unpopular in the light of present global economic challenges in the country, while formal adoption is gaining ground (Ibraheem, 2013). Therefore, it may be said that the knowledge and practice of adoption has become an alternative option for infertility management in Nigeria (Adewumi, Etti, Adotokunbu, Rabi, Akindele, Ottun, Akunlusi, 2012).

However, as the rate of infertility is on the increase, many infertile couples who successfully adopt prefer to adopt infants and pose as their biological parents (Johnson, 2002). It is estimated that more than 70 million couples globally are affected by the issue of infertility and, in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria has been largely impacted (with 20% - 45% of this figure) (Adewumi et al, 2012). To manage their infertility some turn to unsuccessful and expensive Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART) (which many cannot afford) while others seek alternative solutions through adoption.

It has also been suggested that women and couples having undergone previous orthodox specialist treatment; suffering from a tubal infertility; of maternal age above 35; having an absence of living children; in possession of secondary and tertiary education; and with correct knowledge of the implications of child adoption, are more likely to adopt a child (Ezugwu, Obi & Onah, 2002; Nwobodo & Isah, 2011). On the other hand, Omosun

& Kofoworola (2011) argued that the rate of acceptability and practice of adoption in Nigeria is relatively low. This is as a result of couples being discouraged because of cultural implications, misconceptions, stigmatisation, financial burden, and stressful procedures (Avidime, Ameh, Adesiyun, Ozed-Williams, Isaac, Aliyu, Sullyman, Idris, and Ojabo, 2013; (Eke, Obu, Chinawa, Adimora and Obi, 2014). As adoption procedures are relatively stressful in the Nigerian welfare and judicial system (Oladokun, Arulogun, Oladokun, Morhason-Bello, Bamgboye, Adewole, & Ojengbede, 2009a, 2009), some potential adopters feel challenged by the process. The capability of a prospective adopter is assessed by the Social Welfare Department and this includes inspecting their living conditions, financial status, and other relevant factors to ascertain their preparedness for a new parenting role (Adewumi et al, 2012). In addition, the necessity to check for compatibility and progressive adjustment between the adoptee and the adopters is sometimes required before and after placement (Oladokun, Arulogun, Oladokun, Morhason-Bello, Bamgboye, Adewole, & Ojengbede, 2009b), even though this should, ideally, be required by law.

Psychologically, the fear of being ridiculed in public make some potential adopters put off the idea of opting for adoption as solution to their infertility problem. In the same vein, due to religious beliefs (e.g Islamic religion) other potential adopters do not accept adoption as an alternative to infertility, instead their religion permits marrying more women to raise offspring.

1.3 Motivation for the study

Using Nigeria as a case study, concealment of adoption information from adoptees is peculiar among adoptive parents. This is very particular when adoptees are adopted as

babies or infants in which case their background may not be known. The reasons why adoptive parents conceal adoption information is yet unclear, and hence requires further investigation among others. Exploring the reasons why adoptive parents generally conceal adoption information (particularly from the adoptee) might be for their benefit or for the benefit of the adoptee or both. In any case, some important questions arise including: “What does an adoptive parent stand to gain from concealing adoption information from an adoptee? How does this affect the life of an adoptee mentally, socially and psychologically? To the best of this researcher’s knowledge there have, in the past, been cases of children adopted as babies who, as they grew up, assumed that they were the biological children of their adoptive parents only to be informed by a third party at a later stage (adolescence, teenage, youth) that this was not the case. This experience led to traumatic psychological and psychiatric problems for some of the adoptees. Equally, the adoptive parents become affected as they may be confronted with the challenges from an adoptee’s aggressive demand of his or her background origin, and how he or she came to be adopted. From this perspective, one may ask the question: “Will sharing or disclosing of adoption information to the adoptee solve the problems and the complexities that develop in adoptive families due to concealment of information from adoptees or otherwise? Therefore, in order to avoid these kinds of problems, (particularly in Nigeria) this study aims to examine acceptability of sharing of adoption information with the adoptee and how this could help in resolving the problems and complexities arising from the non- disclosure of adoption information to adoptees.

Adopters might hide behind the fact that not enough information about the child’s background was provided to them and thus they never thought it necessary to tell the child

that he/she was adopted. Some adopters go to the extent of relocating to another place so that no one might know about the adoption. This is a fact among most adopters in Nigeria (Iphey, 2007).

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Parenting adopted children has gained the attention of researchers, adoption professionals, and social workers lately (Brodzunsky, 2011). There is a considerable body of research on the impact of adoption on adoptive parents; challenges of parenthood in adoption; post adoption contact with birth parents; and depression and adoptive parenting in general. In Nigeria, research on adoption can be noted in the works of Oladokun (2009), Omosun and Kofoworola (2011), Chukwu (2012), Eke et al (2014), and Ojelabi, Osamor and Owumi (2015). The focus ranges from adoption as a management option for infertile couples to knowledge, attitude, and practices of adoption; adoption of children under the Child Rights Act 2003; perceptions of child adoption; and adoption policy and practice.

In spite of the available body of research on adoption in Nigeria, there is no evidence of research in the area of communicating or sharing of relevant information with the adoptee about his adoption status. Furthermore, this issue was neither addressed in the adoption policy nor in the Child Rights Act of 2003. This could be part of the reason why adopters generally conceal information from adoptees.

Concealing adoption information from adoptees is a practice that has generated many problems in adoptive families that negatively affects both the adoptee and the adoptive parents, leading to disruption of the adoption process, particularly in Nigeria. According to Holmes (1993), adoption policies in the United States of America (USA) supposedly restrict the adoptee's access to their personal foundations just as the slavery

system restricted slave children's access to their genetic and cultural foundations. As a result, some adoptees developed curiosity, desire or need to know their birth kin, and to act much as the newly emancipated slaves did. In addition, the author argued that most adoptees would rebel against the act of denying them access to information about their background. This enquiry often began when adoptees are taunted by playmates in early adolescence. In such situations, the adoptee could face psychological problems or become traumatized and emotionally disturbed. Studies show that some even externalise aggressive behaviour when their identity is not known to them. They could feel that their adoptive parents are blocking them from obtaining desired information (Dunbar, van Dulmen, Ayers-Lopez, Berg, Christian, Gossman, Henney, Mendhall, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2006). Similarly, Smith, Howard Garnier, & Ryan, (2006) suggest that there are higher risks of behavioural and emotional problems among adopted children who are denied information about their adoption status. Brodzinsky (2011) argued that some adoptees are hospitalized due to mental illness related to their genetic background and possible birth mother's addiction to drugs during pregnancy. However, in the Nigerian context no attention has been given by researchers to the fact that, apart from genetic causes, there is a probability that the child may develop psychiatric problems arising from shock, distress, grief, and traumatic experience through lack of communication of adoption related information. This is because adopted children are never told of their adoptive status, and when they learn about it from third parties, they are shocked.

Many Nigerian adoptive parents are confronted with challenges of sharing adoption related information with their children, most especially those who adopted them as infants. Making the child aware of his or her adoption status is a problem for adoptive parents in

Nigeria when the child reaches adolescence and begins to ask confrontational questions as: “Who am I”, and “Who will I become”. According to Smith and Howard (1997), the answers to such questions become more complicated to some adoptees because of their lack of knowledge about their origins not even the awareness of their status. The adoptive parents are overwhelmed by fear of people around them knowing of the adoption. The thought of what people will say occupies their minds rather than adjusting to the child, to their new family, and sharing with the child adoption related information and the implications of being adopted as he or she grows and develops.

Social workers in many adoption agencies and adoption practitioners in the country have no guided means or regulations for sharing adoption information with the adopted child. In fact, consideration of the aspect of sharing information is not in their schedule of the adoption process. After the final placement of the child in the adoptive home, the only advice usually given to the adopter on the welfare of the child is that they should take care of the child as their own biological offspring (Blomquist, 2009). It is vital that the child be told from infancy, even though he might not understand. If communicated in a positive manner he/she might even believe him/her to be superior to other children living with their birth parent. In addition, the community where the adoptive parents reside often complicates issues because more often than not the adoptive parent (especially the woman) is stigmatised as a woman with infertility problems who cannot bear children and has to resort to adoption. This is frequently the reason why adopters change residence as soon as a child has been adopted to avoid being known and also to conceal the information from the child as he or she grows (Iphey, 2007). Furthermore, statutory adoption involves legal action whereby a court of law has to terminate the right of the birth parent to enable an

adoptive parent to assume the right of parenthood over a child. However, except in the open adoption model where the court may intervene in the process of contact between the adoptive parent and the birth parent in the best interest of the child (Appelle, 2010), there is no other way in which the adoptive parent may be held responsible legally to compel them to share adoption information with their adopted children. Since this aspect is legally ignored, it affects both the adopter and the adoptee, especially the latter whose best interest is not considered when there is no legal mandate for the adoptive parents to share with the adoptee information about his or her adoptive status. This may have negative implications for the adoptee if they receive the information from outsiders.

Although disclosure or sharing of adoption information with the adoptee is an issue which many adoptive parents refuse to face, especially within the Nigerian context, the issue is nonetheless significant. For instance, it is assumed that many Nigerians do not believe that an adoptee should be informed about his/her adoption status. To many others, revealing adoption information to the adoptee is tantamount to isolating the child from the family. In such cases the right of the adopted child to information is violated by denial of access to such information. The assumption is that adopters generally ignore this area considering it non-essential as long as the child is loved and cared for and accepted as part of the family. It may also be indicative of insecurity on the part of adopters and the fear that the child will no longer love or trust them. Interestingly though this may happen even more certainly if the child finds out that the adopters have not been telling him/her the truth about his/her background. These assumptions require scrutiny. According to Blomoquist (2009) some adoptive parents do not want to discuss this issue because they think that it could be a negative factor in their relationship with the child. Similarly, Ibraheem (2013)

noted that, as in most cultures in Nigeria, child rearing is a communal effort where everyone is involved and thus telling a child that he or she is adopted is likened to separating the child from other members of his family. The issue of an adoptee knowing their identity becomes a problem when information about his or her adoption is concealed. This becomes more problematic when they reach adolescence without having knowledge of their status. The consequence of this could be devastating. This is suggested as part of the challenging aspect of parenting through adoption.

The current research therefore sought to establish why adoptive parents tend to conceal relevant information from the adoptee, the implications of such action for the latter, and exploration of how possibly positive methods of sharing the information with adoptees could help in resolving the many problems and complexities that tend to arise as a result of concealing adoption information from the adoptee in Nigeria. As there is still no provision in the adoption policy of Nigeria for adopters to share adoption information with the adoptee, this suggests that, to date, there is no framework for implementation of the process.

As a crucial matter in the practice of adoption, particularly in Nigeria and especially with children adopted as babies, the communicating or sharing of adoption information with the adoptee calls for the evolvement of an appropriate framework which serves as a policy document to guide the process of what, how, and when to share or disclose the information with the child. This study therefore sought to provide such a framework as a guide to policy makers, adoption agencies, adopters, and all stakeholders involved in the practice and process of adoption.

1.5 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine issues around concealing adoption information from adoptees, and to explore the perspectives of adoption stakeholders such as adoptive parents, social workers and others directly concerned with adoption practices on how sharing or disclosing adoption related information with the adoptees could help to resolve problems and complexities that arise as a result of concealing adoption information from adoptees in Nigeria.

1.6 Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to explore adoption stakeholders' perceptions of sharing adoption information with adoptees in the context of Nigeria.

1.7 Specific Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are:

- i. To examine perceived factors contributing to concealment of adoption information by adoptive parents from their adopted children.
- ii. To identify the perceived possible implications of concealing adoption information from adoptees.
- iii. To explore possible methods of sharing adoption information with adoptees.
- iv. To examine the perceived challenges of sharing adoption information with adoptees.

1.8 Research Questions

- i. What factors contribute to the concealment of adoption related information from adoptees?
- ii. What are the perceived implications of concealing adoption information from adoptees?
- iii. What are the possible methods of sharing adoption information with adoptees?
- iv. What are the challenges of sharing adoption information with adoptees?

1.9 Justification of the Study

In the African context, particularly in the context of Nigeria, most studies to date on child adoption have addressed issues related to adoption practices, processes, and procedures (Issa and Awoyemi, 2006; Iphey, 2007; Ibrahim, 2013); acceptability of adoption as an option for infertile couples (Oladokun et al, 2009; Adewumi et al, 2012); perceptions of the process; (Eke et al 2014); and knowledge, and attitudes towards adoption (Omosun and Odeyemi, 2011). Specifically, it would appear none of these studies has addressed issues around sharing adoption related information with the adoptee. This is probably because adoption is not an open process in the country. The effect of not sharing adoption information with the adoptee may be observable in psychological and emotional problems when the person learns about this through other sources. This study underscores the need for an adoption model that allows the sharing of adoption information with the adoptee in timeouts and positive manner. Such a model input help to obviate the problems associated with non-disclosure.

1.10 Significance of the Study

This study has significance for policy, for practice and for research.

1.10.1 Contribution to Policy

The purpose of policy is to guide action or practice. It is anticipated that the results or findings of this study will contribute to the development and formulation of policies and programmes on child adoption in Nigeria especially in relation to the issue of adoptive parents sharing relevant information with the adoptee in a timeous manner. It will provide insight into the benefits of this process which should assist in resolving the many complexities involved in adoption and some of the unhealthy emotional consequences resulting from poor adoption practices. The study will lead to reflection on policies and practices of child adoption in Nigeria through the additional insight that it will provide in an African (specifically Nigerian) context. The study should generate interest and debate among adoption agencies in the private and public sector in the country and among independent adoption practitioners and professionals. Additionally, the findings might become a useful tool for advocacy and social action by adoption practitioners, social workers, juvenile justice professionals, and adoption agency personnel. A key contribution of this study to the child welfare sector is that it will serve as a reference point for policy makers. The findings may also be incorporated into child adoption legislation in Nigeria. The judicial arm of government might make the aspect of sharing adoption information with the adoptee part of the child rights agenda, as the child has the right to know his/her origins and status in the family.

1.10.2 Contribution to Practice

Although child adoption is recognised and practised in Nigeria, it is important to understand that it is a process and not an event. It is a lifelong process in which the interest of adoptees in learning more about their past is situated along a continuum (Smith & Howard, 1999).

This research sheds light on the fact that child adoption practice does not end with the placement of the child as it continues throughout the life of the adoptee and that of the adoptive parents. The best interests of the child are paramount in this situation and this issue will also impact the adoptive parents. The findings of this study will therefore be useful for adoption professionals and practitioners such as psychologists and child welfare social workers as this will enable them to get involved and offer focused guidance and support to adoptees and adoptive families.

1.10.3 Contribution to Research

The findings of this study will fill a gap in the literature on sharing adoption information with adoptees. The study is likely to generate interest in child adoption communication as an emerging area of interest for social workers, especially those employed in the adoption sector. The study could generate more interest in research on post adoption practices and experiences. Above all, because of the African cultural setting where this research was conducted, the contribution by the study is likely to differ from those carried out in dissimilar environments. Hence this study could stimulate more interest among local researchers in the field of statutory adoption taking into account its more localised content.

There is need for more investigative research into life after the adoption process in areas such as the challenges of parenting an adopted child, adjustment and identity issues, culture and adoption, open communication with an adopted child, and appropriate measures and models which could be utilised in training and acceptance of potential adoptive parents.

1.11 Definition of Key Concepts

The following relevant concepts are defined by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population: Trends of Adoption (UN, 2009).

- **Adoption:** A legal institution that creates ties equivalent to natural affiliation between an adopted person and one or two adoptive parents, so far as provided by the laws of the country.
- **Adopted person/Adoptee:** An individual who has been legally adopted by means of a judicial or administrative process.
- **Adoptive parent/Adopter:** An individual who has legally assumed parental rights over, and responsibilities for, another person through adoption.
- **Adoption stakeholders:** A person or group of persons affected or having an interest in adoption (Collins)
- **Birth parent:** The biological parent of an individual.
- **Childless woman:** A woman who has never had a live birth.
- **Closed adoption:** A type of adoption where there is no personal contact between the prospective adoptive parent and the birth parent.
- **Concealment:** To keep from discovery, hide, to keep secret (Collins, 2012)

- **Concealment of adoption information:** Adoption information is kept secret from the Adoptee.
- **Confidential Adoption:** The process whereby an infant is adopted by another family, and the record of the biological parents is kept sealed (US legal, Inc. 2001-2014)
- **De facto adoption/Informal adoption:** An informal arrangement through which one or more Individuals assume parental rights over, and responsibilities for, another person.
Such adoptions do not have legal validity.
- **Discussant** One who participates in a Focus Group discussion (FGD)
- **Domestic adoption:** An adoption where both adoptive parents and the adopted person are citizens and habitual residents of the same country.
- **Fecundity:** The physiological ability to conceive and give birth.
- **Fertility:** The proven ability to conceive and give birth.
- **Foster care:** A system enabling a child who lacks parental support and protection to be placed in the care of a person or family, usually by court order.
- **Intercountry adoption:** An adoption that involves a change in the adopted person's country of habitual residence. For any given country, this includes both adoption by citizens of that country of children who were resident elsewhere (i.e. the children become immigrants) and adoption by citizens of other countries of children born in that country (i.e. the children become emigrants).

- **International adoption:** An adoption where the adoptive parents and the adopted person are citizens, but not necessarily residents, of different countries.
- **Inter-racial adoption:** An adoption where at least one of the adoptive parents and the adopted person are identified as belonging to different racial groups.
- **Open adoption:** A type of adoption where the birth parent and the adoptive parent file a joint request for the authorisation of the adoption.
- **Primary infertility:** The inability to bear any children, either due to the inability to conceive or the inability to carry a pregnancy to a live birth.
- **Secondary infertility:** The inability to bear a child after having an earlier birth.

1.12 Organization of Study Chapters

This study is organised into seven chapters. Chapter one presents the introduction of the study, its background information and motivation for the study; statement of the problem, purpose of the study; objectives of the study, research questions, significance, and justification of the study, contribution to policy and research, and definitions of concepts. Chapter two presents a review of literature relevant to the study. Chapter three explains the theoretical framework adopted for the study. Chapter four presents the methodology employed in the study. Chapter five presents the findings of the study. Chapter six presents a discussion of the results, while the last chapter presents the summary, and conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature sources relevant to the study. It also highlights gaps in the literature with regard to the current research. The aim is to critically examine previous research and the claims of the researchers and then to create the foundation upon which the study will rest (Merriam, 1998., Rocco, Timothy, and John, 2011). The review is divided into two parts. The first part examines the basic fundamental principles of adoption processes and practices. This includes characteristics of adopters and adoptees, statutory adoption, models of adoption, formal adoption, (closed and open), and informal adoption. The second part reviews literature that focused directly on the objectives of this study. These are : factors leading to concealment of adoption information from the adoptee; implications of such concealment; the possible methods of sharing adoption information with the adoptee; and perceived challenges of sharing such information with the adopted person. The overriding focus of this review is that adoption information should be shared or communicated in an appropriate manner in order for the adopted children to be aware of their adoption status and other information that will help them to appreciate and develop their self esteem. In addition, it suggests that sharing of information with the adoptee about his or her status could help to resolve problems and complexities arising as a result of concealing the information from the child.

2.1.1 Overview of Fundamental Principles of Statutory Adoption Process and Practice

In the processes and practices of adoption, fundamental principles are required. These are discussed below:

- **Characteristics of adopters**

In today's contemporary societies statutory adoption has gained greater recognition than in the past. Jones (2009) posits that adoption has brought many benefits to those individuals or couples who form a legal parental relationship with a non-biological child and also for the children whose birth parents are unable or unwilling to raise them. However, there are certain demographic, social, and attitudinal variables that characterise those who adopt. Some of these variables include: marital status, age, sex, having used infertility services, having previously given birth to a child, education status, income, religion, and having been a statutory or informal foster parent (Hollingsworth, 2000a; Donaldson, 2002; van Laningham, J. L., Scheuble, L. K., and Johnson, D. R, (2012)).

- **Marital status.** Most people who have recourse to adoption are married. The literature reveals that a majority of adopters are married couples who consider adoption and actually adopt (Donaldson, 2002). Lonningham, Scheuble, and Johnson (2012) argue that marital status is one of the variables found to significantly characterise those who adopt in the United States of America. There are also cases of single mothers who consider adoption and actually adopt. Research shows that married respondents consider adoption more than the never married (ibid). In Nigeria the situation is similar. However, adoption laws in Nigeria permit single people (either male or female) to adopt but they are not allowed to adopt a

- child of the opposite sex. This is to avoid sexual exploitation of the child (Chukwu 2012) although same sex practices might still be a problem.
- **Gender.** Research also reveals that women consider adoption significantly more than men, (even among those who are married) (ibid). In many societies, especially in Africa, women are more prone to stigmatisation through childlessness than men (Oladokun et al, 2009). They are often ridiculed and isolated, prompting them to seek a solution by adoption.
 - **A history of infertility treatment.** Another variable that characterises those who adopt is that they have, at one time or another, sought treatment for infertility. Bausch (2006) and Goldberg (2019) found infertility status as one of the consistent reasons for willingness to adopt. Jones (2009) reports that, in the U.S.A, women who have used fertility treatment are ten times more likely to adopt than women who have never received such treatment. Similarly Hollingsworth (2000b) found that women who had been treated for infertility were five times more likely to have contacted adoption agencies or attorneys than women who had not received such treatment. Cudmore (2005) argues that most heterosexual couples who choose adoption do so because of problems related to infertility. Oladokun et al (2009) report that, in Nigeria, a woman who is childless as a result of infertility is often socially ostracised by her immediate family. In most cases she is not allowed to take a leading role in important family functions and events.
 - **Age.** The stipulated age range for adoption depends on the adoption policy of the country concerned. The literature however reveals that adopters are usually of more advanced age than those who have given birth to a child (Lamb, 2008; Jones, 2009;

Scheuble, 2012) In statutory adoption (that is, adoption guided by the law) the age of those who adopt is determined by the relevant legal provision of a given society. For instance, in Europe adoption law requires prospective adoptive parents to be between 21 and 35 years of age. In other countries, such as Guinea Bissau, the civil code allows parents to adopt if they are between the ages of 25 and 60 years (UNESCO, 2009). In Nigeria, the prospective adopter must be at least twenty one years older than the child to be adopted or have attained the age of 25 (Chuckwu, 2012).

- **Economic status.** The economic status of a prospective adopter is usually considered when deciding who should adopt. Studies show that income is positively associated with consideration for adoption. Chandra (1999), Lamb (2008), and Laningham, Scheuble, and Johnson (2012) argue that, for people of lower levels of income, adoption can be a costly pursuit in terms of the cost of the process and the cost of caring for the child after adoption. In the United States of America research reveals that women with an income below 100% of the poverty datum line are significantly less likely to adopt than women with higher income. Similarly in Nigeria, it is people of higher income that find it possible to afford the charges incurred in statutory adoption.
- **Educational status.** Education also plays a significant role in adoption especially in the Western World. A study by Hollingsworth (2000b) revealed that one of the variables that predict adoption seeking and propensity to adopt was educational attainment. In this regard, adoption seekers were those who had attended college, and those who would likely be college graduates. In Nigeria the knowledge and

acceptance of adoption is more prevalent among people with higher levels of education. Adewumi et al (2012) argue that a person who is educated is more enlightened and probably better informed about adoption. They also have correct understanding and a more favourable attitude towards the process.

- **Religion.** Religion is part of the lives of people and impacts their serious decision making process. Hollingsworth (2000a) found that in the United States of America (USA), religion is an important predictor of those who seek to adopt. The findings of a study on consideration for adoption in the US (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Law, 2009) established that women who consider adoption have higher levels of religious affiliation than those who had never considered it. In contrast another study conducted in five Bay Area Counties and California by Tyebjee (2003), found that political, religious, and environmental ideology were unrelated to attitudes or willingness to adopt or foster. Belanger, Cheung & Cordova (2012) concluded that religious faith may be an asset in increasing adoption as well as in improving adoption outcomes especially for black Americans. They stated that, once a church member decided to adopt a child in need, this prompted other church members to appreciate the situation and receive the required training. Lamb (2008) observed that attending religious services increased the likelihood of pursuing adoption for non Hispanic white women in the US. In Nigeria the issue of religion is not prominent among Christians considering adoption while those of the Muslim faith do not support legal adoption. Thus, religious beliefs influence people considering adoption.

- **Foster parenting.** There are cases of people who eventually adopt children who had once been fostered by them. Research findings indicate that women who have provided foster or other formal child care services are significantly more likely to actively pursue adoption. Hollingsworth (2000b) argues that foster parenting in the US is related to adoption seeking for women who are childless as a result of infertility. Frey, Cushing, Freundlich, & Brenner (2008) argue that parents who had fostered a child or children would be more disposed to adopt children who need a permanent family. Studies further indicate that most children who need a permanent family are often fostered, particularly in a customary kinship system since this is emphasised as the best way to raise children in some cultures (Ryan, Hinterlong, Hegar, and Johnson, 2010).
- **Social factors.** There are some social factors that are likely to determine why some people opt for adoption. Dyer (2007) highlighted that these social predictors include the following: the enhancement of happiness (feelings of affection and happiness in relationship with children); the enhancement of wellbeing and positive effects on family relationships; parenthood as a source of life fulfillment; helping children to realise their identity and facilitate their transition to adulthood; and support in old age (some people believe that when they are old and unable to actively help themselves, their children will economically and physically provide support). Hollingsworth (2000a) and Dinka & Dein (2013) emphasised that social factors predicting why people adopt include socio-economic reasons such as having children to secure physical care and economic support for parents in their old age;

to ensure continuity of their lineage; and to enhance their social status in society (especially if the adoptee is a male).

Having identified factors leading people to consider adoption, it is important to consider adoptive parent's obligations towards their children, especially in helping them to discover their identities. According to Triseliotis, Shireman, and Handleby (1997), this becomes possible when adoptive parents first acknowledge the fact that they are psychological parents and not biological parents. In this respect, Johnson (1997) likened adoption to a seed planted in a garden. The seed is the child, the producer of the seed is the birth mother, and the nurturer of the seed (gardener) is the adoptive parent. Each member of the adoption triad (child, birth mother, and adoptive parents) is thus faced with different challenges. One of the challenges is how to disclose adoption related information to the adoptee by adoptive parents, what to discuss and when to discuss.

- **Characteristics adoptees**

There are a number of factors that might indicate that a child is in need of adoption.

These include (but are not necessarily limited to) poverty, neglect and abuse, residential/institutional care, and foster care among others.

- **Poverty.** Poverty is one of the factors that indicate the need for alternative care, possibly including adoption. Carmargo (2005) and Anaute (2013) noted that, in some communities in Brazil, poverty had made many children homeless and wandering the streets. Such children needed families which could care for and protect them. Maundeni (2009) reported the suffering of some children as a result of society denying them their human rights such as shelter, security, and care. Similarly, Formson and Forsyth (in Malinga and Ntshwarang, 2011) described the poverty

stricken state of some families which resulted in parents giving up their children for adoption, either formally through an adoption agency or informally by related family or kinship systems. Also, in Nigeria poverty has led some parents to give their children for kingship adoption (adoption of relatives).

- **Neglect and abuse.** There are cases of children who need to be adopted because of neglect and abuse in their homes. Sturge and Glaser (2000) described the physiological damage as well as behavioural changes that affect children as a result of neglect and abuse. According to Child Welfare Information Gateway (2013), sexually abused children are physically affected and emotionally disturbed, resulting in their inability to trust any person as they view the world as an unsafe place. Similarly Peterson, Joseph and Feit (2014) reported that children who have been abused and neglected in their lives can fear the proximity of adults. Therefore, such children need structured, safe, and nurturing environments different from where they had suffered the traumatic experience (ibid). Adoption can be the best option for such children to help them recover from the trauma of neglect and abuse (Child Welfare Information GateWay, 2013). In Nigeria, child abuse can take the form of using under age children for street hawking, alms begging, and household help (Eke et al, 2014).
- **Challenges of institutional residential care.** Many children in need of care are initially placed in institutional care. Costa and Ferreira (2007) suggest that, if the best interest of a child is the focus in adoption, then the interests of the child should be provided for by a family and not an institution. Similarly, Brodzinsky and Schechter (1990) argued that adopted children in a family setting fare better than those children who are reared in a residential/institutional environment. The argument is that the care

a child receives in a family is more permanent (and personal) than that provided in institutional care. Malinga and Ntshwarany (2011) reported that financial implications of training of workers and some other challenges faced by institutional care may create instability in the lives of the children. Similarly, Foster (2004) pointed out that residential/ institutional care is usually faced with financial challenges in running and maintenance as the resources required to maintain the project are more expensive than assisting families to care for children. According to Maundeni (2009), children in institutional care may lack adequate attachment to the caregiver. The argument is that a child needs to be attached to a caregiver immediately after birth and, if this is lacking, the child's psychological and physical development could be affected. Furthermore, Charles and Matheson (1990) supported the fact that separation could affect attachment, and could create such problems as the inability to learn and to regulate emotions and lack of self-control and self reliance.

- **Foster care.** Foster care is a temporary placement for a child in need of care (Government of Botswana s, 2001). Therefore, such a child needs permanent placement for his or her optimal development. According to Foster (2004) although the best interests of those in foster care are taken into consideration, the continual care of the child is not the focus. In contrast Testa (2004) argued that there are negative effects of long term foster care placement on the child's wellbeing. Similarly, Harden (2004) reported that foster care has been linked to unhealthy child development outcomes even though it is a protective factor against negative effects of maltreatment. Sanchez (2004) pointed to the instability of foster care in which children possibly move from home to home, neighbourhood to neighbourhood, and school to school. As a result of this

transition children are faced with the challenges of constantly developing emotional bonds with significant others.

- **Teenage pregnancy.** In some societies early pregnancy is commonly found among teenagers. According to Child Welfare Information Gateway (2005) there are teenage girls who fall pregnant and are unwilling to abort their babies or are not ready to assume the care and responsibility of motherhood. Therefore, they give up their babies for adoption with the assistance of adoption agencies who identify a prospective adopter. Child Welfare Information Gateway (2005) reported that young women do so because of lack of support from their partners and their family members. Ireland's Adoption Board reported in 2004 that, in a study of 92 women who gave up their children for adoption 40% were under 21 years of age.
- **Abandoned babies.** There are cases where babies are found abandoned by unknown mothers. For instance, in California, United States of America (USA), a baby was found abandoned in a dustbin by a police officer in 1994 and taken to an orphanage whence he was later adopted. Years later, the adoptive parents informed him of his adoption status and its associated circumstances. He was also informed about the role played by the police officer (whom he later met in person) and who was instrumental in tracing his biological parents. He still lives with his adoptive parents for whom he has a deep seated appreciation (CBS News, 2015). In Brazil, Carmgo (2005) asserted that children who were abandoned by their biological families ended up being raised in institutions such as motherless baby homes or orphanages which eventually place them for adoption. This is also common practice in Nigeria as observed by Iphey (2007) who pointed out that it is not uncommon in some communities and cities to find babies

abandoned on the streets near a hospital, in the gutter, near a brothel or beside an orphanage. These babies are later picked up by government security agents who subsequently request the social welfare department to collect them and identify prospective adopters for them. Furthermore, it was reported in a daily newspaper in Nigeria (The Pilot, April 24, 2015) that 62 abandoned babies within that year and at different places were rescued by the government of Lagos state. The babies were taken to registered orphanages and later adopted.

- **Orphaned children.** Children who become orphans through the loss of their parents are in need of alternative care one form of which is adoption. Subbaco and Curry (2004) reported that the heavy burden of AIDS related orphans placed greater responsibility on governments of affected countries (especially in Africa) and necessitated proactive responses to their needs, especially in the provision of alternative care, including adoption. Countries like Malawi, Rwanda, South Africa, and Uganda provide material and other necessary support to promote foster care and possibly adoption for those orphaned by AIDS. Varnis (2001) reported that, in Ethiopia, feasibility studies promoted adoption for AIDS related orphans while in Namibia grandparents took care of over half of all the children orphaned by AIDS (UNICEF, 2003a). According to Samir, Punamaki, Montgomery, and El Sarraj (2007), children are more vulnerable in times of conflict, and Carlson (2001) described the negative consequences of war on children's development and mental health. Likewise Bellamy (2003) and Michael (2003) argue that children are greatly affected by war and many of them become disabled in the process. Masson (2001) reported that children who become orphans as a result of war may become involved in the inter-country adoption process. It is

important to note that adoption is not just an act of charity as it brings mutual satisfaction to both adoptees and adopters.

In summary, adoption had been centered on the need of adults, and not the child. In other words adults have been the centre of adoption mostly among women with infertility problems. Today, adoption professionals, and stakeholders are beginning to see the need for a child centered adoption practice. This implies that the interests of the child should be the prime focus of adoption. In essence, a child's awareness of his/her adoption status, and his or her access to information about this, will be of great value to him or her.

2.1.2 Models of adoption

- **Formal adoption**

An essential aspect of the adoption process and practice is the mode of adoption. This could be formal or informal. A formal model of adoption includes closed adoption and open adoption as explained below.

- **Statutory adoption**

In this postmodern era the trend of people forming their families through adoption appears to be on the increase. This could be due to factors related to infertility among couples and/or a desire to help an orphaned child and others in need of care. Altruism is usually accompanied by a need for self-fulfilment. According to Laningan (2012) about 90% of people in the United States of America have a favourable attitude towards adoption. Chandra, Abma, Maza, & Bachrach, (1999) argue that when the duration of infertility is more than five years, there is usually a significantly positive attitude towards adoption in order to form a family. Similarly, Adewumi et al (2012) state that certain factors, such as not having a living child, awareness of adoption, and the experience of infertility for more

than five years, contribute to positive attitudes towards forming a family through adoption. Smith & Howard (1997) assert that adoption is a unique phenomenon that involves profound life events, including creation of families. Studies reveal that, generally, adoption takes place in a nuclear family which consists of a married couple who jointly consent to adopt a child or children after efforts to have their own biological children prove unsuccessful or that they want additional children to care for when they are no longer able to produce their own (Chukwu, 2012).

The procedure followed when a prospective adopter seeks to adopt varies from country to country according to statutory law guiding the adoption process (UN Dept of Economic & Social Affairs, 2009). Usually it commences with an application by the prospective adopter to the appropriate adoption agency which could be public, private or independent. This is followed by identifying an adoptable child by the agency. A child is said to be adoptable when the consent of his or her birth parents or guardians has been obtained and also based on circumstances such as health and special needs. A judicial order is then obtained which takes into consideration the best interest of the child, and the suitability of the prospective adoptive parent after establishment of acceptability and training of prospective adopters (Rothman 2000; Miall and March 2005).

Sometimes the interest of the applicant is considered in terms of specific types of child desired. In the Republic of South Africa (RSA), the Child Welfare Society recruits and trains potential adoptive parents and registers those considered acceptable. When a child requires adoption matching takes place. After placement the guardian at litem period commences during which a social worker visits to assess the situation before finalisation. Before meeting with the child, the pictures of the children available for adoption could be

shown to the applicants. As the preparation process continues both the agency and the applicants begin to get a clear picture of the most suitable child for the family. In the case of infant adoption, agencies expend much effort in matching infants and families in terms of appearance, ethnic background, religion, intellectual achievements of applicants, and infant background and potential (Triseliotis, Shireman, and Hundleby, 1997).

An essential aspect of the process is the probation period. According to statutory law in many countries, including the United Kingdom and South Africa, this is the period when the adopted child is required to live with the prospective adoptive parents for a certain period before the adoption is finalised. This is to ensure that adoption takes place in accordance with the child's best interests, and such trial period is used by welfare services or officials of the adoption agencies to ascertain whether the child is well integrated into the family, and that the placement is successful. At times, a prospective adopter may choose to adopt from another country (inter-country) or from a different racial group (trans-racial adoption) respectively. In order to standardise inter-country adoption, International Rules for Adoption were instituted. For instance the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Inter-country Adoption, and Federal Legislative policies was established under the United States of America Inter-Country Adoption Act 2000, and Child Citizenship Act 2000 (US Department of State, 2000). According to Jones (2008) some prospective adopters might choose to adopt internationally rather than domestically because of certain benefits such as obtaining infants or a baby with similar ethnic and racial background as the adoptive family, confidentiality of the adoption, and shorter waiting times. Lee (2003) described international adoption as adopting children from another country while trans-racial adoption refers to the joining of racially different

parents and children together in adoptive families. This may occur through various channels such as foster care and the adoption of step children. A report on intercountry adoption in the United States of America, between 2004 and 2014, reveals that intercountry adoptions in 2004 (peak year for such adoptions) was 22884. This number reduced to 6441 in 2014, which is approximately a 72% decrease. Globally, it is suggested that the number of inter country adoptions to the top 24 receiving countries (including the US) fell to 75% in 2014. The global decline has been attributed to factors such as government policies, political instability in some countries, and other wide ranging factors (US State Department, 2015). In the specific case of the United States, 80% of the reduction in intercountry adoptions was effected by China, Russia, and Guatemala. In the 2015 fiscal year, the United States issued 5648 immigrant visas to children adopted abroad by US citizens from 89 countries, with the top 5 countries of origin being China, Ethiopia, South Korea, Ukraine, and Uganda. The 2015 annual report on intercountry adoption into the US indicated that 154 children were from Nigeria.

The international adoption process can be lengthy and challenging. It can also be complicated and expensive. However, often times this is necessary to ensure the realisation of the best interests of the child. The process for every inter-country adoption varies from country to country. The general process followed by the majority of inter-country adoptions includes: selecting the adoption service provider; gaining approval to adopt; being matched with the child in the foreign country; and travelling back home with the child .

➤ **Closed Adoption Model**

Adoption practices of countries take different forms. One such form is closed adoption. Closed or secret adoption (also called confidential adoption) is a model in which an infant

is adopted by another family and the record of the biological parents is kept sealed so that the adoptee and the biological parents are prevented from finding each other or even knowing about each other. (<http://www.justanswer.com/topic-closedadoption>). Cahn and Hollinger (2004), and Appelle (2010) noted that closed adoption is a rebirth that severs and erases all ties and then seals all information about birth families. Faulkner and Madden (2012) posit that this model also involves termination of all contact between parties. It is believed that the closed adoption model originated in the United States of America (Triseliotis, 1997), and was designed to protect the privacy of parties to the adoption in order to remove the stigma of illegitimacy from the child. The secrecy of adoption was later reinforced by Britain in 1972 to protect the adoptive parents against birth parents' interference or any temptation to watch the child's progress. Therefore, the phenomenon of confidentiality in adoption might be connected with concealing adoption information from the adoptee (Barth and Crea, 2009). Although the practice of closed adoption originated in the USA, many African societies are still practising it. For instance in Nigeria closed adoption is where those who adopt do not want other people living around them to know that the child was adopted. The confidentiality in closed adoption makes it impossible to release information about the adoption to the adoptee as this might lead to some liability of the agency that releases the information. Releasing such information might also be tantamount to invasion of privacy and breaking of closed adoption laws.

Proponents of this form of adoption argue that there are some potential advantages that closed adoption offers to all members of the adoption triad: birth parent, adoptee, and adoptive parent . For instance, the birth parents have a sense of closure enabling them to move on with their lives having relinquished their child for adoption. Also it gives them

privacy that no one can threaten. For the adoptive parents it provides freedom from possible birth family intrusion eliminating the risk of complications that could arise from birth parent interference or co-parenting concerns. To the adoptee, closed adoption offers protection from unstable or emotionally disturbed birth parents or birth family members (American Pregnancy, 2016).

With regards to arguments against closed adoption, Frasch, Brooks and Barth (2000) argue that adoptive parents in closed adoption situations are likely to have a negative view of the biological parent while adoptive families in an open arrangement show greater compassion toward birth parents and have a stronger sense of parental entitlement. Furthermore, Wrobel, Grotevant, Samek, & Von Korff, (2013) pointed out that most adoptees in their adolescent years have a strong interest in their birth parents even when they are not in contact. This is related to the young person's need for a sense of identity and belonging demonstrating the importance of communicating to them the information about their adoption even before they reach adolescence. Closed adoption precludes contact between the adoptive parent, birth parent, and the child. However, the fact that the system of adoption is closed precludes the adoptee being given information about his/her adoption. Yet, communication concerning their adoption should commence immediately they are placed (from the youngest age). The manner of communication will systematically differ according to age taking into account the child's level of understanding.

➤ **Open adoption model.**

The main contention of this study is that adoption information should be shared with the adoptee from the earliest stage of their life in a positive manner. In essence an adoptee should be aware of his adoption status in order to avoid potential trauma later in life. The

effect of traditional closed adoption on the health and well-being of the child has been a cause of great concern for mental health and child welfare professionals. This concern has contributed to a shift from closed to open adoption which allows for contact between adoptive parents and birth parents in the best interests of the child (Frasch, Brook and Barth, 2000).

According to Berry (1993) open adoption involves placement contact and sharing of information as well. This includes contact and information sharing that occurs after the adoption has been finalised. Grotevant (2000) describes open adoption as contact or communication between members of biological families and adoptive families following placement. Open adoption has long been in use in the United States of America and it is becoming popular in other societies.

Turkington and Taylor (2009) indicate fact that open adoption has gained support among professionals and scholars as the practice provides adopted children with a greater sense of personality identity and can help them accept the permanence of their adoption. Emphasis on open adoption is the contact arrangement between the adoptive parents and birth parent(s) which comes into force after the finalisation of the adoption. The contact is negotiated or mediated by the parties and social welfare officers involved in the adoption. This enables the child to gain access by contact to his birth parent(s).

According to Maynard (2005) negotiation of agreement of contact between adoptive and birth parents is privately done prior to the placement of the child or finalisation of the adoption process. Faulkner & Madden (2012) and Goldberg (2019) argue that the purpose of the contact is to enable the birth mother to have some form of contact

with the child and/or the adoptive parents after the adoption is finalised. This is in contrast to the closed adoption model which does not allow for any contact between the parties.

- ***Legal implications of open the adoption system.***

In the US open adoption is not practised without legal implications. Appelle (2010) pointed out that post adoption contact is predominately statutory. It is regulated by the court. Studies reveal that there are two types of regulatory schemes that sanction and enforce post – adoption contact among birth relatives, adoptive parents, and the adoptee. The first enforces a post adoption contact agreement among the parties while the second allows the court to impose adoption visitation or contact without regard to any of the parties (Massachusetts General laws Ch. 210, SS 6C 6D & 6E 2008).The major differences between these two regulatory statutes is that adoption with contact is based on an agreement between the parties while the second category does not require that the parties agree. Appelle (2010) explains that the court imposes post adoption contact on the parties involved in the adoption in the interest of the child, especially regarding visitation of the people that matter or are important to the child and whose importance adoptive parents may not appreciate. However, the strength of the contact statutes is that it is a joint effort as it is based on the agreement of those who will be involved in the contact and not on a court – imposed order. Secondly, the contact is designed to minimise court intervention during and after the adoption proceedings. For example, most of the statutes clearly give guidelines for creation, modification, and enforcement of the agreement after adoption. Interestingly, there has been an increase in the prevalence of agreements among birth and adoptive parents for post-adoption contact in the US (Appelle, 2010).

Furthermore, the mode of contact varies depending on the parties involved (Frasch, Brooks, & Barth, (2000). McRoy, Grotevant, Ayers-Lopez, & Henney, (2007) explain that the needs and wishes of the parties involved determine the level and type of contact. It could be in the form of exchanging of pictures, letters, gifts, phone calls, and visits (U.S Department of Health and Human Service, 2005). Henney, Ayers–Lopex, McRoy, and Grotevant (2007) suggest that the contact can be in the form of sharing information between biological and adoptive families. Gross (1993) posited that face-to-face contact tended to be positive for adoptive parents as it enables them to control the contact in terms of the boundary for biological parents.

Wolfgram (2008) argued that in-person contact may not be necessary in an open arrangement, and that other options such as telephone or email conversations or letters can also be used. Furthermore, Wolfgram suggests that the extent to which adoptive parents can influence contact is when they perceive the need to control the contact in order to maintain boundaries around the open adoption relationship. On the issue of frequency of contact, Grotevant (2000) suggested that contact may vary over time. This suggests that the contact may not necessarily be in a particular form. For instance, it could change as the child grows, from exchange of gifts to personal visitation. Dunbar et al (2010) posit that increase in contact depends on the motivation concerning the child’s well-being, better communication, and a good relationship between birth and adoptive parents. The more contact families have with each other the more advantages and fewer disadvantages attributed to the contact.

- *Arguments about open adoption.*

Nevertheless, open adoption through contact has faced opposition. The argument of early critics is that the attachment of the adopted child to their adoptive parent could be threatened by frequent contact arrangements with birth families (Wrobel, Ayers-Lopez, Grotevant, McRoy & Fredrick 1996; Grotevant, 2000). For instance, the child could be confused through having two sets of parents. Furthermore, continued contact between the adopted child and the birth family could hinder attachment and bonding between the children and their adoptive families (Berry, 1993; Grotevant, 2000). In contrast, Grotevant, McRoy, Elde, & Fravel, (1994); Grotevant and McRoy (1998) argue that discussing with the child his/her birth parent by the adoptive parent does not necessarily cause any confusion in the adoptive family.

It is further suggested that there is no wisdom in subjecting children who might have experienced abuse or neglect to ongoing contact with those who have caused them harm (Neil 2006). However, Berry (1993) & Grotevant (2000) argue that the child's birth family might create unnecessary intrusion into the adoptive family which might make adoptive parents feel less secure in their ability to act as the child's parent if contact with birth parents is maintained. On the other hand, it is also observed by critics that the birth mother would have less difficulty addressing grief and loss as she continues to maintain contact with the child. Similarly, Neil (2007) argues that birth mothers are likely to resolve their feeling of loss and consequently display acceptance of the adoption as they maintain contact with the child. However, the most important consideration in relation to all these different scenarios is the best interest of the child

- *Benefits of open contact.*

In the current study, the relevance of the open adoption system should be viewed in relation to the essential benefits it offers to the child, the birth mother, and the adoptive parents. These include an opportunity for open contact between the child and the birth parent through the adoptive parent which helps the child to reconcile his identity and have better understanding of his heritage (Berry, Dylla, Barth, & Needell, 1998; Ayers-Lopez, Wallace, Naik, Chanmugam & McRoy, 2007). The adoptee's life is not clouded by a significant sense of loss as he has contact with his birth family (Smith & Logan 2004); this implies that the feeling of an adoptee that he has lost his parent is not applicable as the system makes way for him to have contact with his birth parent(s); and there is cooperative interaction among birth parents and adoptive parents which improves children's socio-emotional outcomes (Grotevant and McRoy, 1998).

In circumstances where the birth parent or relatives of an adoptee are known, sharing adoption information with the adoptee could give the adopters a feeling of security in their role as parents to the child as well as having had the consent of the birth parent to parent the child (Dorner (1998). In addition, in a situation where the birth parent is a teenager who relinquishes her baby for adoption in order to go back to school, sharing adoption information of this nature with the adoptee might help him or her to understand the mother's limitation and hence appreciate the adoptive parents for their role in adopting him or her (Silverstein and Roszia, 1999).

Research suggests that the adoptive mother, birth mother, and the adoptee are frequently satisfied and comfortable with an open adoption contract (Siegel, 2003;

Sullivan, 2004; Ge, Natsuaki, Martin, Leve, Neiderhister, Shaw, 2008). In a study on patterns and predictors in the USA of openness and contact by Crea and Barth(2009), adoptive parents reported a higher level of comfort with the contact over time and there were positive outcomes for both the child and the adoptive family (Hollenstein, Leve, Scaramella, Milfort, & Niederhiser, 2003; Ge et al, 2008; Wolfgram, 2008). In addition, findings from the same research indicated that adoptive families generally reported high levels of satisfaction with the adoption whether it is open or closed.

- ***Importance of disclosure of adoption information in the open adoption model.***

From the foregoing discussion it is evident that, before the arrangements for contact in open adoption are implemented, the adoptive parent(s) must have been communicating positively with the adoptee about their adoption status through which they will obtain the knowledge that they have another set of parents and relatives. This is effective depending on the feelings and patterns of communication developed in the family regarding the child's birth parents. Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevant, and McRoy (2003) attest to this and suggest that there must have been a developed communication patterns in the adoptive family before the contact with the birth parent and the child can take effect, regardless of the adoption arrangements.

However, a study by Triseliotis, Shireman, and Hundleby (1997:84) suggests that, in open adoption, not all adoptive parents share with their children the gifts and letters sent to them by their birth parents. Their reason for this is that the children were too young for such information. Furthermore, the same study reported that among half of adoptive families involved in exchange of communication, their children were unaware of the open nature of the adoption; and where there were periodic or more regular contacts, it was

always between the adoptive parents and the birth parents. The child was excluded from the meetings on the basis that the agreement for meeting was between the adoptive and the birth parents. Contact meetings of this nature were often conducted in a neutral place such as adoption agencies to avoid geographical identification and identification by name. In this case adoptive parents try to avoid disclosing information to the adoptee.

- **Informal adoption (kinship adoption)**

Informal adoption is one of the forms of adoption which has long been in existence in many traditional societies. It is a practice of caring for a child either temporarily or permanently without a legal contract (Radel, Bramlett, Walters, 2010). According to Selman (2004) 'de facto' adoption (as it is also known), varies in practice and the social functions they perform depend on the cultural setting of a society that refers to the type of informal adoption being practiced. For instance, in Bantomu, a region in Northern Benin, and North Western Nigeria, a child remains permanently attached to a family through customary adoption or fostering (Notermans, 2004). Unlike formal adoption many of these practices involve individuals whose biological parents have not abandoned them.

Goodman, Potts, Pasztor, & Scorzo, (2004) argue that relatives commonly assume primary responsibility for related children when biological parents are unable to care for them. This suggests that, when the birth parent cannot afford to take care of the children (probably for economic reasons or as a result of death) the child could be adopted by a relative. Similarly Malm and Geen (2003) posit that arrangements with relatives are considered for children who are not safe in parental care. This might be the case with parents who are drug abusers. Studies also show that informal adoption

takes place where one of the married partners is adopting the biological child of his or her spouse (UN Department of Economic & Social Affairs, 2009). Gibson, Nelson-Christinedaughter, Grotevant, and Kwon (2005) posit that, in the United States, the practice of informal adoption is particularly well established among the African American community.

Ehrle, Geen, & Clark (2001) argue that research on children cared for by their kin (that is children informally adopted) is limited due to the fact that it is not a common practice in the western world. Similarly, Ryan, Hinterlong, Hegar, and Johnson (2010) support the fact that research on kinship adoption is much more limited than kinship foster care, suggesting that people prefer to foster children related to them than to permanently adopt them. Placek (2007) argues that kinship adoption is not statistically well documented. Brookes, D., Cassandra, S., Leslie, W., & Barth, R.P. (2005) state that some states in the U.S. specifically prefer adoption by kin because such adoptions are considered to provide a greater sense of continuity and permanency for the child. By contrast Halloran (2006) asserts that there are some countries that discourage adoption by relatives, such as Australia, New Zealand, and the Netherlands. The argument is that such adoptions might distort biological family relationships. In support of this contention, Alber (2003) points out that, in the United States and many Western European nations, there is the belief that biological parents are the best persons to educate a child, as changes in parentage cause damage to the child's development.

In African societies the practice of informal adoption is a means of strengthening the bond between different communities and clans while ties with birth parents are usually maintained (U.N. Department of Economics and Social Affairs, 2009). Taller (2004) and

Notermans (2004) point out that it is not only birth parents that have rights and responsibilities toward children in East Cameroon but also other people in the community. In East Africa, among the Pastoral people, infertile or childless women adopt children from co-wives, sisters, sisters-in-law or other close female relatives. The rationale behind this is for support to older childless couples. Similarly, among the Yako of Nigeria, maternal relatives may adopt children after the divorce of the mother. In Nigeria, it is not uncommon to find some people adopting a child from a relative or an unrelated friend or acquaintances (Taller, 2004; Adewumi et al, 2012). The child's surname might be changed or maintained. Studies reveal that the practice of informal adoption in Nigeria is being reduced as a result of economic instability in the country (Ibraheem, 2013).

Aldous (1998) and Malm and Geen (2003) assert that some people choose to parent informally, because adoption would require that they gain consent from the child's biological parents. In contrast Radel, Bramlett, & Waters (2010) posit that some parents prefer to adopt so as to formalise their lifetime commitment to the children in their care, guard against interference by unstable parents or gain access to the benefits of the child. Radel, Bramlett, and Waters (2010) found that, in the United States of America, there is a high level of well-being among those children living informally with relatives. This is because the issue of disrupted parenthood is less serious.

Although most children in informal care situations have already known their biological parents as they were older at the time that they were taken into the care of the substitute parent, the need to formally explain to them about their status and its implications for their present and future life cannot be denied. Moreover, not every child adopted informally is old enough at the time of the adoption to understand what had taken

place. According to Radel, Bramlett, and Waters (2010) there are studies on informal adoption that lack information about the prior relationship status between the relative providing care and the child in care. This means that information about the previous relationship between the caregiver and the child is lacking. Where there was no relationship between the caregiver and the child before adoption (that is, the adopted child is not related to the adopter by any means) sharing of information about the adoption is equally necessary. The fact that adoption is informal does not rule out the need for information to be communicated to the young person in an appropriate manner. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the best interest of the child is vital and decisions relating to adoption must take this into consideration as concealing from the child the knowledge or information about his adoption status is not in his best interest. Therefore efforts should be made by the adoptive parents to share or communicate adoption information with the adoptee in their own best interest.

2.2 Factors related to concealing adoption information from the adoptee

The first objective sought to establish factors related to concealing adoption information from the adoptee. Concealment is an act of hiding or keeping secrets; for instance keeping information from another person. On the issue of child adoption, concealment is synonymous to words such as “confidentiality”, “secrecy”, “sealed records”, and “closed adoption model”. Concealing adoption information does not start from adoptive parents not disclosing information to the adoptee concerning his/her status. It starts from the time a child is relinquished for adoption when the record of the child’s birth is kept sealed by the adoption agency (Gheera, 2014). Historically, “institutionalized secrecy” (that is keeping the records about an adoptee sealed) was introduced into American adoption

policy in 1917. The first sealed records law closing adoption files from being inspected or accessed by adult adoptees, the birth parents, adoptive parents and the general public was enacted in Minnesota in the US in 1917 (Kuhns, 1994). The purpose of the sealed records laws was to erase the stigma of illegitimacy by ensuring equal status and treatment of the adopted and non-adopted offsprings, and to foster productive relationships between adoptees and adoptive parents without the threats of interference from the biological parents. The policy of the sealed records was then accepted by the general public at a time when society was not well accepting of “out of wedlock“ pregnancy or single mother families (Herman, 2014). Furthermore, sealing adoption records or confidentiality in adoption began due to experiences of intrusion and other abuses by birth parents into adoptive families which consequently might affect adoptee peaceful settlement or cause unrest in adoptive families. Hence, this was initially meant to protect the interests of the parties involved in the practice. In essence, the adoptee was to be protected from the birth parent intrusion into the new family, while the birth parent was free to go about with her life after relinquishment without any interference and invasion of her privacy. The adoptive parent could take care of their children without birth parent intrusion or coparenting (Singer, 2010). Both the birth and adoptive parents were legally assured of anonymity by the agency.

In Nigeria, adoption in practice is confidential hence, information about the adoptee is concealed, first by the adoption agency and second by the adoptive parent. Concealment of adoption information from the adoptee is very common among women with infertility problems probably for the reason of hiding from the public the knowledge that the child they have is not their biological child most especially when the child is an infant (Oladokun,

et al 2009; Avidime, et al, 2013). Albeit, review of literature suggests some factors that account for the reasons why some adoptive parent conceal information from their child about his/her status thus denying him/her the knowledge of his/her identity. These factors include stigmatization, fear of rejection, economic gain, lack of confidence, societal perception, avoidance of confrontation, cultural beliefs, fear of peoples comments and misconceptions, attitudes of the extended family, ridicule from friends and neighbours, and religious beliefs (Oladokun, et al, 2009).

These factors are further explained below (Adoption topics, 2015):

Stigmatisation. This is connected to illegitimacy. Some adopters feel that people around them will stigmatise them because of having an illegitimate child if the adoption becomes common knowledge. To avoid this some adopters relocate to another environment as soon as the child is placed so that people around them would think that they had given birth to a new baby before relocating (Iphey, 2007).

Fear of rejection. Another factor that might lead to concealing adoption information, according to Adewumi et al (2012), is the fear that the child might one day reject them as parents when he learns the truth about himself/herself. Parents fear that open discussion might threaten the child's sense of belonging and this could lead to him/her isolating himself/herself from the family and a fractured relationship.

Economic gain. Salam (2004) suggests that property grabbing by relatives of a deceased person could lead to concealing adoption information where the adoptive parents are relatives of the deceased. In this case relatives conceal adoption information so that they can claim the property of the deceased. This is corroborated by Maundeni (2003) who suggested that property grabbing in Africa is common practice. It contributes to poverty

which in particular affects those orphaned by AIDS whose inheritance might be seized by relatives through concealing adoption information.

Lack of confidence. Research indicates that some adopters have a sense of lack of entitlement in relation to their adopted children. This is one reason why adoption agencies should screen and train applicants before finally accepting them (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015).

Societal perception. Social attitudes towards illegitimacy, in particular, increase the incentives to keep adoption confidential and reinforce the view that adoptive families are the same as other families (Smith & Howard, 1997). Bargley and Gabor (1995) argue that some communities perceive adoption as inferior to biological reproduction. Similarly, Bartholet (1999) suggests that adoptive parenting is perceived as less authentic than biological parenting. These views posit that there exist certain negative perceptions about adoption considering a biological tie as the agent of bonding and love, without which the adoptee might be considered a “second rate” child of the adoptive parents. .

Avoidance of confrontation. Some adoptive parents might conceal adoption information from the child in order to avoid confrontation by birth parents or families (American Pregnancy.org). Hence to keep intruders away, many adopters might want to keep adoption information secret fearing that others might claim ownership of the child.

In Nigeria there are many factors that might account for the fact that adoptees are not given information about their adoption. These factors include cultural beliefs, fear of the unknown and misconceptions; attitudes of the extended family, and ridicule by friends and neighbours. These factors are discussed below:

- **Cultural beliefs**

Cultural implications of child adoption cannot be ignored in Nigerian culture. Among the Igbo people of South Eastern Nigeria, cultural norms do not accept adopted children as biological children. They are, rather, treated as outcasts and bastards and sometimes hated, disrespected, and constantly reminded that they do not belong to the family (Ojelabi, Osamor, and Houmi , 2015). The indigenous ideology among the Eastern Nigeria people is that an adopted child is counted as a ‘stranger’ and this contributes to low acceptance of the adoption principle. Consequently, an adoptee may not enjoy all the benefits and privileges of a biological child of a community member (Nwaoga, 2013). In contrast, in the south west, among the Yoruba ethnic group, there appears to be a more positive attitude towards adoption. The common cultural belief among the Yorubas is that infertile couples who have no biological children can be blessed with biological children if they adopt. This belief is anchored in the fact that an adopted child usually attracts yet-to-be born children to enter the physical realm (“Ori omo lo npe wa ‘ye”) (Oladokun et al, 2009). This belief makes it relatively easier to accept adopted children as part of the family and the community in order to attract the blessing of biological children to the adopters. However, there are some Yoruba beliefs that adopted children are bastards with a likelihood of anti-social behaviour which could tarnish their family’s good name. Therefore, the cultural background could be a reason why adopters would not want people to know when they adopt a child, and hence hide adoption related information from the child and the neighbourhood.

In addition to this, acceptability of adoption is also affected by some social issues in Nigeria including the following:

- **Fear of the unknown and misconceptions**

There are fears and misconceptions that adopted children whose parents are unidentified, especially abandoned children, could grow up as social miscreants such as drug addicts, criminals, the mentally retarded or sex workers, and that they could have a negative genetic composition or inherited diseases such as psychiatric illness or epilepsy (Ojelabi, Osamor & Owumi 2015).

- **Attitudes of the extended family**

Attitudes of the extended family may contribute to the psychological impact on the life of the adopted child. According to Ojelabi, Osamor, and Omowumi (2015), the adoptee could be alienated, neglected, and deprived of family possessions which could impair the social and psychological development of the adoptee.

- **Ridicule from friends and neighbours**

Some adopters fear being ridiculed by friends, neighbours, colleagues, and the community when it becomes known that they have adopted a child. This also leads to concealing adoption information from the child, neighbours, and friends.

- **Religious beliefs**

Two predominant religions in Nigeria are Christianity and Islam. The latter prohibits adoption because it believes it is unjust to assign paternity of a child to someone other than the biological father (Ladan, 2007), whereas in the Christian religion, adopting a child, to some, means disbelief in God's ability to bless them with their own children. As a result, if any of the above adopt, they keep it secret, and also hide the information from the adoptee. However, this is not true for all Christians. Apart from these factors, adoptive parents are also confronted with challenges of parenting their adopted child.

The best interest of the adoptee obviously should be paramount in adoption practice. However, adoptee interest cannot be considered without regards to the welfare of other parties involved. What then are the the implications of concealing from the adoptee the information about his or her adoption status?

2.3 Implications of concealing adoption information from the adoptee

The second objective of the study sought to establish perceived implications of concealing adoption information from the adoptee. Secrecy and denial of adoption information from the adoptee could affect the adoption triad members (the adoptee, the birth parent and the adoptive parent) throughout their lives either positively or negatively. The implications are discussed below:

- **Implications for the adoptee**

Adoption entails loss which is not always recognized by the society as emphasis is placed on what the child gains through adoption such as caring, love and a good family, but not on what is lost (Brodzinsky, 2014). From the child's perspectives, the pain of having lost his/her birth parents and siblings could be difficult to bear. He/she can not gain basic information about his/her origin, know about his/her birth families, find truthful answers to his/her questions about his/her adoption or mourn the loss he/she might experience (Brown, Cuckens, Maslowski, & Rupp, 2012; Brodzinsky, 2014).

Howard & Smith (1997) and Brodzinsky (2011) argued that if adoptive parents keep adoption information from the child, it could lead to their feeling like a "second class citizen" who was given away by their birth mother if they discover the truth through other means. It is further argued that a child deprived of information about his/her existence could develop psychological and psychosocial problems if the information is revealed later

by a third party. This could also undermine the child's ability to trust his/her parents. According to Keefer and Schooler (2000), where adoption information is withheld from a child, the result may be the erosion of the child's trust, loyalty and attachment to the adoptive family. In addition, there is ample evidence in the literature which suggests that adoptees make up a significant percentage of psychiatric cases in the United States of America (Lieberman and Morris, 2003; Brodzinsky, 2014).

Furthermore Smith and Howard (1997) contend that children who develop an initial secure attachment with adoptive parents eventually develop a withdrawal syndrome when information about their adoption is not communicated to them and they find out by other means. In a study by Feast and Howe (2000), the levels of impaired psychosocial functioning of the adoptee increased when the adoptive parent seemed to be avoiding discussing the adoption with them. In addition, there is the possibility that the child's sense of belonging might be threatened. In another study in the US, Douglas and Philpot (2003) reported that parents who refuse to acknowledge the difference between an adopted and a biological child deny a relevant and potentially important aspect of the children's origins and identity. Consequently, rejection of the existence of differences frustrates opportunities for the child to discuss a topic of central importance to their sense of identity and worth (Feast and Howe, 2000).

Forest (2003) argued that the lack of adoption communication might lead to adoption disruption or breakdown as well as other serious effects in the life of the adoptee. Thus, secrecy and denial of adoption information could have negative consequences for all the adoption triad members throughout their lives.

Moreover, due to the lack of knowledge about their origin and the ignorance of their true genealogical background, the adoptee may fear the possibility of incest with an unknown biological relative. Other areas affected by concealment of information due to unknown background include hereditary and genetic conditions of health, physical features and life span. Denying adoptees knowledge of their adoption implies interfering with their rights of freedom to participate in and contribute to social and governmental decision making processes (Kuhns, 1994).

- **Implications for birth parents**

It is suggested that many birth parents mourn after giving up their children for adoption especially when they could no longer get informed about their well-being. As evidenced in some studies, birth mothers in the USA regretted for having followed the advice by agencies to pretend that the children they had given up for adoption did not exist and that they should forget their entire experiences with them. This approach made the birthparent to develop emotional conflicts, grief, guilt and depression after relinquishing their children for adoption (Avitan, 2007). Some of the parents wished that if they ever see their children again they would explain to them why they were given for adoption, while others feared the anger of the children on them for having given them away for adoption. It is also noteworthy that some parents would prefer anonymity in support of sealed birth records. This is because to them this could be devastating, and might mean a disruption to their new family (Herman, 2014). Hence, the genealogical identity of the adoptee remains obscure.

- **Implications for adoptive parents**

The concealment of adoption information from an adoptee obviously protects the interest of the adoptive parents from unwanted intrusion as they are able to parent the child

without interference from the birth parents. With this, adoptive parents create the illusion that the child had been born by them (American Pregnancy Association, 2014;2016). The initial joy of having a child to protect, care for, love and nurture in the adoptive home soon gives way to anxiety and fear on the part of the parents as the child grows up to adolescence and adulthood. Their fear is that if the child gets to know about his or her adoption, he or she might decide to leave them in search for his or her birth parents. This to adoptive parents would mean that their expenses on the child would have been in vain. The adoptive parents also are not helped to mourn their possible inability to bear children of their own as a result of infertility problems (Blomquist, 2009). The disadvantage of this is that it could affect the relationship between the parent and the children. Hence, adoptive parents could be emotionally disturbed for not having their own biological children.

Parenting through adoption.

One of the most challenging aspects of adoption is the issue of parenting the adopted child. The crucial aspect of parenting by adoption is the sharing of adoption information with the adoptee (Douglas & Philpot, 2003). Legally an adoptive parent does not assume the role of a parent until the birth parents' legal rights have been clearly terminated voluntarily or by court process (Apell, 2010). A key challenge faced by adoptive parents is that of adjustment. Studies reveal that there is need for adoptive parents to adjust to each child's unique personality and temperament (Johnson, 1997) as children have their own unique personality traits. Literature shows that there is a strong association between a child's interaction with his/her environment and adjustment (Resis, 2000; Stainberge, 2008). Thus, when there is positive interaction between the child and the parent and the child is loved, cared for and securely attached to the parent, adjustment becomes

possible and more straight-forward. Rutter and Koerner (2008) state that the importance of positive interaction between the child and the parent is, when the child is loved, cared for, and securely attached to the parent, adjustment becomes possible. The authors further stress the fact that positive adjustment is the product of good parent-child interaction with open communication and warm supportive behaviour. In essence, positive parent-child interaction makes it possible to communicate to the child information about his adoption.

Although every adoptee should be aware of his adoption status, there is a belief among many adopters, particularly in Nigeria, that a child must not be told or given any information about his/her adoption when he/she is still in his infancy or early childhood developmental stage. The reason given for this is that he/she will not be able to comprehend what it means to be adopted and that he/she should rather be told when he/she is old enough to understand the process, probably at adolescent age. However, when he/she is old enough to understand he/she is also old enough to be devastated by the information (Passmore, Feeney, & Foulstone, 2007). An overview of the child care system in Nigeria reveals that child rearing is a communal effort involving the extended family and the community at large (Ibraheem, 2013). Hence, for a Nigerian adopter to disclose to the child that he/she is adopted is indirectly telling him/her that he/she is not truly a part of the family or the community. In order to avoid isolating the child from the family, some adoptive parents conceal from their children information about their adoptive status.

The literature also suggests that it is important to tell the child of his/her adoption as early in life as possible, and before he/she is able to attach negative implications to the issue (Brodzinsky 2011). Parenting infants, should not rule out the fact that they should be informed of their adoption status. The earlier the child is told the better the outcome.

Freiverds (2002) argues that adoption can be successful and adopted children can form strong emotional attachment when parents and children are given appropriate information, resources, and support. Adoptive parents are often confronted with challenges of disclosure of adoption information, for example with the adoptee. As is the usual practice in Nigeria, such children are not given information about their adoption status. According to Bernal (2003) adoptees are confronted with the issues of identity later in life, for example the question of how to tell the child that she/he is adopted bother the minds of the parents, especially when they reach adolescence. The consequences of not being told earlier about their adoption status include becoming traumatised if they learn about their adoption through means other than in a positive manner from their adoptive parents. This could lead to psychological and behavioural problems in their attempt to cope with such a traumatic situation.

Adoption researchers often refer to adoptees as being over-represented in mental health services as a result of misbehavior, a depression, and negative experiences. The reason for this could be traced to a genetic factor which could either be as a result of the birth parents' possible drug addiction or disease traced to them (Brodzinsky, 2011). It is also possible for an adoptee to develop psychological problems, namely maladjusted behaviours and depression, as a result of concealment of information about his identity and receipt of the information through a third party later in life. This makes it necessary that adoptive parents share with the adoptee information about his/her adoption as early as possible. Johnson (2002) argues that there is need for adoptees to be aware of their adoption and understand the meaning and implications of being adopted so that they may be able to cope with discontinuity in their life history during the periods in which they struggle to

establish their identity, particularly in adolescence. Triseliotis, Shireman, and Hundlebsy (1997) revealed that an adoptee having as much information about him/her as there is to know, did not undermine the relationship between himself/herself and the adoptive parent. Rather, it helps to cement it. On the other hand, it is evasion, secrecy, and lying that negatively affect the relationship. Brodzinsky (2011) describes adoptive parents sharing adoption information with the child as an important responsibility in helping them to understand that they are adopted in as positive a manner as possible. They are then able to celebrate their status and cope with an undefined loss.

The outcome of concealing adoption information from the adoptee according to Hollingstworth, (2002; 2003) could have more negative consequences than the sharing of adoption information with the adoptee. Some of the negative consequences he noted include adoptee identity crisis as they grow up from adolescence to adulthood. In this regard, concealing adoption information from the adoptee would mean being insensitive to the adoptee identity crisis. This will not build a productive relationship among the adoption triad. Moreover, the adoptive parent need not create any fear in adoption if the aim is to save the life of an adoptee, build up life and put meaning into the adoptee. Therefore, since the best interest of the child is of paramount importance, it could be that sharing adoption information with the adoptee may be the best way to go. However, this assumption needs further investigation in this study.

Overall, concealment of adoption information by adoptive parents could be attributed to some uninvestigated reasons. These include the following: not wanting people to know that they have adopted; fear that their friends, neighbours, colleagues, and the community at large will ridicule their inability to bear a child of their own; concern that the

child will leave them on learning that he/she was adopted after having invested so much in his/her care and education; and fear that the child will feel uncomfortable in the family, the school, and his/her peer group if he/she was informed about his/her adoption status (Oladokun, Arulogum, Adenike Bello, Bamigoye, Ojengbende, 2009; Adewumi et al, 2012; Ojelabi, Osamor and Ououmi, 2015).

2.4 Possible methods of sharing adoption information with adoptees

The third objective of the study sought to explore perceived possible methods of sharing adoption information with the adoptee. The methods or approaches of sharing adoption related information with the adoptee constitute a theme that is gaining the attention of researchers in the adoption process and practice, especially in developed countries such the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK). However, in an African context, especially in Nigeria, this aspect has not been the focus of adoption researchers. Equally, it is observed that, even in countries where the focus of research is on sharing adoption related information, it appears that there is no clearly stated approach or method by which this can be done. This includes the method and the timing (Nickman, Rosenfeld, Fine, Maclntyre, Pilowsky, Howe, Derdeyn, Gonzales, Forsythe, and Sveda ,2005; Baltimore, 2008).

Baltimore (2008) observed that, in a study conducted in the United States of America among 200 adopted and non adopted children of different ages, ranging between 4 and 13, it emerged that understanding of the concept of adoption was lacking among the pre-school children despite the fact that they were labelled as adopted by their parents. In addition, there were very few differences in the way the adopted and non adopted children comprehended the concept of adoption. In another study, Palacios and Sanchez-Sandoval

(2005) noted that, among adoptive families in the United States of America, speaking about adoption to their children early in life was very rare but became more frequent as the adoptees grew older. This implies that adoption related communications tended to increase during adolescence when the adoptees began to ask searching questions about their status. Therefore, there is need for researchers to explore methods that foster a systematic process of open, honest, empathic, life-long family adoption communication processes in order to promote adoptees' self exploration (Brodzinsky, 2006).

With respect to sharing adoption related information with the adoptee, Triseliotsis, Shireman, and Hundleby (1997) suggested the following:

- the disclosure should start from the time the children begin to ask questions about babies and sex;
- adoptive parent should use different methods as appropriate to introducing the concept of family. These include telling and reading of relevant stories;
- the concept of two families, biological and psychological, should be central to the explanations, although the children may not understand the how and why.

In spite of these relevant suggestions, there is need for empirical research to explore adoption related communication, which provides more specific and realistic guidelines that outline the what, when, and how appropriate it is to share certain facts with adopted children; how to judge each child's unique understanding; emotional preparedness; and cognitive functioning related to receiving such information.

2.4.1 The Importance of communicating adoption information with the adopted child.

The need to communicate adoption information with an adopted child cannot be over-emphasized. According to Ashley (2015), communication affects every aspect of life and how people socialize. Galvin (2006), and Robinson, Segal and Smith (2015) argue that in communicative relationships, participants affect and are affected simultaneously by others, thus, as two people interact, each creates a context for one another to relate within that context. Furthermore, a communication perspective focuses on the interaction between two or more persons and the patterns which emerge as they interact over time. Studies on adoptive family communications also reveal specific communication which explains how parents talk with their adopted children about their adoption status and the direct effect of adoption status on family communication (Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevant & MacRoy, 2003; Brodizinsky, 2006). Generally, the impact of family communication pattern theory suggest that adoption status and communication pattern interact to influence child adjustment positive (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2002, 2004, 2006). It is suggested that there is a strong association between parent- child interaction and adolescent adjustment (Reiss 2000; Stanberg, 2001).

On parent-child communication, open communication and supportive behavior has often influenced child adjustment positively. Hence, parent-child interaction plays a relevant role in adopted child's adjustment (Reuters & Koerner, 2008). Furthermore, communication does not take place when there is no information to communicate. Heath & Bryant, (2000) assert that one of the motivation undermining personal communication is the acquisition of information. Thus, adoptive parents sharing adoption information with

adoptees would help them to understand that they were adopted and the implication of being adopted by supporting them to cope with feeling related to their status and their loss.

2.4.2 The process of sharing adoption information with the adoptee.

Communication is deeply rooted in human behaviour and society and involves sharing of knowledge and information (Ash, 2000). It is essentially a continuing process. According to Heath & Bryant (2000) relationships are improved through effective communication. The central theme of the present study is communication of adoption information with the child. Much has been said before about its importance and the implications of sharing of relevant information. In addition, it should be noted that interpersonal relationships embedded in love, care, and affection between the adopter and the adoptee in a relationship characterised by secure attachment serves as a basis upon which the sharing of the information becomes more positive and effective. The question is, when and how should the information be shared? It is an important fact that the best interests of the child should be paramount. Therefore, the cognitive level of the child should be considered in order to achieve clarity of understanding. However, there is evidence of the effectiveness of sharing with a new born child in the simplest of ways, gradually instilling in their psyche the advantages of the process to their being. This happens at a time when they are susceptible to information positively transferred and reinforced by similarly acceptable outcomes (Krueger, 2009).

Griffin, McEwen, Samuels, Redd, & McClelland (2011) argue that there is a significant difference in the way teenagers perceive themselves when they have information about their birth families' ethnicity, heritage, abilities, education or what they looked like. Forrest (2003) supports the fact that there is need for more sophisticated

adoption information for adoptees as they grow. This is because the cognitive level of a toddler is different from that of a teenager and that of a teenager is different from that of an adolescent which is also different from that of an adult. Basically, the cognitive development of a child changes as the child matures. The information disclosed must therefore be relevant to the age of the child at that particular time.

2.4.3 What adoption related information should be given to the adoptee?

What an adopted child would want to know should begin with his/her origin, that is his/her background including: birth family (father (if known), mother, siblings, and relatives); who gave him/her up for adoption and why this happened? Was there anything that occurred to his/her parents or him/her that caused him/her to be placed for adoption? He/she would want to know if he/she could contact his/her parents or relatives. In essence, as there is the need for a child to know about his or her origins, and adoptive parents should know how to approach and address the issue. Ignoring this and handling it in an inappropriate manner could have a serious effect on the child (Forrest, 2003).

Forrest (2003) posited that, when an adopted child sought information, this is the first step in building a complete person. It is likened to finding a missing piece of a jigsaw puzzle or filling a hole. As a rule, adoption related information is not given at one time. It is a gradual process depending on the age, cognitive skills, and level of understanding and perception of the child. Research has revealed that there is need for a limited amount of information at a time which will enable the adoptee to know more about him/her by gaining a fuller picture of his/her origins (Forrest, 2003). Similarly, Triselliots, Shireman, and Hundleby (1997) stress the importance of honesty, truthfulness, and a gradual process of sharing of information with the adoptee and not just bombarding the child with

information. Blomquist (2009) posits that some adoptees need extensive help in sorting out who they are. A child needs a strong sense of who he/she is, where he/she belongs, and how he/her came to be adopted. The adoptive parent must be careful in communicating information that will damage the child's self-esteem or sense of identity. Welbourne (2002) suggested that adoptive parents should avoid damaging adoption information that may negatively affect the child. This might compromise the truth which could be equally damaging, and thus the positive and negative results should be carefully weighed. Brodzinsky (2014) emphasised the fact that adoptive parents should be aware of their own feelings and values related to the birthparents and avoid negative judgement concerning them.

According to Welbourne (2003) there is need for adoption agencies to guide the adoptive parents in this regard. Similarly, Forest and Howe (2003) provide the reason why some adoptive parents feel hesitant in providing adoption related information to their children as it could remind them about unhappy experiences which could be unsettling and distressing for both the child and the adoptive parent. However, Feast and Howe (2000) suggest that professionals who are charged with the responsibility of preparing prospective adoptive parents for the task of sharing adoption information should help to develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, and confidence needed to handle the discourse. This has been achieved in South Africa for example, over a number of years – in Child Welfare Society Cape Town Adoption section. At this agency, adoptive parents are prepared before they even engage in the adoption process. This helps parents to prepare for the future.

2.4.4 Principles guiding communication of adoption information.

There are some facts that need to be understood and accepted by adopters concerning adopted children that make them different from non-adopted children. For instance, Blomquist (2009) made the following clarifications: a biological child naturally belongs to his family while an adopted child is not tied by blood and heredity to the family in most cases though, sometimes, the child is related to the adoptive parents but not told. A biological child belongs to his family by societal definition while an adopted child was placed by society into a family but may yearn for that mutual connection. This yearning is to connect with his/her biological parents. In addition, a biological child was kept by his/her parents while the adopted child was given away. In order to assist the adoptive parents in this task guiding principles are required. These include a number of issues as according to Keefer and Schooler (2000) and Brodzinsky (2014). These are listed below.

- **Process.** the sharing of adoption information should be an ongoing process and not an event (Brodzinsky, 2011). It unfolds over time taking into account the readiness, emotional development, and cognisance of the child. According to Forrest (2003), a limited amount of information may be given at a time which may satisfy a young child of 6-7 years. Sharing of adoption information can and should perhaps start from placement which could be shortly after birth.
- **Dialogue.** parent-child dialogue should be developed. Adoptive parents should present the information reasonably and accurately in accordance with the level of understanding of the child. To normalise the child's curiosity, parents should lead by asking questions. According to Rutter and Koerner (2008), positive adjustment is the product of good parent child interaction with open communication and warm

supportive behaviour. In essence positive parent-child interaction makes it possible to communicate to the child information about his adoption.

- **Timeliness.** The information should be given early. Although there is no specific time to disclose to the child about his/her adoption, professionals believe that it should be as early as possible. According to Brodzinsky and Pinderhugue (2002), Merriam (1998), and Melina (2017:39) active attempts to impart meaningful information to children about adoption typically begin in the preschool years. Nickman et al (2005) argue that the ideal time for telling children about their adoption should be between ages 6 and 8. By 6 years a child is believed to have been established in their family and may not feel threatened by learning about adoption (Parents.com.). However, for a newborn the parents can begin to convey relevant messages from the beginning through language, ideas, pictures, and play using the words “adoption” and “adopt” as positive concepts.
- **Parental empathy.** Adoptive parents should be emotionally available for the children and prepared to listen. Sharing of the information to the adoptee can lead to unanticipated thoughts and feelings in their children. They should be able to appreciate how the child is coping emotionally with the information given. Empathy, affection, calmness, self-confidence, and openness to the children’s needs and views are key traits required of adoptive parents during these discussions (Nickman, 2015; Rueter, Keyes, Lacono, & McGue, 2009).
- **Order of priority.** Adoptive parents should start by explaining to the child the birth and family diversity. That is the children should have understanding of different types of families that exist in a way that will make the adopted child know that they

are all equal Sherrill and Pinderhuges (1999) posit that children in age range from 8-11 years have an understanding about the family and adoption

- **Consideration for the child's developmental level and maturity.** Children vary in their intellectual capacity and emotional maturity and understanding the latter is particularly important. To facilitate the story of adoption, children's books on the subject should be used (Brokzskny, 2011) as an educational device.
- **Validation and normalization of children's curiosity, questions, and feelings about their adoptive and birth parents' heritage.** Adoptive parents should help their children to express their curiosity about their origins by encouraging such questions and talking about their heritage in a positive and respectful manner. This assists the adoptive parent to validate and normalise their children's curiosity and questions. According to Blomquist (2009) children are naturally curious to gain knowledge about their birth background.
- **Historical background of the adopted child.**When this is associated with challenging information such as mental illness, criminality, incest or rape as the means of conception or neglect or child abuse during the child's earlier years, parents should prepare the adoptee emotionally to discuss their origins in a supportive manner (Douglas and Philpot, 2003).
- **Avoidance of negative judgement and description of birth parents or the child's heritage :** Children's self-esteem and identity can be undermined if the parents use negative words or make derogatory comments about their family of origin. Possible contact between the adoptive and birth parents and the adoptee in

the future can be affected if negative words are not avoided and this could also affect the child's psychological adjustment (Brodzinsky, 2014).

- **Avoidance of keeping information secret:** Adoptive parents should share with the child as much as possible, information that will enhance his/her self-esteem without keeping anything secret. Studies suggest that not all information about the child's background should be shared at the same time (Forest, 2003). There is some that could be shared when the child is older such as substance abuse and parental psychopathology (Berg-Nielsen, Vikan, and Dahl, 2002). Parents should thus be careful about denying information concerning the birth parent or the children's history by keeping it secret unless it is of a highly sensitive nature. If it becomes known later it can undermine the child's ability to trust their adoptive parents. Barth & Miller (2000) found that some adoption agencies provide adoptive parents with only scanty information which can exacerbate children's insecurity in the future.

2.4.5 Practical approaches of sharing adoption information with adoptee.

The following are practical approaches of sharing adoption information with the adoptee:

- *Using everyday experiences and casual observations of events.*

The use of everyday experiences is one practical approach of sharing adoption information with the adoptee. According to Eiseman (2017:3), everyday experiences with things commonly found in the environment can be used to teach or explain adoption concept to a child. For instance, a neighbour's new puppy (dog) can be used to explain to an adoptee how young animals, like young humans need care. Puppies need someone to protect and shelter them. In the course of discussing with a child, he/she may be prompted to wander

about the plight of a puppy if there is no one to take care of it. However, using the example of a puppy in the home, adoptive parents can share the relief and joy of a puppy in the home since it is being fed, and helped to be healthy and happy. Using this analogy, adoptive parents can share the story of child adoption with passion and love with the adoptee in a way that the adoptee feels good about adoption.

Another example of using everyday observation to share adoption information is the comparison of pregnant woman and a woman who is not pregnant. By observing a pregnant woman, an adoptee may ask the mother if he/she was in her tummy as the pregnant woman? The adoptive parent could use the opportunity to explain to the adoptee in positive terms the essence of motherly care, and that sometimes a birth mother (owing to unforeseen circumstances) may not be able to care for her baby in which case there may be the need for someone else to care, love and give the baby a loving family. At this point, the adoptive parents can share with the child with a calm tone of voice how he/she came to be adopted in the family. The tone and calmness of voice used in sharing the information of adoption can give the child pleasant emotions, thus creating a foundation for further discussion and exploration of more complex issues on adoption.

- ***By role playing.***

Adoption information can be communicated to a child using role playing. The child can play with the parent particularly with the mother using a baby doll. Tompkins (2017:6) indicated that through role playing children can work out their feeling about adoption. The role to play could be, being a mother, parent in need of a child or a mother placing her child for adoption : a ‘doll’ representing the baby to be adopted. The parent can initiate the role play or the child if he/she has been told to some extent about his/her adoption. When

information is communicated using role playing, it becomes easy, natural and more fun than talking.

Furthermore, drawings can also be used to practically share adoption information with an adoptee. A child may be asked to draw out what he/she is thinking or how he/she feels. Using visual art is a great therapy. The ability of a child to put his/her feelings or thinking into drawings makes the parent to empathize with the child.

- ***Important points to emphasize when talking about adoption to the adoptee.***

When talking about adoption to an adoptee, there are some important points that need to be emphasized. This is to help the child understand that adoption is a normal practice. According to Minz (2017:34) the following points should be emphasized:

- (i) Tell the adoptee that adoption is normal and is a way of building a family.

Explain to the child that families can be formed either by children being born into birth families or being born into families where they are adopted. The later happens when a parent gives birth and does not have adequate means to take good care of the baby; she gives the baby for adoption to another family. Sometime too, unforeseen circumstances such as accident, baby abandonment or other causes might be the reason for babies being placed for adoption.

- (ii) The child should be informed that the adoption is for ever, and that good behavior is expected on his/her part as a beloved child in the family.

- (iii) Explain to the child that adoption is not shameful or secret as it is just a way of forming a family

- (iv) Explain to the child that he/she is wanted and loved, and that he/she did nothing bad to be placed for adoption

(v) Explain to the child that as a parent you understand whatever he/she may feel about adoption, and that you are always there for him/her.

(vi) Tell the child to have respect and compassion for his/her birth parent if there is need to talk about that issue.

2. 4.6 Approaches of Talking About Adoption to Children of Different Ages.

It is important to appreciate approaches to sharing adoption information with the children concerned. Different age groups have different needs. According to Mantell (2017:49), there are 5 stages.

- ***Ages:-3-5 years old.***

Ages three –five-years are usually known as age of curiosity. These are ages children want to ask questions to show they belong, are accepted, safe and secure. By these ages they have short attention spans and once their curiosity is satisfied or the conversation goes on too long, they want to change the subject or ignore the speaker. They are literal thinkers and cannot understand abstract concepts. The best simple approach is to answer only questions the child is asking on adoption with the words that express feelings and for the child to know you are always there for him or her (Saidman, 2017:9). According to Mantell (2017:48), there are five developmental stages an adoptive parent should work through in sharing adoption information with an adoptee. The stages include :

- (i) **Learning some adoptive language:**

Adoption conversation becomes a natural topic for both the child and the parent when the talking starts early. This is a stage for laying the foundation for later conversation. As the curiosity of the child leads the way the parent should follow by giving more

information. However, the attitude of talking calmly and sharing the facts about it should give the child the most important message that adoption is good. This makes him/her feel completely comfortable discussing whatever is on his mind. In essence the tone of the language and the comfort that is given by the parents is as important as the topic you relate. At these ages the information of adoption is given as a sketch than can be filled in with more details as the as the child grows.

(ii) Finding out whose tummy they grew in.

It is natural for every child whether adopted or not to ask his/her mother anytime he/she sees a pregnant woman if he or she grew in the tummy of the mother before he/she was born. A child cannot truly differentiate birth and adoption as ways of forming a family, until the child knows something about birth and reproduction. An answer to a question such as “Did I grow in your tummy?” could be “You grew like a flower in another lady’s tummy until you were born. But the lady was not able to take care of you, so Mommy and Daddy came to adopt you and bring you home with us”. However, in cases where birth mothers are not known the child should be told that the mother placed him or her for adoption anonymously. However the adoptive parent should not talk ill of the birth mother. A child may think of birth mother as an intruder and wish he/she had grown inside the tummy of the adoptive parent he knows and love.

(iii) Understanding the fact that the child was born like other children.

When telling the child information about his/her adoption. It is very important to tell the child that he/she was born normally like any other child. It is not uncommon for the child of ages five to six to ask the parent where babies come from. It is the duty of the

parent to tell the child that it takes a man and a woman to create a baby and after a period of gestation a baby is born. The child will be able to understand the concept of adoption as basic information about reproduction and birth is introduced to him. It also gives the opportunity to talk about birth father because of the tendency of the child assuming the adoptive father is his/her birth father. Where birth parents are not known, it should be stated that the parents gave them up for adoption anonymously.

(iv) Realizing two sets of parents – birth parents and adoptive parents.

Adoption practitioners argue that the basic part of adoption information to be given the child is that he has two sets of parents, birth parent and adoptive parents. There is a tendency for the child to think that that he/she has done something wrong or misbehaved which could have led to him/her being placed for adoption as children feel responsible whatever happened to them. It is therefore the duty of the adoptive parents to reassure the child that he/she had not done anything wrong or did not do anything that had made the parent place him/her for adoption. Adoptive parents should avoid giving wrong impression about the birth parent. It is not appropriate to tell the child he/she was loved by the birth parent to have been placed for adoption, because he/she will think one day his adoptive parents who have him/her could also place him/her again.

(v) Noticing Differences in Physical Appearances.

It is possible for differences in the physical features of the adopted child and the adoptive parents to be obvious. It is important for adoptive parent to create an open empathetic family atmosphere where adoption discussions have a free course. This will

serve as a good foundation as the child grows in years and the feeling about adoption becomes more complex.

The advantage of early talk with adoptee is that it helps to build strong self-confidence which will carry him/her through his/her childhood and beyond and be able to stand among his/her peers in school and other venues of learning.

- *Age:- 6-8 year old.*

By the time a child is within the age of six and eight, he/she is already in school outside the home environment. In the school he/she is exposed to peers and teachers who influence him/her and his world. The child assumes the role of a pupil, a classmate and a friend. By this age range, the child begins to realize that most children around him/her were not adopted into their families. Children by their nature are inquisitive. Hence, they might ask questions among themselves about their families. In this case if the adopted child had been prepared by talking to him about his/her adoption, he/she will be able to answer the question from his/her friend or class mates confidently.

Another important thing about children of this age range as noted by Saidman (2017:11) is that they need to understand why their birth parent were not able to raise them. They try to connect the idea of being adopted by a family and being rejected by another. They ask questions directly to their parents. In this wise the parent should be honest and concrete with the answer they give especially about their birth parent. Even if they do not know the birth parent they should not speak negatively about them. If the parent has been talking or sharing adoption information with the child, this is the time to reassure the child of your love and care and that the adoption is of ever.

- *Age : 9-12 year old.*

Furthermore, Saidman (2017:13) suggested that children within these age range tend to be open to talking and conversation that helps their intellectual ability. At this stage the adoptive parent must be prepared to help their child for more challenges ahead of him/her. Ability to highly reinforce the lines of communication is very important at this time as this will help the child into adulthood. At this age there is need to reassure the child of your love for him/her as he/she needs the ability to cope with school work, peers, teachers and counsellors. He/she wants to know if he/she is loved, attractive, smart and capable, if he/she can make and keep friends, is he/she like his/her peers and family, why was he/she adopted, is it because he/she was not loved by his/her birth parents or he/she has done something wrong.

- *Adolescent period.*

This is the period the child thinks critically and demands concrete fuller and more factual answers to his/her questions born from his/her curious minds. He/she wants to ask questions that might not have meaning to him/her in earlier life but now he/she wants to know why his birth mother and birth father gave him/her away. He/she thinks critically that to have been adopted means someone had to give him/her away.

Six common adoption related questions often asked at adolescent period and ways they can be helped. These are listed and explained below (Riley & Meeks, 2017:21):

- ***An adolescent wants to know the reasons for his/her being adopted?***

Why was he/she given away? Was there anything bad that he/she has done? Why couldn't his/her birth parents work things out and take care of him/her. One of the hardest challenges faced by the adoptive parent is to explain to their children the story behind their adoption. By the adolescent period the child wants to have definite information about why and how his/her birth parents relinquished him/her for adoption. Definitely, the adoptive parents might not often know the actual reason for the relinquishment. What they could do in this situation is to acknowledge the fact before their child that they do not know. However, they could reason together and imagine with their child the probable reasons why the birth parent placed them for adoption. Where circumstances played a role, the child should be informed in a positive manner about the circumstances in order for him/her to appreciate the adoptive parents.

- ***An adolescent want to know the truth about the birth parent.***

When children are young, they could be satisfied with general ideas about their birth parents. But adolescent period is not so. An adolescent adoptee wants to know the detailed facts about his/her birth parent. They demand for definite information. He/she wants to know what led to his/her parents relinquishing him/her, he/she wants to know whether he/she has brothers and sisters about his/her birth father. Parents should be conscious to take into consideration the readiness of the child to assimilate the information to be given in terms of the child's temperament, emotional and intellectual maturity. These are the determinant factors of the correct timing for sharing difficult information with the child.

It is better for the parents to reveal all the details they know about the birth parents including the difficult ones. This will prevent the child from fantasizing about his/her birth parent which could damage his/her identity formation. At adolescent age a child possesses new cognitive capacity to process information and to consider facts and feeling as he/she is given detailed facts about his/her birth parents.

- ***An adolescent wants to know why he feels different from everyone else.***

Adolescent period is the stage where a child wants to fit into the group or system he/she finds himself/herself. For an adolescent adoptee a sense of being different is already created for the fact that he/she was adopted.

There are children who were adopted from another culture or race and this makes them feel different from their family and peers. Thus the difference brings about discrimination to the child this affects their sense of belonging and loyalty to the adoptive family. To help such children, the parents should prepare their minds before they reach adolescence .

- ***An adolescent wants to know what will happen when he/she leaves home.***

When a child gets to adolescence age more especially late adolescence it is not unlikely for some adolescents to assume that may be the end of the parent child relationship especially when it is necessary to leave home for college or to any other place. An adopted adolescent is vulnerable to separations of any kind. He thinks since his birth parents once gave him up for adoption maybe someday his/her adoptive parents might give him/her up too. To get rid of this assumption from the mind of the adoptee the parents need to reassure him/her of their love for him/her and for the permanence of their parent child relationships that they are always there for him/her.

- ***An adolescent wants to know who is he/she really?***

An adolescent often faces the challenges of identity. He/she wants to know who he/she really is. He/she wants to know whether he/she resembles his/her birthparent or is different from them; he/she imagines how his/her birth parents look like. More than often in biological family the issue of similarities and differences are readily discussed. Parents are often heard saying their children resemble or are similar or different in one area or other. It can be on the physical feature or in a particular character. This makes the child feel a stronger bond to his/her parents and more sense of belonging. Thus identities build up from values beliefs, capabilities, talent, intellectual capabilities, racial, ethnic heritage, personal goals, and expectation and physical characteristics.

- ***An adolescent wants to know if it is good to think about his/her birth parent.***

It is natural for a child to think about his birth parent. Many adopted children often have frequent feelings, thoughts or imagination about their birthparents. Also, the fear of hurting their adoptive parents or disappointed them if they should ask questions or talk often about their birth parent makes them hide their feelings and struggle alone with their emotional connection to their birth parents. Adoptive parents should empathize with their children and let them know what they understand, and how they are feeling about their parent. Parents should understand that the fact that the child has emotional feelings and thinking about his/her birth parent, does not necessary means the love they have for them will diminish.

Parents should identify with their child in his feelings and support them in their request for information about their birth parents. Parents initiate the conversation about their child birth parents; this will remove his feeling of conflicted loyalty.

2.4.7 Guiding tips in sharing adoption information with adoptee.

Mantell (2017:49) suggested the following as guiding tips in sharing adoption information with the adoptee:

- **A slow beginning** – begin the talk slowly with the child. More details would be shared as the child develops.
- **Clarification of questions**- make sure you understand and clarify any questions your child is asking before you answer. It may be simpler than you think.
- **Validation of emotions**-At this age, it is important to consider the emotions of the child; that the facts to be shared.
- **Checking your feelings**: It is important you check your own feelings about adoption before sharing with your child. If feelings about it are negative no matter whatever right words you use the child will pick your negative tone of voice if you are negative about adoption.
- **Safety environment**- The adoptive parent can create a safe environment for talking. In addition, the parent can initiate the discussion if the child rarely raises the topic.

In spite of the guided principles discussed above there is need to educate adoptive parents on the how, when, and what to communicate to their children. Adoption professionals, practioners and social workers have a significant role to play in this respect.

Their wealth of knowledge and experiences will be very useful in this regard. According to Johnson (1997), some adoption agencies are guilty of neglect by not making sure that their professionals' education is up-to-date, and by not being more forceful in offering adoptive parents the opportunity to learn. Therefore, educating prospective adopters during the process of adoption and before placement of the child is very important as this will enable them to know what, when, and how to communicate adoption information with the adoptee. Most reputable adoption agencies around the world screen train (group setting) and offer ongoing support after placement.

2.5 The challenges of sharing adoption information with the adoptee

The fourth objective of the study sought to establish perceived challenges of sharing adoption information with the adoptee. Adoptive parents are often confronted with the challenge of disclosing information to the adoptee. According to Douglas and Philpot (2003), the crucial aspect of parenting by adoption is the sharing of adoption information with the adoptee. This becomes more crucial when the adoptive parent is in a dilemma as to whether to conceal the information or to share it; and if the information is to be shared, the question of what to share, how to share it, and when to share it becomes important. Existing literature suggests that some adoptive parents assume that sharing adoption related information with the child is not important. For instance, Feast (1998) and Howe (2000) argued that adoptive parents might ignore or avoid sharing adoption information when they sense that it might make the child uncomfortable or cause unease in the child. In addition adoptive parents may feel that, since the child is not asking questions about his origins, there is no need to raise the subject. In other words not knowing how the child would feel about the information makes parents conceal the information.

The effects of sharing adoption information with the adoptee have been discussed extensively in the literature. Brodzinsky (2011) concludes that the ability of the child to understand his being adopted depends on the ability of the parents to communicate with him the information in a positive manner. The impact could be positive or negative depending on the manner in which this is done. Every child deserves to know his origins. According to the Child Rights Act 1989 (article 21), a child is entitled to information that will be of benefit to him/her. It is therefore very important for children to have access to information about themselves, in order for them to develop a clear sense of identity (Feast and Howe, 2000). However, the outcome depends largely on the method of communication.

2.5.1 Challenges relating to sharing of adoption information with the adoptee in the Triad.

There are perceived challenges that might confront the participants in the adoption triangle following the disclosure of adoption information. According to Blomquist (2009), the process of searching can affect the feelings of the adoptee, adoptive parents, and birth parents due to conflicting interest. For instance:

Adoptee : The possibility of an adoptee searching for his or her birth parent upon realizing he/she is an adopted cannot be underestimated . The search can have a beneficial effect on adoptee sense of identity. It is an undeniable basic human need to know one's true identity, and hence one's true place in history (Muller and Perry, 2001; 2008). In essence, an adoptee seeking to know information about their background is viewed as normal rather than neurotic (Lieberman and Morris, 2003). The adoptee may start to search for his/her birth parents and, by doing so he or she may fear hurting his/her adoptive parents who in

turn might think that their child is looking for alternative parents because of feeling insecure and unhappy. In addition, the adoptee may fear their birth parents' rejection of them once again, having been as it seems 'rejected' by birth parents by given them up for adoption. This creates a conflict of interest. This notwithstanding, the search is important and inevitable in the life of the adoptee. This is because of the need to know their past in order to continue into their future.

The purpose of the search is not necessarily to hurt anyone but to appreciate their identity which must be respected (Neil, 2011). There is no amount of love that can satisfy the vacuum created by the curiosity to know a past that is concealed (Blomquist, 2009). In addition, Forrest (2003) argues that not all adoptees wish to be united with their birth parents. This may depend on the historical background of the child and how the adoptive parents present the information. As information on adoption is disclosed to the child he or she begins to think of his or her identity. According to Bernal (2003), the issue of identity is complex for adopted children, especially those who are in their teens. This is because they have two sets of parents. The lack of knowledge about their birth parents can affect them negatively, and make them question who they are. Hence, it could be more challenging for them to make a distinction between how they are similar to and how they are different from both sets of parents. The adoptee may fear their birth parents' rejection of them once again.

Birth Parents: It is possible that the search for birth parents by adoptees may create mixed-feelings among many birth parents. Apparently, some birth parents would love to be united together with the children they have long relinquished for adoption (many years ago). This could either be by physical contact or by any other form of contact such as a

telephone call. In the same vein, some birth parents may not want to be reunited with their children. This is because they may fear the anger and wrath of their child having failed in their duty to keep him or her.

Research results indicate that birth parents who desire to know about the children they relinquished for adoption, were apparently those (parents) who had had a second thought about having relinquished their children for adoption. Subsequently, such birth parents developed a psychological need for contact information about their children (Biehal, Elliot, Baker, & Sinclair, 2010). Equally, other studies indicate that some birth parents still preferred to keep their anonymity after they had relinquished their children for adoption. They preferred to avoid any intrusion into their privacy, after, they had relinquished the parenthood of their children to adoptive parents. Nevertheless, the interest of the parties involved should be considered in the process of a search for contact. The searcher should be guided by the social worker, child counsellor/psychologist, pediatricians who need to explain to the adoptive parents that it is normal for their children to be curious about their origin, and also help adoptive parents in validating and supporting their children's effort to understand the past and find a healthy connections to them (Brodzinsky, 2014).

Adoptive parents: The challenge of losing the child they had nurtured for many years may overwhelm many adoptive parents when the child decides to search for birth parents. In this situation, many adoptive parents feel betrayed by the adoption agency which had during placement, assured them that the child now belongs to them in all respects without fear of any intrusion. Also, adoptive parents may feel threatened when their child starts searching for his/her birth parents thinking that they will lose the child they had nursed for

years. It is also evident that there are adoptive parents who disclose to their children information about their adoption status, and are willing to help the adoptee to search for birth parents by initiating it (Neil, 2007). In addition, a good therapeutic relationship between adoptive parents and their social workers can provide significant support during the post adoption phase (Zosky, Howard, Smith, Howard, & Shelvin, (2005; Factsheet Child Welfare Information for Family Gateway, 2015)

2.5.2 The role of professionals in information sharing by adoptive parents.

The need for help from adoption professionals such as social workers, adoption practitioners, child counsellors, psychologists, and pediatricians cannot be over emphasized with regards to the issue of communicating adoption-related information with the adoptee. According to Brodzinsky and Pinderhuges (2002) sharing adoption information with children has been identified by adoption professionals and practitioners as an important challenge confronting adoptive parents. The need for the adoptive parent to seek help and counselling should be adhered to in order to prepare and equip them to carry out their obligations in this regard. As such, professionals recommend the use of age-appropriate language bearing in mind that children vary in their intellectual capacity and emotional maturity. Also, there is difficult information which requires the intervention of psychologists (Brodzinsky, 2011). For instance, the illness model could be used in relation to birth parents having problems of alcohol, drug abuse or other forms of psychopathology. This could be described to the child as the parent suffering from illness that cannot quickly and easily be overcome. Similarly, neglectful or abusive behaviour can be reframed in terms of impulse control problems related to personality that are very difficult to correct. The child may be told that, as a result and in the best interests of the child, he had to be

removed from the care of the birth parents and placed in a more stable and capable family (Brodzinsky, 2011). Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevent,& McRoy (2003), and Brodzinsky (2005) also suggested that there is need for professional counselling of adoptive parents to emphasise that the ability to grieve adoption-related loss is tied to a family environment characterised by openness, honesty, and respect. According to Triseliotis, Shireman, and Hundleby (1997) social workers in adoption agencies should guide adopters in sharing relevant information with the children.

2.5.3 Beneficial effect of sharing adoption related information with the adoptee.

A study by Douglas and Philpot (2003) in the US suggested that adoptees who expressed satisfaction with the level of information provided to them by their adoptive parents were much more likely to evaluate overall satisfaction of their adoptive experience as positive. This suggests that, when adoptive parents are able to relate more honestly in sharing information with their children, it helps in the latter's adjustment and psychosocial development. Furthermore, when information is neither denied nor distorted, it allows adopters to empathise with adoptees. In essence, empathy and open communication maximise the child's positive acceptance and understanding of who they are (Feast and Howe, 2000). Providing information to the adoptee as positively as possible is of benefit to the child as it enables him/her to know his/her genealogy, the reason for his/her being adopted, and also to appreciate his/her status as an adoptee. This gives the child a feeling of self-worth and a secure identity. In addition, the adoptee has more confidence in his/her attachment to his/her adoptive parents. As communication enhances relationships, the relationship between the child and the parent in adoption is established when relevant information is shared.

A comparative research project conducted in London, studied 394 adult adoptees who searched for their birth relatives and 78 adult adoptees who had not yet searched but their birth relatives had made enquiries about them. The results revealed that 40% of the adoptees in the study acknowledged that their parents had been willing, in principle, to discuss their adoption and its background. Only 29% said that they felt entirely comfortable raising the topic with them. Half of all respondents felt satisfied with the level of information about their adoption given to them by their adoptive parents, leaving the remaining half either unsure (21%) or dissatisfied (29%) with the amount and nature of knowledge available (Douglass and Philpot, 2003).

2.6 Chapter summary.

Evidence show that the issue of sharing or communicating adoption information with the adoptee has not been fully investigated, especially in the African context. The few available studies are based on experiences in the western world. Therefore, for a successful and satisfying adoption to take place in the context of Africa (particularly Nigeria), research in communicating adoption information is needed. As a challenging aspect of adoption practice, sharing or disclosing of adoption information with the adopted child requires a proactive effort by all players. Issues of conflict of interest that might arise and affect the family, have to be addressed sooner rather than later. These issues include the fear that if the child knows that he/she is adopted he/she may abandon the adoptive parent; the child's fear that his/her parent may be unhappy and consider him/her to be disloyal to them; and the birth parents' fear of the child pouring out his/her anger on them for abandoning him/her if he later finds them. These issues are better addressed in an open, sincere, and loving manner through a research study of this nature.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter examines two theories that are used in this study. Research must be informed by theories which help to interpret and understand the phenomenon under study. In this case the theories selected are: Social Constructionism and Ecological Systems Theory. The purpose of this chapter was to critically examine these theories and their significance and relevance to the theme of the study.

3.1 Social Constructionism Theory.

Social Constructionism may be defined as a perspective which believes that a great deal of human life exists as it does, due to social and interpersonal influences (Gergen, 1985, p. 265; Gergen and Davis, 2012). It is a theory of knowledge in Sociology and communication that examines the development jointly constructed in understanding of the world. Its main focus or concentration is on social influences on communal and individual life. According to Gergen and Gergen (2012), it is a theoretical movement that brings alternative philosophical assumptions regarding reality construction and knowledge production. Hence, social constructionism is concerned with the ways in which knowledge is historically situated and embedded in cultural values and practices.

3.1.1 Proponents and Historical Development of Social Constructionism.

Different writers and authors have dwelt on the theme Social Constructionism at different times and places, and have made different contributions to the theory. They include: Giambattista Vico, Immanuel Kant, and Karl Max all of whom made constructionist and constructivist remarks. In Britain, two leading social constructionists were Rom Harré at University of Oxford, and Michael Billia and his team at Loughborough University who concluded that attitudes are features of rhetoric. Harré on the other hand produced a series of works on the thematic body,

individuality, social life and motivation. Other social constructionists include Bakhurst who described a view of mind that regards capacity as the ability to live in a meaningful world (Bakhurst, 1991). Vygotsky, Leonitev, Luria, Voloshinou Bakhtin and Llyenkov (Burr, 2003) also made contributions to this theory. However, the major social constructionists contribution from sociology is usually taken to be Berger and Luckman (1996).

3.1.2 The Focus of Social Constructionism.

Social constructionism places emphasis on complexity and interrelatedness of many facets of individuals within their communities. In essence, people work together to construct artifacts. Constructs can be created through the social interactions of a group. For instance, a child functions in relation to his/her environment, constructing, modifying and interpreting the information he/she encounters in his/her relationship with the world (Von Glaserfield, 1995, p. 5). Hence an individual has capacity to think and construct his/her own understanding of the world.

Constructionism is based on relations and sustains the role of individuals in the social construction of realities (Cojocar, 2013). Furthermore, the interactions of persons and groups together in a social system form, overtime concept or mental representation of each other's actions. The concepts formed eventually become habituated into reciprocal roles played by the actors in relation to each other. Consequently, the roles are made available to other members of the society to enter into and play. Thus, the reciprocal interactions are said to be institutionalized (Cojocar, 2010). In this process institutionalization meaning is embedded in society. Equally, knowledge and people's conception and belief of what reality is, become embedded in the institutional fabric of the society (Berger and Luckman, 1996, pp. 75-76).

3.1.3 Key Concepts in Social Constructionism.

There are a number of key concepts associated with social constructionism, and these include construct, culture, nature and construction of knowledge, externalization, objectivation, and internationalization.

Construct. The word construct explains the ability to make by placing parts together, to build or put up things together. Social constructionism is the capacity of an individual to construct his/her own understanding of the world. It is connected with thinking which may have its derivation from cultural historical background. At times it may be interactions or interrelatedness of individuals or groups within their communities. Burr (2003) explains that social constructionism involves challenging most of the common sense knowledge of ourselves and the world we live in. Thus, in the process of social construction, the impact of cultural values is very vital in the understanding of human behaviours. Therefore, social constructionism focuses on meaning and power. Cojocaru and Bragaru (2012) agree that meaning is the product of prevailing cultural frame of social linguistic. The meaning people attribute to their cultural values affects their behaviours and interaction with significant others. According to Dickerson and Zimmerman (1996 p. 80), social constructionism locates meaning in understanding of how ideas and attitudes are developed within a social community context.

Culture. Culture is embedded in the lives of the people, and hence, inseparable from the people. According to Owen (1995, p.186) social construction is the claim and view point that the content of our consciousness, and the mode of relating we have to others is taught by our culture and society, and that all the metaphysical quantities we take for granted are learned from others around us. In the perspectives of social constructionism individuals are regarded as integral parts of culture, political and historical evolution in specific times and places. Furthermore, social constructionism believes that apart from genetic inherited aspects of humanity, all other aspects of humanity are created, maintained and destroyed in the process of interactions with others through time. Thus,

social practices of all life begin and are recreated in the present and eventually end. What is therefore important in the perspective of social constructionism are the ways in which socialization and acculturation amongst people are practiced through interaction with one another which results in shaping mutual existence of one another.

- **Nature and construction of knowledge.**

One of the perspectives of constructionists is that knowledge and truth are created and not discovered by mind (Schwandit, 2003). The nature and construction of knowledge according to Berger and Luckman (1991) have significance for society. Knowledge is viewed as created by interactions of individuals within society which is central to constructionism. Furthermore, Berger and Luckman (1991) view society as existing both as objective and subjective reality. As objective reality, a society exists through the interaction of people with the social world, while the social world in turn influences people resulting in routinisation and habitualization. That means that any frequently repeated action becomes cast into a pattern. In time habitualization becomes embedded as routines, forming a general store of knowledge. This becomes institutionalized by society to the extent that future generations experience this type of knowledge as objective. The objectivity is continuously reaffirmed in the individual interactions with others. The society experiences subjective reality primarily through socialization where its members are given identity and a place. Burr (2003) suggests that our identity originates from social realm and not from inside a person. Thus, socialization takes place through significant others who mediate in the objective reality of society, render it meaningful and as such the individuals internalised it through the medium of language (Berger and Luckman, 1991). Language makes thoughts and concepts possible and provides means of structuring the way the world is experienced.

- **Externalization, Objectivation and Internalization.**

It is believed by social constructionists that human beings create and sustain all social phenomena through social practice. There are three fundamental processes responsible for this fact namely: Externalization, Objectivation and Internalization. Externalization occurs when people act on their own world, creating some practice. For example people have an idea and externalize it by telling a story or writing a book about it. This then enters into the social realm as other people re-tell the story or read the book. The story or book begins to take on a life of its own once it has entered the social realm. The initial idea expressed has thus become an object of consciousness for people in that society. This objectivation., also develops a factual existence of truth, which means the truth is out there as an objective feature of the world . Internalization comes as the future generations that are born into the world where the idea already exists, internalize it as part of their consciousness and as part of their understanding of the nature of the world. This account according to Berger and Luckman (1996) shows how the world can be socially constructed by the social practices of people, and at the same time by their experiences of their world. Hence, social constructionism can be said to have achieved the status of an object.

3.1.4 Application of social constructionism theory to the study

Social constructionism theory may provide a framework for understanding why adoptive parents conceal from an adopted child the information of his/her status, or what leads to concealment of adoption information in adoption practices. The socially constructed role of married couples is to bear children. When this is absent they are often ridiculed by the society. Women are the object of most ridicule and stigmatization. In some cultural settings in Africa, infertile couples are not allowed to take a leading role in important family functions or events nor have a say at public gatherings. At times they are subjected to psychological torture and physical violence (Avidime et al 2013). “They are

often socially ostracized by their immediate families (Oladokun et al 2009). This social construction of reality of the phenomenon of infertility, involves a complex set of beliefs and values within a specific social structure. Consequently many infertile couples resort to adoption after all effort to have biological children of their own has proved abortive.

The act of concealing adoption information from an adopted child in many adoptive families in Nigeria is often faced with consequences that negatively affect the adopted child, and the adoptive parents are not left out . The question is why do adopters conceal from their child information of his/her status? Or what makes them to conceal the information.

To broaden possibilities of understanding the phenomenon of concealment of adoption information from adopted child, it is needful to look into the mode of adoption practice.

Social constructionism believes that knowledge is created or constructed and not discovered by the mind (Schwandt 2003). The knowledge of concealment of adoption information from the adopted child has its root from the model of adoption practice in Nigeria which is the closed adoption model. This begins with the adoption agency when it does not give any information about the original background of the child, the record of the child is sealed and not known by the adopter. The adoptive parents are only told to take care of the child placed in their hand as their biological child (Chukwu, 2012). Thus, the agency created the knowledge of concealment of adoption information from the child most particularly in the adoption of babies. The construction of knowledge of concealment of adoption information emerges from the adoption agency in the closed adoption model and continues to have a significance in the society among many adopters (Berger & Luckman,

1991). This continued to be developed and reinforced by factors such as individuality, environment/society, culture, language, social policy, and religion. These factors are further explained below:

Individuality factor: Social constructionism believes that an individual has the capacity to construct his/her own understanding of the world. Constructionism is based on relationships and sustains the role of individuals in the social construction of realities (Cojocaru, 2005 & Cojocaru 2013). In relation to the society's attitude (construct) towards adoption, constructs such as stigmatization, ridicule, ostracization, compel the adoptive parent to adopt a construct of concealment, for fear of being stigmatized and ridiculed by friends, neighbours and acquaintances as being unable to have children of their own. In addition they also fear losing the child if the knowledge of being adopted is known to the child. Hence, some adopters go to the extent of relocating their residences so as to prevent others knowing about the adoption (Iphey, 2007).

Environmental /society factor: The act of concealment may be reinforced by the society or environment. Bargley and Gabor (1995) argue that community is an important stakeholder in the adoption process. One of the principles of social constructionism is that society is viewed as existing both as subjective and objective reality (Gergeh & Davis, 1985; McNamee & Gergen, 1992). In the case of adoption and concealing information it is a subjective reality in the sense that it relates to the experience of those who are concerned. According to Bartholet (1999, 2014), there is a societal construction that adoptive parenting is less authentic than biologically produced children. As social construction is focused on meaning (Cojocaru & Bragaru, 2012), attaching meaning to the society construction on the issue of adoption could reinforce the attitudes of many adopters

towards adoption leading to concealment of adoption information. Many adopters hide from the adoptees, their extended families, and their neighbours information about their adoption. Albeit in other societies positive construction in-put is rather placed on the adoption, attaching positive meaning such as giving a child a lovely home, family and a brighter future. This would have a positive impact in the lives of both the adopted child and the adoptive parent, thus, making the adoption successful.

Cultural factors: Cultural values are vital and inevitable in many societies although, there could be cultural variations from one society to another. For instance, in major traditional societies in Nigeria high premium is placed on child bearing while, childlessness could be a cause of marital instability, especially in the African culture. In the same vein, marital success could be based on the ability of a couple to procreate (Avidime et al 2013).

In the perspective of social constructionism, the content of our consciousness and the mode of relating we have to other, is taught by our culture and society (Owen 1995, p. 186). In other words, our interaction with one another is based on what we learn from our culture and the meaning attached to it. Meaning is the product of prevailing cultural frame and social symbolic practices (Cojocararu & Bragaru 2012). Thus, meaning itself is a construction. For instance it is believed in some Nigerian societies that adopting a child who is not related by blood could portend bad omen to the family. If anything negative happens in the family the adopted child could easily be pointed to as the cause of the misfortune. It is also a cultural construct in Nigerian society that sharing adoption information with an adopted child could be separating a family, that is separating the child from the adoptive family implying that the child does not belong. Hence, in the cultural practice of Nigeria society concealment of adoption information is a social construct.

Language:- From social constructionism perspective language is more than just a way of connecting people. For instance, language is a means of communication and social interaction (Gergen & Gergen, 1991). Social constructionism stresses the importance of feedback (reinforcement) for constructed verbal behaviour within a milieu in helping an individual construct his or her knowledge. Furthermore, in a social constructive system, learners are teachers and teachers are learners, just as in verbal communication where speakers are listeners and listeners are speakers (Pear and Crone-Todd, 2002). Adoptive parents communicate with the adoptee, and adoptees communicate with their adoptive parents. If adoption information is communicated effectively with the adopted child, it could increase his/her self-esteem and enhance his/her adjustment to his/her adoptive family. If on the other hand the information is concealed from the child, the consequent effect might be emotional and psychological problems if he or she acquires this knowledge from a third party.

Social policy : Social policy is concerned about the welfare of citizens and the ordering of the network of relationships between men and women who live together in societies. It is also about the principles which govern the activities of individuals and groups as they affect the lives and interests of other people in the society. Hence, people in a society are governed by the construct of the social policy of the society. In relation to adoption practice in Nigeria, the policy is silent on the issue of concealment or sharing information with the adopted child about his/her status.

Religion: Religiously people are affected by the construct of their religious beliefs. In Christian circles, it might be viewed as a lack of faith in God's word to recourse to child adoption instead of waiting on God to have a biological child. The Islamic religion on the

other hand does not support adoption as constructed by the tenets of this faith. Consequently, adoptive parents from either faith background might decide to adopt a child secretly and conceal the information from the public and the child.

3.2 Ecological systems theory.

Ecological systems theory was first propounded by Urie Bronfenbrenner, a Russian born American developmental psychologist. The theory deals with human development and reveals the importance of a child's development within the context of systems of relationships that form his or her immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 2005). What makes the theory different from other human development theories is its emphasis on environmental factors as playing a major role in the development of a child. According to Bronfenbrenner, ecological systems theory focuses on the quality and context of the child's environment. Therefore, his model acknowledges that humans do not develop in isolation but rather in relation to their family, the home, school, community, and society of which they are part.

As a child develops, his or her interactions within the environment might become more complex. The complexity can arise as the child's physical and cognitive structures grow and mature. The implication of this process is that human development is shaped by the interaction between an individual and his or her immediate family, the school, the community, and the society. This interaction is both a progressive and reciprocal process between an active child and the persons, objects, and symbols in the immediate environment which take place over a period of time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; 2006). The enduring form of interaction in the immediate environment is referred to as 'proximal

process.’ Examples of this can be seen in parent-child and child-child activities, and in group play. The complete and modern ecological model is shown in figure 1.

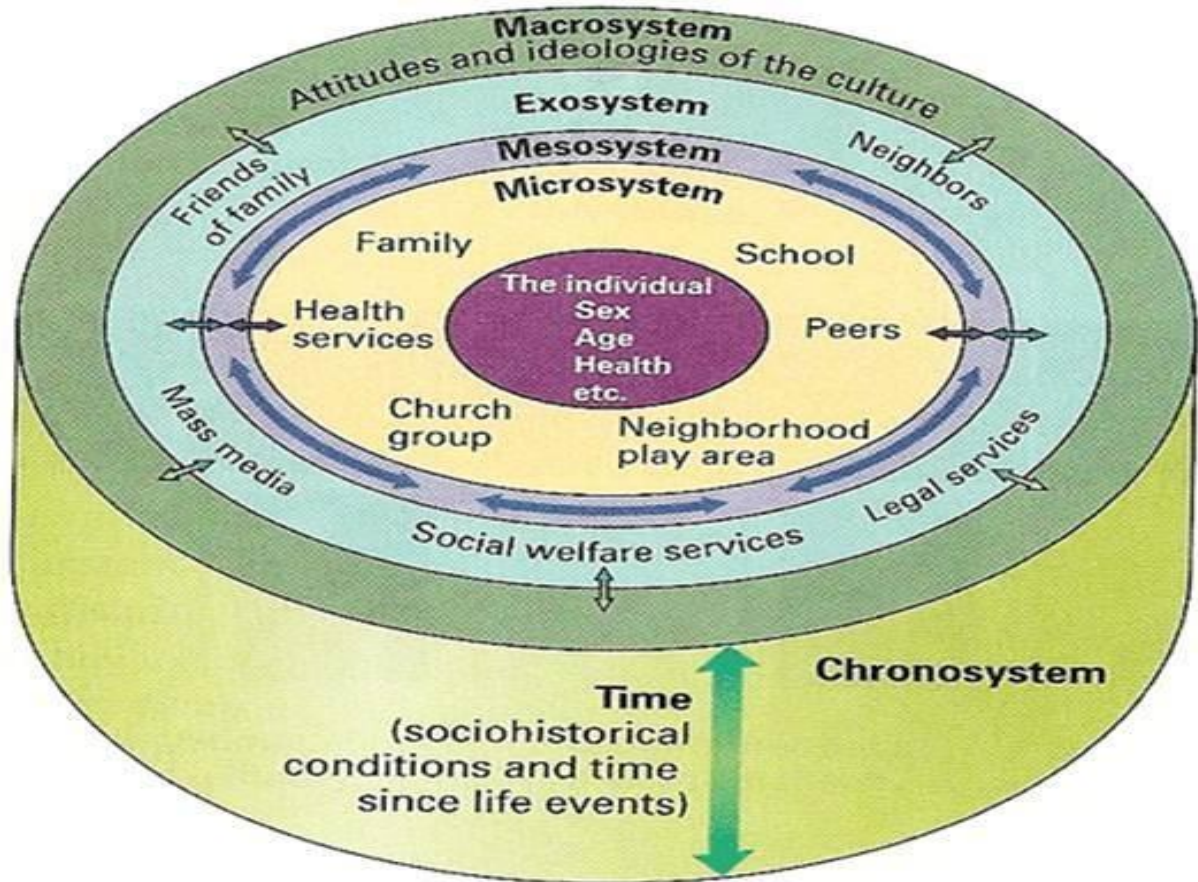


Fig.1: Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological model of human development

A modern view of Bronfenbrenner’s complete ecological model is termed Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Human Development. The individual is at the centre with identifiable attributes such as sex, age, and health. He or she affects, and is affected by, the settings in which the person spends time. The most important of the settings within a child’s environment is the family. Other immediate environmental settings

alongside the family include the school, peers, neighbourhood, play areas, church group, and health services.

Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner grouped environmental systems with which an individual interacts either directly or indirectly into five levels namely: microsystem, mesosystems, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. A microsystem is a setting which comprises the relationship and interactions between a child and his/her immediate environment which has direct impact on the child's development. These settings include the family, school, neighbourhood, child care centres, peer group, religious affiliations etc. Broadly, microsystems define a pattern of activities in the form of social roles and interpersonal relationships among young persons in a given face- to-face setting. A child's development is thus determined by what he or she experiences in these settings since that is where a large part of their time is spent. A mesosystem, according to Berk (2000), provides the connection between the structures of the child's microsystem. It is a linkage process that takes place between two or more settings within the microsystems. Therefore, a mesosystem is a system of microsystems. An example of this is a relationship between home and school and between home and workplace. It can also be between the child's church and his or her neighborhood. In all cases, there is the developmental impact of two way communication and participation between parents and the child's environmental group.

Other environmental systems are exosystems, macrosystems, and the chronosystem. An exosystem is described as a linkage and process taking place between two or more social systems or settings in which the child does not function or play an active direct role (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The structures in this system impact the child's

development by interacting with some structure in his or her microsystem. An example of this is the parent's workplace (Eckenrode and Gore 1990) and family social networks (Cochran, Lerner, Riley, Gunnarsson, & Henderson, 1990). For example, a parent's experience at work may influence a parent-child experience at home. This happens when a parent's schedule of work in her workplace interferes with her care of the child at home. This might increase conflict within patterns of interaction with the child in the family. The mass media, social welfare services, legal services, and neighbours are also part of the exosystem and play their own roles in child adoption practices. A macrosystem describes the culture of the people and how it affects the development of the child in terms of the attitudes and ideologies of the people.

Every structure in each of the systems (micro, meso, and exosystems) portrays the characteristics of a given culture or subculture which has particular reference to belief systems, knowledge, customs, and lifestyles. The growing child copies and mimics the culture, belief system, and lifestyle of his or her environment.

The study of human development and the passage of time are often treated as chronological events. A chronosystem entails change or consistency over time in personal characteristics. For example, changes occur over the life course in the family structure, socioeconomic status, employment, place of residence, and other aspects of life. There is the likelihood of children reacting to environmental changes as they get older and they may be more able to determine how that change will influence them. Elder, Modell, Parke (1993) suggested that time is not just an important attribute of the growing human being but also a property of the surrounding environment, both for the life course and across historical time.

3.2.1 Relevance of ecological systems theory to the study.

The ecological systems theory constructively aligns with that of social constructionism in that both relate to the immediate and social environment. Like the social constructionism theory, ecological systems theory identifies a child with the objects within his or her immediate environment and with which the child spends most of his/her time. A caregiver happens to be one of the objects. The ecological systems theory centres on how various systems within the immediate environment of the child aid in the positive development of the child. The child is at the centre of the model, surrounded by various structures that support his development. According to adoption professionals and practitioners, adoption should be child centered not adult centered (Welbourne, 2002). Even though adults also benefit, the welfare of the child must be considered first in all adoption processes. Johnston (1997) argues that adoption must be, and remain, primarily about the needs of the child and thus the child should be the centre of all processes and activities relating to adoption. Ecological systems theory is therefore relevant to this study as it is centered on the development of the child in relation to his environment.

Furthermore, according to international human rights law, adoption should be regarded as principally a child care device rather than a means of providing succour to childless persons or relief to incapable parents (Chuckwu, 2012). The implication is that the welfare of adopted children, as well as their development, are paramount issues of consideration in adoption processes. Therefore, adoptive parents should not conceal adoption information from the adoptee as this would deny the child knowledge of his identity which would contribute to the development of his or her positive self-esteem.

The adoptee being the centre of adoption demands that every structure that contributes to their development must contribute positively to their welfare. Hence concealing information that will be of benefit to the child could impede their development and the effect could create psychological problems within the young person. On the other hand, if information about adoptive status is communicated to the child in a positive manner and at an appropriate time this could enhance positive emotional development.

Another aspect of the theory relevant to the study is the interconnectedness of the systems in which the child develops. This also affects the interpersonal relationships between the child and the objects in his or her environment with which they interact. For instance, the family is the most immediate environment of the child. Therefore family experiences shape the child's development, family expectations, and interactions among family members as well as the larger society (Ken and Peluso, 1999; Christian, 2006). If there is a positive relationship in the family between parent and child (and child to child), this helps the latter to relate positively with the external environment of his/her mesosystem such as the school, church, friends, play group, and neighbourhood. However, if relationships in the immediate family breakdown, the child will not have the tools to explore other parts of his mesosystem

As children interact with the wider society, it helps them to progress to more complex relationships within their immediate environment (Addison, 1992). An example would be the interaction between the family and the school, between the parent and the teacher, and between the teacher and the child and his peer group. By extension, studying environmental factors which affect the child's development would enable adoptive parents

to monitor and encourage positive, beneficial interactions while discouraging interactions that could negatively affect the child's development.

Powell, Cooper, Hoffman, and Marvin (2013) stressed the need for early adjustment of the adoptee in the family. This becomes possible if the adoptee has early knowledge of his adoption status and identity. If the information of adoption status is appropriately communicated to the child early enough, he or she becomes adjusted to the adoptive family, understands the implication of being adopted, and relates freely and positively with the immediate environment. As a result, the child confidently and courageously interacts with external environments without being negatively affected by friends, neighbours, and schoolmates who might, through gossip, try to intimidate the adoptee about his adoption status.

3.3 Significance of the two theories in relation to current research.

The two selected theories, social constructionism and ecological systems theories constructively align with each other in studying the statutory adoption process in the best interest of the child. Ecological system theory deals with human development and explains the importance of a child's development within the context of systems of relationships that form his or her immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These systems in which the child develops are socially constructed. In a socially constructed system, the child learns from his environment by interacting with objects in the social environment. Social constructivism posits that learner construction of knowledge is the product of social interaction, interpretation and understanding (Vygotsky, 1962). Both theories have some similarities, for instance social constructionism believes that human life exists as it does, due to the social and interpersonal influences (Gergen, 1985,p265). Similarly in ecological

system theory, a child's development is influenced by what actually happens in the settings (ecological system environment) that is, in the immediate family, school, church and community. According to radical social constructionism the child functions in relation to his/ her environmental constructively, modify and interpreting the information he/she encounters in his/ her relationship with the world. In the same vein, the ecological framework, facilitates, organises information about people and their environment in order to understand the interconnectedness of the way children develop. In addition Bronfenbrenner (1979) believes that it is necessary to observe the way children behave in natural settings, while they are interacting with familiar adults in prolonged periods of time. A good interactive relationship opens doors for interactive communication between the parent and the child which leads to good parent-child interactive relationships. In essence, a child who develops in an atmosphere of a good interactive, interpersonal relationships should be able to construct a positive concept of himself/ herself (even as an adoptee) modify, or adjust himself to the information or knowledge of being adopted.

Bronfenbrenner viewed the process of human development as being shaped by the interaction between an individual and his/her environment. Similarly, social constructionism also concerns the interaction of people and groups of people together in a social system, over time where people form a concept or mental representations of each other's actions. The concepts eventually become a habit into reciprocal roles played by the actors in relation to each other. The roles are made available to other members of society to enter into and play out. The reciprocal interactions are said to be institutionalized (Cojocau, 2010). In the process, knowledge and people's conception and belief of what reality is become embedded in the institutional fabric of the society. As the child relates

and interacts with the objects of his/her environment, developing a model to communicate adoption information with the adoptee will essentially involve all the interacting structures with which the child spends a great deal of his or her time, especially the immediate family, school, church, and community. A child's interaction with objects in his or her immediate environment involves different communication patterns. According to research in this regard, communication is the glue that helps families deepen their connectedness to one another and improve their teamwork, decision making, and problem solving (Robinson, Segal, and Smith, 2015). According to Huang (2009), Schrodt & Philips, (2016), Young (2016), family communication patterns and styles influence children's attitudes and behaviour in a number of areas.

Ritchie and Fitzpatrick (1990:523) explain that "the family communication environment is a set of norms (constructs) governing the trade-off between informational and relational objectives of communication." In other words, the family environment determines the type and purpose for which information is given. Grotevant, Wrobel, van Dulmen, & McRoy (2001), and Brodzinsky (2006) suggest that the possibility of family members communicating with one another is particularly vital when it comes to creating a shared social reality among adoptive family members. Creating a social reality is also determined in the family by the strong attachment of family members to one another. Hence, the school, the church, and other social interaction groups could be good communication channels for positive adoption information in the best interests of the adoptee.

With respect to social constructivists pedagogy Science, Skinner (1957) stated that construction of scientific knowledge is a special case of composition. Pear and Crone-

Todd (2002) noted that after making what they believe to be new discovery, scientists communicate their findings to peers who provide feedback (reinforcement). Also, scientists who work in isolation eventually make their findings known which form part of the body of essential knowledge. In this regard, findings of this study will be communicated in appropriate scientific language as contributions to the body of essential knowledge in adoption policy formulation, research and practice. Communicated findings will shape society approach to the issue of disclosure or non-disclosure of adoption information to the adoptee in one or two ways: it may be accepted and confirmed by adoption policy makers or not accepted as part of policy formulation. It is also to be noted that occasionally a given construction from scientific discovery may be radically different from the prevailing view, but could be the best approach view. In this case, a paradigm shift would be necessary (Khun, 1994; Pear and Crone-Todd, 2007). Thus, both the ecological system of the environment and the social construct of the environment are significant in this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology for the study. It commences with an overview of the research process, followed by research philosophy; research approach; research design; sampling; methods of data analysis; reliability and validity; and ethical considerations. The study adopted a qualitative approach in the primary data collection using interviews, focus group discussion, case studies, and documentary analysis. Sampling issues considered the target population, sample size, and sampling method. The data analysis section explains how the data analysed. The reliability and validity section explains the measures and initiatives the researcher employed in order to ensure that results of this study are valid and reliable. The ethical considerations section explains how the researcher addressed relevant ethical issues. The limitations of the study are also explained.

4.2 Research Process

The process adopted in this study comprised the following stages: selecting the research area; formulating research aim, objectives, and research questions; conducting the literature review; selecting data collection methods; collecting primary data; data analysis.

- (i) Selecting the research area;

The motivation behind the researcher's choice of the research area was largely personal and professional interest in childwelfare and adoption issues in Nigeria.

- (ii) Formulating research aim, objectives, and research questions

The overriding focus of this study was to explore the perspectives of adoptive parents, social workers and other adoption stakeholders about disclosing adoption information to the adopted child in Nigeria. Hence both the specific objectives and the research questions were formulated and developed in such a way as to elicit accurate stakeholder perceptions on the subject and the necessity or otherwise of adoptive parents sharing adoption information with their adopted child.

(iii) Conducting the literature review

Based on the overriding aim of this study, the researcher conducted in-depth literature review in order to understand the subject area of adoption, its practice and process, factors influencing concealment of adoption information from adoptees, implications of concealing adoption information from the adoptee, the possibilities of sharing adoption information with adoptees, and the challenges of sharing adoption information with adoptees.

(iv) Selecting data collection methods

This study adopted a qualitative research approach because of its nature as explained in the research approach section (4.4) and the research design section (4.5). The qualitative research approach essentially enabled the exploration /understanding of adoption stakeholders perceptions on the theme of the study. Therefore, it was appropriate for the researcher to adopt in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, case studies, and documentary analysis as data collection techniques. This approach enabled the researcher to explore in-depth what the stakeholders think, feel or do and, most importantly, why, with regard to sharing adoption information with the adoptee.

(v) Collecting primary data.

Primary data for this study were collected from Lagos and Oyo states in Nigeria. The choice of these locations was because of their centrality in location to this study. For instance, Lagos is the chief cosmopolitan city in Nigeria, allowing different ethnicities and tribes to live together in pursuit of diverse business activities as the city is also the commercial centre of the country. Moreover, the city of Lagos has many adoption agencies (public, and private). In the case of Oyo state, there are many adoption agencies, and it is also the chief indigenous city of the old western region of Nigeria. Appropriate adoption stakeholders were identified for in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. An interview schedule was prepared as a guide by the researcher ahead of interviews with dates and times appropriately considered.

(vi) Data Analysis.

Being a qualitative study and also considering the data collection methods adopted, data analysis required that data from all sources, including recorded interviews, transcripts, field notes, and pictures be organised, coded, formatted and analysed appropriately. Firstly, the researcher engaged in manual coding; then the researcher matched the theoretical framework of the study with the coded data in order to validate the theory using the collected data. Final coding was necessary to ensure that no details had been omitted from data transcription sources. The researcher compared the study objectives with the overall result of analysis to ensure that the research objectives were achieved, and that the research questions had been sufficiently addressed.

4.3 Research Philosophy.

The choice of any research methodology is best explained through the philosophical underpinnings anchored in ontology and epistemology (O’Leary 2014). From ontological and epistemological perspectives (as shown in figure 2 below) research methods, research strategy, and research approach are rooted in ontology and/or epistemology. The method can be qualitative or quantitative or both; and the strategy can be a case study or an experiment on the one hand or a deduction or induction on the other. The approach is either empiricist or interpretivist, both of which have a view of epistemology and ontology as shown in figure 2 below.

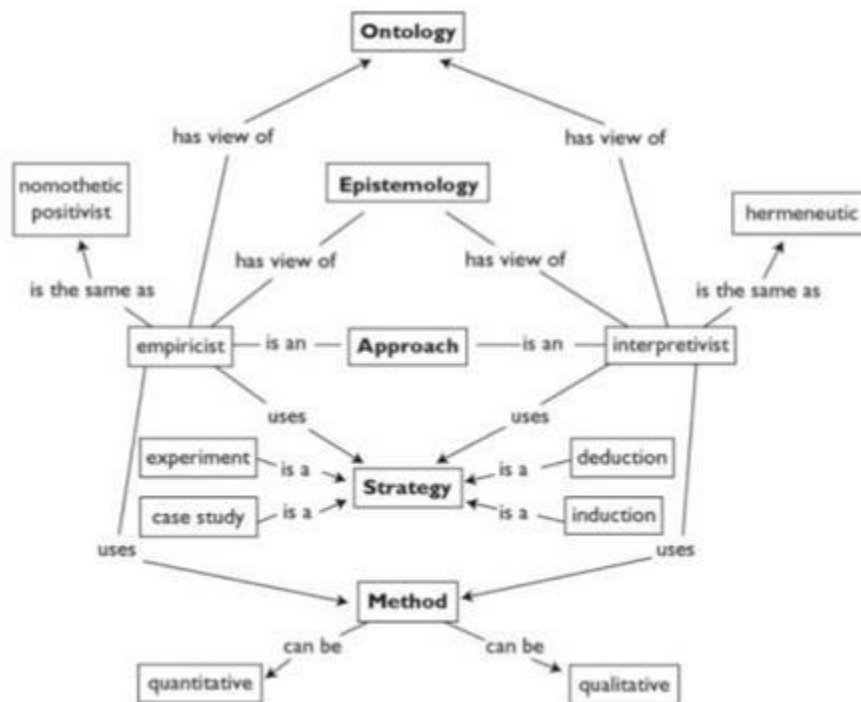


Fig. 2. Impact of ontology and epistemology in the choice of research methods

(Source:<http://researchmethodology.net/>)

From figure 2 above, it can be seen that, ontologically, the research method can be quantitative or qualitative. According to Hunter and Leahey (2008), quantitative research refers to the empirical investigation of social phenomena using statistical and computational techniques with the aim of developing mathematical models and theories pertaining to the phenomena. Quantitative research is applied when it is necessary to quantify in numerical terms the outcomes of a research study using statistical analysis to determine results. According to O’Leary (2014:121) “Quantitative research is often characterized as an objective positivist and empiricist search for truths that relies on hypotheses, variables, statistics which is generally large scale, but without much depth”. As shown in figure 2, the positivism paradigm aligns more with quantitative research. On the other hand, qualitative research provides a measure of how people think, feel or behave in a certain way depending on their interpretation of social entities. Hence, qualitative studies align with the interpretivist theory (see also figure 2 above). This study aligns with the qualitative and interpretivist approach.

Furthermore, Dudovskiy (2016) noted that there are two main contrasting research philosophies - positivism and phenomenology. The distinction between positivism and phenomenology is illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Positivism Vs. Phenomenology

	Positivism	Phenomenology
Basic notions.	The world is perceived as external and objective . Independence of the observer . Value-free approach to science.	The world is perceived to be socially constructed and subjective. Observer is considered a part of the object of observation. Human interests drive science.
Responsibilities of researcher.	Focus on facts. Causalities and fundamental laws are searched for. Phenomena are reduced to the simplest elements. Hypotheses are formulated and tested.	Focus is on meanings Aim is to understand the meaning of events. Explore the totality of each case. Ideas are developed by induction from data.
Most suitable research methods.	Concepts have to be operationalised.	Using several methods in order to explore different aspects of phenomena.
Samples have to be large		Small samples are analysed in greater depth or over longer periods of time.

Source: EaserbySmith, M., Thorpe, R, and Jackson, P.R (2008)

From the forgoing discussion, this study adopts a phenomenological position, in that the core of the research is a socially constructed and subjective phenomenon based on cultural settings as already indicated in the literature review section. This also aligns very well with the theories of social constructionism and ecological system used in this study.

4.4 Research Approach

In line with ontological and epistemological underpinnings, qualitative research of this nature aligns with the inductive, interpretivist philosophy (See figure 2 above). This is further supported by considering the details of approach of the deductive and inductive strategies as shown in table 2 below.

Table 2. Deductive Vs Inductive research

Deductive Approach	Inductive Approach
<p>Principles based on science.</p> <p>Movement is made from theory to data.</p> <p>Causal relationships between variables need to be explained.</p> <p>Quantitative type of data is mainly collected.</p> <p>Measures of control are applied in order to ensure the validity of data.</p> <p>Concepts are operationalised in order to ensure the clarity of definitions.</p> <p>The approach is highly structured.</p> <p>Researcher is independent from the research process.</p> <p>Samples need to be selected of a sufficient size in order to be able to generalize research conclusions</p>	<p>Meaning of human attachment to event is explored.</p> <p>Research context is understood at a deeper level</p> <p>Qualitative data are collected.</p> <p>More flexible approach to research structure to make provision for change during the research process.</p> <p>Researcher is perceived to be a part of the research process.</p> <p>Research findings do not have to be generalised.</p>

Source: Saunders et al (2007)

This study naturally lends itself to the inductive method, and hence an inductive approach was adopted.

4.5 Research Design

This study adopted an exploratory research design as the idea was to generate insight into the phenomenon under study. This is also in line with the objectives of the study. According to Babbie (2007) an exploratory design is used when a researcher is making an attempt to obtain ideas about insight into a relatively new and unstudied phenomenon. Consistent with the views of Pole & Lampard (2002) and Poryman (2005) this study was an attempt to investigate a problem that has not previously been sufficiently

studied in Nigeria, and apparently no known previous research for reference in the Nigerian context could be found.

Exploratory research was useful in order to test the feasibility of undertaking a wider study of similar focus covering the entire nation. In this study the researcher proposed a model for sharing adoption information with adopted children using South Western Nigeria as a case study. One advantage of the using of an exploratory research design in this study was the possibility to gain contextual information on the issue of sharing adoption information with the adoptee (Babbie, 2007). For instance, the study sought to examine why adoptive parents conceal adoption information from an adopted child, and also the possibilities of sharing information with the adoptee on his or her adoption . Being a flexible design approach, exploration made it possible to address research questions in an inquisitive and probing manner in order to explore the possible implication of concealing adoption information from the adoptee and the impact of disclosing to the adopted child information of his/her adoption status. The awareness of the possibility of sharing adoption information with the adoptee, and the manner of sharing the information were explored from the perspective of adoptive parents, adoption agencies, adoption practitioners, and other stakeholders involved in the adoption practice in South Western Nigeria. The findings of this study are likely to generate foundational information which could further be used to generate a formal hypothesis which could be used in future quantitative studies on similar issues.

Furthermore, table 3 below clarifies the distinction between exploratory research and conclusive research (Dudovskiy, 2016).

. Table 3. Exploratory Vs Conclusive Research

Research project components	Exploratory research	Conclusive research
Research purpose.	General: to generate insights into a particular situation.	Specific: to verify insights and aid in selecting a course of action.
Data needs .	Vague	Clear
Data sources.	Ill defined.	Well defined.
Data collection form.	Open-ended, rough .	Usually structured.
Sample	Relatively small and subjectively selected to maximize generalization of insights.	Relatively large and objectively selected to permit generalization of findings.
Data collection.	Flexible; no set procedure	Rigid; well-laid-out procedure
Data analysis.	Informal: typically, non-quantitative.	Formal; typically quantitative
Inferences/recommendations.	More tentative than final.	More final than tentative

Source: Dudovskiy, 2016.

Therefore, the design of this study is exploratory utilizing a case study approach.

4.5.1 The case study approach

A case study approach was adopted for this study, and data were collected using qualitative methods including in- depth interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. A case study, according to O’Leary (2014), uses in-depth approaches by delving into details and contexts in order to uncover the rich experiences of the individual, event, community, group or organisation being explored. One of the guiding principles of a case study technique is that it allows for multiple methods of data gathering. The rationale behind this is using more than one source of data to confirm the authenticity of each source

by means of triangulation. Hence, with this approach, the researcher utilised a combination of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and analysis of secondary sources.

According to Aurini, Heath,& Howells (2016), it is possible to incorporate several data collection methods in a qualitative study as is the case with research utilizing mixed methods involving qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study. This study adopted the former approach so as to amass a rich collection of data. Moreover data were collected from participants of diverse backgrounds who were selected from the Department of Social Welfare, adoption agencies, and stakeholders from the Ministry of Social Welfare and Women's Affairs, child care centers (children's homes) and schools. This was to enrich the data in order to justify the conclusions of the study.

Using multiple methods of data collection and varied participants requires triangulation for the findings to be reliable (Denzin, 1978) and also for validation of replicated and converging findings (Cook & Campbell 1979). Thus, one advantage of utilizing the case study approach was the provision of rich, in-depth qualitative data. Another advantage of using the case study approach, was that the researcher was able to build a holistic understanding through prolonged engagement and development of rapport and trust within a clearly defined and highly relevant context(O'Leary, 2014). Furthermore, a case study technique is structured around context rather than respondents thus immersing the researcher in the reality being studied. This study was conducted within the diverse environment of adoption practice in Nigeria and included stakeholders, adoption practitioners, and social workers. The case study approach was used as supportive evidence of theory. For instance, the researcher applied both the ecological system theory and the theory of social constructionism in this study. Both theories have impact in the

development of the child in the social environment. The ecological systems theory holds that human development is influenced by different types of environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); while social constructionism theory is a perspective which believes that a great deal of human life exists as it does due to social and interpersonal influences (Gergen, 1985, pp 265). Therefore, the researcher included, among the participants for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, those who immediately and directly impacted child development such as the family, school, religious institutions, neighbourhood, and peers, in addition to other social settings directly or indirectly affecting the child in his environment.

A case study approach has the ability to capture multiple perspectives and to build a more in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Aurini, Heath, and Howells, 2016). The case study approach is therefore considered appropriate for purposes of this study which was to explore participants' perspectives on the possibilities of sharing adoption information with adoptees, and hence develop a framework in this regards.

4.6. Qualitative Method

There are two major research methodologies commonly employed in research, namely: Quantitative and Qualitative. Quantitative methods are based on mathematical calculations in various formats. Specifically, quantitative methods use questionnaires mostly (closed ended) to collect data, and analyse data involving tables of frequencies and other statistics including mean, mode median, correlations, regression, and others. To the contrary, a qualitative research method does not involve numbers or mathematical calculations. It is closely associated with words, sounds, feelings, emotions, colours and other elements that are non-quantifiable. Qualitative studies aim to ensure a greater level

of depth of understanding. Qualitative data collection methods include in-depth interviews, focus groups discussion, observation, game or role-playing, and case studies (Dudovski, 2016).

A qualitative approach was used in this study. It is commonly accepted among researchers that the type of research questions often determines the type of methodological approach to be used (Dawson, 2013; Aurini, Heath, and Howells , 2016). A qualitative approach was adopted in order to develop an appreciation of deeper meanings and an understanding of the phenomenon being studied. By employing a qualitative approach the researcher was able to understand the experiences of the participants in relation to the objective of the study and the research questions. Qualitative methods of collecting data, such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, were employed by the researcher. This enabled the researcher to generate significant details regarding relevant concepts to provide a deeper understanding of the viability and possibility of sharing adoption information with the adopted child in Nigeria.

By employing qualitative methods, it was possible for the researcher to collect data in a natural setting from participants directly in a face-to-face manner. This is one of the characteristics of qualitative research (Creswell 2013), unlike quantitative methods where questionnaires are used as data collection instruments. With a qualitative approach the researcher obtained data from stakeholders (adoption practitioners, knowledgeable and experienced people, and others involved in adoption practices in Nigeria directly or indirectly) using approaches that allow direct personal contact, for example, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

The researcher collected data from different sources such as social workers in the Ministry of Social Welfare, adoption agencies, other stakeholders such as policy makers, security agencies, and schools. The researcher used triangulation to cross-check the consistency of data collected across settings, participants, and at different times. By so doing, the researcher ensured reliability and validity of data and also the overall credibility of the study (Shenton, 2004). Interviewing participants provided an efficient method of learning about people's perspectives. This allowed the researcher to draw inferences from these perspectives that might not have been possible if the interview had been the only data collection method.

In terms of sample size, the study is localized to a small sample size of thirty-five (35) participants because of the qualitative nature of the research. However, findings from a qualitative study can be generalised to the extent that the data are valid and representative enough, depending on the sampling procedure (Hammersley, 2008; Maxwell 2013). According to Hammersley (2008), there are two types of generalization, namely empirical and theoretical. Empirical generalisation concerns applying findings from qualitative research to populations or settings beyond the particular sample of study. This is called "transferability" which involves a transfer of knowledge from a study to a new situation (Ritchie and Lewis, 2013). Theoretical generalisation concerns itself with the formation of a theoretical concept that has a wider general application that is used in qualitative methods to develop a wider theory. The findings of this study could be generalised to other socio-demographic and geographical areas in Nigeria for two reasons. First the phenomenon being studied (that is the issue of sharing of adoption information with the adoptee, particularly children adopted from infancy) is common among adopters

in different parts of Nigeria. Secondly, the development of a framework for communication of adoption information would be useful for all parts of Nigeria especially if the policy recommendations derived from this study were accepted and implemented by an appropriate government organ.

4.7 Methods of data collection.

4.7.1 Sources of data.

Data collection for this study included primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected directly by the researcher by means of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions of samples drawn from the study population. Secondary data were obtained from existing documents, periodicals, journals, literature, records, databases, and the internet. In particular top social work databases such as Social Services abstract, Family and Society Studies Worldwide, Google Scholar, Ebsco, Child Welfare Information Gateway, PubMed (with MGetIt links), Eric etc were consulted for relevant secondary data.

(1) Primary data collection

(a) Interviews

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews among selected participants. As the name implies, an in-depth interview allows the researcher to explore by probing for detailed responses from the interviewees on issues being investigated. The researcher sought to understand the perspectives of interviewees on the issues of concealing or disclosing adoption information as contextualised within their own experiences as stakeholders in the adoption practice in Nigeria (Aurini, Heath, and Howells, 2016).

The purpose of using in-depth interviews was for the researcher to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewees' points of view on questions such as: 'what are your views on sharing adoption information with the adopted child? 'Do you think that concealment of information from the adoptee is of benefit to him or her?'

As a technique for collecting data in qualitative research, the in-depth interview has its own benefits and advantages. For instance, it allows the researcher to probe for more detail so as to obtain in-depth information from the participants. The probing enabled the researcher to obtain sufficient information for achieving the objectives of this study. Another advantage of in-dept interviews is that they allow for freedom of self-expression without any imposition or intimidation as the respondents express their views, experiences, beliefs, and understanding without being restricted to particular answers (peculiar to the quantitative method). The important fact to note is that the researcher learnt about the problem or issue under study from the participants' vantage point. Furthermore, the technique is not a once-and-for-all method with regard to the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewees as the interviewer has an opportunity to return to the interviewees to clarify information.

1) Designing the interview guides.

This study utilised appropriate principles guiding interview designs in qualitative studies. An interview guide is a qualitative instrument of measurement which provides the questions the researcher aims to ask by outlining and organising them into themes, topics, and issues that the interviewer wishes to cover in the course of the interview. Interview questions for this study were drawn from the central theme of the study, the purpose, and the objectives. The advantage of using an interview guide was that it helped the researcher

(interviewer) to cover the same material with each respondent focusing on predetermined themes, topics, and issues of the study.

Following the guiding principles of qualitative interviewing, there were three possible formats of interview: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. Structured interviews consist of a series of pre-determined questions that all interviewees answer in the same order. In unstructured interviews, no questions are prepared prior to the interview and the interview is conducted in an informal manner (Dudovskiy, 2016). Informal conversations or unstructured interviews according to Patton (2015) are unplanned and unanticipated forms of interaction between an interviewer and a respondent that occurs naturally during the course of the interview or observation. Semi-structured interviews contain components of both structured and unstructured methods. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer prepares a set of questions to be answered by all interviewees, allowing for the fact that additional questions might be asked during in-depth interviews to clarify and/or further expand on certain issues (Dudovskiy, 2016).

For this study, the researcher employed structured and semi-structured interviews which are more appropriate for qualitative research and suitable for achieving the objectives of the study. Babbie (2007) suggests that unstructured and semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility between the interviewer and the interviewee. The flexibility of the process gave both the interviewer and the interviewee an opportunity to ask for clarification of questions and to probe for more answers. The structure of the questions being open-ended infers that some questions were generated naturally and spontaneously as the interview progressed allowing for greater flexibility.

According to Aurini, Heath, and Howells (2016), interview questions are of two basic varieties: descriptive and theoretical. Descriptive questions are used inductively to examine localised understandings, that is the experiences and the understanding of the interviewees. The researcher employed descriptive questions in order to understand the knowledge, experiences, perceptions, and involvement of the participant in the theme of the study, and for examining their understanding of the sharing of adoption information with the adoptee. Theoretical questions are indicative of a deductive approach, building questions around a theoretical proposition. The distinction between descriptive and theoretical types of question is related to the purpose or intention of the question rather than its nature.

2) Conducting in-depth Interviews.

There are two key players that need to be considered for the interview in research. The first is the interviewee and the second is the interviewer. Interviewees are the respondents and the participants to be interviewed, while the interviewer is the researcher or the research assistant. Conducting an interview requires appropriate preparation which entails systematic planning and following through to conducting the interview. For this study, the targeted respondents were selected from amongst adoption practitioners, professional social workers from the Department of Social Welfare and Women Affairs, adoption agencies (private and independence), children's homes, security agents (e.g. police), and schools. The researcher sent a formal letter of introduction including a brief description of the project, the type and duration of participation, contact information, and a formal request for participation in the interview. The letters were delivered by hand to the various places and people to be interviewed. The use of email was not adopted as it was considered ineffective due to inconsistency in power supply in most parts of the country which could

delay the process. Also, the location and date of the interview were decided and communicated. As pointed out by Hepworth et al (2010), how successful an interview is depends on the physical setting and related arrangements. This means that the interviews need to be conducted in a relaxed environment, free from any form of pressure. Therefore, having appropriately scheduled the interview there was no delay in proceeding according to schedule, as this might have caused the participants to cancel, lose interest or forget about the arrangement.

Interviews were conducted in the interviewees homes or offices as was convenient. During the interview process the researcher established rapport with the participants before the commencement of the one-on-one interview. This interaction was to enable the researcher to explain the purpose of the interview in a non-threatening manner. Permission of participants to record their responses was sought and obtained prior to the commencement of the interview, and the respondents were assured that their identity would be kept confidential. The use of a tape recorder was very important as this served as a backup for note taking. Permission was sought and granted for use of tape recorder.

(b) Focus groups

The focus group is a method of “describing and understanding a particular issue from the perspective of group participants” (Khan & Manderson, 1992:57). This provided an opportunity for multiple interviewees to interact conversationally with the researcher on different occasions in a discussion group setting. The goal was to use rich discussion to elicit a depth of opinion that might not arise from direct questioning. This helped the researcher to collect a wide range of relevant data for the study. Equally, using focus group discussions provided an opportunity for the participants to interact with one another,

sharing experiences, views, opinions, and understanding of the possibility of sharing of adoption information with the adopted child by adoptive parents. This enabled the researcher to collect a wide range of opinions from different people of similar characteristics without close family or friendship ties to one another.

An important aspect of this method is the 'group process'. A group is not merely a gathering of individuals to be interviewed but rather the creation of dynamic group interaction which is essential for the validity of the study.

In this study, the advantage of using focus group discussions was that it allowed the researcher to collect data from people's view-points in a group setting. Furthermore, data from focus groups were used to substantiate data from interviews, observation, and other data collection methods.

(1) Conducting focus group discussions.

In conducting focus group discussions as a means of collecting data for this study, the researcher took into consideration some important factors such as the size of the group, the number of groups, demographic information, time allocation, location of meeting and number of focus group meetings. The researcher acted as the moderator of each focus group discussion meeting.

(i) Detail procedure for Focus group discussion.

Number of focus groups: The study used two (2) focus groups for data collection. Morgan (2012) suggested four to six groups depending on the range of topics and diversity of the participants. The range of topics in this study was adequately handled by two (2) focus group discussants.

Size of focus groups: Each focus group comprised ten (10) participants. According to Warren and Karner (2010), participants in a focus group could be as few as four and as many as twelve. Morgan (1998) suggested that the number of participants in a focus group depends on the topic at hand. However, smaller groups are better if the topics are of an emotional nature or when it is expected that each individual might have a lot to say on the subject. Larger groups seem to be better for more general topics where greater number of opinions, experiences, and stories need to be shared.

Group categories : The focus groups were divided into two categories. The first group comprised of those who were directly connected with adoption issues namely Social workers. The second group comprised of those who were not directly connected with adoption issues but were members of the public whose perceptions on the theme of the study were sought by the researcher. The goal was to seek the general opinions of the public on the study issue at hand. In the two groups of participants, there were people with different or similar opinions. This enabled the researcher to collect a rich set of data from all participants. Participant's gestures, body language, action and reaction were also taken into cognisance as these contributed to the richness of the data collected. The length of time allocated for each of the discussions group was 60 to 90 minutes as recommended by Babbie (2007) and Aurini, Heath, and Howells (2016). The time allocation also depended on the topics and the diversity of participants. In selecting the location for the group discussion, the theme under study, the participants, and the type of information solicited by the researcher were considered. Stewart et al (2007), suggested that where possible the place of work of participants could be used for focus group discussion meeting, but this was only possible in the case of social workers. However, for the general public

perceptions group the meeting took place at a convenient locations outside the participants place of work . For instance in a church premises.

During the discussios of each of the two focus groups, the researcher played the role of moderator, facilitating and ensuring that every participant took part in the discussion, sharing their views and opinions, with none dominating or diverting from the topic under consideration. The researcher began by self introduction and explaining to the group the purpose of the discussion and its usefulness. The researcher then outlined how the group should function through open, honest, and considerate communication. The researcher encouraged everyone to fully participate and respond to questions as well as to freely ask questions when necessary and share their opinions or views especially if they differed from what others would say (Berg and Lune 2012).

The moderator commenced with open-ended questions and encouraged the participants to answer questions in a conversational manner. The open-ended questions ranged from broad to more focused issues. Probing questions were used to obtain more information. This was to ensure that every member participated in the discussion, sharing their views and opinions, with no one dominating the group or diverting from the topic. In the course of the discussions, the moderator observed participants' body language and encouraged building rapport through appropriate communication among participants in a group.

With reference to the topic at hand: "Adoption stakeholders Perceptions of sharing adoption related information with adoptees: a case study of Nigeria" , participants had different views and opinions to share. The researcher, as a moderator, opened the discussion, and invited individuals to share their views, opinions and experiences . Though there were differences of opinion, participants were free to explain and maintain their views

The researcher enlisted the help of two research assistants and note takers. In addition, audio recording was used with the permission of the participants. In the event of recording equipment malfunctioning note taking served as a back-up procedure.

To avoid inconsistency, the researcher probed for clarification from participants where applicable. The moderator closed the discussion by providing a brief overview of key points raised and discussed to ensure that opinions of the participants were accurately recorded.

(ii) Focus Group Guide

The following were guiding questions for the focus group discussion

(1) What are the views and attitudes of people in your community to child adoption?

Please explain.

(2) Suppose you were an adoptive parent would you conceal information about his/her adoption status from your child? If so, why? If not why not?

(3) Suppose you were an adoptive parent would you share information about his/her adoption status with your child? If so, why? If not why not?

(4) In your own view, can you explain the likely implications that may arise for the adoptive family if :

(a) The adoptee has no access to information about his/her status?

(b) The information is shared with the adopted child ?.

(5) How would you advice the following adoption stakeholders on the issue of sharing /not sharing adoption information with the adoptee:

(a) Adoptive parents?

(b) Social workers?

(c) Adoption agencies?

(d) Policy makers?

(6) What are the reasons for your advice in item (5) above?

(2) Secondary data collection

Secondary data for this study were collected from document sources such as records kept by selected adoption agencies, children's homes and other relevant literature sources from libraries, the Internet, and social work databases. The relevant social work databases consulted included Social Services abstract, Family and society studies worldwide, Google scholar with MGetIt links, PubMed (with MGetIt links), Child Welfare Information Gateway etc. These sources gave the researcher access to relevant data concerning adoption transactions. The advantages of exploring secondary data included that it provided relevant information immediately, saves time and resources; minimizes stress; and reduces costs associated with field studies and eliminates concerns over building trust. Secondary data have its own challenges; for instance, the data available might not be expressly generated to answer particular research questions. At times the data may be outdated and therefore, not valid for a particular research project. The researcher checked existing data sources to ensure its relevance before using them. Rubin and Babbie (2007) stressed the importance of not just relying on a single source but rather focusing on several primary and secondary sources of data collection in order to give the researcher more confidence in the credibility of the data. An important aspect of secondary data collection is documentary analysis.

(a) Documentary Analysis

Data collected from secondary sources were carefully perused to complement data collected from qualitative in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. In this regard, more specific and relevant documents used included official records from international organizations such as UNICEF; relevant federal and state governments records (especially legislations, policy documents, press releases, pamphlets); relevant local government records; relevant non-governmental organizations records; records from libraries; catalogues, comics, pamphlets, letters, and emails; journals, diaries, and memorandas; meetings agendas and minutes; client records, photographs and videos; medical records; educational documents, newspapers or magazines; columns/articles/advertisements; news and current affairs and biographies. Places visited in order to gain access to these documents and records included social welfare offices (both government and non governmental); schools, hospitals, religious places, and legislative offices among others.

In the utilization of documents and records certain procedures were followed . According to O'Leary (2014), the researcher should first gather available documents and decide which of these to explore. Information collected from the documents were organized and carefully examined. The researcher explored the background information of all documents being analysed in order to verify their source and usefulness; purpose and content; circumstances surrounding their production; date of production, where it was produced and what type of data it contains. Thirdly, the credibility of the document was located and assessed for inherent bias. Lastly the contents of the documents was explored, and useful themes made part of the interview questions and focus group discussions.

(b) Context analysis

The researcher also did context analysis with respect to document sources perused. This was also useful during the interviews as responses to questions were recorded as information relevant to the researcher's inquiry, and highlighted and organized for easy analysis by using a colour-coded highlighting system. The researcher determined what was to be 'looked for' and noted the amount, the frequency, and the context of the occurrence. This approach is called 'context analysis'. The benefits of using document analysis as one of the sources of data collection cannot be underestimated. According to O'Leary(2014:250-251) it reduces costs and minimizes stress for both researchers and subjects. It capitalizes on the vast amount of data already available on organizational documents; it gives the researcher knowledge of what already exists; and assists in estimating what is available, what is not available, and what to expect. It enables the researcher to collect rich, in depth qualitative data. These and more advantages were tapped into in the course of this study by per using document sources as the need arose.

4.8 Validity and Reliability

(i) **Validity and reliability of the interview guide**

One important strength of any research is its validity and reliability. Validity refers to whether the study is well grounded and the findings accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participants or the readers of the account (Creswell and Miller, 2000; Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Validity relates to the extent to which the research instruments can measure what is intended to be measured. It is evaluated according to the context and objectives of the project (Maxwell 2013). Reliability on the other hand deals with the degree of consistency of the instrument of measurement. In other words, reliability refers

to whether a particular technique applied repeatedly to the same object would yield the same result each time. In this regard the researcher ensured that the questions in the interview guide are informed by the purpose, objectives, and research questions of the study.

To ensure validity and reliability of data collected, the researcher carefully aligned the research purpose, objectives, and research questions with the qualitative data collection instrument. The researcher also carefully scrutinized the study drafts with colleagues, and with her supervisors to be sure of what the research sought to do, how it was conducted, and what was expected as a result. For easy collection and analysis of data, the interview and focus group questions were divided into themes, topics, and issues. This was to avoid misconceptions and ambiguities in the questions. The questions were organized in logical order to make it easier for the interviewer to deliver them and for understanding of the interviewees. During interviews and focus group discussions, the researcher made use of note taking and tape recording with the permission of the participants. This way it was possible to validate participants responses.

(ii) Validation of data from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

Validation of collected data or findings of a research study occurs throughout the steps in the process of research so as to make the overall research credible. Although biases which could impede the validity and reliability of collected data are often unavoidable, this must be kept in check or completely avoided. In this research some of the biases that were avoided included the following: asking questions in the process of the interview by the interviewer in a way that would predispose respondents to answer in the way the interviewer wanted them to; interviewer's body articulation such as excessive smiling or

nodding of the head in agreement with the respondents when the answers or the responses were in support of the assumptions of the research; participants answering questions in a way that may distort their true views or behaviours; biases on the part of the participants to agree with whatever was said by other participants; participants saying what would convey a favourable impression of themselves; and the presence of an agency official or an important personality.

The researcher acknowledged that the collection of data and its interpretation must be based on the true nature of life as it exists and be free from the researcher's and the participants' biases, views, and/or imagination. Therefore, the researcher ensured that data collected were internally and externally valid. In ensuring internal validity, the researcher ensured that the information given by the participants was factual and true. This was done by going back to the participants for clarification, and also playing back recorded interviews to the participants for verification of what had been recorded. The clarification of interpretation of the participants' views ensured that the data given by the respondents were properly recorded, and balanced with the researcher's own interpretation of the respondents views. According to Howard in Aurini, Heath, and Howells (2016), "rich data can counter the twin dangers of respondent duplicity and observer bias by making it difficult for respondents to produce data that uniformly support a mistaken conclusion just as they make it difficult for the observer to restrict his observation so that he sees only what supports his prejudices and expectations."

Furthermore, triangulation of data was done to verify validity and reliability. For instance, focus group discussions were conducted initially as a way to explore themes already addressed through in-depth interviews. Evidence was drawn from a variety of data

sources (especially the literature) to increase the credibility of the research findings. To strengthen the trustworthiness of the data collected the researcher employed the assistance of other facilitators (research assistants) to collect and correctly record data in order not to miss essential data if data were collected by the researcher only.

4.9 Sampling issues

4.9.1 Study setting/study area profile

The setting of this study was South Western Nigeria with particular reference to Lagos and Oyo states. This section presents the physical, demographic, and economic characteristics of the chosen study setting. Nigeria is divided into 36 states, with the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) in Abuja. The 36 states are further sub-divided into 6 geo-political zones namely: North West, North East, North Central, South East, South West, and South South as shown in figures 3 and 4 below.

This study falls within the South West geo-political zone comprising Ekiti State, Osun State, Ogun State, Oyo State, and Lagos State (Fig.3). Lagos and Oyo states were purposively selected for this study because both were considered central to the study in terms of access to relevant information, stakeholders, institutions, and ethnic diversities.

NIGERIA GEO-POLITICAL ZONES

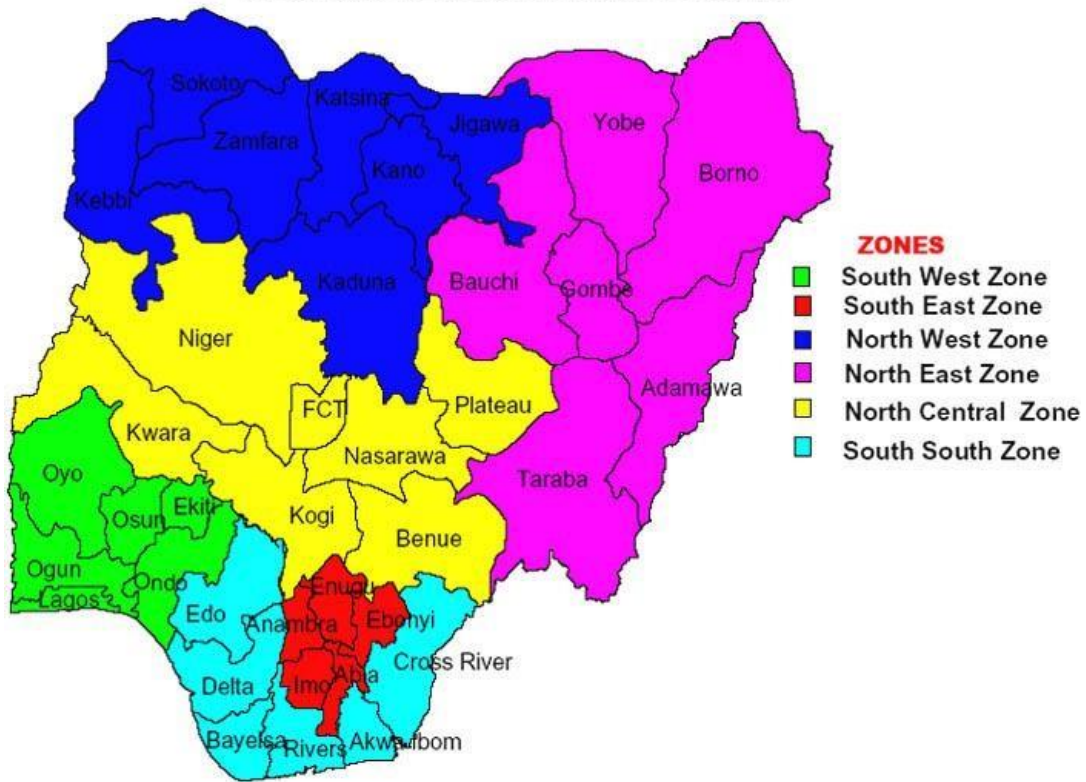


Fig. 3. Map of Nigeria & 6 Geopolitical Zones. (Source:OldNaija.com)

For the purpose of this study the focus area falls within the South West geopolitical zone (figure 3).



Fig4: South West Geopolitical zone . (Source: OldNaija.com)

(a) Lagos State

Lagos State is located in the South Western part of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is bounded on the North and East by Ogun state, in the west by the Republic of Benin, and on the South by the Atlantic ocean. Twenty-two percent (22%) of its 3577 square kilometres comprises lagoons, and creeks. Lagos is the largest city in sub-Saharan Africa with a population of over 8million in its urban area alone. Economically, Lagos state hosts the largest seaport as well as the largest centre of commercial activity in Nigeria.

The choice of Lagos state for this study was due to the fact that it is a cosmopolitan city, and the chief commercial city of Nigeria. As such, it provides residence for large numbers of people from various ethnic groups. The representation of various ethnic groups in Lagos state made it an obvious choice for this study. The researcher had the opportunity to select samples representing various tribes as respondents. Furthermore, language would not be a barrier between the researcher and participants, since pidgin English is generally

accepted by Lagosians. In addition, the practice of adoption is very prominent in Lagos, and there are various adoption agencies and registered orphanages. (Wikipedia, 2015).

(b) Oyo State

Oyo state is an inland state in South Western Nigeria. Its capital, Ibadan, is the largest indigenous (native) city in West Africa. The state is bounded in the North by Kwara state, in the west by Osun state, in the south by Ogun state, and in the east partly by Ogun state, and the Republic of Benin. The state covers an area of approximately 28, 454 sq kilometres. The landscape consists of old rocks and dome shaped hills which cover roughly about 500 meters in the southern part reaching a height of about 1,219metrs above sea level in the northern part. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people of the state. A number of national and international agricultural establishments are located in the state such as the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) Ibadan (Wikipedia, 2015).

The choice of Oyo state in this study was due to the fact that the state is predominantly indigenous. It also boasts of a large number of orphanages, social welfare centres, and adoption agencies (private, public, and independent). There is a Department of Social Welfare with a section which addresses adoption issues. The Department of Social Welfare falls under the Ministry of Women and Social Welfare. Furthermore, as an indigenous city, its culture has a significant impact on the lives of the people. This gave the researcher an opportunity to study the impact of culture on adoption and sharing of adoption information with adoptees. It also gave the researcher an opportunity to include indigenous respondents in the study. The state is home to the first television station in Africa, as well as the most sophisticated and liberal scientific and cultural community on the continent. Nigeria's premiere university the University of Ibadan is also situated in the

state as well as a significant library and documentation centre including a renowned Institute of African Studies. These were advantages for the researcher in terms of access to appropriate secondary sources.

4.9.2. Study population.

Considering the theme and the purpose of the study, the study population was divided into two categories namely: those who are directly involved in the process of adoption and those who are indirectly involved. Those directly involved included the social workers from the state and private adoption agencies; adoptive parents; administrative officers connected with adoption issues; directors and management of key informants in adoption agencies, children/motherless babies homes, and the judiciary who are usually involved in statutory adoption procedures. Experts in the knowledge of adoption and other persons involved in adoption were also targeted.

The second category of respondents was the population of those who were indirectly involved in adoption whose opinions and views on the issue of disclosing adoption information with the adopted child was deemed useful data. These included teachers in public and private schools (since adoptees were represented in schools even though the child might not be recognized as an adoptee); doctors in hospitals whose role is to counsel women with infertility problems to consider adoption; policemen involved in the placement of abandoned babies into child care centers; community leaders in which such children lived.

4.9.3 Sample size.

The sample size of a study population is often determined by the shape and form of the data the researcher wishes to collect and the goals of the analysis (Leary 2014). As

suggested by Aurini, Heath, and Howells (2016), a qualitative study that relies on in-depth interviews should include a maximum of 50 participants. In this study the total number of respondents was 35 representing data collected using in-depth interviews, fieldwork, and focus group discussion. The selected respondents comprised the following informants: two (2) directors/officers incharge of child adoption in the Department of Social Work in the Ministry of Women Affairs, Youth Development and Social Welfare; three (2) adopters; two (2) lawyers; one (1) paediatrician from the University College teaching Hospital (UCH) Ibadan; one (1) child carer from a Child Care Centre; two (2) lecturers, one from the Department of Social Work, University of Ibadan, and the other a guidance counsellor; one (1) school teacher; one (1) policeman; one (1) community leader; and one (2) religious leader. In addition, there were two (2) focus group discussants of ten (10) participants in each group.

With the exception of the teachers, policeman and the community leader all other respondents were directly involved in the adoption process as social workers, paediatrician, lawyers, child carer and adopters. These formed the key informants of this study. Their information/views were useful source of data. As pointed out by O'Leary (2014) key informants could be instrumental in providing access for the researcher to a world he might otherwise have tried to understand while being locked from the outside. Thus, the informants were used to generate primary data for this study through in-depth interviews.

4.9.4 Sampling procedures

For selecting sampling techniques, the researcher adopted a non-probability sampling technique upon which most qualitative research relies. Unlike probability

sampling techniques which involve random sampling, and where all elements or participants in the study have an equal chance of being selected, the non-probability sampling technique involves a purposeful selection where the researcher has a particular purpose in mind for selecting the sample. The researcher purposefully selected the key informants on the basis of their knowledge and their involvement in the adoption processes. Apart from the key informants, other participants whose opinions or views mattered in this study were school teachers, guidance counsellors, policemen, religious leaders, and community leaders. These participants were directly or indirectly involved in the adoption process or contributed to the child's development in his environment such as schools and communities.

The advantages of purposive sampling techniques as spelt out by Maxwell 2013 for this study are listed as follows. First it enabled the researcher to make a purposeful choice of the participants based on the researcher's judgement and knowledge and the purpose of the study. Second it provided an opportunity for the researcher to employ more than one sampling method to collect the needed data particularly as the study was exploratory and the researcher was able to collect sufficient data. Third the purposive sampling techniques are inexpensive and made it easier to obtain samples with specific characteristics. For example, the key informants with their wealth of knowledge and expert opinions were tapped to gain relevant information during in-depth interviews.

However, according to Maxwell (2013) generalization could be done empirically using qualitative methodology by applying findings from qualitative research to populations or settings beyond the particular sample of the study. There is also the challenge of bias in

sampling (Leary 2014). The researcher consciously made efforts to avoid biases and subjective judgement (Panneerselvan, 2004).

4.10 Pilot Study.

It is expedient for pre-testing to be used on a small sample of data before the actual research is conducted. According to (Babbie, 2007) the importance of the pre-test is to enable the researcher to highlight potential issues that could pose challenges to the study such as gaining access to the respondents and establishing their willingness to participate; verifying clarity of questions and time taken for interviews; and that recording and note taking are appropriate. These and other areas of the process were checked during the pre-test process. It is an ethical obligation of the researcher to inform participants about the research and ensure that their consent is given. In this regard the researcher obtained permission from the University of Botswana Internal Review Board (IRB) and also from the Ministries of Social Welfare in Ibadan Oyo-state and Lagos state. This was done in fulfilment of ethical obligations and also as part of university requirements.

The pilot study was conducted in Ibadan Municipality of Oyo-state using 10 participants (as a focus group). It was carried out among enlightened and educated people with knowledge of adoption. The participants included social workers and other volunteers who were interviewed, and they also formed a focus group discussion. The pilot study was conducted with the help of 2 research assistants who facilitated the focus group discussions and the interviews by taking of notes during the process. The 2 research assistants were selected among graduate students. The researcher explained and guided them as appropriate regarding the study before using them.

There are some benefits of conducting a pilot study. First it helped the researcher to pre-test the validity and reliability of the interview instrument; second the researcher was able to determine if the research instruments are appropriate to collect authentic data for the study. From the pilot study, it was possible to modify aspects of the research instrument to avoid ambiguities where necessary, particularly with regard to framing of the questions. The researcher also used colleagues to preview the questions, to ensure that ambiguities were eliminated.

4.11 Methods of Data Analysis

4.11.1 Data management and analysis

Data collected for a research study must be properly organized, coded, analysed, and interpreted. As part of data management, the researcher organised and labelled the data collected with appropriate variables. Organizing and labelling was done in terms of date of collection, location, type of data, and contact information immediately after every interview. This enabled the researcher to recall the interviews in detail and also made it easier for identification and for quick retrieval when needed. Saldana (2013) and Miles et al (2014) recommended that data management should occur throughout the data collection phase. For proper organisation of material, the researcher transcribed the recorded oral text into written format. This was done by playing the recorded interview, listening to it, and comparing it with the drafted notes. This process was carefully repeated to ensure that no details were left out. The researcher edited and clarified information gathered during the process of in-depth interviews and focus group discussion. The transcription and verification processes were done with the help of research assistants who were involved in the data collection activity. As a team, the researcher and the assistants worked together

at this stage to obtain all data collected from all sources (interviews, focus group discussions, and documents) and compared for reliability, validity, and accuracy.

Coding and analysis. Coding is described as ‘shorthand devices to label, separate, compile, and organize data (Charmaz 1983:186). For a neat, orderly process, coding occurs in distinct and compartmentalized stages (Aurin, Heath and Howells, 2016). Coding of data enables the researcher to summarize and synthesize trends. First the researcher did pre-coding. Layder (1998) and Saldana (2013) recommend that pre-coding of data should be carried out as soon as the data are collected. As part of coding, the researcher reviewed the data and notes and highlighted key passages in the text, and attributed codes to such items as the characteristics of the participants, places, and other relevant facts. Coding was also generated for the research questions, key concepts, theories and all textual documents. Questions posed during the interviews were used to create an initial list of codes. After pre-coding, the researcher did open coding by segmenting the data into descriptive codes. This meant the data were put into segments that brought out different characteristics embedded in the data so as to differentiate ideas expressed. Concepts, relationships between the participants, actions, and meanings that emerged would also be segmented.

During the coding process, the researcher ensured that the codes were consistent with the collected data. By the third stage, the codes had broadened into categories and themes. The researcher rearranged and structured the codes hierarchically to identify categories. Categorization is the process of grouping codes under larger unifying classifications (Aurini, Heath, and Howells, 2016). Coding into categories tended to be more descriptive in nature, while themes tended to be the outcome of interpretive process

(Rossman and Ralls 2002). In the process of coding and recoding the researcher was able to identify patterns, relationships, and explanations and ensured that all these were based on the purpose of the study, research objectives and research questions. Hence throughout the coding and analysis process, the researcher had a written plan which served as a guide in what to do at a time.

4.12 Methodological issues in qualitative research

4.12.1 Translation

The participants for the in-dept interviews (see section 4.9.3 paragraph 2) comprised people who are educated, while the participants of the two focus group discussions compromise of people with some level of education. However, their levels of education differed, implying that while some respondents expressed themselves fluently in English, some used ‘Pidgin English’ which is, by nature all colloquial. The researcher and the research assistants understand both the English language and Pidgin English and was able to understand respondents in both categories’ own contributions during the interview.

4.12.2 Strengths and limitations of the methodology

Strengths: The strength of a research study lies in its validity, reliability, and authenticity. Data collected from all sources and perspectives were checked by means of triangulation. Hence, data collected from in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary analysis were combined and verified in order to produce a data set for the study. Feedback from the respondents enabled the researcher to compare her own interpretation against that of the respondents. The researcher ensured that there was rapport between the interviewer and the interviewees to ensure flexibility. Moreover, the use of research assistants offered more insight into any assumption that might be missing if data collection were to be done

by only one person. Different methods of collecting data and synthesizing them gave more understanding of the phenomenon under study and this strengthened the validity of the findings.

Limitations: Nigeria is divided into six geopolitical areas, and each consists of six states. Of the six geopolitical areas, one was chosen (i.e South West) and in this two states were selected, namely Oyo and Lagos. As a result, this study can not be generalized to the entire country. Therefore, unlike quantitative research, generalization was not made in this qualitative study due to the limited area coverage. In addition, the use of purposive sampling techniques faces some constraints such as being limited to small-scale in-depth studies which also do not allow for generalizations of the findings to a large population. The nature of the theme did not allow for in depth observation in terms of interaction between the adoptive parents and the adoptee. The researcher was not able to observe this because of the sensitivity of the issue. This is the reason why the researcher conducted interviews with people who are directly involved in adoption practices such as social workers, lawyers, children home care givers, adoption agencies, and pediatricians; and those indirectly involved in adoption practices such as teachers, policemen, community leaders, and religious leaders .

Another limitation was the challenge of making contacts with all desired participants due to their schedules of operation.

4.12.3 Ethical considerations

It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the right and the well being of the participants are protected at all times. In conducting this research, the following ethical principles were upheld.

1) Informed consent:

Before involvement of any participants in in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the researcher endeavored to explain all that would be involved, such as the subjects, the type of activity in which they would be involved, their time commitment, the nature of the study, and the fact that the study result would be used for academic purposes only. The participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary, and that they were not being forced or coerced into doing so. Therefore, participants had the right to discontinue at any point during the interview process if they so wished.

2) Confidentiality/anonymity :

Many participants did not want their identity to be known. The researcher ensured that the identity of each participant was protected. Instead of using the real names of the participants during the focus group discussions, pseudonyms were used.

Data collected were kept solely by the researcher strictly restricting any other person's access to the raw data. Recorded interviews would not be shared with any other person other than the supervisors if they so requested for it.

All information collected anonymously would be identified with any particular respondent or participant.

3) Avoidance of harm/risk: Efforts were made to conduct all interviews and focus group discussions in a safe environment where participants would not experience any form

of harm or threat, physical, psychological, emotional or otherwise. The topic under study could be sensitive to some participants particularly the adoptive parents hence the researcher was careful to ensure that the framing of questions did not uncover painful experiences or stir up unpleasant memories. Adequate information was given to the participants before the commencement of the interview concerning expectations and the subject matter. Offensive, discriminatory or unacceptable language was avoided during interviews and focus group discussions.

4) Acknowledgements- This study properly acknowledges all the work and contribution of those referenced.

5) The study maintained the highest level of objectivity in approach and presentation of findings.

4.12.4 Benefits.

According to O'Leary (2014:63-64), the benefits of ethical considerations in research include : the respondents' interests are kept in the forefront in any decision-making process; every participant are adequately protected; and equal treatment for every participant . The researcher upheld ethical principles, maintained integrity, and encouraged the subjects to participate in the research.

4.12.5 Researcher role.

The major goal of research is to produce credible new knowledge that could be trusted and relied upon by others. Therefore, the most important role of the researcher is to make this possible. In the course of this study the researcher did not allow her beliefs, feelings, experiences, opinions, and impressions to influence the research process or findings. Beliefs or opinions were not allowed to color what the respondents expressed as

their views or opinions, and how these are interpreted. Thus the researcher allowed for multiple perspectives by interviewing different categories of people, especially those connected with the issue of adoption. The researcher managed the issue of subjectivity in this study by first recognizing, appreciating, and exploring respondents' beliefs or assumptions concerning the topic under study and avoiding any judgement on any issue not understood. The researcher rather checked her interpretation with someone who was a part of the local culture so as to eliminate her own bias. Given that she is part of the society in which the study was carried out, the researcher is aware of some experiences of adoptive parents and their children. It is likely that most of these children may not be aware that they are adopted having been adopted as infants. There are negative consequences of concealing the adoption information from the adoptee as supported in this study. Moreover, answers to questions regarding how, when, and what to share were clearly identified and recommended. This is the overall goal of this research effort.

4.13 Summary.

In this chapter, methodological issues of the study have been discussed. In particular, the chapter has articulated the research methodology adopted which is qualitative, and the instruments used in collecting data which included in-depth interviews, focus group discussion, and documentary analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings based on analysis of qualitative data collected using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The findings are presented in accordance with the objectives of the study. The presentation is arranged based on sequence of objectives of the study. Specifically, the narrative views of fifteen (15) interviewees and two focus group discussions (consisting of 20 participants/discussants) are presented and analysed. The chapter highlights issues related to the problems of concealment of adoption information from an adopted child, as well as the perceptions of adoption stakeholders in sharing adoption information with the adopted child.

Furthermore, the narratives and opinions of respondents helped to explain why people conceal adoption information from their children and the effects of concealment and sharing adoption related information. The data were coded under themes based on the objectives of the study. The two focus group discussions were the Social Workers Group (SWG) and Public Perception Group (PPG) respectively. The PPG was made up of people of different walks of life.

5.1.2. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents.

Fifteen (15) respondents were involved in in-depth interviews, while twenty (20) participants constituted two focus group discussions; making a total of 35 participants. Participants in the in-depth interviews included the following adoption stakeholders as shown in table 5.1: two (2) Directors/officers in charge of child adoption in the Department of Social Work in the Ministry of Women Affairs, Youth Development and

Social Welfare; two (2) adoptive parents; two (2) lawyers ; One (1) Paediatrician from the University Teaching Hospital, Ibadan (U.C.H); one (1) child carer from a Child Care Center; two (2) lecturers, one from the Department of Social Work, University of Ibadan and the other a guidance counsellor from another University; one (1) school teacher; one (1) policeman; one (1) community leader; and one (2) religious leaders.

Table 5.1. Demographic Characteristics of participants in in-depth interviews

Type of Respondents/Professional Background	Gender Male(M) Female(F)	Marital status Married(M)	Numbers of Respondents
Social Work (Director)	M	M	1
Social Work (Director)	F	M	1
Adoptive parent	M	M	1
Adoptive parent	F	M	1
Pediatricians	M	M	1
Lawyers	M	M	2
University Lecturers/Guidance counsellor	F	M	2
Policeman	M	M	1
School teacher	F	M	1
Child care provider	F	M	1
Community leader	M	M	1
Religious leaders	M	M	2
Total	M(7);F(8)		15

As noted, the focus group discussions consisted of 20 participants (Table 5.2) forming two groups of 10 participants each. The first group involved social workers while the second

group involved different categories of adoption stakeholders in the society whose views or perceptions contributed to the study. All were purposively selected. The Social Workers' Group (SWG) was purposively selected for participation due to their level of experience in family social welfare and essentially since some of them are directly in charge of child adoption units. The second group identified as the Public Perception Group (PPG) involved adoption stakeholders of standing in society who were purposively selected in order to understand society's perceptions on the theme of this study. A summary of the demographic characteristics of respondents in the Social Workers Group (SWG) and Public Perception Group (PPG) is represented in table 5.2 below.

Table. 5.2 Demographic Characteristics of participants in Focus Group Discussion.

Professional Background	Gender	Marital Status	No. of respondents	Identification
Social Work	F	M	6	Social Workers group (SWG)
Social Work	M	M	4	Social Workers Group (SWG)
Public Service	F	M	6	Public Perception Group (PPG)
Public Service	M	M	4	Public Perception Group (PPG)
Total			20	

All the participants in this category of the study sample were married individuals. In one of the focus groups there were two couple-participants each (i.e. husbands and their wives were together as participants). In the groups consisting of 10 participants each, there were more women than men.

Distribution of Participants by Age.

The age of the participants for both the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussions ranged from 40 -70 years. This information is shown in Table 5.3

Table 5.3. Distribution of participants by age

Ages	30 - 39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+	Total
No.	10	15	5	4	1	35

Distribution of Participants by Geographic location

The study focused on the states of Lagos and Oyo in Western Nigeria. Reasons for the choice of these states were already discussed in section 4.9.1. However, the participants although resident in Lagos and Oyo states hailed from different states across the country including Oyo, Ondo, Oshun, Lagos, Ekiti, Ogun, Anabra and Imo. Participants’ occupation included working for government, NGOs, or self employed. English was the main medium of communication as all participants could speak and write in English. A summary of the distribution of participants by state is shown in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4. Distribution of participants by state

State	Lagos state	Oyo state	Total
No of participants	17	18	35

5.1.3 Perceptions on sharing Adoption Information

The first objective of the study sought to “Examine factors related to concealing adoption information from adoptees”. Themes and subthemes emerging from this objective included the following:

Themes and subthemes:

- (i) Societal/ Community factors
 - Perceptions of the society toward adoption,
 - Societal views on rearing adopted child
- (ii) Cultural factors
 - Cultural values relating to rearing adopted children
 - Cultural beliefs on communal values
- (iii) Individual adopter concerns
 - Adopters fears and misconceptions
 - Unavailability of information from adoption agencies
- (iv) Confidentiality of the adoption process and practices.

The second objective sought to ‘identify possible implications of concealing adoption related information from adoptees’. Under this objective the following themes and subthemes emerged :

- (i) Psychological implications
 - Emotional problems
- (ii) Social implications.
 - Withdrawal syndrome
 - Loss of self-esteem

The third objective sought to “explore perceptions of the participants on the issue of sharing adoption related information with adoptees”. The themes and sub-themes emerging from this objective included:

- (i) Perceptions of society relating to sharing of adoption information with adoptees
- (ii) Possible ways of sharing adoption information with adoptees.
 - When to share adoption information with adoptees
 - How to share adoption information with adoptees
 - What adoption information to be shared
- (iii) The roles of the social worker in the sharing of adoption information.

The fourth objective sought to “examine the challenges confronting adopters and adoptees in the sharing of adoption information with the adoptees”. The themes of this objective were:

- (i) The effect of sharing adoption information with adoptees on the adoptees.
- (ii) The effect of sharing adoption information with adoptees on adoptive parents.

Table 5.5 provides a summary of key themes and sub-themes of this study, consistent with the study objectives.

Table 5.5. Summary of Themes and Subthemes

Objective	Themes	Subthemes
1. To examine factors related to concealing adoption information from adoptees.	1) Societal/Community factors	a. Perceptions of the society towards adoption b. Societal views on rearing adopted children
	2) Cultural factors	a. Cultural values relating to rearing adopted children. b. Cultural beliefs on communal values.
	3) Individual factors	a. Adopters fears and misconceptions b. Unavailability of information about the adoption from adoption agencies.
	4) Confidentiality of the adoption process.	
2. To identify the possible implications of concealing adoption information from the adoptee	1) Psychological implications	a. Emotional problems
	2) Social implications	a. Withdrawal syndrome b. Loss of self-esteem
3) To explore the perceptions of the participants on the possibilities of sharing adoption information with adoptees.	1) Perceptions of society relating to sharing adoption information with adoptees.	
	2) Possible ways of sharing adoption information with adoptees.	a. When to share adoption information with adoptees. b. How to share adoption information with adoptees c. What adoption information to be shared.
	3) The roles of social workers in sharing of adoption information with adoptees.	
4. To examine the challenges of sharing adoption information with adoptees.	1) The effect of sharing adoption information on adoptees. 2) The effect of sharing adoption information with adoptees on adoptive parents.	

52. OBJECTIVE 1: Factors related to concealing adoption information from the adoptee in Nigeria.

The first objective sought to establish factors related to concealing adoption information from the adoptee. In other words, the researcher sought to find out what motivated Nigerians adopters to conceal adoption information from adoptees? In responding to objective 1, a number of themes emerged from the study findings, and these were: societal and community factors; cultural factors; individual adopter factors and factors around confidentiality of the process and practice of adoption. Findings relating to each of these themes are unpacked in the next few paragraphs.

a) Societal and community factors

One factor relating to concealing adoption information from adoptees which emerged from the study related to what can be summarized as societal and community factors. From the study findings, a couple of sub-themes could be discerned from the theme of societal and community factors viz: Perceptions of society towards adoption; and societal views on rearing an adopted child. Let us consider each of the two sub-themes in turn.

- ***Perceptions of society towards adoption***

One sub-theme to emerge regarding societal and community factors related to perceptions of society towards child adoption. The study, in this regard, found that adoption was perceived as a taboo in Nigerian society, and the society also often showed negative attitudes and made negative comments on adopters, and adoptees. Respondents explained that for instance, the adopter is labelled as an irresponsible person, while the adoptee is labelled a bastard. These findings emerged from the Social Workers focus group respondents, the Public Perception focus group respondents and the in-depth interviews

with some key adoption stakeholders. The Social Workers focus group noted that it is a taboo in society for one to adopt a child who is not related by blood and whose background is not known. Furthermore, those who adopt were regarded as irresponsible people who are not worthy to be given responsibility in the community and the society at large. The adoptee is also labelled as a bastard in society. This observation is buttressed by the following remark which was made by a respondent from in-depth interview:

“In our society it is not seen as a right to adopt a child who does not belong to you by blood (relation). A family that adopts is seen as not worthy to be given responsibility in the community. In our society a child that is adopted is labeled as a bastard and stranger in the family and may not be welcomed by the extended family”.

Similarly, the Public Perception Group noted that the negative construct of society towards those who adopt contribute to concealing adoption information from the adoptee, the community and the society. This is evidenced by a remark made by a respondent from the in-depth interviews, who noted:

“It is the attitude of the society towards those who adopt that makes some adopters to hide the information of adoption from the adoptee even from the society. Sometimes some adopters relocate to a new area to live where no one may know them”.

In line with societal perceptions, a Lawyer during in-depth interviews concurred and further stated:

“In a society or community where adoption is not seen as good, normal and legal, the adopters tend to conceal the information of adoption from the child and from the society”

- ***Societal views on rearing adopted children.***

Another sub-theme to emerge regarding societal and community factors related to societal views on rearing adopted children. The study, in this regard, found out that rearing adopted children is commonly viewed by Nigerian society as rearing a bastard (child) as he/she does not belong to the family by blood. The common expression by respondents in the Public Perception focus group was that an adopted child could become ‘abnormal’ in the course of staying with the new family. This contention was corroborated by a respondent from the indepth interviews who said:

“An adopted child is labelled as a stranger, a bastard and might grow up with deviant behavior such as being an imbecile, or a thief.”

The Social Workers focus group added that according to Nigerian societal beliefs, an adopted child may not be reckoned with in the community as well as the wider society. One of them had this to say:

“In some communities, adopted children do not inherit anything as they are not given shares of the communal properties because they are not counted as an original breed of the community.”

A Paediatrician (respondent) during an in-depth interview, described Nigerian societal views on rearing an adopted child as being surrounded with lots of myths. According to him,

“In society, when you don’t have biological children, people advance lots of myths to explain why; and when a child is not a biological child, and also not related by blood, this has many connotations in the community or in the society’s view. The negative connotations attached to rearing an adoptee force many adopters to relocate to new residential locations in order to hide the information about the adoption from both the child and the community.”

b) Cultural factors.

A second factor regarding concealing adoption information from the adoptee related to cultural issues. Indeed, the question asked was : what cultural factors, if any, might explain the tendency to conceal adoption information from adoptees? It was established from the study findings that cultural factors had two emerging issues : one, values relating to rearing of adopted children; and two, Nigerian cultural beliefs on communal values. The two sub-themes are discussed below:

- ***Cultural values relating to rearing of adopted children.***

One sub-theme relating to cultural factors had to do with considering cultural values relating to rearing of adopted children. To this end, it emerged from the study findings that in Nigerian society, it is taboo to adopt and rear a child who is not related by blood. According to the views of a community leader expressed in a personal interview, adopting a child unrelated to one by blood can easily destroy a family lineage. He elaborated:

“In my culture, child adoption is very rare, because of the cultural belief that adopted children are bastards and could destroy family lineage or empire that had already been built. For this reason, those who dare to adopt conceal the information.”

From the Social Workers focus group respondents, it emerged that culturally, the idea of adoption was not supported in Nigerian society, thus, forcing adopters to conceal such information. A respondent from an in-depth interview corroborated this contention as follows:

“There is no adverse effect for concealing adoption information because the culture permits it.”

Similarly from the Public Perception group respondents it emerged that cultural values relating to rearing adopted children did not favour the practice. The group unianimously concluded that

Nigerian culture held a negative attitude towards child adoption.

- ***Cultural beliefs on communal values.***

Another sub-theme under cultural factors, related to investigating cultural beliefs on communal values. In this regard the study found out that rearing of children generally is considered a communal effort that is, children are jointly reared by biological parents, the extended family and indeed even the community. It was explained that this belief is entrenched and highly valued in the cultural settings of various communities in Nigeria. Societal perceptions in this respect were that the adoptee is a stranger to the family and the community, therefore, he or she was not entitled to any inheritance given to children born in the family and the community.

As remarked by a discussant in the Public Perception focus group,

“In our culture a child that is adopted is labelled a bastard and stranger in the family, and may not be welcomed by the extended family.” “In some cultures, when

sharing something among children in the community, a child that is adopted in that community is not giving anything because he/she was not born in the community.”

In fact, a considerable number of respondents from the Social Workers focus group identified cultural values as a major problem affecting the rearing of adopted children in the society.

This was supported by a respondent in an in-depth interview who stated that:

“Our culture is the problem, our cultural values affect us a lot.”

c) Individual adopter factors (or concerns).

A third factor related to concealing adoption information from the adoptee had to do with issues that can be described as ‘individual adopter factors’ (or concerns). This study sought to understand (apart from societal/cultural factors) what individual factors, or concerns, if any, might explain the tendency to conceal adoption information from adoptees. It emerged from the study findings that the theme of individual adopters’ factors produced a couple of emerging sub-themes, namely adopters’ fears and misconceptions, and scarcity of information on adoption from adoption agencies. In the next couple of paragraphs, we consider each of the two sub-themes.

- ***Adopters’ fears and misconceptions.***

One of the two sub-themes to emerge pertaining to individual adopters’ factors related to fears and misconceptions held by some adopters about the whole issue. According to the findings of the study, individual adopters tended to conceal adoption information from adoptees, because of fear of being stigmatized, mocked ridiculed by community/society (if the adoption becomes known), and the fear of the adoption arrangement being disrupted in the future. In addition, the findings revealed that individual adopters may develop some

misconceptions about the adoptee such as the possibility that one day the adoptee might becoming ‘abnormal’ (ie mentally disturbed) healthwise, and develop abnormal behaviour (deviant behaviour) . An adoption stakeholder during in-depth interviews explained it this way:

“Fear of the unknown future of the adoption arrangement such as - what if the adoptee gets to know about the adoption, what action would he/she take ?; what if the adoptee turns to deviant behavior, what impact would this have on the family?, etc.”

It was gathered from the Social Workers focus group respondents that individual adopters tended to conceal adoption information from the adoptee for fear of what people would say should they get know of the adoption. This observation was corroborated by one respondent in the in-depth interviews who said:

“Some adopters conceal adoption information for fear of being stigmatized and mocked by the society.”

In the same vein, it emerged from the Public Perception focus group that individual adopters at times concealed adoption information because they did not want to be known as adopters. One respondent, a Lawyer during an in-depth interview, had this to say:

“Individual adopters choose to conceal adoption information from their children for their self defense; that is, they do not want people to see them as adoptive parents but rather as biological parents of their children.”

Furthermore, a Guidance Counsellor who participated an in-depth interview, explained that adoptive parents concealed adoption information for security reasons. She highlighted that

if adoption information is disclosed the adopted child would be treated as a stranger in the family, and may be stigmatized. She further explained:

“In my view, adoptive parents conceal adoption information from adoptees for security purposes: in order not to lose the child, and for the child to be free in the family and not feel like a stranger.”

- ***Unavailability of information on adoption from adoption agencies.***

A second sub-theme to emerge pertaining to individual adopter factors related to scarcity of information on adoption, from adoption agencies. It emerged from the study findings that the adoption agencies did not routinely give adoptive parents information on adoptees background; as the agencies do not support the idea of sharing adoption information with adoptees. It emerged that the agencies only counselled adoptive parents to take good care of adoptees, and to treat them as their own biological children. Moreover, it was explained, in most cases, the agencies did not have any information on the adoptee especially if he/she had been abandoned by the biological parent.

The Social Workers focus group observed that there was no need to share as much adoption information as possible with adoptive parents. One discussant in the group said:

“We do not support the disclosure of adoption information to the child or to adoptive parents by agencies as this may not be necessary.”

Similarly, respondents in the Public Perception group corroborated this observation and further noted that adoptive parents hid under the fact that adoption agencies did not give information about adoptees, so they (the parents) concealed from the child information about his/her adoption status. One respondent explained:

“The reason why adopters choose to conceal adoption information from adoptees is because of the adoptees unknown background. For instance, no one would want to be identified with a baby abandoned in the bush or picked from a refuse bin.”

d) Confidentiality factors.

A fourth factor relating to issues around concealment of adoption information from adoptees had to do with the whole question of confidentiality i.e confidentiality of the process and practice of adoption. The idea in asking the question was to try and understand what concerns there might be regarding the principle of confidentiality, and how this might influence the tendency to conceal adoption information from adoptees. The study established that confidentiality of the adoption process was enforced by most agencies and this influenced the decision to conceal adoption information from the adoptee. The Social Workers focus group noted that confidentiality was central to their work, and hence they passionately enforced it. One in-depth interview respondent put it more succinctly when he remarked:

“Confidentiality is the ethics of adoption practice in Nigeria.”

The respondents further emphasized that the idea of confidentiality was to hide the adoption from the public, and ultimately from the adoptee. One respondent explained it this way:

“Just because of the confidentiality involved in the adoption process, we always want to do it the way our clients want it to be done, because of the circumstances surrounding them which is to be free from public ridicule and shame as adopters.”

Similarly, respondents in the Public Perception focus group remarked that adoptive parents kept the adoption confidential because they did not want neighbours to know they had

adopted a child, but for the neighbours to see them as biological parents. As noted by another respondent:

“Adopters keep the adoption process confidential, so they can conceal information about the adoption because they are ashamed of their inability to have biological children”

From a legal point of view, a Lawyer during in-depth interviews, explained that adoption by its very nature is considered confidential in Nigeria; therefore confidentiality is part of the adoption law. He added:

“The law presumes that the child would not know anything about the adoption in his/her life. This is why we have all the rules and regulations in the procedures of adoption practice in Nigeria.”

53. OBJECTIVE 2: Possible implications of concealing adoption information from adoptees in Nigeria.

The second objective of the study sought to establish the possible implications of concealing adoption information from adoptees. In responding to objective 2, two themes emerged from the study findings, and these were: psychological implications, and social implications. Findings relating to each of these two themes are considered in the next few paragraphs.

a) Psychological implications.

An overriding issue to emerge regarding psychological implications of concealing adoption information from adoptees may be summarized as emotional problems. The study, in this regard found out that emotional problems such as adoptees getting depressed,

being demoralized, being devastated, being traumatized and manifesting violent behaviours on hearing about their adoption status, were dominant occurrences in such circumstances.

One of the respondents explained thus:

“If the child gets to know that his/her parents hid from him/her information about his/her adoption, he/she can be depressed, demoralized, and devastated. The wagging tongues of some third parties in the neighbourhood who might constantly remind the child that the parents are not his/her biological parents could have psychological effects on the child. In fact, the child might even think that everybody is talking about him/her; as a result he/she might be depressed and devastated”.

On this note, respondents from the Social Workers group described the possible emotional reactions of adoptees upon knowing later of their concealed adoption information as hurtful, heart breaking, reactions which might negatively affect the relationship between the adoptee and the adoptive parents. A guidance counsellor during in-depth interviews, in support of this contention, also noted that:

“The information will be received as a shock to the child, and he/she might feel very badly hurt, which could bring about a strained relationship, where the adoptee no longer trusts the parents for not telling him/her of his/her adoption status”.

Similarly, emerging from the Public Perception focus group was the observation that the adoptee could be traumatized, and he/she might become violent in the family if adoption information is concealed and he/she gets to know about it later in life from a third party.

As explained by one respondent during an in-depth interview:

“The child could be traumatized on hearing that the adoptive parents are not his/her biological parents. The initial thought could further develop into a depressive mood where the adoptee might even think of committing suicide. At first, the child might not believe, however, due to repeated confrontation with the same information, the child might recurse to confronting the adoptive parents about his/her adoptive status, which could lead to violent behaviours in the attempt to know his/her biological parents”.

A Police Officer in an indepth interview explained how concealment of adoption information can also affect the adoptive parents. According to him:

“The parents who conceal adoption information from the adoptee may face uncertainties in the future both for the child and for themselves. For example, such parents may be gripped with fear and anxiety, and many unanswered questions may flood them such as: how would it be, if the child gets to know of his/her adoption? What would be the likely reactions from the child? Would the child leave them, reject the adoptive parents? etc”

Another respondent buttressed the police officer’s point of view when she narrated an experience which she witnessed as follows:

“It is not good to conceal information of adoption from the child because it could be dangerous and have adverse effects on the child. There was a case of a couple who adopted a girl and they lived in the United Kingdom. Along the way, the father died. The dead body of the father was brought to Nigeria for burial. It was during their stay in Nigeria for the burial that she (adoptee) got to know that it was concealed from her that she was an adopted child of the family. The adoptive

mother happened to be the second wife of the adoptive father. The first wife had grown up biological children of her own for the man; the adopted girl happened to be a grown-up girl by this time and had never been informed about her adoption. Before this time she was doing well in the family. But when she heard about her adoption, she became devastated and started taking drugs, which behaviour she had not exhibited before. In my opinion, if the child had been told early while they were still in the UK even before the adopted father died, her case might not have resulted in taking drugs”.

The study also sought the opinion of one respondent who had actually adopted a child. The adopter, during an in-depth interview, opined that:

“Those who adopt other people’s children must realize that they cannot conceal the information forever. When the truth is told or known especially by the adoptee it can be devastating. I was told of a case of a boy in a football team, who scored a goal for his team. Another person from the opponent team then said, ‘If it was not for this bastard boy we would have won the match.’ The boy referred to as bastard then asked the person who called him bastard. ‘Why do you call me bastard? The reply he got was that those you called your parents, whom you are living with are not your real parent. This boy became worried, troubled and confused. This happened because his parents had hidden from him the fact that he was adopted”.

Another respondent, a teacher had this to say:

“. There was a case of a girl adopted but the information was kept from her, she never knew about her being adopted. One day, she was being abused by her colleagues that she was a bastard. Later she went home to ask her mother,

'somebody told me that you are not my mother; is it true?' The mother said 'don't mind them I am your mother. But the girl did not stop there, she continued her investigation. She began to see that there was something to this. The parent began to fear that the girl had been told. Later one day in the middle of the night she woke her mother up asking her to tell her the truth about who her biological mother was? 'I have done my research and realized that you have not told me the truth'. The mother burst into tears. Apparently the adoptive mother had concealed the adoption information, so that the child would not be affected negatively and the love between them would not be strained. The girl eventually left the family''.

b) Social implications

The second sub-theme to emerge pertaining to possible impact of concealing adoption information from adoptees related to social implications. The study established that two sub-themes can be discerned from the theme of social implications, namely, withdrawal syndrome and loss of self- esteem.

- ***Withdrawal syndrome***

One subtheme to emerge regarding the possible social implications of concealing adoption information from adoptees related to what can be described as withdrawal syndrome. The study in this regard, found out that adoptees can withdraw from people around them on hearing of their adoption status. It was explained that, this could lead to disruption of the adoption process because the child might decide to abandon the adoptive family in search of his/her biological parents. Emerging from the Social Workers focus group discussion was an observation that the relationship between the adoptee and adoptive parents might become strained if he/she got to know about the adoption from a third party. It was

further noted this also might lead to mistrust as the adoptee might no longer trust the adoptive parents for hiding information about his/her adoption status. Respondents from the Public Perception focus group added that some adoptees might go ahead to challenge their adoptive parents for information on the whereabouts of their biological parents, and if no information is given, they might run away from the home. One respondent had this to say:

“Adoptees might challenge adoptive parents, demanding for information about their biological parents: I was told that you are not my biological parents, please where and how can I locate my biological parents? Some adolescent adoptees might plan to run away from home”.

A child carer who participated in the indepth interviews however indicated that not all adoptees will develop negative reactions upon hearing news of their adoptive status. Some actually remain calm and retain a positive demeanor. She explained this as follows:

“At times, an adoptee may have positive thinking about the adoption. For instance, he or she may think that the reason he/she was not told about the adoption may be because of the love of the adoptive parents, in order not to hurt his/her feelings, and so that he/she does not feel like not belonging to the family”.

Thus, the observation from this respondent was that not all adoptees react negatively upon learning of their adoption status. However for the majority, negative reactions are the order of the day, according to the respondents.

- ***Loss of self esteem.***

A second sub-theme regarding the possible social implications of concealing adoption information from the adoptee related to loss of self-esteem. The study findings revealed

that the adoptee may lose his/her self esteem when he/she gets information from peers that he/she is not a biological child of his/her parents. One respondent, a school teacher said :

“The child may feel inferior in the midst of other children when he/she considers other children living with their biological parents”

Respondents from the Social Workers focus discussion group also indicated that peers uncharitable attitude towards adoptees tended to affect their social interactive life, which in turn negatively affected the adoptees self-esteem. This observation was corroborated by one respondent who noted :

“In the case of social interaction between adoptees and peer groups, the uncharitable attitudes of peers such as negative labels, yelling, mocking, ridicule , name calling or even isolating an adoptee made them feel uncomfortable and inferior among peers. At other times, peers over-sympathize and empathize with adoptees for not knowing and living with their biological parents. This no doubt creates inferiority complex in adoptees”.

The Public Perception focus group discussion shared the view that the life of adoptees is often consciously dominated by what people around them think and speak of them, which definitely affects their social life. This contention was corroborated by one respondent who said:

“The social life of adoptees is often affected by what their peers in the neighbourhood say to them. Most times the comments of peers are meant to inform the adoptee that he/she is not a biological child of the parents, and this might make the adoptee confused, depressed and demoralized”.

Interestingly, the Adopter referred to earlier, who participated in an in-depth interview, concurred with the above contention and further stated that:

“The adoptee feels isolated from the peers when he/she thinks of himself/herself as being an adopted child as informed by the peers.

Thus this possible social implication was corroborated by someone with first hand experience as an adopter.

54. OBJECTIVE 3: Possibilities of sharing adoption information with adoptees in Nigeria.

The third objective of the study sought to establish the possible ways of sharing adoption information with adoptees in Nigeria. In responding to questions around this objective, three sub-themes emerged from the study findings. These were: Perceptions of society relating to sharing adoption information with adoptees, Possible ways of sharing adoption information with adoptees, and the Roles of social workers in the sharing of adoption information with adoptees. Findings relating to each of these themes are discussed in the next paragraphs.

a) Perceptions of society relating to sharing adoption information with adoptees.

One sub-theme relating to possible ways of sharing of adoption information with adoptees was to do with perceptions of society relating to sharing of adoption information with adoptees. The study findings emerged in two folds: One, that adoption information should be shared with adoptees, and two, that adoption information should not be shared with adoptees. There were more respondents in support of sharing adoption information with adoptees, than those who said the information should not be shared. It emerged from the

findings of the study that respondents who felt that adoption information be shared with adoptees based their reason on the fact that sharing the information would help the emotional stability and early adjustment of adoptees. Respondents from the Social Workers focus group noted that though it is good to let an adoptee know about his/her adoption status, this is not a common practice in Nigerian society. One respondent corroborated this when she noted:

“Naturally, there is no information that is secret. If there is need, the parent should tell the child. However, adoptive parents could seek guidance from social workers”.

Another respondent (a social work practitioner) corroborated this as follow:

“Although we do not encourage disclosure of adoption information to adoptees, however, we always advice adopters to let us know when they need to tell the adoptees about the adoption as confidentiality is the ethics of the adoption practice in Nigerian society”

A respondent who participated in in-depth interview had this to say:

“ You can adopt a child legally, and let the child know that he/she was adopted so that the child does not get the information from a third party outside”.

It emerged from the Public Perception discussion group that their consensus view was that telling an adoptee about his/her adoption helps him/her get to know about the adoption from the parents and thus helps him/her to get adjusted to the family. This would also help the child not to be shocked upon hearing the information from a third party. In support of

this, one respondent, a Guidance Counsellor who participated in an in-depth interview said:

“It is advisable that adoptive parents disclose adoption information to their adopted children before they get to know of the information from outsiders. No matter how long it is concealed, adoptees will get to know one day. Therefore, it behoves adoptive parents to share the information with adoptees early”.

Another respondent, a Lecturer in the Department of Social Work during in-depth interviews remarked as follows:

“For emotional stability, it is important that the adoptee be informed about his/her adoption status as early as possible to enable him/her adjust easily”.

The adopter referred to earlier, during indepth interview was of the opinion that sharing adoption information with adoptees would build and cement the relationship between them and their adoptive parents. In her words, she stated as follows:

“As an adopter, I prefer to share with my child stories about his adoption and this has helped our relationship in addiotn to the love and care bestowed upon him”

Another adopter spoke of the benefits of sharing information with adoptees, emphasizing that this could affect the adoption positively. She noted that:

“It is good to share adoption information with the adoptee as this could inspire the adoptee to help others who may be in his/her shoes; this will also add value to the life of the adoptee”.

A few respondents felt that adoption information should not be shared with adoptees. This set of respondents based their reason on the fact that sharing the information might

bring about a separation between the child and the adoptive parents. In this regard, a religious leader in an in-depth interview explained as follows:

“An adoptee should not be treated as a stranger in the family. This implies that, adopters should not let the child know that he/she was adopted, so that he/she would have a sense of belonging to the family, and not feel like being a stranger in the family. The adoptee should be treated as a biological child, and should not be exposed to the public as an adoptee, but rather as a biological child of the family”.

A social welfare officer who participated in in-depth interviews had this to say:

“I do not think it is necessary to tell the child about his/her adoption status because it may create problems for the child and the parents. If the child is told about the adoption, he/she might react negatively. For instance, he/she might react violently demanding to know about his/her biological parents”.

Thus, it emerged that the possibility of sharing adoption information depended on societal views.

b) Possible ways of sharing adoption information with adoptees.

The second theme emerging from sharing adoption information with adoptees related to possible ways of sharing the information. The study findings showed that a number of sub-themes can be discerned from this theme viz: When to share adoption information with adoptees about their adoption; How to share adoption information with adoptees about their adoption; and What adoption information to share with adoptees about their adoption. Each of these sub-themes are discussed below.

- *When to share adoption information with adoptees about their adoption.*

The first sub-theme to emerge regarding the possible ways of sharing adoption information with adoptees related to “When” to share the information. The study in this regard found out that most respondents were of the view that adoptees could be told of their adoption status as early as at 3 years of age, or 7 years of age or the latest 10 years of age. A few respondents noted that adoptees could be told of their adoptive status when they reach adolescence age or when they are 18 years of age.

Various reasons were adduced for the various recommended ages at which sharing of adoptive information could commence. For instance, according to some respondents, telling the adoptee early will help him/her grow and adjust with his/her adoptive status. Releasing the information to an adoptee at adult age assumes that the adoptee is mature enough to understand what adoption is, and why he/she was adopted. One respondent noted as follows:

“Early disclosure of adoption information with adoptees is good because it will help the adoptee grow up with the knowledge and will not react negatively when he/she gets the information from a third party”.

Another respondent added:

“An appropriate time to tell the adoptee is when he/she is 18 years old. At this age the adoptee is considered mature and able to understand what adoption is and why he/she was adopted”.

From the perspective of the Social Workers discussion group, findings indicated that there is need for adoptive parents to be sensitive to the timing of age of sharing adoption information with adoptees. They noted that adoptive parents should share adoption

information with adoptees when they can understand what adoption is about, and be able to receive the information. One respondent, a guidance counsellor said:

“An adoptive parent needs to be sensitive to adoptee temperament and emotion. It is important to look for an atmosphere or an event that would aid the sharing of the information in a way the adoptee can understand and accept the information”.

The Public Perception discussion group observed showed that adoptees should be informed of their adoption status at adolescent age when they (adoptees) are considered mature enough to understand the concept of adoption. This was supported by a Lecturer, who said:

“It is good to inform the adoptee of his/her adoption at adolescent age when the child is conscious and mature enough to understand adoption. For instance, informing the adoptee at secondary school age is good enough, rather than doing it when he/she becomes an adult. Sharing the information at adult age may be too late, and the information may be irrelevant to the child at that age”.

A child care giver, during indepth interview explained that the purpose for informing the adoptee of his/her adoption early in life is to avoid a situation where the adoptee gets the information from a third party, something that could cause embarrassment to the adoptee. According to this respondent:

“I support the idea of informing the adoptee about his/her adoption early in order to avoid the negative consequences (emotional and psychological) which could follow as a result of the adoptee being informed by a third party within the neighbourhood, school environment or the wider society”.

- *How to share adoption information with adoptees about their adoption.*

The second sub-theme to emerge regarding the possible ways of sharing adoption information with adoptees related to “How to” share the information. Findings relating to this sub-theme revealed a number of suggested necessary steps to take when sharing such sensitive information. According to respondents, this should begin with having a good cordial relationship with the child from the outset; disclosing the information with love; use of appropriate adoption story and giving opportunity for the adoptee to contribute to the story before relating it to the adoptee’s adoption case. The need for an adoptive mother to let the adoptee know that she is the child’s parent, even though the adoptee is not from her tummy was also emphasized by respondents. One respondent suggested the following strategy:

“Tell the child in love that you are his/her parent and he/she is your child, but you are not the one who gave birth to him/her. By the time you explained to him/her in love, whenever he/she hears something relating to his/her adoption outside it won’t be strange, and his/her answer to the outsider will be yes my mummy had already told me”

The Social Workers discussion group indicated that how one tells the adoptee about his/her adoption status depended to a large extent on the existing relationship between the parents and the child. This view was corroborated by one respondent during in-depth interview. She said:

“Your relationship with the child matters. If there is a cordial relationship of love and care between the child and the adoptive parents, it will be very easy to share

information about the adoption with the adoptee. Also, and most importantly adoptive parents need wisdom to share adoption information with the adoptees”.

The Public Perception discussion group admonished that adoptive parents ought to give adoptees solid assurance that they, as parents would always be there for them. A respondent stated thus:

“It is better to carry the child along, you can share a story, listen to the contribution of the child. Then let the child know that you are his/her parent, although not from your tummy. Let him/her know how you love and care for him/her and that you will continue to love and care for him/her”.

A Guidance Counsellor remarked during an indepth interview that the feelings of the adoptee must be put into consideration when sharing sensitive adoption information, and that the sharing of information must be done in a manner that will not hurt the adoptee. The Counsellor said:

“Sharing of adoption information with the child should be handled in a way the child will feel honoured and proud and nobody will be hurt. This needs patience and understanding”.

- ***What adoption information to be shared with adoptees.***

The third sub-theme that emerged from possible ways of sharing adoption information with adoptees related to “What” information to share with adoptees. The study found that what to share with the adoptee depended on the age of the child at the time of sharing the information with him/her as well as the existing environment. In this regard, respondents admonished that care must be taken not to tell the child what would demoralize him/her.

According to a Lawyer, who was one of the respondents:

“Whatever the adopter chooses to reveal to the child about his/her status, you are not to reveal everything to the child at the same time. The age of the child must be first considered as you decide what is to be revealed”

Findings from the Social Workers discussion group revealed that adoptive parents must be careful in terms of their choice of words to use when communicating adoption information with an adoptee. One respondent, a Social Worker the following advised directed at parents:

“Mind what you say to the child. Don’t just say that you picked the child from the gutter, or from a public place where he/she was abandoned”

However, a number of respondents held a different view from what the Social Workers group said above. For instance, the Public Perception group stated that adoptive parents must tell the adoptee how exactly he/she was adopted and the circumstances surrounding the adoption. One respondent noted that this is possible. He explained:

“If there is a good relationship between the parent and the child, let the child know how he was adopted, where he was picked from, that alone can make the child be sensible. For instance, ‘your mother threw you away, you were picked and taken to hospital but I decided to take care of you’. That alone can make the child appreciate you and will stick to you all the days of his/her life”.

One of the adopters posited that it is not good to start telling the adoption story from how the child was abandoned and picked up for adoption. The story should rather start from a gentle explanation. She went on to state that:

“There is no need to tell the child how she was abandoned on the road, in a place. This may damage his/her self esteem. I would rather start the story from how I got

her from the hospital among other children under the care of a nurse; how I fell in love with her on seeing her for the first time , and I decided to adopt her as part of my family”.

c) The Role of Social Workers in sharing adoption information with adoptees.

The third theme to emerge from possibility of sharing adoption information with adoptees related to the role Social Workers could play in the sharing of adoption information with adoptees. Findings of this study revealed that Social Workers play a crucial role in providing counselling services to adoptive parents, organizing seminars and workshops for adopters and the provision of welfare services to adoptive families. Hence, they could play an important role if a decision is taken to share adoptive information with adoptees. According to a University Lecturer who participated in indepth interview:

“Social Workers are professionals that should help in this area. It is part of their role in provision of psychosocial services. If the adopter is not bold enough, the social worker can be involved in sharing adoption information with the adoptee. That is, sharing of information could be done in the presence of the adopter and the social worker. I believe social workers are educated to handle the sharing of information with adoptees. In addition, social workers through the social welfare office could organize seminars and workshops for adopters to prepare them for their new roles as adoptive parents, and especially in the task of sharing adoption information with adoptees ”

Respondents from the Social Workers group discussion concurred with the view that it is the duty of Social Workers to help adopters who have challenges in sharing adoption information with adoptees. Respondents from indepth interviews too held a similar view.

In fact some Social Workers confirmed they were already playing this role. One respondent, a Social Worker said:

“If it is necessary to share the information of the child’s adoption with him/her we normally tell adopters to let us know when the need arises. What we mean by this is that if the child is putting pressure on the parent as a result of what he/she has heard from an outsider then there will be need to tell the child”.

The Public Perception discussion group also echoed the position that Social Workers ought to intervene when need be, in the event adoptive information is to be shared with the adoptees. This view was also shared by some in the in-depth interviews group. One respondent said:

“If the adopter is not bold enough, Social Workers can be involved in sharing adoption information with the adoptee. This could be done by inviting the social worker in the presence of the adoptee and the adopter, and the social worker could use his/her expertise to handle the situation. We believe that Social Workers are well placed and have expertise to handle the sharing of adoption information with adoptees, as they are experts in adoption issues”.

5.5 OBJECTIVE 4: Challenges associated with sharing adoption information with adoptees.

The fourth objective sought to establish likely challenges confronting adopters in the sharing of adoption information with adoptees. In responding to this question, two sub-themes emerged from the study findings and these were: “the possible effects of sharing adoption information on adoptees, and the possible effects of sharing adoption information

on adoptive parents “. Findings on each of these sub-themes are discussed in the next few paragraphs.

a) Possible effects of sharing adoption information on the adoptees

The likely effects of sharing adoption information with adoptees related to such factors as likely impact of divulging the adoptive information on adoptees, upon being informed of their adoptive status. According to respondents, adoptees could easily become emotionally and psychologically affected upon being informed about their adoptive status. One speculation was that the adoptee was likely to want to know about his/her biological parents, how he/she ended up with the adoptive family, and how he/she could locate the biological parents. One respondent explained this further:

“The first set of questions the child may ask on hearing of his/her adoption are: “Who are my parents? Where are they? How can I locate them?”. The parent (adopter) must be prepared to give hopeful answers to the child’s questions without telling the child a lie. This needs wisdom and love”.

Respondents from the Social Workers group discussion revealed that the possible effects of sharing adoption information with adoptees depended inter alia, on the temperament of the child at the time of sharing the adoption information with him/her. It was further explained that some adoptees might receive the information with shock, and turn wild, while others might receive the information and surely resign to it as their fate and proceed to adjust to life depending on their age and maturity. One respondent, a social work practitioner concurred and had this to say about the issue:

“It depends on the personality of the child, some children may go wild, when they are told of their adoption, while others may take it as their fate. It also depends on

the adopter, and the time the child is told. If the child is told late in life, he/she may feel that the adoptive parent has not done well by keeping such information all these years”.

According to the Public Perception focus group discussion, some adoptees could begin to display withdrawal symptoms, resulting in them keeping away from everybody and manifest ill feelings towards the unknown biological parents. A respondent from the indepth interviews group concurred and added :

“There may be initial discontinuity; that is the child may withdraw from everybody connected to him/her, especially in his/her adoptive family and the child may be bitter”.

Another respondent, also from the indepth interviews group corroborated this view by adding:

“The child may feel bad about his/her birth parent who dumped him/her and care less about his/her life. Nevertheless, the child will have a strong desire to know his/her birth parent”.

However, among the Social Workers group, few of the respondents had a different view, noting that some adoptees may in fact manifest positive reactions on being informed of their adoptive status. This position was also shared by a few in the in-depth interviews group. One respondent who held a similar view opined:

“If the child is told when he/she is already mature, the child may think, can any biological parent do better than this, when he/she considers the way he/she has been cared for. By the time the child is told, how he/she was picked up and cared for, he/she may appreciate being adopted”.

One of the adopters, in this study, a male explained that the impact of sharing adoption information with adoptees depended on how and when the information was communicated.

He further explained thus:

“This depends on how the child is told and when he/she is told. If the child is told after he/she has heard from outside the family, this may have a negative effect on the child. However, if the child hears it from the parent with love and empathy it may have a positive effect on the child”.

The respondent added:

“ An adoptee can be faced with challenges such as having two sets of parents, one known and the other unknown. Thus the lack of knowledge of their birth parents is a challenge on its own to the child”.

b) Effects of sharing adoption information with adoptees on adoptive parents

The second sub-theme to emerge on the challenges of sharing adoption information with adoptees related to how this might affect the adoptive parents. In other words, what are the likely challenges to be faced by adoptive parents who share adoption information with their adopted children? Findings from this study revealed that adoptive parents may find themselves in a dilemma especially as regards to how to handle the situation arising from the pressure from adoptees demanding to know more about their biological parents or even demanding to be told about the whereabouts of their biological parents. One respondent explained that an adoptee may ask piercing questions like:

“Who are my biological parents? Where are they? How may I locate them?”

Another respondent, a Lawyer concurred and added as follows:

“The consistent curiosity of the child with the pressure put on the adopter to know his/her biological parent(s) after hearing of his/her adoption status could be a challenge to the adopter who may not have an immediate solution to this”.

Respondents from the Social Workers focus group explained that adoptive parents faced the challenge of losing their adopted children. Their perspective was neatly summed up by one social worker in the indepth interviews who stated:

“The challenge of losing the child may confront the parent and the fear of what next the child could do upon hearing about his/her adoption could be a threat to the adopter”.

Similarly, respondents from the Public Perception focus group discussion, indicated that adoptive parents were likely to face a hard time disclosing sensitive information to an adoptee. They indicated the child was likely to want to search for his/her biological parents, which action would be a mean feat. This position was also corroborated by respondents in the indepth interviews group. One respondent said:

“Another challenge to the adoptive parent, is the aspect of ‘search’ when the child might demand for his/her biological parent. The process of search could be cumbersome and stressful to the adopter”.

Not every respondent however thought disclosure would have negative results. Some respondents especially from the Public Perception Group however stated that sharing of adoption information with adoptees could be that challenging in some cases for both the adoptee and adoptive parents. For instance, one respondent, a school teacher, narrated the case of a girl who got to know about her adoption status late in life, but reacted positively and appreciated the adoptive mother. The teacher explained the child reacted as follows:

“Whether you are my biological mother or not, I have seen the way you are taking care of me. You are God sent person to help me, you are my mother.”

Obviously, the adoptive mother must have been very much relieved to hear such a reaction.

This suggests that not all adoptive parents end up having to fend off a barrage of questions and having to deal with negative reactions from adoptive children.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the study findings. Sources of data included documentary analysis, in depth interviews and focus group discussions. The discussion constitutes interpretations of analyzed data which are considered alongside the reviewed literature. The findings provide the basis for understanding the problem of concealing adoption information from adoptees and the desirability or otherwise of sharing adoption information with adoptees. The discussion is based on the objectives of the study and is arranged in four broad sections. The first section of the discussion unpacks the findings related to the problem of concealing adoption information from the adoptee, including perceptions of people on child adoption. The second section discusses respondents' perceptions on some possible implications for concealing adoption information from adoptees as perceived by the respondents. The third section discusses respondents' perceptions on the possibilities of sharing adoption information with adoptees, while the fourth section discusses findings on the challenges of sharing adoption related information with adoptees in Nigeria. Findings discussed in this chapter provide the basis for critical recommendations.

6.2. Factors contributing to concealment of adoption information from adoptees.

As noted in the previous chapter, the following factors were identified as contributing to concealment of adoption information: society/community (environment)

factors, cultural factors, individual adopters' factors, and confidentiality of the adoption process.

6.2.1 Society/community (environment) factors.

- *Society factors*

With regards to societal factors, a number of issues emerged from the study. In this regard the researcher sought to identify people's views about child adoption in Nigerian society. The findings revealed that adoption is not given full recognition by most people in Nigeria society. According to the responses given, adoption is counted as either a taboo practiced secretly, or something with mystical connotation attached to it. The beliefs of the people in the society influenced their perceptions, hence leading to concealment. In most sections of the Nigerian society, adopters are considered as irresponsible people and not worthy to be given responsible positions in the society. A child who was adopted is considered a bastard because he or she is not related by blood to the adoptive parents, and naturally anyone who adopts will try to conceal. This response is also corroborated in the literature. Omosun and Kofowarola (2011) for example, argued that the rate of acceptability of adoption is relatively low because of cultural implications and societal misconceptions. These arguments are also corroborated by Oladokun et al (2009a), Avidime et al (2013), Eke et al (2014) who posit that stigmatization, financial burdens and stressful procedures sometimes discourage people from opting for adoption.

Respondents in this study stressed that these 3 factors (stigmatization, financial burdens and stressful procedures) in addition to peoples' ignorance of adoption procedures tend to deter them from adopting children. Similarly, Ezugwu et al, 2002; Wusu and

Isiugo-Abanihe, 2006; Nwobodo and Isah, 2011 in their studies confirmed the findings that peoples' perceptions and decisions towards adoption were heavily influenced by their cultural beliefs. Stigmatization in particular will result in concealment. This notwithstanding, some respondents in the study indicated that they viewed adoption as an alternative way of raising a family and in their view, which brought enormous joy to the family. Even this positive view has not removed stigma which leads to concealment of adoption.

One other identified societal/community factor contributing to concealing adoption information from adoptees had to do with direct negative comments made towards adoptees and adopters. For instance, society's conceptions about adoption significantly contributed to the issue of concealment of adoption information. It is a reality that society's social constructs through the use of language, affects peoples' attitudes and perceptions towards adoption. This finding is in line with the social constructionist perspective which posits that every society is connected by language. However, language is more than just a way of connecting people, as it also language also affects their actions. Furthermore, a language could be generated and sustained or discussed based on the beliefs of the society and their social interaction (Gergem & Gergem 1999). Responses from participants revealed that in Nigerian society, adopted children tend to be labelled "bastards" because they are not biologically born into the family where they were adopted. Such language obviously has far reaching negative connotations. In the same vein adoptive parents are looked down upon and tend to be regarded as irresponsible and not qualified to be given responsible positions in the society simply because they do not have biological children of their own. This again has far reaching impact on the individual concerned. Oladokun et

al, 2009b and Tabong, Adongo, 2013 observed that women or couples without biological child of their own are often stigmatized, ridiculed, and excluded from leadership roles in society, and are often excluded from important social events. It would appear that women in particular bear the brunt of societal negative attitudes and comments as very often they are stigmatized. This is a prevailing phenomenon in many communities in Nigerian society, and hence the key reason why those who adopt tend to keep it a secret.

The effect of negative terms (such as bastard) could be devastating due to the meaning attached to the words. For instance, negative terms can negatively affect the hearer or receiver's action or behaviour. Burr (2003), Gergem (1994), Mcnamee (2004), stated that according to the theory of social constructionism, a language derives its meaning from its use in context. Furthermore, Cajocarú and Bragarú (2012b:32) also stated that "meaning is construction as the product of prevailing cultural frame of social linguistic, as well as discursive and symbolic practices". In other words, a term gets its meaning from its use in context and cultural construct. Naturally, no parent would like to be counted as irresponsible in society and her child labelled a bastard. Hence, many who would not want to receive such appellation would prefer to hide their adoptive status.

Another finding is the lack of knowledge in Nigerian society about what adoption is about, and hence its low acceptability. It appears from the findings of this study that adoption is not well received by many people in Nigerian society as an alternative way of forming a family. However, some do accept adoption as a remedy for a woman, especially with infertility problems. In developed countries such as the United States of America, United Kingdom and Australia, open adoption is practiced, hence, adoption is well accepted as an alternative way of forming a family (Grotevant, 2000; Turkington & Taylor,

2009). But not so in most of Africa. And yet, if adoption were accepted as an alternative way of forming a family, then, probably there would be no need for anyone concealing any adoption information from the adoptee, as there would be, no place for negative appellation. Thus, this contention affirms the social constructionist theory's position which states that social constructs emphasize their dependence on contingent aspects of our social selves. This position implies that 'a thing could not have existed, had people not built it, and people need not have built it at all, at least not in its present form. Had we been a different kind of society, had we had different needs, values or interest, we might well have built a different kind of thing or built the same one differently (Boghossian 2001:1). Therefore, in application non-disclosure of adoption information to the adoptee could not have existed if it was not built or constructed in the present form of hiding the origin or the identity of the child from him/her. Had it been in a society where the need, values or interest of the child are the paramount consideration for adoption, then it would have been built differently, perhaps predicated on the principle of disclosing adoption information to the adopted child in a normative and positive manner.

- *Community (Environmental) factors*

Respondents identified the environment as one of the factors that tend to contribute to the concealment of adoption information from the child. In this respect, the immediate environment such as the family, neighbours, school and religious affiliation are significant factors which can not be ignored with respect to adoptive children and the family. This observation is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human development which argues that human beings do not develop in isolation but rather in relation to their family, the home, school, community, and society of which they are part. From the

findings, respondents explained how the environmental factors as spelt out in Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979;1986), contributes to concealing adoption information from the child. For instance, the immediate family of the child (that is the father, mother and other siblings) may all play important roles in the life of the child. The family provides an environment for social and mutual interactions. This is consistent with the views of Brook (2000) who noted that the development of the child should focus on quality and context of the child's environment. In addition, Fahey, Keilthy and Polek (2012) noted that the quality of parent- child relationships may act as an aspect of family wellbeing. This is more dependent on personality and serves as a protective factor for children in the family. Hence, revealing to a child that he/she is adopted, according to some respondents, could affect the child emotionally and might even strain his/her love for the parents.

The parent-child relationship is critically important as it is a function of bonding especially between the child and the mother. Hence, telling the child that he/she was not a biological child of the family could mar the relationship. To avoid such situations, adoptive parents have tended to conceal the information, according to the respondents. In addition, some respondents further argued that adoptive parents would not want their child to feel like a stranger in the family. They wanted the child to feel at home and belonging to the family. Therefore, most parents would not disclose to the child his/her adoption status. Furthermore, some respondents stated that adopters kept the adoption information a secret because they did not want the child to feel insecure in the family. Whereas, in developed countries such as the United States of America and United Kingdom, most adoptees tend to be aware of their adoption, the records of their origins are usually sealed. However,

most adoptees are against concealment and “contend that denying them access to their records of origin does abridge their constitutional rights to privacy, to receiving important information, and to equal protection of the law” (Kuhns, 1994:266). On the part of adoptive parents, their fear has essentially been that if the child got to know that he/she was adopted, he/she might feel that his/her life is not secure because he/she is not a biological child of the particular family. There were more respondents holding the view that child adoption information should be concealed from the child, than there were those who thought that the child should be told about his/her adoption status. The respondents who said the child should be informed of his/her adoption status, support research findings by Johnson, (2000); Kohler, Grotevant, and Mcroy, (2003); Brodzinsky, (2014) who all stated that adopted children should not be denied the knowledge of their adoption status. The respondents who held the view that the child should be told about his/her adoption status believed that the conversation in this regard should happen when the child had become an adult. Their reason for taking this position was that at that age, the person would be mature enough to be appreciative of the adoptive parents’ roles in their life especially when they reflect on how they had been cared for and loved by adoptive parents.

In essence, parents and families play foundational roles in their children’s lives upon which the foundation for good child development rests (Freyers, 2002). This is part of family dynamics- one of the most important elements affecting healthy child development (Health Canada 2003). Bronfenbrenner (1979) posited that the family is the most important immediate environmental factor where the child affects and is affected by other members. In summary, findings from this study suggest the following environmental factors as being the key reasons why parents tended to concealed adoption information from their child:

- To keep the parent/child relationship from being strained
- To enable the child to freely interact as a member of the family, and not as a stranger.

It would appear from careful analysis of the facts that these reasons are noble enough and could be accepted as having the interest of the child at heart as a paramount concern (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989:Article 21). For instance, preventing the straining of love between the parent and child is crucially important, given that healthy relationships, like charity, ought to begin at home. It is common course that healthy parent-child relationships have their solid foundation on love. The child having free interactions with other members of the family and not being forced to act as a stranger in the family is extremely positive for the child.

As a dynamic system, the family allows mutual bonding and interdependent interactions among its individual members. This creates room for parents and adult members to pass on appropriate norms, values and models of behaviour to the children. Additionally, the family unit provides a sense of security, and emotional stability for its members. In spite of these benefits, and the reasons for concealing adoption information from the child cited earlier, there is the possibility of the child getting to know about his/her adoption status from third parties at school, or in the neighborhood as nothing can be kept secret forever without being exposed. There is no consensus among researchers about the consequences of adoptive children getting to know from third parties that they were adopted. One view says such sensitive information, if not communicated properly, could destabilize the child which ultimately could cause the child to manifest anti-social behaviours and also disrupt family peace. But others do not subscribe to this viewpoint.

According to Brodinzsky (2014) when information about the adoption is shared with the child in a positive and normative manner with love, the child would likely accept his/her adoption status and live with it without any violence. Both view points seem more persuasive.

- ***Neighbours as a factor.***

Neighbours constitute a category of people living around and interacting with the family. It can be those living in the next house, in the same street, community, selling together in the same market or working together in the same office. According to the Oxford dictionary, a neighbour is a person living next door or near to another. Findings from the current study revealed that neighbours through gossip, ridicule and mockery could constitute one factor why an adopter might not want them to know about the adoption. Some neighbours according to the respondents, can make the situation untenable by telling the child to leave the adoptive family and look for his/her own birth parents. Such a child might end up frustrated and could easily experience psychosocial and psychiatric problems because he/she might fail to locate the birth parents whose care he/she would be longing for. In fact, some respondents suggested that some adoptive children might even get misled through wrong counselling by neighbours. A respondent (paediatrician) suggested that adoptive parents at times ended up changing their environment by relocating to another area in an effort to manage adoption challenges. Thus, some adopters may relocate to a new area where they are not known as soon as they have adopted their children. This is done to hide the adoption process from their neighbours. This observation corroborates that of Iphey (2007) who stated that in most African

societies, adoptive parents tend to relocate to a new environment as soon as the placement of the adoptee is done, in order to further preserve the secrecy of the adoption.

The contribution of environmental factors in making an adopter hide adoption information from the child therefore can not be overlooked. Nevertheless, since no secret can be absolute the child might in due course still get to know through third parties that he/she was adopted. To avoid such unpleasant situations for the child from happening, it would be probably better to find appropriate means of revealing to the child, in a positive and normative manner, information about his/her adoptive status as early as possible in the adoption process even when the child is still an infant.

- *School as a factor.*

Not many respondents attested to the possibility of the school acting as a contributing factor to why adoption information in Nigeria is concealed from the child. A few respondents made reference to school only in the context of the discussions on how the child would feel or perform at school if he/she got to know about the adoption in an unpleasant way, probably through gossip. Respondents reiterated the point that adopters tend to conceal adoption information from their child for fear that if he/she got to know, it may affect his/her relationship with peers at school. Thus, the child's development could be negatively affected or determined by what he/she experiences in this setting.

Brodzinsky (2014) suggested that it is important for adoptive parents to tell their child early about his/her adoption. This in his view is necessary so that the child's schooling is not negatively affected if he/she gets the information about his being an adoptee from peers at school. As noted elsewhere, when children are told earlier, this helps them to have

confidence to stand before their peers in the school and tell them that their status of being an adoptee is already known to them and there is no secret about it, and also that it did not bother them at all.

- ***Religious Affiliation as a factor.***

According to the perception of the Christian religious leaders who participated in this study, adoption information should not be shared with the child. The religious leaders explained that the child belongs to the adoptive parent, period. Thus, in their view there is no need to tell the child about his/her adoption status. They further explained that all those who believe in God were adopted into God's family as children of God and that is why all Christians call themselves children of God. Nonetheless, some Christians argue that it is better to tell the child of his/her adoption status as soon as the child can distinguish between a father and a mother than conceal the information. They believe the church could assist the parents to divulge this information to the child, backing it up with scriptures from the Bible in a way that the child would understand. There is therefore, in their view no need to conceal the information, although sadly, some go to great lengths to conceal this vital information. A respondent shared the story of a member of a church who disguised herself as being pregnant and when it was time to be delivered of the baby, she came up with a baby that she had adopted and presented the baby to the public as having given birth to the baby. When the truth later came out, she got ashamed and faced ridicule in the community. Clearly there is no need for people to get to such lengths, and yet this happens because in Nigerian society adoption is looked down upon.

However, not all religions believe in adoption, or that adoptive status should not be shared with the child concerned. It emerged from the study findings that those who are of Islamic

faith for example, did not believe in adoption as the practice is against their faith. It was explained that a Muslim can only foster a child and not claim parenthood over the child. This supports study findings on adoption among Muslims in the Middle East (Inhorn, 2006), and those of Ladan (2007) in Iran on the same theme. In the Inhorn study, Egypt and other Islamic influenced states, stand in contrast to the widespread fostering done in some West African societies, and the notion that families are made through everyday practices in the Andes. In Egypt, formal adoption is infrequent, and fostering is often done in secret because of beliefs in the essential significance of blood ties in that country. Although caring for orphans is valued and religiously prescribed in Islam, formal adoption, in which a child becomes a permanent member of a family, is prohibited and socially a problematic form of familial relationship. In urban Egypt, particularly important is the belief that family members have and should have blood connections. Without a clear genealogical relationship, Egyptians worry that parent-child relations will be strained. Similarly, in Lebanon, Inhorn noted that most men could not accept the idea of social fatherhood, arguing that an adopted or donor child won't be their child (2006:98). One Sunni Muslim man reportedly told Inhorn (2006:105):

“If we adopt, we wouldn't really feel comfortable looking at this child, given that he's not our biological child. When he grows up, we would have to tell him honestly that he's not our child. Then his psychology would be affected. He wouldn't feel that hopeful. There would be a “gap” because he's not our child. If you have your own biological child, you will feel differently. He is your own child, so you feel attached”.

Thus, different religious groups have differing views on the issue of adoption. This suggests different perspectives too, in respect of whether or not to divulge adoptive information to adoptees.

6.2.2 Cultural factors.

Another reason why adoption information is concealed from the child, as perceived by the respondents is cultural factors. Findings from the study revealed that culture permeated the lives of people and it is difficult to separate people from their cultural beliefs especially on theme adoption. From social work focus group discussions, it was revealed that non-disclosure or concealment of the practice of keeping adoption a secret is a product of people's belief systems and cultural constructs. This supports the findings of Smith, Scupac and Mohamed (2016), who opined that beliefs are strongly linked with actions. By definition, culture is the set of attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviors shared by a group of people. It is communicated from one generation to the next through the process of socialization (Matsumoto 1996). Culture can also be viewed as socially transmitted knowledge and behavior shared by some group of people (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Therefore, it would be correct to view culture as "the combined effect of humanly constructed social elements that helps people live together" (Rees, 2017: 4). Thus, human behavior is many ways shaped and modified by culture.

Cultural factors assist in understanding why people do certain things or behave in certain ways. There is need to examine the values that govern peoples' behaviors. It is hard to examine and understand the values that govern people's behaviours by direct observation; but this can be done by interviewing key members of society and community organizations. This will help to understand why people behave in certain ways (Spencer-

Oatey 2012). For example, one may ask why do people hide adoption information or fail to consent to giving adoption information to their adoptive children? Respondents mostly attributed this to cultural beliefs and constructs of the Nigerian society (as is the case in other African societies). This supports the findings of Ezugwu, Obi & Onah, 2002; Wusu and IsiugoAbinihe, 2006; Nwobodo and Isah, 2011) who observed that most of the circumstances in which adoption occurred in Nigeria were culture-based. For instance, just as the authors identified such circumstances influencing couples' decision towards adoption (infertility, gender completion, desire for an heir to sustain lineage and inherit possession) as being culture based, the action of hiding adoption information from adopted children in Nigeria can also be said to be culture-based.

Moreover, in most African societies, values are embedded in culture, and this influences to a large extent, the behavior of the society. This again is consistent with Smith, Scupac and Mohamed's (2016) findings that beliefs tend to be strongly linked with actions. Sometimes, those cultural values which focus on what people say or the reasons for their behaviors, may not be easily attributable to the underlying reason for their behavior because they remain concealed (Oatey 2012). For instance, having biological children is highly valued in African society, and in Nigeria in particular, especially for married couples. However, if married people have no biological children, they are as noted earlier counted as irresponsible people not worthy to be given responsibilities in the society. Therefore, to avoid such negative appellations, such couples might opt to secretly adopt a child. Thus, the value of children has led to adoption for those who are unable to conceive their biological children, and yet cultural beliefs have led to adopters being forced to

conceal the information about their adoption. They conceal not only from the community, but even to the adoptee him/her self.

In essence, keeping adoption a secret is culturally accepted in Nigerian society as it is the order of practice. This secrecy is a social construct that is generally accepted in the society; it also has psychological (construct) connotations since the public do not have to know about the adoption. This is essentially to protect adopters from ridicule and stigmatization. This is consistent with social constructionism theory key concepts such as constructs and culture, among others (see chapter 3 of this study). However, studies reveal that adoption should be child-centered and not adult-centered. The child's interest must be paramount in any adoption process in spite of the culture of a society (Welbourne, 2012). In addition, The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), (1990), as well as Neil, (2011) suggest that the rights of the child must be taken into consideration. Clearly it is the right of a child to know his/her origin (UNICEF, 2007; Welbourne, 2012). Hence, the predominant view seems to be that adoptive parents should not conceal adoption information from their adopted children but rather share the information with them, and of course do so timeously.

6.2.3 The Individual as a factor.

Another finding from the study identified adoptive parents as a contributing factor to the concealing of adoption information from adoptees. Respondents explained that adopters wanting to avoid being stigmatized, ridiculed and mocked often decided to keep their adoption a secret. This confirms previous study findings by Ojelabi, Osamor and Owumi (2015) which (as noted earlier) indicated that adopters tended to keep their adoption a secret to avoid being stigmatized and ridiculed by society. According to the

study findings, social issues surrounding child adoption ranged from the numerous fears and misconceptions about adoption, to the stigma associated with a child whose biological parents are unidentified. The possibility that many Nigerians assumed an adopted child could be a child of such persons as drug addicts, criminal convicts, mentally retarded, prostitutes and the likes, could not be ruled out. Thus, individual adopters' constructs might serve as a factor in this regard. The individual construct about adoption is apparently based on the realities found in the society or culture. For instance, as noted earlier, the reality in some societies is that adoption is seen and constructed as a deviation from the norms of the society. In such situations, it is not seen as an alternative way of forming a family legally. It is out of these socially constructed societal ideas about adoption that an individual adoptive parent may contract their fears. Evidently, the knowledge and peoples' conception and beliefs about adoption tended to get embedded in the institutional fabric of society (Beger and Lukman). According to Bharadway (2002) adoption, when done properly, is not viewed as a remedy for infertility, but rather as a way of providing love, care, and family for a child. If viewed this way, then there would be no need to fear, and the child getting to know about his/her adoptive status, will live happily with the parent.

Social constructionism theory asserts that individuals have the capacity to construct their own understanding of a social system (the world) which usually is rooted in the historical, cultural background, or through interactions with other individuals or groups within their communities (Cojocar and Bragaru, 2012). This statement links in neatly with Bharadway (2002) contention made above. Thus, individual constructs of adoption based on cultural background do not support the idea of disclosure of adoption information. However, from the perspective of international organizations including the United Nations

Convention on The Rights of a Child, 1989: article 21; UNICEF (2007) and African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child 1990; adoption practices must be guided by the child's best interests. The dignity of the child must be respected at all times, and the rights of a child (including rights of access to information about the child) must not be denied. Therefore, based on these perspectives it is probably important to share adoption information with the child concerned irrespective of any individual contracts.

6.2.4 Confidentiality as a factor.

Confidentiality of the adoption process and practice was identified as one of the factors contributing to concealing adoption information from the child concerned. Confidentiality is synonymous with concealment or secrecy. Confidentiality of the adoption process and practice had been a contentious issue among adoption researchers over the years. The argument was that the adoptee should be allowed access to his/her records of origin. This led to the emergence of the open adoption model, although many other authors upheld concealment or confidentiality is important (Cahn & Hollinger 2004; Appelle, 2010; Faulkner & Madden, 2012).

The original aim of confidentiality of the adoption process and practice was to decrease the stigma associated with illegitimacy that is, referring to a child adopted as a bastard or an illegitimate child. Hence, historically the welfare of a child was considered when it came to making decisions of placement for the child. Confidentiality was also promoted in order to prevent intrusion of birth parents into adoptive parent homes. Therefore, the process of confidentially placing a child with a prospective adopter made it possible for some adoptive parents to avoid telling their children that they were adopted. In support of this, Blomquist (2009) explained that some adoptive parents ignore telling

their children because they thought it could be a negative factor in their relationship with their children.

According to research findings, the implications of confidentiality of the adoption process, or concealment of adoption information, included a denial of access to adoptee records of his/her origin, knowledge of his/her identity, and adoptee low self esteem. The denial of an adoptee's access to records about his/her origin could be frustrating and devastating, and as such could lead an adoptee into developing psychiatric problems, including withdrawal syndroms and eventually disrupting the adoption process. Although the process and practice of adoption is considered confidential in most African societies, particularly in Nigeria, the upbringing and training of an adopted child is not a secret. Therefore, the sharing of adoption information with the adoptee should not be concealed. This is corroborated by the finding of a study done in the United States of America which reported that confidentiality merely concealed the adoption proceeding from the public, but not from the actual participants (Khuns, 1994). Be that as it may, a number of studies shed more light into the world of adoption practices, and methods of disclosing adoption information to adoptees. For instance, Brodzinsky (2014) enumerated the process of sharing adoption information with adoptees, noting it needed to start at age 3 upwards. Helping professionals (such as social workers) should work together with adoptive parents to ensure that adoptees are given information of their status in a way that did not hurt the child.

6.3 Perceived possible implications of concealing information from the adoptee.

In the preceding section, the researcher discussed the factors that contribute to concealing adoption information from the child in Nigeria. This section discusses the possible implications of concealing adoption information from adoptees.

Two themes emerged from the study findings in regard to this issue, namely psychological implications and social implications. For social implications, two subthemes namely withdrawal syndrome and loss of self esteem emerged from the study findings.

6.3.1 Psychological implications.

- ***Emotional Problems.***

The findings of this study showed that psychologically the child could develop emotional problems if adoption information is concealed by adoptive parents, and the child somehow gets to know of his/her adoptive status from outsiders such as peers at school and in the neighbourhood.

Emotionally, the child could feel indifferent from his/her peers, and could look down upon himself/herself as an outcast. The child could assume that everybody is looking down on him as a deviant, for the reason that others are living with their biological parents while in his/her own case it is not the case, and he/she does not even know his/her birth parents. Furthermore, the child could be demoralized and depressed psychologically especially when people tell him/her that he/she is an adopted child. This will consequently affect his social life as he may feel everybody is talking about him. This perspective is supported by Howard & Smith (1997) who argued that if adoptive parents keep adoption information from the child, it could lead to the child feeling like a 'second class' citizen who was given away by his or her birth parent. The emotional impact of being told by

others that he/she is not the biological child of his/her parents could make the child feel rejected and sad. This contention is in agreement with the views of Smith et al (2006) who noted that there could be high risks of behavioural and emotional problems among adopted children who were denied information about their adoptive status.

Equally, the child could get confused after being told that he was not a biological child of the family. The confusion could further be heightened by the fact that he/she might have seen pictures of him/her with his/her adoptive parents when he/she was a baby; whereas he/she is being told by outsiders that he/she was not a biological child of the parents. Still, this could be more confusing to the child considering the parent-child relationship that existed in the family, and the love and care bestowed on him/her by the parents. Indeed, if the child could confirm the fact that he/she was not a biological child of the family, he/she might never trust the parents again, angry at their concealing of his true identity. This assertion agrees with the views of Brodzinsky (2011), who stated that concealing adoption information from adoptees by adoptive parents could undermine the child's ability to trust his/her parents in future, should the child get this information from outsiders or third parties as usually happens in the case of Nigeria.

6.3.2 Social implications.

Another theme that emerged from findings of this study regarding possible consequences of concealing adoption information from adoptees was identified as social implications. Two subthemes : withdrawal syndrome and loss of self esteem were discerned from this theme. As noted previously, culturally an adopted child (not related by blood to the parents) could be termed a 'bastard child' in Nigerian lingua. The word 'bastard' could easily cause the child to react violently, and could as well lead to constant

or consistent mis-behaviour on the part of the child. If this is not adequately attended to, the child could experience mental or psychiatric problems. Lieberman and Morris, (2003) and Brodzinsky, (2014) argued that there are significant percentages of psychiatric cases among adoptees in the United States of America which were not unconnected with the negative effect of improperly disseminated adoption information. Similarly Feast and Howe (2000) posited that the levels of impaired psychosocial functioning of the adoptee increased when the adoptive parents failed to open discussion of adoption with their children. Therefore, the lack of proper adoption information communication affects the adoptee and can lead to adoption disruption and other serious effects on the child, including developing a withdrawal syndrome and low self-esteem, to mention but a few.

- ***Withdrawal syndrome.***

One of the social implications of concealing adoption information from adoptees according to the findings of this study, was withdrawal syndrome. It emerged that numerous cases of children developing withdrawal syndrome have been noted in studies. These are real life cases of children who were not told about their adoption by their parent, but only got to know about their adoptive status from outsiders. Consequently, the children decided to withdraw or even leave their families. In this situation, some children who had developed secure attachment with their parents developed a withdrawal syndrome after they got to know about their adoption from gossipers and outsiders. This was because information about their adoption had not been communicated appropriately to them by their adoptive parents before they got the information from people outside their adoptive home.

Findings of the study also indicated that in a few cases, it was possible that the implications of concealing adoption information from an adoptee could bear positive fruit

for some adopted children, especially if done at their younger stages of life. However, when they got to adolescence stage of life, they experienced identity crises (Passmore, Feeney, & Foulstone, 2007). The assumption was that their parents did not tell them initially about the adoption because they did not want them to feel different, that is, as not being part of the family. Nevertheless, existing literature shows that there was a high level of satisfaction among adoptive children when adoption information was not concealed from them, but was rather shared (Hollenstein et al 2003; Ge et al, 2008; Wolfgram 2008).

On the part of adoptive parents, concealing adoption information from the child could happen due to fear of what would become of the adoption if the child got to know that he/she was adopted. This supports Dunbar et al's (2006) view that adoptees might see adoptive parents as blocking them from obtaining desired information about their status. It was also revealed from findings of this study that adopters often agonied over whether to tell the child of the adoption status or not, when to tell the child, how to tell the child, and indeed what to tell the child. It was explained that some adopters might form the habit of telling lies in an attempt to hide from their child information about his/her adoption status. This might happen when the child, having heard this from outside the family, starts to pressurize the parents to identify his/her birth parent. If the child's demands are not met, he/she might as well become violent which might disrupt the adoption arrangement. This supports the findings of Forest (2003) who noted that the lack of adoption information communication might lead to adoption disruption.

According to Douglas and Philpot (2003) parents who refuse to acknowledge the differences between an adopted and biological child, tend to conceal adoption; and in so doing deny a relevant and potentially important aspect of the child's origins and identity.

Although, some parents tend to conceal adoption information, the implications might outweigh what could have happened if the information was disclosed to the child. Avitan, (2007) posited that in an open adoption situation where birth parents willingly gave up their children for adoption, some parents thereafter experienced grief, guilt and depression as a result of placing their child for adoption when they thought they might not see them again. However, there are cases where some birth parents would still want to maintain anonymity about the adoption that the birth records should still be kept confidential, because they would not want the child to know about the adoption as this to them could disrupt their new family (Herman, 2014).

- *Loss of self-esteem.*

Apart from withdrawal syndrome, another anticipated social implication identified by the study was the loss of self-esteem. With the possible challenges from peers in society, the child might feel inferior in the midst of other children when he/she considers that other children are living with their biological parents. From the study findings, it was noted that the feeling of inferiority complex among peers might as well be due to negative labels, and uncharitable attitudes of peers including mockings, name calling or even isolating of the adoptee; while some peers might sympathize and empathize with the adoptee for not knowing and living with the biological parents. Such attitudes might make the adoptee feel uncomfortable, and could as well create inferiority complex in the adoptee. This implication could have been minimized or even avoided had the adoptive parents disclosed the information to the adoptee before the intrusion of third parties, as explained above.

6.4 Possibilities of sharing adoption information with adoptees in Nigeria.

From the findings of this study, three themes emerged on the possibilities of sharing adoption information with adoptees. These included society views on sharing adoption information with adoptees, possible ways of sharing adoption information with adoptees and the roles of social workers in the sharing of adoption information with adoptees.

6.4.1 Perceptions of society relating to sharing adoption information with adoptees.

As noted earlier, findings of this study indicated that respondents suggested that adoptive parents should share adoption information with adoptees for emotional stability and early adjustment of adoptees. To ensure this, Neil (2011) noted that there is need for adopters to understand adoption from the child's perspectives, and in relation to his/her personal experience as a member of the adoptive family, and the impact this might make in his/her life.

In Nigeria, societal view of sharing adoption information with adoptees has never been an issue of concern. This has been because of the use of secret adoption practice in the country which favours concealment of adoption information to a very large extent. As stated earlier, findings of this study also confirmed that concealment of adoption and hence (concealment), of sharing of adoption information had been the ethics of the practice in Nigerian society. This is confirmed in available research findings in Nigeria, which established that secret adoption was infact the common practice in the country (Oladokun et al, 2009b; Ojelabi, A. O; Osamor, E. P, and Owumi, E. B. , 2015). However, as stated in the motivation for this study, it has become necessary to evolve a policy on adoption practice in Nigeria which includes the sharing of adoption information with adoptees.

6.4.2 Possible ways of sharing adoption information with adoptees

A couple of sub-themes were discernible from the study findings with regards to possible ways of sharing adoption information with adoptees. These included: when to share adoption information with adoptees about their adoption, how to share such information, and what adoption information to be shared with adoptees, concerning their adoption.

- *When to share adoption information with adoptees.*

In general, the findings of the study indicated a case for early disclosure of adoption information with adoptees. The timing of the disclosure according to respondents could be as early as at 3 years of age, 7 years of age or 10 years of age, while for other respondents the recommendation was telling the child of his/her adoptive status at adolescent age. Another important finding in this regard was that in addition to the age of the child, consideration should also be given to the temperament and emotions of the child at the time of sharing the information.

In respect of the age at which to start adoption conversation, the findings support the observation by Brodzinsky (2014), who suggested and categorized ages of adoption conversations as follows: pre-school years, between 3-5 years when the child gradually receives or learns parts of their adoption story; middle-childhood between 6-12 years of age when the child would have developed a significant understanding and ability to adjust to adoption; and adolescent age between 13-16 years which is the period at which they have the capacity to think abstractly. In addition, Nickman et al (2005), suggested that the child could be told about his/her adoption status at between the ages 6-8. According him, at this age, the child should have been established in the adoptive family, and may not feel threatened by learning about the adoption. In a study by Palacios and Sanchez-Sandoval

(2005), it emerged that among adoptive families in the United States of America, speaking about adoption to their children early in life was very rare, but became more frequent when adoptees grew older. In all indications, most important to consider is apparently the cognitive level of the child at every age as adoption is a lifelong process.

Comparing these perceptions with the literature, the latter shows that the child should be told about his adoption even when he/she does not understand what it means to be adopted, say at three years of age (Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Brodzinsky, 2014). Welbourne (2002) suggested that parents should be careful when sharing adoption information with the adopted child, and that they must avoid as much as possible information that could be damaging to the young person. Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Brodzinsky (2014) suggested that the parent should consider the age of the child, as this affects how they will interpret the information given, how their understanding of adoption changes with age, and how their understanding can impact their adjustment, self-esteem, identity, and family relationships. All these factors are of great importance when considering the sharing process.

Furthermore, evidence from previous research shows that positive adoption conversations could help to build adoptee self-esteem and provide a sense of safety and security to a child (Krueger, 2009). In addition, it gives an opportunity to shape attitudes and expand the child's knowledge before any negative influence from outside the family may interfere (Brodzinsky, 2014; Eisenman, 2019). Equally as noted by Feast and Howe (2000), it helps the child to develop a clear sense of identity and gives him/her a sense of positive acceptance of who they are. In addition, Hollenstein et al, 2003, Ge et al, 2008; and Wolfgram 2008, posited that adoptive families reported high levels of satisfaction with

adoption when adoption conversation was started early with proper focus on positive conversation.

- ***How to share adoption information with adoptees about their adoption.***

This sub-theme on how to share adoption information according to findings, revealed the necessary steps to adopt when sharing adoption information with adoptees. The identified steps included beginning with having a good cordial relationship with the child from the outset, disclosing the information in love and empathy, use of appropriate stories and giving opportunities to the child to contribute to the story before relating this to the child's case of adoption. There was also emphasis on the fact that the adoptive mother should honestly let the child know that she is not his/her biological parent, but that she had since taken on the role of parent to the child. The 'how to' of communicating adoption related information with an adoptee is very essential. Adoptive parents can either win or lose the confidence of the adoptee depending on how well the information is communicated.

Studies of adoption family communication mostly have examined adoption specific communication of parents talking with an adopted child about his/her adoption, or examined the direct effect of adoption status on family communication (Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevant, McRoy (2003); Brodzinsky (2006). In contrast to direct effect studies, the family communication pattern suggests that adoption status and communication pattern interact to influence child adjustment (Steinberg, 2001; Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2004). In other words, a child can adjust successfully to the adoptive family even after the information of his/her status has been divulged to him/her. Methods that can be used to share the information according to the respondents, included the use of everyday experiences. This view is supported by Eisenman, (2019) who noted that to help a young

child to understand what adoption and caring really mean, the parent should lead the conversation about how the child came to be adopted. Using everyday experiences is like going from the known to the unknown. It is important to note that the child should be told about his or her adoption early enough and then as often as possible. Above all, the sharing of adoption information with the adoptee should be handled in a way the child should feel honoured and proud without any hurt feeling. This of course needs patience and understanding.

- ***What adoption information should be shared with adoptees .***

As noted earlier, the study found that what to share with adoptees depended on the age of the child at the time of sharing the information. In this regard, care must be taken not to tell the child information that would demoralize him/her. This observation is in agreement with the contention by Welbourne (2002) who argued that any information difficult for the child to comprehend, or that could damage his/her self-esteem or identity should not be shared. Social workers or adoption agencies should be tasked to evaluate the circumstances and reach a decision on an appropriate course of action. It also emerged from the study findings that adoptive parents should carefully and appropriately tell the child the circumstances surrounding their adoption, starting from a positive perspective. In this regard, Welbourne (2002) however, suggested that any information that could be of benefit to the child must not be kept from him or her. Perhaps, the sharing could be done in consultation with professional counsellors, such as social workers.

6.4.3 The roles of social workers in the sharing of adoption information with adoptees.

It emerged from findings of the study that of all the helping professionals, social workers play a crucial role in providing counselling services to adoptive parents, organizing seminars and sensitization workshops for adopters and providing welfare services to adoptive parents. Hence, social workers as human service professionals and particularly as part of their psychosocial services, are better placed to help adopters, especially those who are not bold enough to tell the child of his/her adoption status. The belief, according to the findings, is that social workers, with their psycho-educational knowledge, are capable of handling the issue of sharing adoption information with the adoptee. The consensus of opinion among the respondents was that in cases where parents are pushed to the wall by the pressure from their child to know of his/her adoption (having heard of it from outsiders), adopters could seek assistance from the social workers to handle such situations. Social workers can organize seminars to prepare the minds of adopters and also train them on adoption issues especially on how to disclose adoption information. In fact, on reflection, it is the duty of the social work professionals to help adopters who might experience any challenges in the adoption process, including challenges relating to sharing adoption information with adoptees.

Social media platforms such as facebook, whatsapp, twitter, emails etc can also be used to organize and disseminate appropriate training and counselling programmes for the benefit of adopters. This observation is corroborated by findings from other studies which indicates that a programme could be organized using social media. Such a programme could incorporate pediatricians, especially in helping to normalize adoptive children's

curiosity about their origins as well as helping adoptive parents by showing them how to support the efforts of the children in their efforts to understand their past and in finding healthy connections to it. They can also help the parents to find ways of discussing with their children, birth family issues in a positive manner (Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Brodzinsky, 2014). As a result of a good therapeutic relationship between adoptive parents and social workers there could be provision of significant support during the post adoption phase (Zosky, Howard, Smith and Howard 2005). This support should include protecting the interest of both the child and the adoptive parent. This is crucial for the success of the adoption relationship.

6.5 Challenges of sharing adoption related information with the adoptee.

The study established that challenges of sharing adoption related information with adoptees are two fold; namely the effects on the adoptees, and the effects on the adopters.

- ***The effect of sharing adoption information on adoptees***

Findings of this study revealed that the positive effects on the adoptees of sharing adoption information, were many and varied but included boosting the self-image of the child; the child adjusting earlier to his/her status; the child knowing his/her identity of origin; the child being emotionally stabilized; the child having a sense of safety and security; the child being confident to face any negative outside influences; the child understanding that he/she was born like any other child, but brought up by another family aside from his/her birth parent; and the child appreciating the parents who adopted him/her and gave him/her love, care, and a family.

Studies have consistently found that the outcome of sharing adoption information with adoptees about their status could be successful. Triseliotis, Shireman, and Hundlehsy

(1997); Johnson (2002); Blomquist (2009); Brodzinsky (2014) noted that successful adoption (including the sharing of adoption information with adoptees) result when information of adoption is presented to adoptees earlier considering their ages with relevant information at a time, their cognitive levels of understanding, their emotions, the good parent-child relationship, and the inter-personal relationships in the family. This implies that communicating with adoptees in the family is part of a gradual process and not just a once-of f affair. Thus, effective communication of adoption information with the child concerned helps to maintain a successful relationship in adoptive families. A successful adoption must be dialogue-based. Adoptive parents should present the information reasonably, and accurately. In order to normalize the child's curiosity, parents should lead by asking questions. In addition, parents' empathy is essential: adoptive parents should be able to appreciate how the child is coping emotionally with the information given. Empathy, affection, calmness, self-confidence, and openness to the child's needs and views are key traits required of adoptive parents during the discussion with their children (Nickman et al, 2005; Rueter et al 2009).

Findings of this study also identified some likely negative effects of sharing adoption information on the adoptee (if the information is shared lately in life). These included the child being psychologically affected on initially receiving the information; being emotionally shocked and feeling bad; and being socially isolated from peers. In addition, the child may withdraw from parents and peers; become bitter and violent; feel rejected, devastated, and confused with identity issues; and the bond between the parent and the child may be strained and disrupted. These negative actions and reactions of adoptees confirm the findings of Feast and Howe (2000); Hollingstworth (2002; 2003);

Forest (2003); and Smith et al (2006) all of whom observed that lack of adoption communication with adoptees could lead to impaired psychosocial functioning. In addition, there could be higher risks of behavioural and emotional problems; adoption disruptions and other negative consequences.

- *The effects of sharing adoption information on adopters*

With regard to the effects of sharing adoption information on adopters, the study findings revealed that there could be the likelihood of the child requesting for the whereabouts of his birth parent, and how he/she could locate them which information the adopter may not be able to account for or even know about, in the case of an abandoned child. There is also the challenge of parents losing the child on hearing of his/her adoption as he/she may decide to abscond. Furthermore, adoptees may threaten adopters as some adoptees might become violent on hearing about their adoption story. With the constant request of adoptees to know the whereabouts of their biological parents, adopters may become overwhelmed.

From the literature, the outcome of sharing of adoption information, how it affects the child, and the likely challenges faced by the child and also the adoptive parents, all depend on the relationship between the child and the parent, the bond of love that exists between them, and the manner in which the information is disclosed. Brodzinsky (2011) noted that if adoptive parents take it as an important responsibility to help adoptees understand their adoptive status in a positive manner, adoptees would celebrate their status and easily cope with any undefined losses. Therefore, the possibilities of producing a positive outcome of sharing adoption information with adoptees cannot be underestimated. This becomes possible when there is positive interaction between adoptees and adopters; where the

adoptees are loved and cared for, they will be securely attached to the adopters, and there will be positive adjustment leading to a good and cordial parents-children relationship with open communication and warm supportive behaviour.

Sharing adoption information with adoptees has beneficial effects on adoptees sense of identity as it gives opportunity to shape the attitudes and also expand the knowledge of adoptees before influence outside the family comes into play. Such a move helps build adoptees self-esteem and gives them a sense of safety and security (Eisenman, 2019). Furthermore, Brodzinsky (2014) stated that having positive adoption conversations with the adoptee may be of great benefit, and will certainly be better than withholding such information.

6.6 Concluding remarks

The issue of child adoption is a complex phenomenon. It is equally sensitive as it deeply affects the life of the child in particular and the adoptive parents as well. The aspect of disclosing adoption information to the adoptee is also quite a sensitive issue. The child in particular has a psychological need to know his/her origin and identity. This need of the adopted child can be very strong and compelling and presumably more than the confidentiality of the process. As such, since the generality of opinion is that adoption should be child-centered (in the interest of the child), information about his/her origin and identity should not be concealed from the child. This means that confidentiality of the process and practice should not be a stumbling block to sharing vital information needed by the child to end his/her identity crises.

Existing literature on adoption suggests that the more information that is given to an adoptee about his/her background, the better for the adoptee to adjust and accept his/her

adoptive status, and the less likely the adoptee will experience any negative outcomes as he/she would normally appreciate the adoptive parents as true parents, considering the love and care they would have bestowed on him/her in the family. Therefore, adoptive parents should not feel threatened that they might experience any negative outcomes if they assist their child to know about his/her adoption. Most adoptive children would seek information about their adoptive status for the sake of their origin and identity, and not necessarily to use it to search for a new set of parents if their adoption status is communicated in a normative and positive manner.

The legal aspect of the adoption process could help matters, by considering the interest and the rights of the child. In this case, the child has the right to know about his/her adoption. The law should also safeguard not just the welfare of the child, but also the interest of the adoptive parents. These must be clearly reflected in the national policy documents of nations of the world in general (and Nigeria in particular).

Essentially, the outcome of adoption to a large extent requires the input of social workers and guidance counsellors as they provide the much needed support and confidence in the process. To complement the efforts put in by various adoption stakeholders in the process and practice of adoption, the aspect of sharing adoption information with the adoptee requires a national policy framework as well as a guided format. This study proposes a framework for sharing adoption information with the adoptee in Nigeria.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

The study explored the views and perspectives of adoption stakeholders with regards to sharing adoption information with adoptees in Nigeria. The focus of these was on the issue of concealing adoption information from the adopted child, and how sharing or disclosing of such information may help to resolve problems created by concealing the information. The previous chapter discussed the findings of the study on the views of respondents based on: the factors contributing to concealment of adoption information from the child by adopters; the implications of the concealment of adoption information from adoptees; the possibilities of sharing adoption information with adoptees; and the challenges of sharing adoption information with adoptees.

This chapter presents a summary of the study; conclusions coming out of the study, recommendations and contributions, including a proposal of a model framework for sharing adoption information with adoptees..

7.2 Summary of Study Findings

The study explored adoption stakeholders' perceptions of sharing adoption information with adoptees in Nigeria. The study objectives were: to examine perceived factors leading to concealment of adoption information from adoptees by adoptive parents; to identify the perceived possible implications of concealing adoption information from adoptees; to explore perceived possibilities of sharing adoption information with adoptees; and to examine the challenges of sharing adoption information with adoptees.

A total sample of 35 respondents (15- in-depth interview and 20 focus group participants) were selected from a target population of adoption stakeholders consisting of social workers, lawyers, paediatricians, university lecturers from the Department of Social Work, University of Ibadan (Nigeria's premier University), a religious leader, a community leader, a child carer from a Child Care Centre, a school teacher, a church teacher, and a police officer. The study adopted a case study approach and qualitative research methods to collect and analyse data. Primary data was collected from in-depth interviews and 2 focus groups of 10 participants each, while secondary data were leaned from existing literature and observation. The study was conducted in Lagos state and Oyo state of Nigeria. As stated earlier, the choice of these 2 states was due to their significance in adoption practices in Nigeria. Lagos is the chief cosmopolitan and commercial city of Nigeria containing representatives of all tribes. Oyo state is the chief indigenous city of Nigeria, and hence a culturally endowed state. Both Lagos and Oyo states which were purposively selected have well established Social Welfare Departments and many adoption centres and institutions for orphaned children.

A pilot study was conducted to pre-test the research instrument to ensure its suitability for the purpose of the study. The data were analysed and findings presented and discussed in the previous two chapters.

The findings of the study indicated that concealing adoption information from the adoptee is a common challenge in adoption practices in Nigeria. The major reasons given in support of concealment were anchored in the beliefs and misconceptions of the people which stem from their cultural beliefs regarding adoption. For instance, it is believed that a child that is not born biologically or related by blood is a bastard and people who adopt

such children are considered as irresponsible and unworthy of societal respect. This belief affects the attitude and acceptability of adoption in Nigerian society. Therefore, secrecy becomes the order of practice for those who adopt. Again, it emerged that adoption essentially catered for adopters need for a child among families faced with the problem of infertility and inability to conceive a biological child. Hence, adoption is adult centered, rather than child centered. This made it possible for adopters to conceal from the child information about his/her adoption so as to avoid the cultural stigma and any other likely consequence on both the adoptee and the adopter.

The study was supported by two theories, viz: the theory of social constructionism and the ecological theory of human development. Social constructionism posits that systems in which the child develops tended to be socially constructed, and learner's construction of knowledge is the product of social interaction, interpretation and understanding of the environment. As seen in this case study, the attitudes and meanings attached to child adoption in Nigerian society is the product of prevailing cultural frame and social symbolic practices.

As social construction is focused on meaning (Cojocaru & Bragaru, 2012), attaching meaning to the society's construction on the issue of adoption could reinforce the attitudes of many adopters towards adoption leading to concealment of adoption information in the Nigerian society. Albeit in other societies positive construction in-put is rather placed on the adoption, attaching positive meaning such as giving a child a lovely home, family and a brighter future. This would have a positive impact in the lives of both the adopted child and the adoptive parent , thus, making the adoption process successful.

Furthermore, although adoption is legally practiced, the laws and policies are silent on sharing adoption information with the child. The argument from the social workers point to the to protect the interest of the adopter, hence value of confidentiality. However, that perspective seemed awkward, and also old-fashioned giving it is happening in the information society of the 21st century. Therefore, this study proposed a reversal of the status quo in adoption practice in Nigeria, arguing for a scenario where the adoptee is given the right to know of his/her adoption status by the law through the adoptive parents and not from third parties, which stance has enormous negative effects as currently being witnessed in Nigeria. A child growing up without knowledge of his/her origin and identity often reacts negatively and becomes devastated especially if the child gets to know about his/her adoption status from the wrong sources. There is a sense in which this causes embarrassment and creates a state of confusion having a deep psychological impact on the child.

Moreover, there was broad consensus that concealing adoption information from the adoptee had enormous negative consequences for the child emotionally, psychologically and behaviourally. Some children could even turn violent in the adoptive home if they got to know about their adoption status from sources outside the home. They might fight the parents because they feel they have concealed such vital information from them all these years. Many of the respondents shared the view that the child could be psychologically affected by the initial shock of unexpectedly hearing about the adoption, and this could even lead to mental problems or even the child committing suicide, socially withdrawing from the family, and even absconding. Thus, it could be exceedingly painful

to the child if the adoptive information is hidden from him/her, than when the information is positively, constructively, and timely shared with the child.

By the same token, adoptive parents might find themselves in a dilemma not knowing what to do especially when the child becomes violent or threatens suicide. In times of such confusion, the consensus was that professional help was called for and social workers were best placed to assist adoptive parents to overcome such challenges.

The positive effects of sharing of adoption information with the adoptee were found to be numerous, especially if adoption information is shared in a timely, positive and loving manner. This gives the child the opportunity to shape his/her attitudes and adequately prepare to absorb any negative information from third parties. Findings of the study revealed that timely sharing of the information could also help the child to build his/her self-esteem and to have a sense of safety and security. In addition, the child could develop a clear sense of his/her identity and acceptance of his/her adoptive status. Sharing of adoption information with the child has its own fair share of challenges in the process. The findings revealed that there could be initial shock to the child upon receiving the information, but if the child was told sufficiently early in life, say as a toddler, and the information was built up as the child grew, then the likelihood of shock on receiving the information from outsiders would be drastically minimized.

Sharing the information could turn out to be the solid foundation that could promote love, care and a good relationship between the parents and the child. This could make the child more appreciative of the adoptive parents and not turn violent after getting to know about the adoption. Thus, love, care and a good relationship between the parents and the child should be the foundation for the sharing adoption information with the adoptee.

Therefore, in the best interest of the child and of adoption practice in Nigeria, this study makes the following recommendations and contributions.

7.3 Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that concealing adoption information from the adopted child has more negative effects on the child than the sharing of it. The negative implications of non-disclosure of such information could have damaging consequences on the child according to the findings of this study. Although, some respondents consider concealing adoption information from the child as positive, they failed to consider that the concealment may not last for life as there is a high probability of the child getting to know about his/her adoption through third parties. Since adoption must be in the best interest of the child, whatever action that leaves a negative impact on the adoption arrangement should be avoided and only positive processes advanced.

7.4 Recommendations and contributions to the study

The recommendations are in two segments, first specific recommendations to particular stakeholders, and second, a proposed framework for sharing adoption information with adoptees.

The study found that adopters conceal adoption information from adoptees due to societal perceptions towards adoption, cultural values relating to rearing adopted children, cultural beliefs on communal values, individual fears and misconceptions, scarcity of information on adoption from adoption agencies, and confidentiality factors (research question 1). The possible implications of concealment of adoption information from adoptees included emotional problems such as adoptees getting depressed, being demoralized, being devastated, being traumatized and manifesting violent behaviours on

hearing about their adoption status from third parties. There could also be social implications including withdrawal syndrome, and loss of self-esteem (research question 2). The possibility of sharing adoption information depended on societal views. There was broad consensus for a reversal of the practice of concealment of adoption information from adoptees to a scenario where the adoptee is giving the right to know his/her adoption status (research question 3). Sharing adoption information might affect the adoptee emotionally and psychologically, while adoptive parent might find themselves in a dilemma as to how to handle the situation (research question 4).

Therefore, based on the above findings, the following recommendations and contributions to the study could go a long way in promoting successful child centred adoption practices in Nigeria.

7.4.1 Recommendations for policy makers

- **Government involvement through comprehensive adoption policy**

The involvement of the government is vital in the process and practice of child adoption in Nigeria. This becomes effective when there is policy in the area of sharing adoption information with adoptees to guide the practice. Already the enactment of the Child Right Act 2003, has been a positive move to strengthen the process and practice of child adoption in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the process of sharing adoption information with the adoptive child did not feature in the Act. This information could be incorporated into the policy framework as additional policy and practice in Nigeria through appropriate legislation. The child has the right to access information about his biological origin or identity irrespective of whether or not he/she is biological or adopted one. Appropriate and comprehensive policy on child adoption including sharing adoption information with the adoptee could

alleviate negative attitudes to child adoption, ensure positive public perceptions about child adoption, and holistically affect general attitudes towards adoption to the benefit of both adoptees and adopters.

There is no existing policy on sharing of adoption information with adoptees in Nigeria. Hence, there is need for a policy to legislate free flow of adoption information (including sharing adoption information with adoptees), while equal consideration and protection in the interest of the parties in the adoption triangle is given. The policy should be child-centred which should be specifically oriented towards facilitating child development and promote their interest. The policy should be child-centred, and should aim to expand the adoptee's ability to learn of their birth origins. A policy that promotes a child-centred approach should be developed and this policy should recognize and acknowledge as much as possible children's reality and accommodate the interest of the child. For example, the reality is that a child has a right to know his/her biological origin.

7.4.2 Government backed public enlightenment adoption campaign

Apart from policy enactment, it is recommended that as part of the government intervention, there is need for organised public enlightenment to create awareness of the concept and benefits of child adoption in order to remove the societal taboo connotation attached to child adoption. A section of Departments of Social Welfare at every level of government (that is federal, state and local) should be created for this purpose. Their duty would be to create public awareness of what child adoption encapsulates. Adopted children need love and care in a family setting or environment which a childcare centre cannot adequately provide. Moreover, adoption is not evil and adopting a child who is not related by blood is legal. Thus, the sustained frequency of publicity of adoption awareness is likely

to help eradicate or at least reduce negative perceptions created by the society and the culture of fear and misconceptions on the part of adopters which lead to concealment of adoption information from the adopted child.

Government policy to promote adoption enlightenment through social media and other information dissemination platforms such as radio, television and newspapers could be used to sensitize the community in order to discourage unethical practices towards the child. This could also help to minimize the socio-cultural implications associated with child adoption. Furthermore, live stories of those who were adopted, and who got to know about their adoption; and were satisfied with the adoption could be shared as testimonies in order to remove the taboo associate with adoption.

- **Involvement of Non Governmental organizations**

Apart from government involvement through public enlightenment campaigns, non governmental organizations such as Faith Based Organizations (FBO) and Community based organizations can also be involved in public enlightenment campaigns,.

For instance religious organisation could help in public awareness; since large numbers of people are often found in the churches and public worship centres. As part of public enlightenment campaign, other places such as schools, market places, could also be avenues to reach the masses with appropriate information.

7.4.3 Recommendation for Adoption stakeholders

The issue of confidentiality in the adoption practices in Nigeria has been more favourable to the adopters than the adoptees. The reason, as has been stated earlier is to protect the interest of the adopters while the interest of the adoptee is not prioritised. This has not always been constructive for adoptees.

Therefore, it is recommended that social workers should reconsider their stance on the issue of confidentiality and be flexible by giving room for the sharing of adoption information with the adoptees. From the review of literature, the importance of sharing information with adoptees was noted. Furthermore, social workers should lead in providing the guidelines for sharing of adoption information with adoptees. In addition, social workers should be involved in training of prospective adopters. Apart from the usual process of adoption, the training should include ways and means of sharing with the adoptee his/her adoptive status. The training should happen both before the probation period and after it, as a follow up before the final placement.

Other professionals such as Paediatricians, Guidance Counsellors, Child Psychologists, and Family Therapists among should also be involved in training. Their wealth of experience will help the lives of those they assist.

In addition, there should be an organized forum from time to time where adopters can be able to share their experiences among themselves especially on the areas of sharing with adoptee details of their status. Adopters can learn from each other's experiences. This makes the intervention of social workers less stressful and more practical.

7.4.4 Proposed Framework for sharing adoption information with the adoptee

The purpose of this section is to propose a contingency framework for sharing adoption information with the adoptee. During this research, two focus group and fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted to collect information on “adoption stakeholders perceptions of sharing adoption information with adoptees: the case of Nigeria”. The potential factors

included in the proposed framework are based on this data. In addition, Four essential questions guiding the proposed framework were:

- 1) Why should adoption information be shared (Policy document provided by Government)
- 2) When should adoption information be presented to adoptees?
- 3) How should adoption information be presented to adoptees?
- 4) What adoption information should be presented to adoptees?

Telling the adoptee about his/her adoption status as a fact must be done in order for the adoptee to know that though the adopters are their parents, they are not their biological parents. This information is vital so that when the adoptee gets to know through an outsider, the information will not come as a shock which could leave a far more negative impact on the adoptee than a positive one.

Consequently, from the findings of this study and the literature, adoptees would want to know more about:

- 1) Their birth origin
- 2) The birth parents
- 3) Whether they have parents and siblings
- 4) How they can locate birth parents and siblings
- 5) How they got to be adopted and what brought about the adoption

In order to evolve a proper framework for sharing adoption information with the adoptee, the researcher proposed the following stages:

I. Stage 1: Understanding the partners in Adoption process using a Segmented Triad Pyramid (STP) – The Nigerian situation

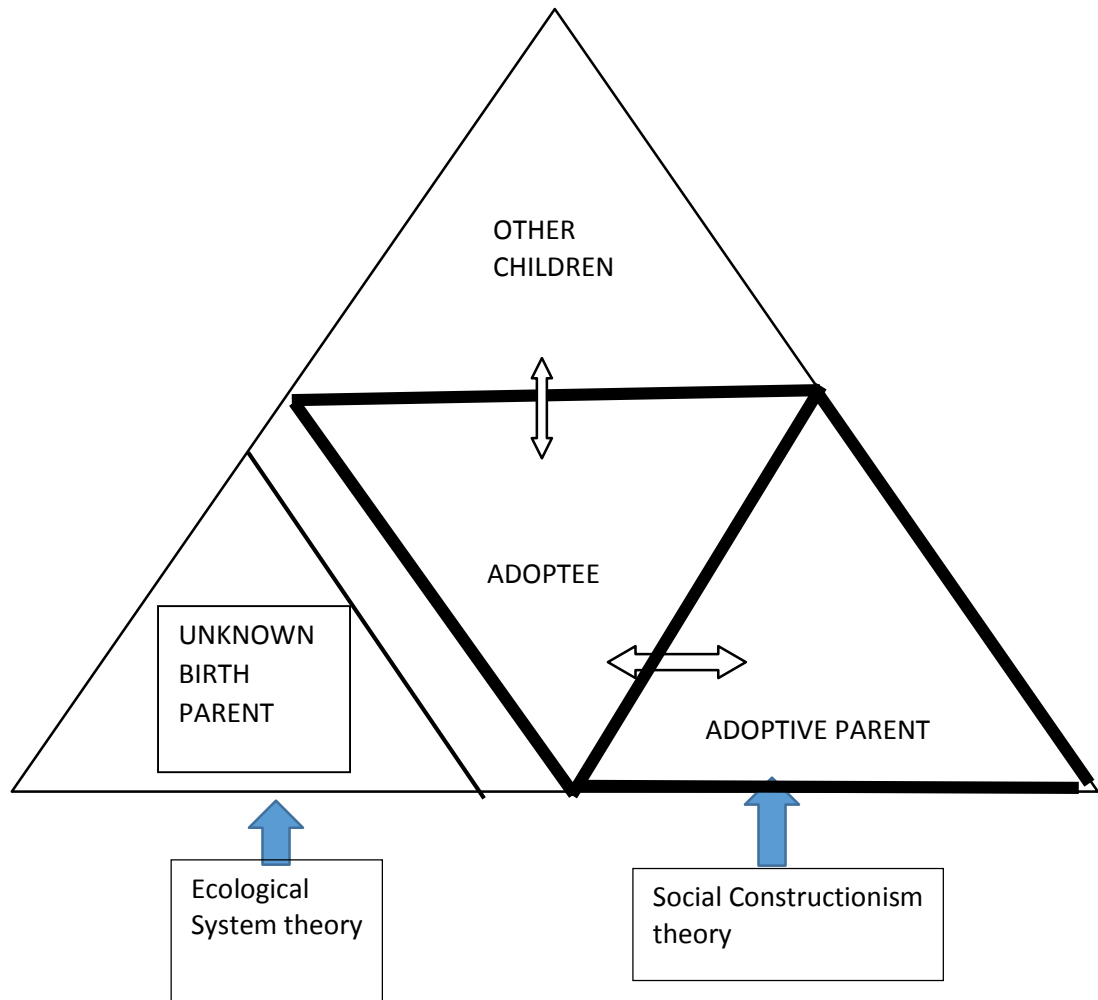


Fig 7.1. Proposed Adoption conversation skeleton

Figure 7.1 shows the adoption conversation skeleton which emerged from the study. The skeleton rests on the findings of this study and also draws from the ecological systems and the social constructionism theories used in this study. The segmented triad pyramid (STP) has the adoptee at the centre of the conversation or communication. There is as expected conversation between:

- 1) Adoptee and Adoptive parent
- 2) Adoptee and other children in the home when necessary. The other children could be older adoptees or biological children

There is no conversation or communication between:

- 1) Unknown birth parent and adoptee as is usually the case in Nigeria
- 2) Unknown birth parent and adoptive parent

Arrows connect the triangles where conversation or communication is expected. What is also very important about the STP is the fact that it reveals:

- 1) The components of parties to the conversation or communication (adoptee, adoptive parent, other children if any).
- 2) The complexity of adoption information communication. For instance, communication among adoptees in the home or communication among adoptees and biological children (where applicable).
- 3) The scope of this study is limited to communication between adoptive parents and adoptees

The rest of this framework addressed this aspect (i.e communication between adoptive parents and adoptees) of the study.

II. Stage 2: Application of framework in this study

As stated previously the study focused essentially on children adopted as babies or infants abandoned by unknown birth mothers either in a bush, gutter or dust bin; and the baby is picked up and brought to a government agency which officially places the baby in a social welfare centre from where the baby is legally adopted by potential adopters. As proposed in this study, the need to make the adoptee aware of his/her

adoptive status through sharing of needful adoption information with him/her by the adoptive parent cannot be over emphasized. To achieve this goal, the communication channels must be opened between the adoptive parent and the adoptee, and this in a positive and normative manner, and with love and care. The adopted child in an adoptive home must be told of their adoption status by adoptive parents so that the adoptee does not get to know of their adoption status through outsiders. Communication of information between an adoptee and any biological children in the home is beyond the scope of this study. The next stages in this skeleton covers the details of the proposed framework.

III. Stage 3: Communication between adoptive parents and adoptees

The communication model is limited to communication between adoptive parents and adoptees (i.e sharing adoption information with the adoptee(s)) as indicated in fig 7.1 thick triangles.

IV. Stage 4: The Proposed Framework

Figure 7.2 shows the proposed framework for sharing adoption information with the adoptee in four phases which answers 4 vital questions namely:

1. Why share adoption information with the adoptee? It is expected that the reasons or necessity for sharing adoption information with the adoptee be clearly stated in the form of a policy statement. This is for the government to address through appropriate legislation.
2. When should adoption information be shared with the adoptee? At what age should the sharing of adoption information with the adoptee commence? Ages 7, 8, 9, 10, 18 are suggested by respondents who participated in this study. However, the

literature suggests starting from ages 3 to 5, 6 to 12, and 13 to 16 (Brodzinsky, 2014). In doing this, the cognitive level of the child at every age determines what to and how to communicate the information. This study concurs with Brodzinsky, 2014 recommendation of starting from the age of curiosity, ages 3-5 as explained in section 2.4.6.

3. How should adopters communicate adoption information with the adoptee?
4. What information should be shared/communicated with the adoptee? This should include information about the adoption itself. Information on adoptive parents and not biological parents since they are usually unknown; adoptee birth origin and circumstances; adoptee birth parent and siblings as unknown etc.

Figure 7.2 shows the proposed framework in four frames 1 (Why), 2 (When), 3 (How), and 4 (What).

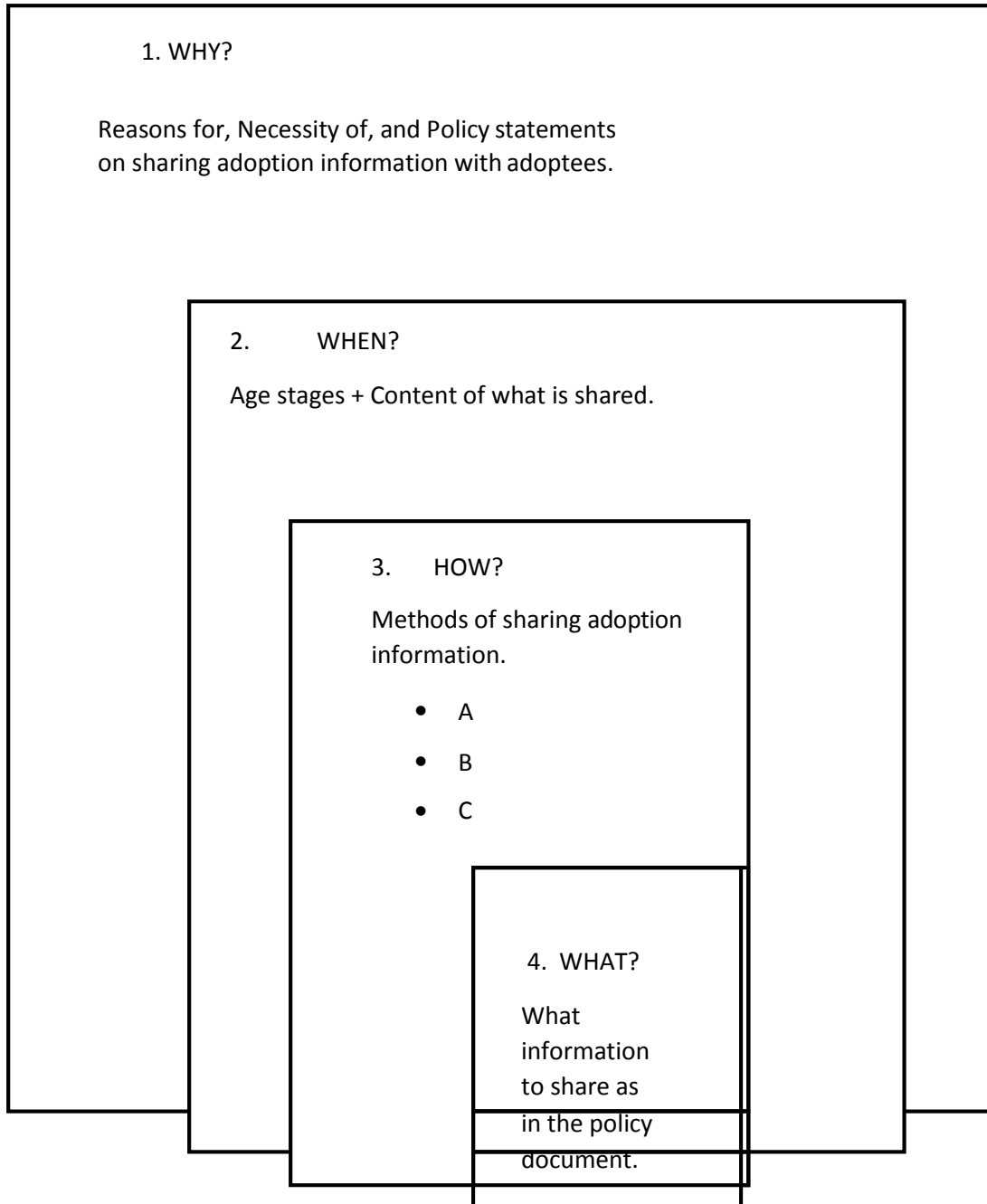


Figure 7. 2. A Proposed framework for sharing adoption information with adoptees.

Source: J.K. Okike (2020).

From figure 7.2, the four frames of the framework are explained as follows:

Frame 1 [WHY]: General policy statement by government which should guide adoption

process and practice including sharing of adoption information with adoptees.

Frame 2 [WHEN]: At what age should sharing adoption information commence?

Talks starting in infancy should be made early and often even before the child is old enough to understand. This is to get the child accustomed to the word adoption, which should progressively expand as the child grows say from ages 3 to 5, 6 to 12, 13-16 adolescent age.

Frame 3 [HOW]: Through storytelling, and the use of a calm tone of voice, the adoptive parent may share the story of how the child was adopted and brought into the family; play method using a doll to indicate caring ; everyday experiences (e.g. casual observation about everyday events; use of appropriate video films relating to adoption; use of bible stories relating to adoption (how believers are adopted by God into His family through his love for mankind). Keep the sessions simple and relaxed. The use of common experiences is also appropriate as a teaching tool (e.g. on how young animals (puppies) are cared for day and night for their protection), and other appropriate methods relevant to the age and the emotional development of the child.

Frame 4 [WHAT]: What type of information to be shared with adoptees.

Information about the facts of the adoption status in an honest manner, the circumstances leading to the adoption shared in a positive manner (unknown birth parents, unknown siblings, baby in need of care and comfort etc).

7.4 The case for future research

The following are recommendations for future research on child adoption in Nigeria.

1. There is need for future research to cover a larger population so as to allow for generalisation of findings to inform policy and practice.
2. There is need to investigate post adoption experiences of adopters and adoptees in Nigeria.
3. There is need to investigate communication patterns among adoptees or between adoptees and biological children where they exist.
4. There is need for research on attitudes of adult or adolescent adoptees towards their adoptive status.
5. Adoption in Nigeria is currently confidential (closed). There is need for research on perspectives on open adoption model in Nigeria.

7.5 Limitations of the Study.

The limitation of this study include:

1. There were accessibility and bureaucratic constraints to reaching some individuals in high profile employment positions in government ministries which limited the diversity of sources of data for the study.

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APPENDICES



Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic Affairs)

Office of Research and Development

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Ref: UBR/RES/IRB/SOC/034

**The Head,
Department of Social Work
University College Hospital, UCH
Ibadan, Oyo State**

9th May 2018

RE: APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER: MS JULIANA K. OKIKE

Since it is a requirement that everyone undertaking research as a University of Botswana staff or student should obtain an ethical clearance letter, the Office of Research and Development at the University of Botswana has been tasked with the responsibility of overseeing research at UB including facilitating the issuance of Research Permits for all UB Researchers inclusive of students and staff.

I am writing this letter in support of an application for ethical clearance by Ms Juliana K. Okike, a PhD student at the University of Botswana in the Department of Social Work. Ms Okike has proposed to conduct a study titled "*Adopters' and Social Workers' Perceptions of Sharing Adoption Related Information with Adoptees: A Case of Nigeria*". The objective of this study is to investigate whether the branches are performing according to expectations. The findings of this research may help LNLS to identify if its meeting its objectives and the needs of its users, know the strength and weaknesses in service provision at the branches.

The Office of Research and Development is satisfied with the process for data collection, analysis and the intended utilisation of findings from this research. We will appreciate your kind and timely consideration of this application.

NB: This letter does not however give permission to collect data from the selected facilities without approval from an Ethics Committee in your home country. A copy of the Ethics clearance letter must be submitted to ORD. Consent from the identified individuals should be obtained at all times.

We thank you for your usual cooperation and assistance

Sincerely,

Dr M. Kasule

Assistant Director



Office of Research & Development



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24th June, 2019

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam


RECOMMENDATION FOR MRS JULIANA KOFOWOROLA OKIKE

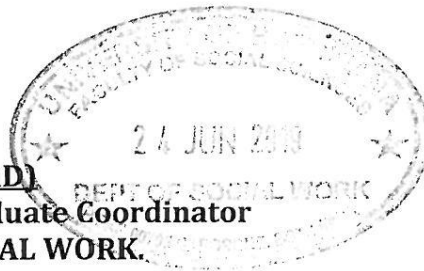
I am delighted to introduce Mrs Okike to you who is a PhD candidate in the Department of Social Work. She has been in the programme since 2013/14 academic year under UB student ID No. 201308182. At this stage she has completed all her taught courses and is in the process of writing her PhD thesis. Her thesis supervisors are Prof. Tapologo Maundeni and Prof. Gloria Jacques.

As part of the requirements for successfully completing the PhD programme, a candidate is required to attend conferences both within and outside Botswana to present and publish such papers. As a Nigerian citizen (Passport No. A06249407), she may require a visa to enter your country. Please kindly assist her to travel to your country as necessary.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding Mrs Okike's registration in the PhD in Social Work degree programme.

Sincerely,


Morena J. Rankopo (PhD)
Senior Lecturer & Graduate Coordinator
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK.



INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: Adopters' and Social Workers' Perceptions of Sharing Adoption Related Information with Adoptees: A case study of Nigeria

Principal Investigator :Juliana KofoworolaOkike, [MSW.]

Phone number(s): 76840261

What you should know about this research study:

- We give you this informed consent document so that you may read about the purpose, risks, and benefits of this research study.
- You have the right to refuse to take part, or agree to take part now and change your mind later.
- Please review this consent form carefully. Ask any questions before you make a decision.
- Your participation is voluntary.

PURPOSE

You are being asked to participate in a research study of **Adopters' and Social Workers' Perceptions of Sharing Adoption Related Information with Adoptees: A case study of Nigeria**

The purpose of this study is to examine the issue of concealing adoption information from adoptees, and to explore the perspectives of adoptive parents, social workers and other adoption stakeholders on how sharing or disclosing adoption related information with the adoptee could help to resolve problems and complexities that arise as a result of concealing adoption information from adoptees in Nigeria.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because your contribution will assist in addressing the problem. Before you sign this form, please ask any questions on any aspect of this study that is unclear to you. You may take as much time as necessary to think it over.

PROCEDURES AND DURATION

If you decide to participate, you will be invited to the focus group discussions/interview meetings arranged to collect the necessary data for this study.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

All interviews and focus group discussions will be conducted in a conducive and safe environment.

BENEFITS AND/OR COMPENSATION

Light refreshments shall be provided at focus group meetings

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data from this investigation will be treated as confidential and anonymous information for research study only. None of these will be used for commercial use.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide not to participate in this study, your decision will not affect your future relations with the University of Botswana, its personnel, and associated institutions. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Any refusal to observe and meet appointments agreed upon with the central investigator will be considered as implicit withdrawal and therefore will terminate the subject's participation in the investigation without his/her prior request. In this event the subject will be paid what is owed to him/her or forfeit a proportionate amount of relative payment mentioned earlier in this document. In the event of incapacity to fulfill the duties agreed upon the subject's participation to this investigation will be terminated without his/her consent and no compensation will be offered under these circumstances.

AUTHORIZATION

You are making a decision whether or not to participate in this study. Your signature indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, have had all your questions answered, and have decided to participate.

Name of Research Participant (please print)

Date

Signature of Staff Obtaining Consent
(Optional)

Date

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM TO KEEP.

If you have any questions concerning this study or consent form beyond those answered by the investigator, including questions about the research, your rights as a research participant; or if you feel that you have been treated unfairly and would like to talk to someone other than a member of the research team, please feel free to contact the Office of Research and Development, University of Botswana, Phone: Ms Dimpho Njadingwe on 355-2900, E-mail: research@mopipi.ub.bw, Telefax: [0267] 395-7573.



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7th June, 2018

The Assistant Director Research Ethics,
Office of Research & Development,
University of Botswana.

Dr. M. Kasule,

RE: APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL CLEARANCE: MRS. JULIANA K. OKIKE

I write to acknowledge receipt of your letter in respect of the above named candidate from your university who is in Nigeria to collect data for her Ph. D research on "Adoption and Social Workers Perceptions of sharing adoption Related information with the Adoptee: A case study of Nigeria".

Mrs. Okike has been given the permission to collect her data as requested.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Dr. Olufunmilayo O. Folaranmi

Our Vision:

To be a world-class institution for academic excellence geared towards meeting societal needs

Our Mission:

- To expand the frontiers of knowledge through provision of excellent conditions for learning and research
- To produce graduates who are worthy in character and sound judgement.
- To contribute to the transformation of society through creativity and innovation.



**MINISTRY OF WOMEN AFFAIRS, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT,
SOCIAL WELFARE AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION**

PRIVATE MAIL BAG 29, AGODI POST OFFICE,
IBADAN, OYO STATE OF NIGERIA

Your Ref. No.....
All Communications on this matter should be
addressed to Honourable Commissioner quoting

Our Ref. No. MWACDSW&PA/SW63Vol II/35

5th June, 2018.....20.....

RE-APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL CLEARANCE: MRS. JULIANA K. OKIKE

I am directed to acknowledge the receipt of your letter in respect of the above named candidate from your University who came to Nigeria to collect data for her PhD research on "Adopters and Social Workers Perceptions of sharing adoption Related Information with the Adoptee: A Case Study of Nigeria".

2. Mrs. Okike had been given the permission to collect her data as requested in Ibadan/ Ibarapa Zonal Social Welfare Office, Onireke, Ibadan, Juvenile Correctional Institution, Ijokodo, Ibadan and Social Welfare Office Headquarters.

3. Thank you.

Mr. S.O. Kolajo,

Director Social Welfare Department,
For: Honourable Commissioner.

APPENDIX E
SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT,
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA

Interview Guide

This interview guide is designed to form part of data collection for a research study undertaken by a PhD student of social work from the University of Botswana. You are kindly requested to provide answers to enable the researcher collect relevant data to contribute to knowledge in the field of adoption. Any information you provide will be treated with absolute confidentiality. Please note that participation in this study is voluntary and you will not be forced or coerced to be involved. Should you wish not to participate in this study at any time, you may please do so.

Thank you.

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW GUIDE
DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND OF RESPONDENTS

1. What is your state of origin?
2. What is the name of your town/city?
3. Which state are you residing in at present?
4. To which ethnic group do you belong?
5. What language do you commonly speak?
6. Mention any other language you speak
7. What is your marital status: single/married/divorced/cohabiting?
8. Age range: How old are you: 20-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50, 50-59, above 60?
9. Gender : male/ female
10. What is your level of Education: Primary/Secondary/Tertiary/other?
11. What is your current employment status: employed/unemployed/self-employed?
12. If employed, what is your occupation?

13. If self-employed, what is your occupation?

OBJECTIVE 1: TO EXAMINE FACTORS RELATED TO CONCEALING ADOPTION INFORMATION FROM ADOPTEE.

1. What are the views or perceptions on child adoption in your community/society?
 - Respondents to explain :
 - (i) if adoption is accepted or otherwise in their community.
 - (ii) the community attitude to adoption
2. Does your culture or belief support the act of concealing adoption information from adoptee?
 - Respondent to explain if there is any cultural reasons or beliefs that support concealment of adoption information from adoptee.
3. What are your views about concealing adoption information from the adoptee?
 - Respondents to discuss “ should an adopted child be denied access to information about his status”
4. What do you think are the reasons why adopters conceal adoption information from the child?

Respondents to explain:

 - (i) the likely reasons why adoptive parents conceal information from adoptee about his or her status.
 - (ii) Is it in the interest of the adoptive parent or that of the birth parent or in the best interest of the child?
5. If you were an adopter would you conceal from your child information about his or her adoption? If so, why? If not, why?

OBJECTIVE 2: TO IDENTIFY POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS OF CONCEALING ADOPTION RELATED INFORMATION FROM THE ADOPTEE.

1. How do you think a child whose adoption information is concealed would react to himself, his adoptive parents, his birth parent if he/ she learns about it later in life?
2. How does the denial of access to adoption information affect the identity and self-esteem of an adoptee?
 - Respondents to discuss what could be the plight of such a child if he/she never knew about his/her identity.
3. How does concealing adoption information affect the adoptive parent, adoptee, and birth parent?
 - Respondents to discuss likely social and psychological implications.
4. In your own view, can you explain the likely implications that may arise in the adoptive family if the adoptee has no access to information about his status?

OBJECTIVE 3: TO EXPLORE POSSIBLE WAYS OF SHARING ADOPTION INFORMATION WITH THE ADOPTEE

1. Do you think it necessary (or otherwise) to inform the potential adopter before final placement, the importance of disclosing to their child his/her adoption status?
 - Respondents to discuss :
 - (i) if there is the necessity of training for adopters or otherwise
 - (ii) if there is need for professional assistance during adoption process in relation to sharing adoption information with the adoptees or otherwise.
2. If you think information should not be shared with the adoptee, what are your reasons?
3. If you think information should be shared with adoptee, how should adoption information be shared with the adoptee ?
 - Respondents should discuss:
 - (i) If there be guiding principles to follow or methods that can be used?
 - (ii) How could the social worker help in this area

4. When do you think is the appropriate time to disclose or share with the adoptee information about his status?
 - Respondents to discuss:
 - (i) What age they think it appropriate to start sharing with the adoptee information about his/her adoption.
 - (ii) What stage in life : infancy, toddler, adolescence, adulthood?
 - (iii) Should information be shared all at once or should it be shared gradually as the child grows?
5. What type of information should be given to the child about his background?
6. What are the likely challenges that can confront adoptive parents in the process of sharing with their child information about his/her adoption.
7. Suppose you are an adoptive parent, what possible approaches would you take to share or disclose to your child information about his adoption ?

**OBJECTIVE 4: TO EXAMINE THE EFFECT OF SHARING ADOPTION
RELATED INFORMATION WITH THE ADOPTEE**

1. What do you think could be the outcome or effect of sharing adoption information with the adoptee?
2. How does sharing adoption information affect the life of an adoptee in his/her relationship with adoptive parent, birth parent, peers at school, in the neighbourhood and in his or her religious affiliation.
3. In your own view can you explain the implications or challenges of sharing adoption related information with the adoptee.
4. Suppose you are an adoptive parent would you choose to share or disclose to your child information about his /her adoption , if not why?

APPENDIX F
FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

The following are guiding questions for the focus group discussion

- (1) What are the perceptions and attitudes of people in your community to child adoption? Please explain.
- (1) Suppose you were an adoptive parent would you conceal information about his/her adoption status from your child? If so, why? If not why?
- (2) Suppose you were an adoptive parent would you share information about his/her adoption status with your child? If so, why? If not why?
- (3) In your own view, can you explain the likely implications that may arise in the adoptive family if :
 - (a) The adoptee has no access to information about his/her status
 - (b) The information is shared with the adopted child.
- (4) How would you advice the following adoption stakeholders on the issue of sharing /not sharing adoption information with the adoptee:
 - (a) Adoptive parents
 - (b) Social workers
 - (c) Adoption agencies
 - (d) Policy makers
- (5) What are the reasons for your advice in item (5) above

APPENDIX G: Reseacher's Application Letters to conduct research

Department of Social Work
University of Botswana
P.O.Box 00706
Gaorone, Botswana
2 April 2018

Dear Sir/Madam,

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN (DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE)
REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW OFFICERS

I am a Doctoral student at the University of Botswana under the supervision of Professors T. Maundeni and Gloria Jacques of the Department of Social Work. The focus of my Thesis is on child adoption. The aim is to explore the views and perspectives of Stakeholders (Social Workers, Adoption Agencies, Juvenile Welfare officers (Police Station), Orphanages, and others connected with child adoption practice) on the issue of concealment/sharing of adoption information with adoptees in Nigeria,

I am by this letter seeking permission to interview some of the officers in charge of adoption in your office. The following ethical issues will be observed during the process.

- (i) The identity of the officers interviewed will not be disclosed.
- (1) The interview will be conducted at their own convenience.
- (2) Care will be taken to avoid any form of embarrassment during the interview session.
- (3) Participants will not be forced to disclose information they are uncomfortable discussing or sharing.

The participation of your office in this exercise may help to promote a more successful adoption practice in Nigeria.

I am looking forward to your favourable cooperation.

Yours Sincerely,

Juliana Kofoworola Okike
Tel: +2347019010939
Email: jkokike3@gmail.com

Department of Social Work
University of Botswana
P.O.Box 00706
Gaorone, Botswana
2 April 2018

Dear Sir/Madam,

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN (DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK,
UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN)
REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW LECTURERS

I am a Doctoral student at the University of Botswana under the supervision of Professors T. Maundeni and Gloria Jacques of the Department of Social Work. The focus of my Thesis is on child adoption. The aim is to explore the views and perspectives of Stakeholders (Social Workers, Adoption Agencies, Juvenile Welfare officers (Police Station), Orphanages, Social Workers Educators and others connected with child adoption practice) on the issue of concealment/sharing of adoption information with adoptees in Nigeria,

I am by this letter seeking permission to interview some of the lecturers in Social Work (Social Workers Educators). The following ethical issues will be observed during the process.

- (j) The identity of the officers interviewed will not be disclosed.
- (4) The interview will be conducted at their own convenience.
- (5) Care will be taken to avoid any form of embarrassment during the interview session.
- (6) Participants will not be forced to disclose information they are uncomfortable discussing or sharing.

The participation of your office in this exercise may help to promote a more successful adoption practice in Nigeria.

I am looking forward to your favourable cooperation.

Yours Sincerely,

Juliana Kofoworola Okike
Tel: +2347019010939
Email: jkokike3@gmail.com

Department of Social Work
University of Botswana
P.O.Box 00706
Gaorone, Botswana
2 April 2018

Dear Sir/Madam,

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN (DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK/
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE HOSPITAL IBADAN)
REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW SOCIAL WORK STAKEHOLDERS

I am a Doctoral student at the University of Botswana under the supervision of Professors T. Maundeni and Gloria Jacques of the Department of Social Work. The focus of my Thesis is on child adoption. The aim is to explore the views and perspectives of Stakeholders (Social Workers, Adoption Agencies, Juvenile Welfare officers (Police Station), Orphanages, Social Workers Educators and others connected with child adoption practice) on the issue of concealment/sharing of adoption information with adoptees in Nigeria,

I am by this letter seeking permission to interview some of the lecturers in Social Work (Social Workers Educators). The following ethical issues will be observed during the process.

- (k) The identity of the officers interviewed will not be disclosed.
- (7) The interview will be conducted at their own convenience.
- (8) Care will be taken to avoid any form of embarrassment during the interview session.
- (9) Participants will not be forced to disclose information they are uncomfortable discussing or sharing.

The participation of your office in this exercise may help to promote a more successful adoption practice in Nigeria.

I am looking forward to your favourable cooperation.

Yours Sincerely,

Juliana Kofoworola Okike
Tel: +2347019010939
Email: jkokike3@gmail.com

Department of Social Work
University of Botswana
P.O.Box 00706
Gaorone, Botswana
2 April 2018

Dear Sir/Madam,

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION OYO/LAGOS
STATES)
REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW TEACHERS

I am a Doctoral student at the University of Botswana under the supervision of Professors T. Maundeni and Gloria Jacques of the Department of Social Work. The focus of my Thesis is on child adoption. The aim is to explore the views and perspectives of Stakeholders (Social Workers, Adoption Agencies, Juvenile Welfare officers (Police Station), Orphanages, Social Workers Educators and others connected with child adoption practice) on the issue of concealment/sharing of adoption information with adoptees in Nigeria,

I am by this letter seeking permission to interview some of the lecturers in Social Work (Social Workers Educators). The following ethical issues will be observed during the process.

- (1) The identity of the officers interviewed will not be disclosed.
- (10) The interview will be conducted at their own convenience.
- (11) Care will be taken to avoid any form of embarrassment during the interview session.
- (12) Participants will not be forced to disclose information they are uncomfortable discussing or sharing.

The participation of your office in this exercise may help to promote a more successful adoption practice in Nigeria.

I am looking forward to your favourable cooperation.

Yours Sincerely,

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