Global Scientific JOURNALS

The Adoption Experience: Stories of Success

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the

College of Criminal Justice Education

Data Center College of the Philippines

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Course

Criminological Research II (Thesis Writing and Presentation)

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October 2025

CHAPTER I
THE PROBLEM AND IT'S SETTING

Introduction

Adoption—whether legal or relative—is a significant life transition that reshapes an individual's identity, emotional landscape, and life trajectory. Many adoptees come from backgrounds marked by neglect, abandonment, separation, or the loss of biological parents. Despite these hardships, numerous adopted individuals develop resilience and achieve personal success when raised in supportive and nurturing environments. This study highlights the lived experiences of successful adoptees, focusing on the challenges they faced and the strengths, coping mechanisms, and realizations that guided them toward stability and fulfillment (Pinderhughes, 2021). This research study sought to shed light on their journeys, highlighting not just their struggles but also the practices, strengths, and realizations that carried them toward personal achievement and stability.

Adopted individuals often faced unique challenges that shaped their identity and future trajectory. Before adoption, these individuals encountered emotional, social, and physical hardships stemming from their biological parents' inability or unwillingness to care for them. These early experiences often left lasting imprints, yet adoption provided a transformative turning point in their lives. The adoption process itself, while a potential lifeline, brought its own set of challenges, particularly in navigating the transition into a new family dynamic, adjusting to a new environment, and managing potential feelings of loss or confusion about their identity. Research suggests that adoptees may experience struggles with identity formation and attachment due to early separations or trauma (Jones, 2020).

Once adopted, many individuals exhibited resilience and determination to overcome these obstacles. However, their paths were rarely linear, and the strategies they employed in

handling the emotional and social complexities of adoption provided invaluable insights into the factors that contributed to their success. Studies highlight that open communication within adoptive families and supportive relationships greatly contribute to positive adjustment and emotional well-being among adoptees (Schwartz, 2021). This study examined how successful adoptees overcame adversity, highlighting the coping strategies and personal practices they embraced to manage their experiences and emerge as well-adjusted individuals.

The main objective of this study is to explore and understand the lived experiences of successful adopted individuals, particularly how they overcame the emotional, social, and psychological challenges of adoption and achieve personal resilience and success. It seeks to identify the strengths, coping strategies, and realizations that shape their identities and contribute to their overall well-being and life stability.

Background of the Study

For many adopted children, life had begun in brokenness left behind by poverty, abuse, abandonment, or the death of parents. They had grown up questioning why they had not been wanted, or why their lives had not begun with a family who could keep them safe. Though they had been adopted, not all had received the emotional nourishment they had needed. Some had been given homes but not healing. Families had provided shelter but had often struggled to connect with the child's invisible wounds, leaving gaps in emotional development and identity (Lopez & Martin, 2023).

Legal adoption had been a formal process in which a child, often from an orphanage or temporary care facility, was permanently placed with a new family through the involvement of government agencies or licensed legal professionals. In the Philippines, this process had been managed by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and had included

several steps such as home studies, background checks, counseling, and court proceedings (DSWD, 2023). Once finalized, the adopted child had gained the same legal rights as a biological child, including inheritance rights and a new birth certificate reflecting the adoptive parents' names. Legal adoption had provided structure, long-term security, and often reinforced a stronger sense of belonging and identity for the adoptee, as the family bond had been both emotionally and legally recognized (Lopez & Reyes, 2023).

Relative adoption, on the other hand, had usually been an informal arrangement in which a child had been raised by extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, or uncles without undergoing the formal legal adoption process. This had often occurred when biological parents had been unable to care for the child due to death, illness, or financial hardship. While this setup had offered a sense of familiarity and emotional closeness, it had lacked the legal safeguards that came with formal adoption, such as official documentation, inheritance rights, or name changes (Santos & Alonzo, 2024). Children in these situations had often experienced ambiguity in their role within the family and had sometimes faced challenges related to legal identity and access to government benefits. Despite the informal nature of relative adoption, many of these arrangements had been built on deep familial love and a strong sense of duty.

Children who had experienced neglect, abandonment, or the death of their biological parents and had later been adopted—whether legally or by relatives—had faced unique vulnerabilities. Studies had shown that early childhood trauma, particularly the loss of parental figures, had significantly increased the risk of behavioral issues, including delinquency and criminal involvement (Smith & Jordan, 2023). The absence of early, stable emotional bonds had often resulted in attachment difficulties, poor emotional regulation, and social maladjustment, all of which had been risk factors for later criminal behavior. Adopted individuals who had

overcome these initial disadvantages and achieved success had demonstrated resilience that merited closer examination.

Adoptees perceived their life situation as a complex mixture of gratitude, confusion, and emotional adjustment, experiencing a deep sense of belonging within their new families while simultaneously wrestling with ongoing questions about their identity, origin, and place in the world. Their life experiences were profoundly shaped by the emotional bonds they had formed with their adoptive families and by the degree to which they had felt accepted, loved, and supported throughout their upbringing. During the adoption transition, adoptees had frequently faced emotional struggles such as feelings of abandonment, identity confusion, trust issues, and difficulties forming secure attachments. These challenges had often been intensified by sudden cultural, social, or familial changes that had required rapid and sometimes overwhelming adaptation. Such difficulties had led to periods of anxiety, behavioral issues, social withdrawal, or even depression if left unaddressed.

To cope with these emotional burdens, adoptees had often sought support from trusted family members, participated in counseling or support groups, expressed their feelings through creative outlets such as art or writing, and worked toward developing personal resilience through self-reflection and positive relationship-building. Establishing open and honest communication with adoptive parents had also played a crucial role in helping adoptees process their emotions and feel safe expressing their fears and uncertainties. Over time, successful adoptees had come to understand that their self-worth had not been determined by their biological history but by the meaningful relationships they had nurtured, the personal growth they had achieved, and the strength they had discovered within themselves. Through this journey, they had developed a strong, secure sense of identity, belonging, and emotional maturity—marking a profound realization of their success and resilience in navigating the complexities of adoption.

This study is related to the field of criminal justice because it had explored a group inherently at risk of coming into conflict with the law, yet who had defied that risk. Understanding the lived experiences of successful adopted individuals had offered insight into protective factors, intervention strategies, and rehabilitation approaches that could inform criminal justice policies. It had also aided professionals such as law enforcement officers, social workers, and juvenile justice advocates in identifying at-risk youth and designing programs that fostered resilience rather than criminality.

While much of the existing research on adoption had focused primarily on the pain it had caused or the legal complexities involved, a crucial aspect had remained overlooked—the transformative potential of the adoption experience. The study had filled this gap by shedding light on the untold stories of adopted individuals who had not only navigated their struggles but had emerged stronger and more resilient because of their journey. It had moved beyond mere statistics to amplify real, personal voices—voices that had embodied strength, hope, and healing. These had not just been stories of survival but of profound personal growth, meaning, and purpose. The researchers had aimed to offer a message of hope to those still on their journey, reminding them that they were not alone and that their experiences had the potential to shape them in ways they might never have imagined.

The specific objectives of this study were to investigate the emotional, social, and psychological challenges encountered by adopted individuals during and after the adoption process, and to examine the coping strategies and adaptive practices they employed to navigate these challenges. The study further aimed to explore the impact of adoption on the development of self-identity and personal resilience among adoptees. Additionally, it sought to identify the factors that contributed to their overall well-being, life satisfaction, and stability. Finally, the

research aimed to illuminate the personal insights and strengths that enabled adopted individuals to achieve success and positive life outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

The study aimed to explore the lived experiences of successful adopted individuals and sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the perceived life situation of the adoptees?

2. What are the difficulties encountered by the adoptee during their adoption transition?

3. What are the practices employed by the adoptees in handling those difficulties?

4. What are the realizations of being a successful adoptees?

Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the theoretical framework guiding the study of successful adoptees' lived experiences and how these individuals thrive beyond adoption.

Attachment Theory

This theory stated that the foundation period during which caregivers bonded with a child determined the path of emotional and social development in individuals. Bowlby (1969) established that children created strong connections with their primary caregivers, thereby building essential components of their later life relationships, including trust and security systems. A child experienced the development of secure attachment through stable and loving care, which later enabled healthy relationship formation during growth. However, inconsistent or neglectful caregiving often led to insecure attachment styles, such as avoidant, ambivalent, or disorganized attachment. These early attachment patterns had influenced not only the child's behavior and emotions but also their future relationships and mental health.

This theory was applied to better understand the emotional and psychological experiences of adopted children or individuals. Many of these individuals had faced early-life issues such as abandonment, neglect, or the loss of biological parents, which had disrupted the development of secure bonds and made trust and healthy relationships more difficult to form. However, the study acknowledged that with care, support, and a stable home, adopted children had been able to form strong bonds over time. The researchers investigated the attachment patterns of former orphans to determine how these patterns had influenced their transition to adoptive families and what effects these childhood experiences had on their adult relationships and emotional health.

Resilience Theory

This theory provided a foundation for understanding how individuals adapted to and overcame significant stress or adversity. Developed by Ann Masten (2001), it viewed resilience as a dynamic process of positive adaptation rather than a fixed trait. Masten described it as "ordinary magic," emphasizing that resilience stemmed from normal human adaptational systems rather than rare qualities. The theory highlighted how individual strengths, supportive relationships, and environmental resources interacted to help individuals recover, adapt, and thrive despite challenges. It also provided a useful framework for understanding how protective factors could buffer the effects of risk and promote healthy development.

This theory was applied to explain how adopted children had been able to grow up healthy and successful despite experiencing early life challenges. It had been useful in understanding how these individuals had adapted and developed in healthy ways, even after facing trauma, loss, or instability prior to adoption. The theory emphasized that resilience had not been something extraordinary, but rather something that could be developed through consistent support and care. This had entailed providing a safe environment, emotional and social support, and a loving adoptive family for adopted individuals. The research had

investigated the coping strategies adoptees had used when adjusting to their new families and had revealed which elements had strengthened their emotional capabilities and contributed to their successful life outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

The study utilized the Input-Process-Output-Outcome (IPOO) Model to guide a structured exploration of adoptees' experiences. The IPOO Model was a framework used to present the flow of a study in an organized manner, showing how initial factors were processed to produce results and eventual outcomes (Calderon & Gonzalez, 2016). In line with this framework, the **Input** phase focused on key issues in the lives of adoptees—specifically their perceived life situations, the difficulties they had encountered during the adoption transition, the practices they had adopted to overcome these challenges, and the realizations they had achieved after attaining personal success.

In the **Process** phase, the researcher employed a qualitative research method using a phenomenological approach to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences. Data were collected through various methods such as interviews and observations and underwent thematic analysis to uncover common patterns, themes, and deeper insights. This approach provided a holistic understanding of the adoptees' life situations, the challenges they had faced during the adoption process, the strategies they had used to overcome these difficulties, and the profound realizations they had achieved as they navigated their journey toward success and personal fulfillment.

The **output** of the study, titled "The Adoption Experience: Stories of Success," will be an advocacy video that will be shared on online platforms as part of an awareness campaign highlighting the experiences of adopted individuals. This advocacy video will feature the

personal journeys of the participants, including the difficulties they encountered, the practices they embraced, and the emotions tied to their adoption experiences. Through visual storytelling, narration, and selected excerpts from their lived experiences, the video aims to empower adoptees to embrace their stories and help the public better understand the realities of adoption. By presenting these narratives in video form, the campaign seeks to reach a wider audience, increase emotional engagement, and promote a more inclusive and supportive community. The advocacy video will serve as a creative and accessible medium that encourages empathy, reduces stigma, and strengthens public awareness regarding the challenges and triumphs of adoptees. Ultimately, it aims to inspire collective acceptance and foster a deeper appreciation for the strength, resilience, and success of adopted individuals.

Lastly, the **outcome** of the study will bring a deeper understanding of adoptees and their experiences. By promoting awareness and empathy, the initiative will foster a more compassionate and inclusive view of adoption. The community will recognize both the difficulties adoptees face and the practices they develop, creating an environment where they are valued, respected, and free from stigma. As a result, adoptees will feel empowered and supported to share their stories and pursue their dreams with confidence.
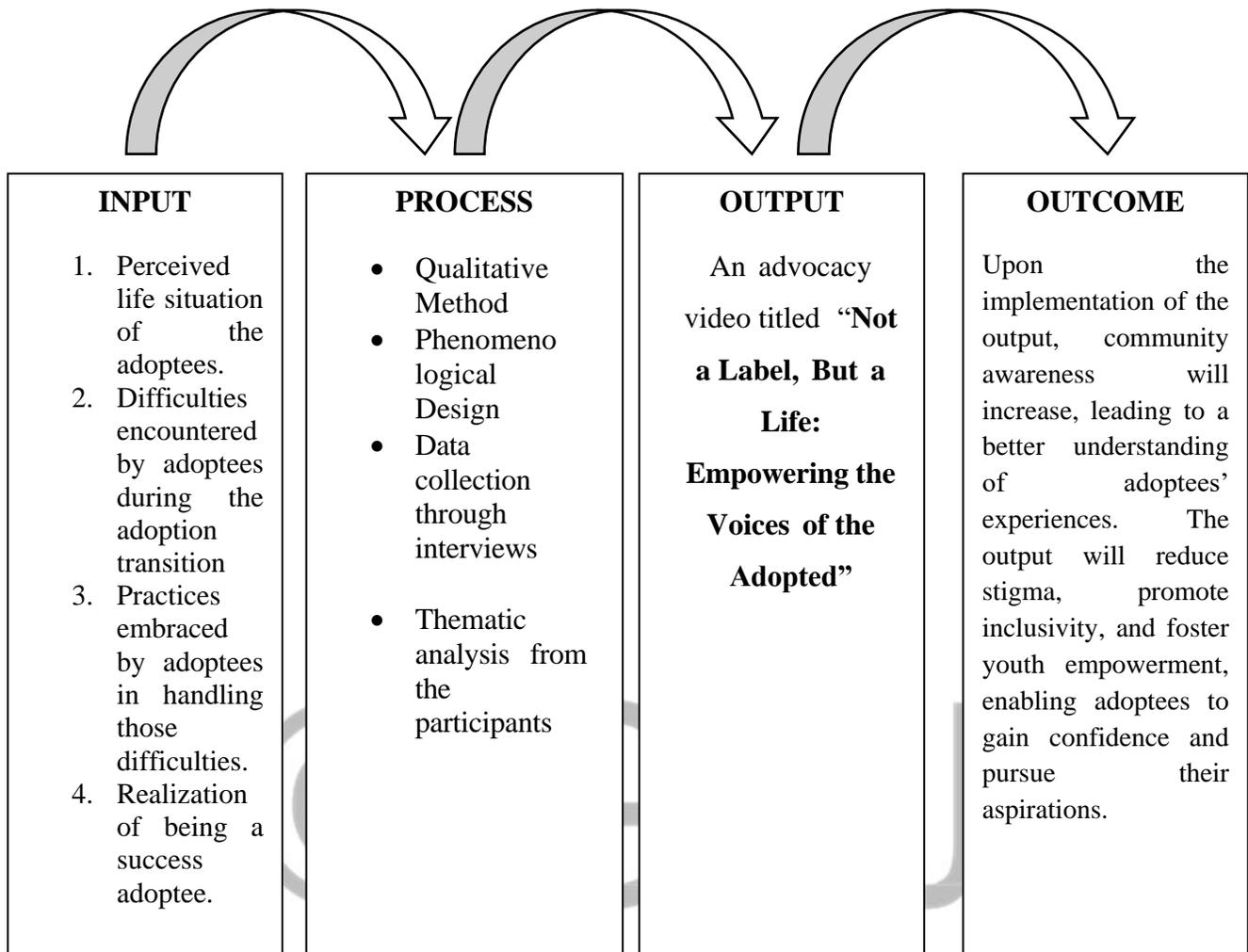
INPUT	PROCESS	OUTPUT	OUTCOME
1. Perceived life situation of the adoptees. 2. Difficulties encountered by adoptees during the adoption transition 3. Practices embraced by adoptees in handling those difficulties. 4. Realization of being a success adoptee.	• Qualitative Method • Phenomeno logical Design • Data collection through interviews • Thematic analysis from the participants	An advocacy video titled "**Not a Label, But a Life: Empowering the Voices of the Adopted**"	Upon the implementation of the output, community awareness will increase, leading to a better understanding of adoptees' experiences. The output will reduce stigma, promote inclusivity, and foster youth empowerment, enabling adoptees to gain confidence and pursue their aspirations.

Figure 1. Paradigm of the Study

Significance of the Study

This study benefits the following:

Adopted Children. The study showed that adopted children shared their adoption

experiences with others. Learning from other orphans had helped them build inspiration,

confidence, and coping strategies for emotional and social challenges.

Foster Parents. Understanding success stories had encouraged parents to adopt strategies that nurtured emotional security, identity, and achievement. It had also helped foster families create supportive environments and address the needs of adopted children.

Biological Parents. The study had provided hope for biological parents by showing that their children could thrive after adoption. It had also helped them make informed decisions regarding adoption.

Relatives. The study had helped relatives recognize their role in the child's development and offered strategies for fostering inclusion, emotional support, and healthy family dynamics.

DSWD (Department of Social Welfare and Development). The study had helped DSWD improve adoption services by understanding adoptees' experiences and by creating better support programs.

Orphanage Institutions. The findings had helped orphanages understand the long-term effects of adoption and guided them in preparing and supporting children emotionally.

Future Researchers. The study had enhanced knowledge on adoption, attachment, resilience, mental health, family relationships, and social adaptation patterns.

Scope and Limitation

This study focused on the experiences of adoptees, particularly focusing on their perceived life situation, the difficulties they encountered during their adoption transition, the coping practices they embraced, and their realizations of being successful adoptees.

The participants of this study were eight adoptees who were considered successful individuals, residing in different municipalities of Ilocos Norte, specifically in Bacarra, Dingras, Dumalneg, Pasuquin, Solsona, and Vintar. The study, conducted during the Academic Year

2024–2025, was limited to adoptees who had demonstrated personal, academic, or professional success, regardless of their current age.

Definition of Terms

Adoptee. They referred to the participant in this study who has been legally adopted and is now living as a permanent member of an adoptive family, sharing their lived experiences, difficulties, coping mechanisms, and realizations before, during, and after the adoption process.

Adoption. This refers to the legal and emotional process through which a child becomes a legitimate member of a new family, with all rights and responsibilities transferred from the biological parents to the adoptive parents, as reflected in the experiences of the study participants.

Adoption Transition. This refers to the period in which the adoptee adjusts to their new family, coping with emotional, psychological, and social challenges such as belongingness, trust, and adaptation to new family norms and relationships.

Difficulties. This refers to the emotional, social, and psychological struggles encountered by adoptees during their transition into their adoptive families, such as integration hurdles, bullying, social mistreatment, and doubt of belonging, as revealed in their narratives.

Experience. This refers to the totality of the adoptees' personal and emotional encounters before, during, and after adoption, including the hardships, coping practices, realizations, and transformations that shaped their present lives.

Perceived Life Situation. This refers to how adoptees view and interpret their own circumstances and emotional conditions across different life stages, before adoption.

Practices. This refers to the coping strategies and behaviors employed by adoptees to overcome their difficulties, such as seeking strength through faith, expressing gratitude toward adoptive parents, and building emotional connections to achieve healing and belonging.

Realizations. This refers to the insights and self-understandings adoptees develop after reflecting on their adoption journey, such as recognizing love beyond blood, finding silver linings in hardships, and redefining success through resilience and personal growth.

Success. This refers to adoptees who have demonstrated positive adjustment, personal stability, and fulfillment in life, emotionally, socially, and professionally, despite the adversities they faced in their early years.

Success Stories. This refers to the adoptees lived narratives of overcoming difficulties and achieving personal growth, empowerment, and happiness, symbolizing triumph over adversity and serving as inspiration for others.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE & STUDIES

This study presents a review of literature and studies that are relevant to the present study.

Adopted adults' motivation, decision making, and experience of searching: A synthesis of qualitative studies (2024)

Watson, B. L. (2024) examines why adult adoptees search for birth-family information and how searching contributes to identity work. It frames the search as an iterative, emotionally complex process that adoptees undertake to resolve gaps in personal narrative and belonging. Line-of-argument synthesis of 18 qualitative interview studies up to 2023. The author selected

studies that foregrounded adult adoptee narratives and applied thematic synthesis to identify cross-cutting motifs.

Key themes included feelings of a 'missing piece', ambivalence about reunification, varied outcomes of search encounters, and the centrality of social support. Many adoptees reported that searching prompted a re-evaluation of self and relationships.

The review argues that searching is a form of identity work with implications for wellbeing and meaning making. For adoptees adopted by relatives, the decision to search (or not) and the meanings attached to origin narratives are likely to shape perceptions of success and belonging.

A Qualitative Exploration of Counselling Training Experiences of Counsellors Who Were Adopted as Babies (2024)

Bevitt, A. (2024) investigates adopted shapes counsellors' personal and professional identities, with emphasis on how adoption narratives inform therapeutic stance and boundary-making. In-depth narrative interviews with four counsellors adopted in infancy; interpretive phenomenological analysis identified themes related to identity, disclosure, and professional practice. Participants described adoption as an enduring influence on empathy, reflexivity, and motivations to work with families; they also reported careful navigation of self-disclosure in practice.

Findings suggest adoptee experiences can inform therapeutic sensitivity and highlight the ongoing nature of identity work; implications include training and supervision supports that acknowledge adoptee therapists lived histories.

Adoptive family practices: Voices of adoptees of closed adoptions

This qualitative study explores how adult adoptees raised in closed adoptions narrate family life, secrecy, and identity, with attention to cultural context. Biographical in-depth interviews with five adult adoptees; narrative inquiry and thematic analysis were used. Participants recounted experiences of secrecy, delayed disclosure, and identity negotiation; many employed strategies of selective disclosure and meaning making. The study highlights how cultural norms and secrecy shape adopted identities; comparative insights are relevant for kin adoptees where family ties may complicate disclosure practices (Puhan, S. S. 2024).

Exploring risk and protective factors in kinship families: Children's perspectives (2023)

This study centers children's voices to identify risk and protective factors experienced within kinship family arrangements, including relative adoptions. Participatory interviews and creative methods with children living in kinship care; thematic analysis prioritized children's own framings of experience. Children emphasized emotional continuity with kin as protective, while economic stress and caregiver burden posed risks. They also highlighted the role of clear communication in feeling secure. Children's accounts underscore mechanisms of resilience relevant to adoptees adopted by relatives: relational warmth and communicative openness mitigate risks and support adjustment (Clements, J. 2023).

The Social and Emotional Foundations of Non-Biological Families

Johnson and Lee (2021) explored the social and emotional foundations of non-biological families, such as adoptive families, to challenge traditional views that define family solely through biological connections. The study emphasized that love, support, and shared experiences are essential components that shape the meaning of family beyond genetic ties. The research aimed to deepen the understanding of how emotional dynamics contribute to forming and maintaining strong family identities in non-biological contexts.

The researchers employed qualitative research design, utilizing in-depth interviews and case studies with participants from various non-biological family structures, including adoptive parents and children. A thematic analysis approach was used to identify key emotional and social processes that contribute to family cohesion. Participants were carefully selected to ensure diversity in family composition and background.

Findings indicated that emotional connection, trust, and mutual care serve as the primary foundations of family cohesion within non-biological families. These factors were often reported as more significant than biological relationships. Shared experiences, communication, and long-term commitment were identified as central elements in shaping the families' sense of identity and stability.

The study underscored the inclusive and dynamic nature of family, emphasizing that emotional and social bonds can be equally, if not more, powerful than biological ones. Johnson and Lee (2021) advocated for a broader societal and policy recognition of non-biological families, suggesting that support systems, family policies, and therapeutic practices should adapt to reflect these diverse family structures. The authors also recommended further research to explore social acceptance and representation of non-traditional families in modern society (Johnson and Lee 2021).

Kinship care in the welfare system: The lived experience

Borenstein (2025) examines lived experiences within formal kinship care placements, focusing on relational meanings and systemic interfaces that shape outcomes. Phenomenological interviews with kin caregivers and young adults formerly in kinship care across multiple sites in Victoria, Australia. Participants valued familial continuity and belonging but reported role ambiguity, expectations, and challenges accessing formal supports. The findings illuminate

relational complexities in kinship placements that inform how adoptees adopted by relatives make sense of their life stories and successes.

Qualitative studies of the lived experiences of being in out-of-home care: A scoping review (2023)

This scoping review maps qualitative research on children and young people's lived experiences across out-of-home care settings, including adoption and kinship placements. Systematic search and thematic mapping of qualitative studies up to 2022, focusing on participant-reported meanings and experiences. Common themes included identity negotiation, stigma, the importance of relational continuity, and the role of communicative openness in positive adjustment. The review provides a broad foundation indicating the centrality of voice and narrative in understanding adoptee wellbeing; it supports the use of phenomenological methods for the current study (Hayes, et al. 2023)

Post-Adoption Adjustment and Achievement. Early Emotional Support Predicts Better Academic, Professional, and Relational Outcomes in Adulthood.

Hartman and Quinn (2023) argue that the quality of emotional support received shortly after adoption can significantly influence later success in academic, professional, and relational domains. They highlight gaps in prior research, particularly the lack of longitudinal studies connecting early post-adoption experiences with adult achievements. The primary question of research is whether early emotional support predicts better academic, professional, and relational outcomes in adulthood.

The researchers conducted a longitudinal study following a cohort of adoptees from childhood into adulthood. Emotional support levels were assessed during early adolescence using standardized psychological assessments and caregiver reports. Adult outcomes were measured

through a combination of self-reported surveys, employment records, educational achievements, and validated relationship quality scales. Statistical methods, including multiple regression analyses, were employed to evaluate the predictive power of early emotional support while controlling variables such as socioeconomic background, age at adoption, and gender.

The findings revealed a strong positive association between early emotional support and adult success. Higher levels of early support correlated with greater academic achievement (higher graduation rates and GPAs), better professional outcomes (stable employment and higher job satisfaction), and more fulfilling personal relationships. Regression analyses indicated that emotional support in early adolescence remained a significant predictor of adult outcomes even after adjusting for confounding factors.

Early emotional support is a critical determinant of long-term success for adopted individuals. The study emphasizes the importance of providing emotional stability and nurturing environments during the critical adjustment period after adoption. The authors discuss implications for adoptive parents, educators, and policymakers, advocating for early intervention programs to enhance emotional support. They acknowledge limitations, such as potential self-report bias and the need for more diverse samples and recommend future research to explore intervention strategies and the biological mechanisms underlying emotional adjustment.

Adoptees' Contact with Birth Relatives in Emerging Adulthood.

Grotevant et al. (2020) examined how adoptees' contact with birth relatives during emerging adulthood influences their identity formation and psychological well-being. The study aimed to understand the role of communication openness in adoption relationships. It provided valuable insights into how long-term relational contact affects the personal growth of adoptees.

The researchers used a longitudinal mixed-methods approach that combined surveys and interviews among adoptees from different backgrounds. Data were analyzed to explore associations between relationship frequency, quality of contact, and emotional outcomes. Grotevant et al. (2020) focused on measuring variables such as attachment, self-concept, and family cohesion.

Findings revealed that adoptees who maintained consistent and positive communication with their birth relatives reported stronger identity coherence and emotional stability. In contrast, those who had inconsistent or conflictual interactions experienced increased anxiety and confusion. The results underscored that open and supportive communication enhances psychological well-being. The study concluded that open adoption practices should be encouraged, provided that emotional boundaries and readiness are respected. Grotevant et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of post-adoption counseling and supportive systems for both adoptive and birth families. The findings reinforced that emotional safety and transparency foster healthier relationships.

Early Childhood Income Instability and Mental Health in Adolescence: Parenting Stress and Child Maltreatment as Mediators.

The study sought to understand how environmental and familial stressors influence developmental outcomes over time. It relates to adoption contexts by highlighting the indirect pathways through which family instability shapes emotional adjustment and resilience among youth.

The research employed a mixed-method approach with a strong qualitative component. In-depth interviews with parents and adolescents provided personal insights into the lived experiences of financial strain and emotional distress. The qualitative data were supported by

longitudinal data analyses to trace patterns across development. This combination provided both narrative depth and empirical reliability. Findings indicated that families facing chronic financial instability exhibited higher levels of parental stress, which in turn increased the risk of emotional and behavioral difficulties in children. Narratives revealed that parental frustration is often manifested as neglect or harsh discipline, contributing to lower self-esteem and emotional insecurity in adolescents. However, participants who experienced stable caregiving or intervention support showed stronger resilience and recovery.

The study highlights that stability, emotional regulation, and consistent caregiving play crucial roles in buffering the psychological impact of early adversity. For adoptive families, this implies that creating stable and nurturing environments can counteract the effects of early childhood trauma. The research reinforces that long-term mental health outcomes among adoptees depend not only on the absence of stress but also on the presence of emotional consistency and care (Zhang et al. 2025).

Memorable messages regarding adoption and religion: Perspectives of adult adoptees

This report investigates how family and religious messages shape adoptee identity and coping in religious Filipino households. Semi-structured interviews with 41 adult adoptees raised in religious contexts; thematic analysis identified salient messages. Messages emphasizing belonging, moral duty, and spiritual framing were linked to higher reported life satisfaction and adaptive narrative framing. Religious and familial discourse can act as a supportive framework for identity and resilience among adoptees, especially in culturally religious settings like the Philippines (Maes, K., & Martin, K. 2024).

Narratives of adopted children and family dynamics. (Tuklas Repository. 2020–2023).

A collection of student-led qualitative projects documenting adoptee narratives and family dynamics in the Philippines, with emphasis on relative adoptions. Narrative and phenomenological interviews across multiple theses; common analytic approaches included thematic coding and narrative synthesis. Across projects, themes of stigma negotiation, disclosure practices, family acceptance, and adaptive resilience emerged consistently.

The repository provides grassroots evidence of the cultural and familial processes that shape adoptee lived experiences in the Philippines and informs locally grounded hypotheses.

Exploring the adopted child's adoption experience: A single case study

This single-case study examines a Filipino adoptee's psychological and social experiences within a relative adoption arrangement. In-depth interviews with the adoptee, adoptive relatives, and teachers; participant observation and document analysis were used for triangulation. The case indicated positive adaptation tied to family acceptance, stable caregiving, and open communication about adoption status. The study offers rich contextual insights into family processes that support adoptee success in the Philippine kinship context (Patricelli, K. M. A. 2021).

Sa Likod ng Pagtanggap: The Lived Experiences of Adopted Individuals

This study aims to deeply understand the experiences of adopted individuals, focusing on how they discovered their adoptive status, how they formed their identities, and how they adjusted and interacted with others. The research emphasizes the importance of providing sensitive understanding to these experiences to deepen society's awareness of the issues faced by adoptees. The researchers employed qualitative research design, specifically the phenomenological approach, to explore the personal experiences of the participants. Eight participants, aged 15–25, who were aware of their adoptive status and willing to share their

experiences, were selected using purposive sampling. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted by two researchers, one as the interviewer and the other as the note-taker and recorder. Thematic analysis was utilized to identify key themes and subthemes from the participants' narratives.The study revealed four major themes from the data analysis, (1) Discovering Adoption, participants learned about their adoption either from others or directly from their adoptive parents. (2) Identity Formation, participants exhibited varied emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions to their adoptive status, influencing their self-concept. (3) Adjustment, participants demonstrated different coping mechanisms, including avoidance, rebellion, or striving to be well-behaved as a form of gratitude to their adoptive parents. (4) Relationships with Others, most participants had positive relationships with their adoptive parents but held ambivalent feelings toward their biological parents. The study reveals that the manner in which participants discovered their adoption significantly impacted their emotional state and self-concept. Open and early discussions about adoption may facilitate a more positive acceptance among adoptees. Furthermore, support from adoptive parents and open communication are crucial in building strong relationships and positive self-identity for adoptees (K.J Mangilit et al 2022).

The review of recent literature and qualitative studies from 2020 to 2025 reveals a deepening understanding of how adoption—particularly within kinship contexts—shapes an individual's identity, emotional adjustment, and sense of belonging. Across foreign studies such as those by Watson (2024), Bevitt (2024), and Borenstein (2025), adoptee narratives emphasize that adoption is not merely a legal or social process but a lifelong experience of meaning-making. Adoptees continually navigate personal histories, emotional connections, and family expectations in ways that influence their concept of self and success. Studies on kinship care and adoption (Clements, 2023; Hayes et al., 2023) likewise highlight how familial continuity

provides emotional security yet introduces challenges in defining relational boundaries and identity within familiar family structures. These international findings underline the universal complexity of adoption experiences, suggesting that emotional openness, supportive relationships, and coherent identity narratives are key indicators of positive outcomes. Local studies and literature further contextualize these dynamics within the Philippine setting, where adoption is often grounded in extended family systems and shaped by strong cultural and religious influences. Research by Maes and Martin (2024) and the Tuklas Repository (2020–2023) reveal that Filipino adoptees often draw strength and moral grounding from religious and familial messages that reinforce belonging and acceptance. Patricelli's (2021) case study of a Filipino adoptee underscores how communication and transparency about one's adoption status foster psychological stability and self-acceptance, even in relative adoption arrangements.

Despite occasional stigma and secrecy, these studies indicate that success among adoptees in the Philippine context is closely tied to familial acceptance, open dialogue, and the capacity of adoptive relatives to balance kinship obligations with nurturing parental roles. Integrating both local and international perspectives, the synthesis reveals recurring themes of identity negotiation, relational continuity, disclosure, and resilience as core dimensions of adoptee wellbeing. Across contexts, adoptees who thrive are those who experience emotional security, acceptance, and opportunities to articulate their personal narratives. For adoptees raised by relatives, the challenge lies in redefining family boundaries—being both a relative and a child—while maintaining healthy attachments and personal autonomy. This underscores the importance of empathy, communication, and consistent support from adoptive family members. In conclusion, while prior literature has illuminated the psychological and relational aspects of adoption, there remains limited exploration of success narratives among adoptees adopted by relatives—individuals who often navigate complex dual roles within their family systems. The present study addresses this gap by focusing specifically on the lived experiences of successful

adoptees adopted by relatives, providing a culturally grounded and phenomenological understanding of how such individuals construct meaning, achieve personal success, and maintain familial harmony. This synthesis therefore establishes the conceptual foundation for understanding how kinship-based adoption can evolve from a potential source of identity conflict into a source of strength and lifelong belonging.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methods used in this study, which covers the research design, research locale, research population and sample, research instrument and data gathering procedure.

Research Method and Design

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of eight successful adoptees residing in various municipalities of Ilocos Norte. Through purposive sampling, individuals who had achieved personal, academic, or professional success were selected. Semi-structured interviews were administered and transcribed, and thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns. Ethical standards, including confidentiality, voluntary participation, and data protection under RA 10173, were strictly observed. (Bhandari, 2025).

A phenomenological research design was adopted in the study, as it sought to explore the authentic experiential knowledge of children who had transitioned from being abandoned to becoming part of an adoptive family. The phenomenological research design was applied to

understand the universal nature of the phenomenon by examining the perspectives of those who had experienced it (Delve, et al 2022).

Population and Locale of the Study

The participants in this study included eight (8) successful adopted individuals and had achieved a recognized level of success. These adopted individuals were selected through purposive sampling based on their personal and professional achievements. Purposive sampling referred to a group of non-probability sampling techniques in which units were selected because they had the characteristics needed in the sample (Nikolopoulou, 2023).

The study was conducted in different municipalities of Ilocos Norte specifically in Bacarra, Dingras, Dumalneg, Pasuquin, Solsona, and Vintar.

Data Gathering Tool

A semi-structured interview was a data collection method that relied on asking questions within a predetermined thematic framework (George, 2023). This method used open-ended questions based on a set theme, allowing participants to share their personal experiences while providing the researcher with the opportunity to ask follow-up questions (Brown, 2023).

The material weas reviewed and validated by the research adviser, a Program Head of Bachelor of Science in Business and Administration (BSBA) of Data Center College of the Philippines, Laoag City.

Data Gathering Procedure

The participants were then contacted and informed about the study, and their consent was obtained. In-person interviews were conducted in safe and comfortable locations, while online interviews were carried out through platforms such as Messenger Video Call. Each interview

followed the same guide of open-ended questions but allowed flexibility for participants to fully express their experiences. All interviews were recorded in a span of 30 minutes to 1 hour, with permission, and transcribed accurately. Notes were also taken during the interviews. Finally, the participants reviewed their interview transcripts to confirm the accuracy of the information, which added to the trustworthiness of the study.

Treatment of Data

The researchers analyzed the interview-based data using thematic analysis, which allowed the identification of recurring patterns and meaningful categories within the qualitative responses. This method was applied to textual data, such as interviews and transcripts, to systematically examine and interpret emerging themes (Caulfield, 2023).

Ethical Considerations

The researchers ensured the protection of the participants' rights and well-being throughout the study. All data were handled with care and confidentitality, and personal information such as names, addresses, email addresses, and photographs were not disclosed in accordance with RA 10173, or the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Pseudonyms were used to maintain anonymity.

The participants were informed about the nature, process, duration, benefits, and possible risks of the research to prevent any form of deception. They were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, ensuring voluntary participation.

After the study's completion, all personal information and collected data were deleted and properly disposed of. The researchers did not release, fabricate, falsify, or misinterpret any data, ensuring that all information presented was truthful and based solely on the participants' responses.

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CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION, AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

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This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data gathered in the study. It explores the lived experiences of successful adoptees, highlighting the challenges they faced, the meanings they attached to their adoption journey, and the factors that contributed to their growth, resilience, and success.

Perceived Life Situation of the Adoptee's

The adoptees' life situations prior to adoption were shaped by various forms of family disruption and emotional deprivation. Their narratives reveal that early childhood experiences were marked by instability, loss, and the absence of consistent parental care. The themes that emerged—Parental Death, Parental Abandonment, Parental Separation, and Parental Incapacity—collectively portray the adoptees' exposure to emotional and environmental hardships that influenced their later adjustment and development.

Parental Death

Parental death refers to the event of losing one or both biological parents, which can have lasting emotional, social, and psychological effects on adoptees. The loss often creates a deep sense of grief and insecurity, which can influence attachment styles, identity formation, and resilience. Studies show that children who experience early parental death tend to have poorer peer and parent-child relationships, increased risk for depression, and lower academic performance as they grow older. (Li,-Huang., et al 2024). Parental death is described as the experience of losing one or both parents, which leaves a profound emotional impact on adoptees, as expressed by the participants.

As shared by Participant 1, who was adopted at the age of 9 and now working at a Private Loan Company:

"Nasapa kami naulila kasi ni nanang ken tatang ko natay. Narigat para kanyak idi detoy nga situation mi."

(We were orphaned early because my mother and father died. That situation was really difficult for me.)

As stated by Participant 2, who was adopted at the age of 12 and now working in DSWD:

"Natay gamin tay nagannak kon gapo iti kinabaket ken kinalakay dan ket haan ko man lang nga nakadkadwa ti nabayag nga panawen isuda."

(My parents died because of old age, and I didn't even get to spend much time with them.)

The responses under the theme Parental Death reveal the deep emotional impact felt by participants who lost their biological parents during childhood. They expressed a lasting sense of loss—not only of their parents but also of the guidance, security, and identity that parental presence provides during formative years. Even as adults, this grief continues to influence their emotions and view of family. Their experiences show that growing up without parents left a lasting emotional weight, shaping how they understand belonging and relationships.

A study by Ellis et al. (2013) found that individuals who experienced parental death in childhood often face ongoing grief, emotional instability, and difficulties in self-identity and

attachment even in adulthood. This supports the participants' reflections, showing that the pain of losing parents early in life has long-term effects on emotional well-being and the ability to form secure relationships.

Parental Abandonment

Parental abandonment involves a situation where a child feels rejected, neglected, or deserted by a parent without formal death. This can evoke intense feelings of shame, guilt, low self-esteem, and identity confusion. Recent empirical work has demonstrated that adolescents who report higher levels of parental abandonment also report significantly greater self-conscious emotions (like shame and guilt) and psychological distress. (Rodriguez et al. 2022). Parental abandonment is the experience of being left behind by a parent who chose not to return and instead built a new life with another partner, leaving the child with feelings of rejection and loss.

Participant 5 who was adopted at the age of 7 and now working as a Nurse expressed that:

> *"Ti ammok idi ket inbati nak ni mamang ko kadidiay auntie na ta mapan suna agabroad, ngem haan met pulos nagsubli sunan kasi adda gayam sabali nga boyfriend nan isu ti simmurutan na."*

(What I knew was that my mother just left me with her aunt so she could go abroad. But she never came back — it turns out she had another boyfriend and chose to be with him.)

Participant 7 who was adopted at the age of 9 and now a Businessman shared that:

> *"Inbati nak ni nanang ko kenni titong ko nga kabsat na, di met nagbayag napan isuna*

> *nakigasang-gasat abroad ngem haan makaawid ni*
>
> *nanang kon ta adda gayam baro a pamilya na idiay*
>
> *abroaden."*

(My mother left me with my uncle who is her sibling. Not long after, she went abroad to try her luck, but my mother never came back because she had apparently started a new family there.)

The participants' responses reveal the deep emotional pain brought about by abandonment. They grieve not only the loss of a relationship but also the deliberate choice of their biological parents to leave them. This experience created feelings of rejection, unworthiness, and emotional detachment. Unlike the grief caused by death, abandonment involves the pain of being left behind by choice, making the emotional impact more complex and marked by betrayal. Their statements express sadness and confusion over not being chosen or sought out, even after many years apart.

A study by Sánchez-Sánchez et al. (2023) found that individuals who experienced parental abandonment reported higher levels of guilt, shame, and emotional distress compared to those who only experienced neglect. This supports the participants' experiences, showing that being abandoned by choice leads to lasting emotional suffering rooted in feelings of rejection and being unwanted.

Parental Separation

Parental separation denotes physical and/or emotional separation between a child and their parents due to divorce, living apart, migration, or other reasons. Such separation is associated with elevated risk of mental health problems, depression, anxiety, and academic difficulties. Longitudinal studies indicate that longer durations of separation are correlated with

worse outcomes in social relationships and educational attainment. (Chen, Lopez, et al. 2023).

Parental separation is described as the early experience of growing up with parents who parted

ways, leaving the adoptee to cope with emotional and familial changes from a young age.

As stated by Participant 4, who was adopted at the age of 10 and now working as an

Accounting Staff:

> *"Ni Nanang ken Tatang ko seperated da since grade 4 nak kasi minor da pelang idi naiyanak nak."*

(My mother and father have been separated since I was in Grade 4 because they were still

minors when I was born.)

As expressed by Participant 7, who was adopted at the age of 9 and now a Businessman:

> *"Elementary nak pelang idi nagsina da nanang ken tatang ko. Haan ko ammo ti gapo na nu apay nagsina da."*

(I was still in elementary school when my mother and father separated. I don't know the

reason why they separated.)

In the words of Participant 8, who was adopted at the age of 12 and now working as a

Nurse:

> *"I was adopted by my mother's cousin after my parents are separated."*

Participants described growing up in homes where emotional affection, parental

presence, and support were lacking—not necessarily because of death or abandonment, but due

to separation or parental immaturity. The shared experience was the absence of emotional security during childhood. Their reflections reveal that they never truly felt nurtured or emotionally supported, leading to lasting feelings of detachment and uncertainty about what family relationships should be.

A study by Henry et al. (2010) found that children who experience parental separation, especially amid family conflict or negative parental representations, are more likely to develop emotional and behavioral problems. This aligns with the participants' experiences, showing that the absence of emotional security and stable caregiving during separation leads to long-term confusion and emotional distress.

Parental Incapacity

Parental Incapacity refers to unpredictable or frequent changes in income, employment, or financial resources that disrupt a family's ability to meet daily needs. It often leads to chronic stress, reduced opportunities, and emotional strain, especially among children in low-income households (Shaefer et al., 2020).

In this study, parental incapacity is defined as the condition of growing up in a financially challenged environment where basic needs were often unmet, as described by participants whose parents were unable to provide consistent support due to poverty and insufficient income.

Participant 3 who was adopted at the age of 8 and now a Policeman expressed that:

> *"Narigat ti pinagbiag mi ken adu kami nga agkakabsat. Haan nga umanay ti pagsapulan dagiti nagannak mi nga mangsuporta ti inaldaw nga kasapulan mi."*

(Life was difficult for us because I have so many siblings. The income of our parents was not enough to support our daily needs.)

Participant 4, who was adopted at the age of 10 and now working as an Accounting Staff shared that:

> *"Haan da kaya ti responsibilidad ken haan dak kaya biagen."*

(They could not carry the responsibility, and they could not support me in life.)

Participant 6 who was adopted at the age of 9 and now working as a Teacher noted that:

> *"Dahil sa hirap ng buhay kahit anong sikap ng mga magulang ko sadyang hindi talaga kasya ang kanilang sinasahod sa isang araw."*

(Because of poverty, no matter how hard my parents worked, their daily wages were simply not enough.)

Participant 8 who was adopted at the age of 12 and now working as a Nurse described that:

> *"Life before I was adopted was very unstable and very hard because of financial problems."*

The theme of Parental Incapacity reflects the experiences of participants who grew up in poverty, with parents unable to provide even their basic needs. This lack of resources affected not only their physical well-being but also the emotional atmosphere in their homes, often leading to their eventual adoption. Participants described large families, unstable sources of income, and constant struggles for survival. Their stories highlight how poverty intensified other

challenges like neglect or abandonment by preventing families from maintaining stability and emotional support.

A study by the Future of Families & Child Wellbeing Study (2023) found that children raised in financially unstable households were more likely to experience depression and anxiety during adolescence. This occurs because unstable income heightens parenting stress, which can increase the risk of maltreatment and emotional strain. These findings support the participants' experiences, showing that financial instability during childhood creates lasting emotional effects—not only from poverty itself but from the stress and insecurity it brings to family life.

Difficulties Encountered by the Adoptee During their Adoption Transition

The transition into adoptive families posed significant challenges for adoptees, affecting their sense of self and belonging. Many struggled with integration hurdles as they adjusted to new environments, rules, and relationships. Encounters with bullying challenges further complicated their social integration, often causing emotional distress. Alongside these external pressures, adoptees grappled with deep question of self-worth, questioning where they fit within their new families and communities. The following section presents the themes that emerged regarding the difficulties adoptees encountered during their adoption transition.

Integration Hurdles

Integration Hurdles refer to the emotional and social difficulties experienced when trying to adjust and build a sense of belonging in a new family or environment, often involving issues of identity, trust, and acceptance (Grigoropoulos, 2022).

In this study, Integration Hurdles refer to the difficulties in adjusting, building relationships, and feeling accepted within a new family environment, often marked by fear, shyness, and unfamiliarity with new family members.

According to Participant 1, who was adopted at the age of 9 and now working at a Private Loan Company:

> *"Permi nga narigatan nak nag-adjust kasi nga haan nak sanay ti presensya da ken bigla nga napan kami ti sabali nga pamilya, ket haan met nga isu ti nakasanayan mi."*

(I always had difficulty adjusting because I wasn't used to their presence, and suddenly we moved to another family, which was not what we were accustomed to.)

As shared by Participant 2, who was adopted at the age of 12 and now working in DSWD:

> *"Diay time nga pinag-adjust ko diay baro a pamilyak kasi Pastora diay nang-adopt kanyak ket kaslang mabuteng nak agkamali."*

(At the time I was adjusting to my new family because Pastora adopted me, and I was kind of afraid to make mistakes.)

As expressed by Participant 5, who was adopted at the age of 7 and now working as a Nurse:

> *"Narigatan nak nga nag-adjust kasi haan ko met pela suda unay am-ammo ken haan nak sanay ti presensya da or makihalhalobilo ti haan ko pay unay am-ammo."*

(I had difficulty adjusting because I didn't really know them well and I wasn't used to their presence or interacting with people I wasn't very familiar with.)

In the words of Participant 6, who was adopted at the age of 9 and now working as a Teacher:

"Ang pinakamahirap talaga na aking pinagdaanan ay

ang paraan ng pakikisalamuha sa mga iba pang parte

ng aking bagong pamilya lalong lalo na sa pamilya ng

aking Papa kasi noon sobrang mahiyain akong bata."

(The hardest thing I really went through was the way of interacting with other parts of my new family, especially with my father's family, because I was a very shy child back then.)

As narrated by Participant 8, who was adopted at the age of 12 and now working as a Nurse:

"Adjustment to my new family"

The participants' experiences show that adapting to their new family environments during the adoption transition brought emotional discomfort and social unease. Many adoptees felt anxious and uncertain as they entered unfamiliar households with new family members. This sudden change often led to fear, hesitation, and difficulty engaging, especially when they were unsure of family expectations or afraid of making mistakes. For some, shyness and limited interaction with their adoptive families made emotional adjustment and social integration even harder.

A study by Tarroja (2015) found that family functioning—particularly openness, emotional bonding, and communication—strongly influences how well adoptees adjust. When adoptive families struggle with openness or have dysfunctional relationships, children tend to experience anxiety, detachment, and challenges in integrating into the family. Similarly, another study by Tarroja (2006) revealed that adopted children often feel insecure or withdrawn when

they lack clear information about their background or emotional reassurance from their adoptive parents. These findings align with the participants' experiences, showing that successful adjustment requires more than just living in a new home—it depends on emotional connection, trust, and open communication that help adoptees feel secure and truly part of the family.

Social Mistreatment

Adopted individuals may experience social mistreatment, including bullying, exclusion, or discrimination, which can negatively impact their sense of belonging and emotional well-being. Such experiences are found to increase vulnerability to psychological distress and social withdrawal (Ferrari et al., 2022; Grigoropoulos, 2023).

In this study, social mistreatment describes the participants' experiences of being excluded, ridiculed, or negatively judged because of their adoptive status. These experiences often occur in social and school environments, leading to feelings of rejection, emotional discomfort, and low self-esteem, as participants learn to suppress their emotions or withdraw socially to avoid further mistreatment.

Participant 3, who was adopted at the age of 8 and now a Policeman described that:

> *"Tay time nga mapan nak makiay-ayam or mapan nak agbasa kasi haan maiwasan ti bullying. It is difficult kasi haan ko met mabalin ipakita nga apektado nak kasi nu ipakitak ket mas lalo dak nga uyawen."*

(There were times when I go to play or to study, bullying is unavoidable. It is difficult because I can't show that I'm affected; if I show it, they will bully me even more.)

Participant 4, who was adopted at the age of 10 and now working as an Accounting Staff revealed that:

> *"Bully kase everyday nga maipampamukha kaniak jay school nga kaslang intakwil nak ti sarilik nga Mama ken Papa."*

(I get bullied every day at school, with people constantly reminding me that my own mother and father have rejected me.)

Participant 8, who was adopted at the age of 12 and now working as a Nurse explained that:

> *"I experienced receiving negative opinions and bullying from the people around me."*

Participants described painful experiences of being mistreated, especially in school settings where their adoptive status became a source of ridicule. They shared how teasing and discrimination made them feel ashamed and excluded, forcing them to hide their emotions to avoid further humiliation. These experiences reflect the heavy social stigma surrounding adoption and the lasting emotional impact of being treated as different. The bullying they endured deepened feelings of isolation, damaged their self-esteem, and affected their ability to build healthy peer relationships.

A study by LiCAS (2023) found that cultural stigma in the Philippines contributes to the negative treatment of adopted individuals, especially those adopted at an older age. It revealed that adoptees often face discriminatory remarks such as "ampon ka lang" ("you're just adopted"), which reinforce feelings of inferiority and exclusion. This supports the participants' experiences,

showing that societal prejudice and insensitive attitudes cause emotional distress, rejection, and identity struggles among adoptees, shaping how they view themselves and their place in society.

Question of Self-worth

Question of Self-worth refers to the internal uncertainty or questioning by adoptees regarding whether they truly fit or are accepted within their adoptive families or social groups. This may arise from feelings of marginalization, contested identity, or social exclusion, and can lead to emotional distress and lowered self-esteem (Adoption and Social Identity Loss study, 2025).

In this study, question of self-worth describes the participants' feelings of uncertainty and fear of rejection within their adoptive families, marked by questions about their worth and acceptance.

As stated by Participant 4, who was adopted at the age of 10 and now working as an Accounting Staff:

> *"Adu iti what if's ken question ti panonot ko no apay inbati dak wenno haan dak man lang pinanindigan"*

(I had many 'what ifs' and questions in my mind about why they abandoned me or did not stand by me.)

As expressed by Participant 6, who was adopted at the age of 9 and now working as a Teacher:

> *"Hindi ko maaalis sa aking isipan na baka hindi nila ako matanggap na baka iba yong pakikitungo nila sa akin dahil hindi nila ako kanno-ano."*

(I cannot get out of my mind the fear that they might not accept me, that they might treat me differently because I'm not related to them.)

According to Participant 8, who was adopted at the age of 12 and now working as a Nurse:

"I'm questioning myself why my biological parents gave

me to another family. It's hard to express what I feel."

The participants shared ongoing struggles with belonging and identity within their adoptive families. Many expressed fear of being treated differently or not fully accepted because they were not biologically related to their adoptive parents. Unanswered questions about why their biological parents gave them up created lasting emotional conflict and self-doubt. These feelings of uncertainty and insecurity continued long after the adoption, deeply affecting their self-esteem and emotional well-being.

A study by Moroney et al. (2025) found that adoptees often experience uncertainty about acceptance and struggle with their sense of belonging within adoptive families. This supports the participants' experiences, showing that belonging goes beyond living in a household—it depends on emotional reassurance and relational support that help adoptees feel truly valued and secure.

Practices Embraced by the Adoptees in Handling Those Difficulties

Adopted individuals often face unique and complex difficulties related to identity, belonging, and family adjustment. These challenges can affect multiple aspects of their lives, including emotional well-being, social relationships, and personal development. To navigate such experiences, adoptees develop and embrace various strategies and practices that enable them to cope, adapt, and thrive despite the obstacles they encounter. These approaches often involve both internal coping mechanisms, such as reflection and prayer, as well as external

behaviors, such as fostering positive relationships with their adoptive families. The following themes highlight the specific approaches and behaviors adopted by these individuals, illustrating their resilience, adaptability, and determination to overcome adversity and build meaningful, empowered lives.

Strength Through Faith

Strength Through Faith refers to the inner resilience and psychological support gained from faith or spiritual beliefs, which individuals draw on to cope with stress, adversity, or emotional challenges (Öztürk et al., 2024; Howard et al., 2023).

In this study, strength through faith refers to the participants' reliance on prayer and spiritual devotion as their primary source of comfort, wisdom, and emotional resilience when facing life's challenges. It reflects how faith serves as an anchor that helps them cope with difficulties, find peace, and regain inner strength during times of hardship.

Participant 1, who was adopted at the age of 9 and now working at a Private Loan Company expressed that:

> *"Agkararag isu ti pinaka the best nga talaga, iso ti pangalaak ti source of strength ken wisdom ko"*

(Praying is really the best thing, it's where I get my strength and wisdom)

Participant 2, who was adopted at the age of 12 and now working in DSWD shared that:

> *"Umuna ag pray nak lang no adda nga rigat a mapasamak kanyak"*

(First thing I do is pray whenever I go through difficulties)

Participant 3, who was adopted at the age of 8 and now a Policeman mentioned that:

"Basta inpaay ko amin kenni Apo ti amin nga problemak tapno ti kasta ket malaganan nak."

(I just surrender all my problems to the Lord so that I can be relieved.)

Participant 6 who was adopted at the age of 9 and now working as a Teacher revealed that:

"Ang palagi kong ginagawa ay ang palaging pagdadasal at paghingi ng tulong sa puong maykapal."

(What I always do is pray constantly and ask for help from the Almighty.)

The participants' responses show that trusting in a higher spiritual power serves as a vital coping mechanism during difficult times. This trust is expressed through continuous prayer and spiritual surrender, which provide emotional strength, wisdom, and peace amid hardships. By entrusting their problems to a divine being, participants experience reduced anxiety and greater resilience, allowing them to face challenges with hope and calmness. Their spiritual reliance functions as both comfort and strength, helping them sustain mental well-being and maintain faith through life's uncertainties.

A study by Ai (2022) found that individuals who practice private prayer develop stronger emotional resilience, enhanced character strengths, and a more positive outlook on life. This supports the participants' experiences, showing that prayer is not only a form of devotion but also an essential coping strategy that fosters peace, strength, and emotional stability during hardship.

Reciprocation of Gratitude

Reciprocation of Gratitude refers to the act of responding positively or giving back kindness after receiving help or goodwill, reflecting a sense of moral obligation and strengthening social bonds (Navarro & Tudge, 2020).

In this study, Reciprocation of Gratitude refers to the act of showing appreciation by obeying, respecting, and following the guidance of adoptive parents as a way of giving back for the care and better life received.

According to Participant 2, who was adopted at the age of 12 and now working in DSWD:

> *"Ag-tultulnog nak kadagiti nang ampon kanyak kasi*
>
> *nu haan nak agtulnog kadagiti nang ampon kanyak,*
>
> *haan ko maragpat tuy napintas nga biag ko itan."*

(I obey those who adopted me because if I hadn't, I wouldn't have reached the good life I have now.)

As shared by Participant 6, who was adopted at the age of 9 and now working as a Teacher:

> *"Ang ginawa ko upang maibsan ang aking mga*
>
> *problema ay ang pagsunod sa mga umampon sakin*
>
> *dahil alam kong 'yon ang makakabuti sakin."*

(What I did to ease my problems was to obey those who adopted me because I knew it would be good for me.)

The adoptees' willingness to obey their adoptive parents is strongly influenced by a deep sense of gratitude, which goes beyond simple compliance and becomes a conscious, appreciative choice that positively shapes their lives. Their obedience stems from recognizing that following their parents' guidance fosters personal growth, stability, and improved life circumstances. This gratitude-driven obedience reflects an understanding that respect and cooperation strengthen family relationships, promote harmony, and contribute to overall well-being. The participants' reflections highlight gratitude as a motivating force for prosocial behavior, helping adoptees build stronger bonds within their adoptive families and supporting their emotional adjustment and success.

A study by Dioquino et al. (2025) explored how Filipino breadwinners experience and express *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) in fulfilling their family roles. The study found that gratitude can serve as both a source of pride and a burden, shaping emotional well-being and family dynamics. This aligns with the participants' experiences, showing that gratitude, while deeply positive, also carries emotional weight and influences one's sense of duty and belonging within the family.

Seeking Connection

Seeking Connection refers to the active effort to build emotional closeness, belonging, and supportive relationships to restore a sense of identity, security, and well-being after experiences of loss or separation (World Health Organization, 2025).

In this study, Seeking Connection refers to the effort to build closeness and belonging by communicating, sharing feelings, and engaging with others to overcome loneliness and strengthen emotional bonds.

As expressed by Participant 5, who was adopted at the age of 7 and now working as a Nurse:

> *"Tay makisinarita nak latta nukwa nu kasarita dak*
> *tapno ti kasta ket masanay nak nga maki-belong*
> *kanyada."*

(I still talk to them whenever they talk to me so I can get used to belong with them.)

In the words of Participant 7, who was adopted at the age of 9 and now a Businessman:

> *"Iduron ko ti riknak kanyada tatnon maki-belong*
> *nak ken matulungak ti bagik nga haan nga*
> *makarikna ti lungkot ken iliw. Gapo kadeta ket*
> *nalag-anan riknak idi bumay bayag."*

(I share my feelings with them so that I can belong and help myself not feel sadness and longing. Because of that, I eventually felt relieved.)

The participants' experiences show that adoptees actively engage in open communication and emotional sharing with their adoptive families as an important part of emotional healing. Building close relationships helps them feel a sense of belonging and security, reducing loneliness, sadness, and longing caused by adoption-related separation. This emotional openness strengthens attachment and integration within the family, supporting long-term psychological well-being and resilience. The theme highlights that healing is rooted in relationships—when adoptees feel safe to express their emotions and are met with understanding, they experience greater comfort, acceptance, and family stability.

A study by the Kansas Legislative Research Department (2022) found that children adopted from foster care showed improved well-being when placed in supportive and nurturing adoptive homes. This supports the participants' experiences, showing that emotional connection and open communication are key to helping adoptees heal, build belonging, and develop stronger, more positive family relationships.

Realizations of Being a Successful Adoptee

The journey of adoption is not solely defined by hardship; it also offers a transformative path toward personal growth and success. For many adoptees, being adopted became not a limitation but a motivation to rise above challenges and reshape their futures. Through reflection and resilience, they discovered strength, purpose, and belonging. Their realizations were rooted in self-determination, supportive relationships, and a redefined sense of identity. The following section presents the themes that emerged from the participants' reflections on what it means to be a successful adoptee.

Silver Lining

Silver Lining refers to the positive realization or growth that emerges from difficult or adverse experiences, allowing individuals to find meaning and hope despite challenges (Barr et al., 2024).

In this study, Silver Lining refers to finding hope, strength, and motivation to succeed despite the challenges of being adopted, recognizing that struggles can lead to personal growth, resilience, and a better outlook on life.

Participant 1, who was adopted at the age of 9 and now working at a Private Loan Company, noted that:

"Uray ampon nak lang dapat agpursige nak nga nasayaat ti biag. Kasi Ibagbaga da nga "awan mapalpas na deta, kastoy ti pagbalinan na deta." Isu ti nagbalin nga inspirasyon ko nga agbalin a mas better tatta, nga haan nak lang dapat agpatingga kaediay limit nga ibagbaga da."

(Even if I was adopted, I should strive to have a good life. Because they would say, 'Nothing good will come out of that, that's what they'll become.' That became my inspiration to become better now — that I shouldn't stop at the limit they set for me.)

Participant 2 who was adopted at the age of 12 and now working in DSWD revealed that:

"Uray kasano ti rigat ti pinag-biag mo ket agan-anus ken agpursigi ka lang tapno ti kasta agbalin to nga naurnos ti masangwanam."

(No matter how difficult life is, you must persevere and keep striving so that your future will be organized and better.)

Participant 3, who was adopted at the age of 8 and now a Policeman explained that:

"Haan gayam hadlang iti pagiging ampon, basta laketdi adda ti tiwalak ti bagbagik nga mangiturong nu kasanok labanan ken lagpasan dagiti problemak. Isu ti nangted pigsa kanyak nga agpatuloy latta uray narigat ti dalan nga

lasaten tapno lang magun-od ko ti

nasayaat nga biag ko ita."

(Being adopted is not a hindrance, as long as I have trust in myself to guide me in how to face and overcome my problems. That gave me the strength to keep going, even if the path is hard, just so I can achieve a better life now.)

Participant 6 who was adopted at the age of 9 and now working as a Teacher shared that:

"Hindi hadlang ang pagiging ampon sa

pagtamo ng isang tagumpay na buhay."

(Being adopted is not a barrier to achieving a successful life.)

Participant 7 who was adopted at the age of 9 and now a Businessman stated that:

"Haan nga gapo nga ampon kan ket

kasla naikkatan ka ti kabaelanen wenno

freedom mo dituy lubungen. Ti pudno a

kababalin ti tao ket makita no kasano ka

a bumangon ken lumaban ti biag."

(It's not because you're adopted that your abilities or your freedom in this world are taken away. A person's true strength is seen in how they rise and fight through life.)

The participants' responses show a shared belief that adoption is not a limitation but a source of motivation to live a meaningful and successful life. They emphasized perseverance, self-belief, and resilience as key values in facing life's challenges. Rather than being defined by their background, they used others' negative assumptions as inspiration to prove their worth. Their reflections highlight that success comes from persistence, faith in oneself, and the courage

to rise above difficulties. For the adoptees, challenges are seen as opportunities for growth, and their stories reflect inner strength, determination, and a drive to achieve both personal and professional fulfillment.

A study by Ranieri et al. (2021) found that positive parent-child relationships play a crucial role in helping adopted adolescents develop resilience, a strong sense of identity, and satisfaction with life. This supports the participants' experiences, showing that encouragement and emotional support within the family strengthen resilience and foster personal growth. It aligns with the theme of Silver Lining, emphasizing that overcoming hardship and embracing one's experiences can lead to empowerment and success.

Love Beyond Blood

Love beyond blood describes the concept of chosen family, where emotional bonds and supportive relationships are not limited to biological ties but are formed through care, commitment, and mutual support (Johnson & Lee, 2021).

In this study, love beyond blood refers to the deep gratitude and appreciation they feel toward their adoptive families. It highlights the love, support, and opportunities given by these families, which have been crucial to their personal growth, achievements, and sense of belonging.

As mentioned by Participant 4, who was adopted at the age of 10 and now working as an Accounting Staff:

> *"Agyamanak nak kase adda pamilya nga nangkupkop, nangayat ken nangpabasa kaniak."*

(I am thankful because I have a family who took me in, loved me, and sent me to school.)

In the words of Participant 5, who was adopted at the age of 7 and now

working as a Nurse:

> *"Grateful nak kadagitoy adoptive parents*
>
> *ko kasi inted da amin para maikkan dak*
>
> *ti nasayaat ken komportable nga biag."*

(I'm grateful to my adoptive parents because they gave everything so that we could have

a good and comfortable life.)

As narrated by Participant 8, who was adopted at the age of 12 and now working as a

Nurse:

> *"I deeply appreciate the guidance and*
>
> *support of my adoptive family, who cared*
>
> *for me and helped me become who I am*
>
> *today."*

The participants' responses express deep gratitude and affection toward their adoptive

families, whom they regard as their true source of love, opportunity, and support. They credit

their adoptive parents for providing the foundation for their achievements and overall well-being.

Their reflections emphasize that family is not defined by biological ties but by care,

commitment, and emotional connection. The participants' sense of identity and success is rooted

not only in their own efforts but also in the nurturing and supportive environment their adoptive

families created. This perspective challenges traditional views of kinship, highlighting that

genuine family bonds are built through love and shared emotional experiences.

A study by Grant-Marsney et al. (2015) found that adolescents who felt emotionally close to their adoptive parents showed lower levels of avoidance and anxiety in their adult relationships. This supports the participants' experiences, showing that emotional closeness and trust within adoptive families promote healthy identity development and long-term psychological well-being. It aligns with the theme of Love Beyond Blood, illustrating that unconditional love and emotional support within adoptive families are powerful foundations for personal growth and lasting fulfillment.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a summary of the investigation undertaken, the conclusions drawn and the recommendations given based on the findings.

Summary of the Findings

This section summarizes the key findings of the study, outlining the adoptees' experiences before, during, and after adoption, and highlighting the challenges, coping practices, and realizations that shaped their journeys.

The study revealed that before adoption, the adoptees experienced hardships marked by *Parental Death, Parental Abandonment, Parental Separation*, and *Parental Incapacity.* They endured early loss, abandonment, and financial struggles, leaving them longing for love, care, and stability.

In the transition process, they encountered *Integration Hurdles, Social Mistreatment,* and *Question of self-worth.* Adjusting to a new family brought emotional struggles and identity

confusion, while social stigma and rejection made it harder for them to feel accepted.

Meanwhile, in the practices they embraced, adoptees found strength through *faith***,** *Reciprocation of Gratitude***,** and *Seeking Connection***.** Their faith guided them through hardships, obedience showed their appreciation to their adoptive parents, and building emotional bonds helped them heal and belong.

As part of the realization process, they discover *Silver Lining* and *Love Beyond Blood***.** They learned that success and identity are not defined by biological ties but by love, perseverance, and resilience, proving that adoption can lead to personal growth and genuine happiness.

Conclusions

The study concludes that before adoption, the adoptees lived in difficult circumstances marked by parental death, abandonment, separation, and incapacity. These early experiences brought emotional pain, instability, and a deep yearning for love and security. Such conditions shaped their initial perceptions of life, often leaving them to face loneliness and uncertainty at a young age.

During their transition into adoptive families, the adoptees encountered several challenges that tested their emotional and social resilience. They experienced confusion and adjustment difficulties as they adapted to new environments and relationships. Additionally, many of them faced social stigma and rejection, which affected their confidence and sense of belonging. These struggles revealed the emotional complexities adoptees endure as they navigate new family systems and community interactions.

To cope with these difficulties, adoptees embraced practices that helped them rebuild

their sense of self and belonging. They relied on faith as a source of strength, expressed gratitude through obedience and respect toward their adoptive parents, and nurtured emotional connections within their families. These coping mechanisms provided emotional healing and reinforced their acceptance of their new identity, allowing them to move forward with hope and purpose.

Ultimately, the adoptees realized that being adopted does not define their limitations but rather serves as a foundation for growth and success. They learned that family is built on love rather than blood and that perseverance, faith, and gratitude are vital in overcoming life's challenges. Their journeys reflect that adoption, despite its hardships, can lead to personal transformation, fulfillment, and the discovery of genuine love beyond biological ties.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following are recommended:

- **Adoptees** are encouraged to embrace their life stories, including both their struggles and moments of growth. Recognizing and accepting their emotions is vital because it allows healing and builds self-understanding. By seeking support from groups, mentors, or creative outlets such as writing or art, adoptees can transform their pain into strength and inspire others who share similar experiences.

- **Adoptive parents** are urged to provide unconditional love and understanding to their children. This is important because adoptees may continue to carry feelings of loss, abandonment, or insecurity. By listening without judgment, validating their emotions, and participating in awareness or counseling programs, adoptive parents can build trust and create a home where their children feel truly accepted and valued.

- **Biological parents** are encouraged to acknowledge the lasting emotional impact of separation. This recognition matters because both the parent and child may still

experience pain and a longing for connection. By showing care through respectful communication, such as letters or mediated meetings, and by honoring boundaries, they can nurture understanding and emotional healing for both sides.

- **Schools and communities** are called to create environments where adoptees feel accepted and supported. This is crucial because adoptees may experience isolation or misunderstanding in academic and social settings. Through anti-bullying initiatives, counseling programs, and adoption-awareness activities, schools and communities can promote acceptance, belonging, and confidence among adoptees.

- **Local Government Unit** are encouraged to provide continuous guidance and emotional support even after the legal adoption process. This is necessary because adoption is a lifelong journey that requires ongoing care and understanding. By conducting follow-up sessions, workshops, and regular family check-ins, they can help strengthen relationships and prevent feelings of neglect or isolation among adoptees.

- **Future researchers** are encouraged to conduct in-depth studies on the intergenerational impact of adoption—specifically how the experiences of adoptees influence their parenting styles, family relationships, and perceptions of kinship in adulthood. This topic remains largely unexplored and could provide valuable insights into how adoption shapes not only individual development but also future family systems, offering a broader understanding of the long-term effects of adoption across generations.

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