

**Families of Choice: A qualitative study of
Australian families formed through
intercountry adoption**

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Abstract

Recent sociological literature on family life focuses on the apparently increasing scope for individual choice in forming meaningful, intimate relationships. One important arena for the exercise of such choice is adoption, which is increasingly taking place across national boundaries, taking the form of intercountry adoption. Little attention, however, has been paid to this aspect of contemporary family life by these broader accounts of family change. The research which deals specifically with intercountry adoption focuses on the development and trends of the practice as well as outcome studies, often undertaken in the fields of social work and psychology, and there is little research which investigates the interaction between the general trends in family structure and intercountry adoption.

This study responds to these gaps in the literature by examining the experiences of individuals choosing to form families through intercountry adoption in the Australian social policy environment. Documentary evidence was used to understand the development of Australian intercountry adoption and provide the historical and social policy context for the qualitative component of the study. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to develop an understanding of the choice participants made to form their family through intercountry adoption, and to examine how the state manages this area of social policy.

My study found that individuals choose to form families through intercountry adoption because children are a crucial means by which they can add meaning to their lives and intimate relationships by providing another human being to love and nurture. This child focus was seen as 'natural' and, for some, as an inevitable extension of their relationship. The research also generated findings about the nature of relationships within intercountry adoptive families and the factors which influence how these families are different from biological families. The complex policy environment in Australia creates difficulties for individuals negotiating the system and diversity in legislation and practice among states results in an unclear policy orientation. The movement of children across international boundaries, while not new, has been influenced by a number of global forces including improved transport, enactment of international treaties, media coverage and the introduction of the internet. These advances have resulted in increased knowledge and access to information about intercountry adoption and a more developed understanding of

how the process operates in other countries, which impacts on the experience of the process in Australia.

The sociological account of family formation involving intercountry adoption in Australia that I have developed in this thesis confirms that relationships of choice are being formed in postmodern society, despite messages from a variety of authorities regarding family life which are often mixed, contradictory and dominated by particular family types, rather than by the concept of choice. My study differs from existing studies on intercountry adoption in its achievement of an account of the personal experiences of the intercountry adoption process and family life that links the two together, to show both how broader issues in postmodern family formation structure intercountry adoption, and how intercountry adoption constitutes a vital element of contemporary family formation.

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Acronyms

AACAA	Australians Aiding Children Adoption Agency
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AFIS	Adoption and Family Information Service
AGD	Attorney-General's Department
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ART	Assisted Reproduction Technology
CAA	Contract Adoption Assessor
DIMIA	Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs now called Department of Immigration and Citizenship
DoCS	Department of Community Services
GIFT	Gamete Intrafallopian Transfer
ICSI	Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection
ISS	International Social Service
IVF	Invitro Fertilisation
JP	Justice of the Peace
NABSW	National Association of Black Social Workers
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NSW	New South Wales
TFR	Total Fertility Rate
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
WELSTAT	National Working Party on Welfare Statistics
WHO	World Health Organisation
YACS	Youth and Community Services now called DoCS

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Introduction

Faced with the alternative between family and no family, a growing number of people are 'deciding' on a third possibility: a mixture of various forms, trying out what seems to fit the current situation. (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p. 34)

Until relatively recently, discussions of the sociology of family life have focused on the structure and function of the family unit in society. The shift that has taken place in family sociology has been away from this approach, to incorporate a postmodern understanding of family relationships. In the work of key commentators such as Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck, Elisabeth-Beck-Gernsheim and Anthony Giddens, individual choice is increasingly seen as pivotal to the formation of meaningful, intimate relationships and families of choice are reflected in the growing diversity of family forms (Bauman, 2003; Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1991; 1992). Beck-Gernsheim notes the increasing difficulty in defining the family as 'it is no longer clear who or what is part of the family. The boundaries are becoming unclear, the definitions uncertain' (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 2).

As a result of these changes, it is argued, men and women have altered the way they relate to each other which has significantly influenced the way children are understood within relationships. While previously the focus in a relationship was on the interaction between two adults, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim suggest that the focus has now shifted to children, who have become the 'unique, primary love object' and 'a bastion against the vanishing chances of loving and being loved' (1995, p. 37).

Giddens identifies the emergence of what he calls the 'pure relationship', which he describes as a relationship of choice which occurs when 'a social relation is entered into for its own sake' (1992, p. 98). He also believes that kinship bonds are no longer based solely on biology and marriage, but can be self-made (Giddens, 1992, p. 96) through 'reflexive projects of the self' (1992, p. 198).

Giddens (1999), like Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), highlights the position of children in families, and suggests that the decision to have a child is guided by the 'psychological

and emotional needs' of the parents. He suggests that parenthood is no longer a decision motivated by the economic benefit children provide, but rather involves detailed consideration of the financial burden versus the prospect of forming an ideal relationship based on intimacy rather than on 'parental authoritativeness' (Giddens, 1992, p. 98).

Bauman (2003) writes about 'fluid' relationships in the 'liquid modern setting' and notes how traditional relationships like marriage are no longer the norm. 'The romantic definition of love as "till death us do part"', writes Bauman, 'is decidedly out of fashion – having passed its use-by date because of the radical overhaul of the kinship structures it used to serve and from which it drew its vigour and self-importance' (pp. 4-5). Bauman suggests that intimate relationships today are revocable, subject to change and dependent on choice.

There are many choices facing individuals in society today, which range from decisions about the type of education to pursue, to what kind of job to accept and where to live. Individuals are faced with the choice of selecting a partner, deciding whether the relationship will involve living together or marriage and consideration of whether or not to have children. If, after discussing the advantages and disadvantages of children, a choice is made to raise children, the next question becomes how many children? 'Choice', it seems, has become an essential element in postmodern life and influences the way relationships are formed, but what happens when the choice to have children is constrained because of an inability to conceive?

Interestingly, little attention has been paid to the situation where individuals 'choose' to have children, but the choice does not become a reality. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, pp. 121-127) dedicate very little space to this discussion. Briefly considered are the use of assisted reproduction technologies, but the idea is not developed to consider the outcome should the new technologies fail. Involuntary childlessness is not incorporated into Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's work, nor are other options explored that promote individuals forming intimate and meaningful relationships with non-biological children.

Adoption is one important arena for the exercise of choice in relationships which has largely been ignored in the literature on family life. Further, although some domestic adoption still occurs, adoption is increasingly taking place across national boundaries in the form of intercountry adoption. While there is an emerging literature on other families

of choice like those formed by same-sex couples, accounts of families formed through intercountry adoption are limited in a number of ways.

In contrast to the literature on family life, the intercountry adoption literature deals specifically with the development and trends of the practice as well as outcome studies. These studies often concentrate on adoptees and adoptive parents and researchers with a personal link to adoption frequently undertake the research. In recent times, there have been a number of Australian intercountry adoptees and adoptive parents whose writing has incorporated personal reflections on their own, as well as others, experiences of intercountry adoption (Burns & Burns, 2007; Simmons, 2007; Williams, 2006; Williams Willing, 2005).

Fisher notes how adoption has been given ‘remarkable little attention’ by sociologists (2003, p. 335), and Wegar suggests that the lack of sociological research has resulted in disciplines like psychiatry, social work and psychology dominating studies in this area (Wegar, 1997, p. 5). Such a focus, Wegar believes, has led to the studies usually being orientated ‘in predominantly individualistic terms, without taking into account the social factors and processes that affect adoption experiences and policies’ (1997, p. 5).

Taking a broader perspective, Engel et al. (2007) published a sociological account of international adoption from an American perspective, and DellaCava et al. (2004) discuss how adoption has become a social movement in the USA, resulting in a greater diversity of families. These studies provide a broader look at intercountry adoption in the USA, by providing an overview of the social structures, as well as an understanding of the national and international environment in which the practice operates.

In Britain, Morag Owen (1999) undertook a study of single adopters and identified three groups in her results. ‘Novices’ were in their 20s and 30s and parenting was completely new to them, ‘old hands’ were often older women who had been previously married and had grown up children and ‘professionals’ who had experience of working with children. In a later study, Rosemary Pringle noted a fourth category of single adopters who she described as women aged in their late 30s and 40s without previous parenting experience who were adopting either locally or internationally (2004, p. 232).

While little research exists which investigates the interaction between the general trends in family structure and intercountry adoption, Rosemary Pringle’s (2004) study is one notable exception. Pringle conducted research with single intercountry adoptive parents living in

Britain in an effort to understand how contemporary writings about the self and the nature of relationships are reflected by the experiences and lifestyle choices of single adopters (2004). My study builds on Pringle's work by taking a broader perspective and focusing not only on single adopters and their experiences, but also on individuals who are part of a couple, as well as prospective adoptive parents, adoption professionals and support group representatives. This study responds to the gaps outlined in the literature by examining the experiences of individuals choosing a 'third possibility' as described by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim to form families in Australia through intercountry adoption (1995, p. 34).

Background to the study

Intercountry adoption is a complex and controversial issue that involves the adoption of children, for whom a suitable family cannot be found in their birth country, with families overseas. Accounts of the number of children moving around the world for intercountry adoption differ, but Selman (2000, p. 16) suggested a figure of around 30,000 children in the year 2000, and noted in a recent publication that there has been an overall decrease in numbers since 2004 (Selman, 2009, p. 143).

Much debate in the intercountry adoption literature focuses on the ethics of intercountry adoption. Proponents of the practice view intercountry adoption as a method of providing children with families, as well as giving children access to education and greater life opportunities (Andersson, 2000; Hoksbergen, 1986; Joe, 1978). Those who oppose intercountry adoption see it as a form of cultural imperialism whereby children from developing nations are exploited by parents wanting children in developed countries (Melone, 1976; Miller-Loessi & Kilic, 2001; Ngabonziza, 1991). As Miller-Loessi and Kilic suggest 'it is an ideologically contested phenomenon' (2001, p. 244) which Pilotti notes 'has become a contentious issue, in which ethical, legal, technical and political aspects are not always clearly defined, thus leading to mounting controversy' (1993, p. 165).

My motivation for writing this thesis came from a number of sources. Some years ago, my sister successfully completed the intercountry adoption process in New South Wales (NSW), but withdrew her application when she became pregnant. She had found the process challenging and confronting and I wanted to understand if anything was different twenty-five years on. This initial interest led me to write my honours thesis on intercountry

adoption and later to work in post adoption services. I also have experience as a qualitative researcher working on social research projects.

This Australian study is set against a backdrop of a long-term decline in fertility rates,¹ limited availability of children for local adoption and little Australian research about intercountry adoption. In 1982-83 intercountry adoption accounted for only six percent of adoptions around Australia and today it accounts for 61 percent of all adoptions (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, pp. 8-11). Intercountry adoption therefore, is the dominant form of adoption currently practiced in Australia.

My sociological account of family formation using intercountry adoption in Australia will contribute to the limited Australian research on intercountry adoptive families by providing personal experiences of Australians choosing to form families in this way. The results will enhance knowledge about family diversity in contemporary Australia in relation to families of choice, and provide information about the wider social forces shaping intercountry adoptive families.

Aims of the study

There are three specific aims of this research. The first aim is to examine the personal experiences of families formed through the intercountry adoption process. My second aim is to increase understanding of how the state influences the formation of families through intercountry adoption. The third aim is to understand the relationship between global forces and intercountry adoption as it is practised in Australia.

In order to answer these aims, the following questions will be investigated:

1. What factors are involved in deciding to form a family through intercountry adoption?
2. How do men and women relate to the intercountry adoption process?
3. What differences do adoptive families see between themselves and biological families?
4. What kinds of relationships are significant for intercountry adoptive families?
5. How does the Australian state manage and regulate intercountry adoption?

¹ Although fertility rates are currently experiencing a slight increase in countries like Australia and England, it is perhaps too early to determine whether there is a shift in the overall long-term trend.

6. What are the implications of globalisation for the practice of intercountry adoption?

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. Chapter One outlines the literature in relation to families and the literature on intercountry adoption. It includes a discussion of recent family theorists like Beck (1995), Beck-Gernsheim (2002; 1995), Giddens (1992) and Bauman (2003) who stress the idea of choice when forming intimate relationships and who recognise that a wide variety of family forms exist in postmodern society. Chapter One also outlines the history of children moving within national borders, then across international borders beginning with the Child Migration Scheme, and ending with a discussion of intercountry adoption, focusing on trends in its development.

In Chapter Two, I describe the methodology used in the study. A qualitative approach involving semi-structured interviews was the main method of collecting data, which was effective for promoting discussion of a personal and often sensitive topic like adoption. Also discussed in Chapter Two is my approach to data analysis and a discussion about ethical issues and limitations in the method used.

In Chapter Three, I examine the policy context for my research, by using written sources to outline the characteristics of Australian families such as trends in marriage, divorce, family size and trends in fertility. Also examined is the history of intercountry adoption including details of its development, and a discussion of the trends in adoption and intercountry adoption using adoption statistics. This overview of Australian families and intercountry adoption in Australia provides the social policy context within which participants' opinions about the process are analysed and understood.

Four chapters are dedicated to my research findings, which help to answer the research questions outlined previously and draw on the interview material provided by the qualitative interviews. Chapter Four focuses on the factors involved in individuals choosing to form a family through intercountry adoption and the influences that have informed these choices. Chapter Four also examines whether men and women differ in their experiences of the intercountry adoption process and discusses the basis for these differences.

Chapter Five provides information about families formed through intercountry adoption and considers if participants believed kinship connections to be any different between intercountry adoptive families and biological families. This chapter looks at questions such as how does intercountry adoption affect the formation and development of adoptive families and how do these families see themselves? Chapter Five also considers how others in the community view intercountry adoptive families.

Chapter Six examines participant views about intercountry adoption in the Australian environment. The various roles of the State, Territory and Commonwealth Governments are discussed in relation to the management and regulation of intercountry adoption policy in the context of other government family policies. Analysis involves discussion of participant experiences of the intercountry adoption process in NSW as well as incorporating opinions from adoption professionals and support group representatives from around Australia.

In Chapter Seven, intercountry adoption is discussed in its global context, especially focusing on the impact of advances in technology in the form of improved transport and communication. Questions about the availability of children for intercountry adoption are examined and also discussed is whether the practice is considered a form of aid. Impressions of the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption are discussed and its ability to internationally regulate intercountry adoption is also examined. Answers to each of the research questions are provided in the concluding Chapter Eight, and suggestions are made for future research projects in relation to the diversity of Australian family life.

1

The family and intercountry adoption

...contrary to those interpretations that insist that family links are being weakened, families remain a crucial relational entity playing a fundamental part in the intimate life of and connections between individuals. (Silva & Smart, 1999, p. 5)

The notion of family is important in a changing world where globalisation is producing far-reaching social, political and economic opportunities as well as providing challenges for nations, communities, families and individuals. Most writers agree that the modern family is undergoing a process of change, but whether this change is interpreted as positive or negative depends on the writer's political and/or ideological perspective. What is important, however, is that a conception of 'the family', in whatever form it takes, remains central to the lives of individuals as they seek to form intimate and meaningful relationships with others.

Most people create families through the biological production of children, but when this is not possible, they look for other ways. Some may try assisted reproduction technologies and be successful, while others not successful continue searching. Adoption is one way of forming a family, but with so few children currently available in Australia for local adoption, individuals are turning overseas to create a family through intercountry adoption.

This chapter provides the context for my study by firstly examining the sociological literature on the family and, secondly, outlining the literature on intercountry adoption, specifically focusing on the historical development of the practice and explanations for these trends. The discussion involves examining the history of adoption within a country's borders, followed by an account of its transition into a method of children crossing international borders for the purpose of adoption. This background provides the framework for understanding my research on intercountry adoption and sets the context for exploring the thoughts and opinions of participants involved in the intercountry adoption process.

How to understand the family?

Sociologists have defined the family in many different ways (Gilding, 1997; Lindsay & Dempsey, 2009). Families can be considered in terms of their composition, the functions they perform or the practices in which family members are involved. The sociological approaches to understanding the family include: functionalism, socialism, feminism, the new right, economic rationalism, moral conservatism, social liberalism, postmodernism, queer theory and individualisation (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Becker, 1981; Berlant & Warner, 2000; Lasch, 1977; McDonald, 1995; Morgan, 1975; Oakley, 1976; Popenoe, 1988; Somerville, 1992; Stacey, 1990; Zaretsky, 1976).

Families can also be described in relation to their interaction with institutions in society or in terms of the relationships found within them. They can be called 'extended' families or 'nuclear' families or families formed through adoption or intercountry adoption (Gilding, 1997, pp. 9-24). How the family is defined has implications for the formulation of social policy and the roles played by institutions in relation to the practice of these policies.

Ideas about the family are also influenced by our own world view which has been shaped and formed by personal experiences of the family. Where you were born in the family, how many siblings you have or what relationships were like in your family can all influence how 'the family' is understood. As McDonald notes, 'there is no single, universal definition of a family but each of us defines our own family and, as we move through life, we change our definition as different people take a more or less important role in our lives' (1995, p. 5).

Another aspect of understanding families is recognising that whatever definition is chosen, results in other definitions being rejected. This means that legitimacy will be bestowed on the chosen definition and withheld from the other views presented. The choice of family definition, therefore, has major implications for family policies, as resources are often allocated based on a particular definition of the family group (Gilding, 1997, pp. 24-25).

The literature on family life has also highlighted the evolution of the modern family by questioning whether its development involved a movement away from the extended family and a shift towards the nuclear family. Talcott Parsons (1967), for example, believed that the modern family originated from the extended family which declined due to the separation of home and work caused by industrialisation. Other studies (Anderson, 1971;

Harris, 1983; Laslett, 1972) show no evidence of extended families prior to industrialisation and newer theories on the family focus instead on 'the qualities of relations within the family and on the relationships between family households and the new institutions of industrial society' (Bittman & Pixley, 1997, p. 50).

Silva and Smart note that:

'A major change in the concept of family is that it has come to signify the subjective meaning of intimate connections rather than formal, objective blood or marriage ties. This subjective appreciation binds together people who live in separate households for part of the time, or all the time, as well as people who have legal links, or people who simply choose to belong together as a family'. (1999, p. 7)

Such a definition covers a great diversity of family types and can also include new and emerging family forms. The essential values of the family, however, argue Silva and Smart, are the core values of 'caring and obligation' and are 'central issues which continue to bind people together' (1999, p. 7).

The changing nature of the family

It is commonly acknowledged that the family form is changing and diversifying and the literature on family life provides a number of accounts of the sociological perspectives on factors influencing these changes (Bittman & Pixley, 1997; Funder, 1991; Gilding, 1991; Lindsay & Dempsey, 2009; Mc Donald, 1983; Poole, 2005). Discussions in the literature on family life have moved from consideration of what constitutes a particular family type to a broader discussion about relationships between men, women and children in family groups. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim believe that 'it is no longer possible to pronounce in some binding way what family, marriage, parenthood, sexuality or love mean, what they should or could be; rather, these vary in substance, expectations, norms and morality from individual to individual and from relationship to relationship' (1995, p. 5). This means that any definition of the family is therefore seen as fluid, changeable and diverse.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim highlight the difficulties people face today in relationships where 'role delineations are no longer clear' and 'emancipation and equal rights [which] no longer conveniently come to a halt outside our private lives' (1995, pp. 1-2). They believe instead that:

...questions and choices have emerged at every turn. It is no longer clear whether one should get married or live together, whether one should conceive and raise a child inside or outside the family, whether the father is the man one should live with or the man one loves

who is living with someone else or whether one should do any of these things before, after or while concentrating on one's career. (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p. 15)

The 'normal chaos of love' is the description Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) use to describe the postmodern environment in which roles and relationships are in a state of constant change.

The changes which have occurred in postmodern society mean that traditional roles and behaviour are no longer clear and individuals face uncertainty in their actions and beliefs. In the words of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 'a traditional marriage and family does not represent restriction nor does a modern individual life mean freedom. It is simply that one mixture containing both restriction and freedom is being replaced by another, which seems more modern and attractive' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p. 7).

Beck-Gernsheim suggests that '[t]he family is becoming more of an elective relationship, an association of individual persons, who each bring to it their own interests, experiences and plans, and who are each subjected to different control, risks, and constraints' (1998, p. 67). These thoughts are also echoed in the growing literature found on non-heterosexual families in which families of choice are discussed. Weston (1991) believes that families of choice are developing and seeking legitimation and public recognition as acceptable family forms. This involves the recognition that families are not necessarily formed through blood ties, but can include 'grouping friends together with lovers and children within a single cultural domain' (Weston, 1991, p. 136). Giddens (1999, p. 96) also recognises that notions of kinship are no longer based solely on biology and marriage but have become associated with self-made bonds.

Weeks et al. describe 'families of choice' as family relationships formed by non-heterosexual people who are 'establishing complex patterns of relationships, often using the term "family" in a broad sense, which reveal the development of new forms of mutual involvement and support' (1999, p. 298). The formation of non-heterosexual families of choice are also discussed within debates about family life, as part of a growing awareness of a wider transformation of relationships (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1992) cutting across the heterosexual-homosexual divide (Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 1999, p. 298). Research undertaken by Weeks et al. (1999, p. 308) found that the narratives involved in families of choice were dominated by a recognition for 'some kind of connection with each other ...it's when the commitment or the connection goes somewhere beyond just social things or somewhere beyond - I almost want to say

somewhere beyond choice' (female participant - F 21). Thus, families of choice incorporate ideas about changing patterns of kinship which 'affirm both the significance of individual choice and the importance of responsible commitment and trust', and it is in this sense that the term is used throughout this thesis (Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 1999, p. 314).

Relationships in uncertain times

Both Giddens (1992) and Beck et al. (1995) argue that families are not only influenced by the actors within them, but by the interaction with the wider environment (in Silva & Smart, 1999, p. 2). Morgan expresses the continuity of family life with other areas of existence in his concept of 'family practices' (1996, p. 11). Silva and Smart describe 'family practices' as the 'de-institutionalisation of the family and the blurring of the boundaries which have been assumed to separate families (or the private sphere) from other social institutions (or the public sphere)' (1999, p. 2). This idea is important because it acknowledges the interplay between the private world of the family and the public world of institutions, which are influential in the formation of family and social policies.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim describe the environmental influences on the family, including factors like politics, the economy, work roles, educational opportunities, and mobility and discuss how social inequalities have affected relationships:

If only it were just a question of love and marriage. But one cannot any longer define the relationships between the sexes just in terms of what they seem to involve - sex, affection, marriage, parenthood and so on: one has to include everything else such as work, profession, inequality, politics and economics. (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p. 13)

Like Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), Giddens (1992) also believes that the outside world places strong demands on families because of economic uncertainty and job insecurity and his work shows how individuals are increasingly making choices about themselves and the types of families they form. Giddens (1999) discusses how the decline of socialism has impacted on many things including the family, work opportunities and personal and cultural identity. He also notes that '[t]he more tradition loses its hold and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options' (Giddens, 1991, p. 5).

Giddens discusses the 'pure relationship' which 'refers to a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another' (1992, p. 58). The pure relationship is conceptualised as the ultimate relationship, but one that requires commitment and work. Giddens argues that pure relationships 'presuppose "commitment"', which is a particular species of trust. Commitment in turn has to be understood as a phenomenon of the internally referential system: it is a commitment to the relationship as such, as well as to the other person or persons involved. The demand for intimacy is integral to the pure relationship, as a result of the mechanisms of trust which it presumes' (1991, p. 6). Another feature of pure relationships noted by Giddens is they 'can be terminated, more or less at will, by either partner at any particular point' (1992, p. 137).

While for Giddens (1992) the pure relationship is the ideal, along with other writers (Bauman, 2003; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995;) he recognises that a darker side to relationships can exist including repression and in some cases, violence. As noted by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim: "Love is pleasure, trust, affection and equally there opposites – boredom, anger, habit, treason, loneliness, intimidation, despair and laughter' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p. 12). They also argue that although the sexes have become 'more equal', inequalities still exist and have an impact on individuals and their relationships. 'There is a sharpening contradiction between women's ambitions to live as equals with their mates and colleagues and the actual conditions confronting them between male slogans on mutual responsibility and their unwillingness to alter their daily routine a jot' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p. 14).

Beck-Gernsheim (1998) is also interested in questions about the future of the family and its form, and believes that the family is not breaking up as some commentators suggest, but taking on a new form which is constantly changing. Beck-Gernsheim argues that 'the black-and-white alternative 'end of family' or 'family as the future' is not appropriate' (p. 54). Instead, she suggests there is a need to focus on the grey areas that show a 'trend towards individualisation'. In short, 'a community of need is becoming an elective relationship. The family is not breaking up as a result; it is acquiring a new historical form' (Beck-Gernsheim, 1998, p. 54).

Individualisation

The focus on the individual according to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim is not new, but its current form is considered to be new (1995). ‘One of the most important aspects is its mass character, the scope and systematic character of the current surge of individualisation. It occurs in the wealthy Western industrialised countries as a side-effect of modernisation processes designed to be long-term’(Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p. 8). Weeks et al. observe individualisation in relation to the freeing up of the individual and believe that it ‘offers a greater sense of personal autonomy, of freedom from outmoded and often oppressive patterns of life’ (2001, p. 23).

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argue that men and women ‘are shaking off rigid gender roles’ and beginning to concentrate on themselves and their own needs, wants and desires (1995, p. 24). ‘While men and women are released from traditional norms and can search for a ‘life of their own’, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim suggest ‘they are *driven* into seeking happiness in a close relationship because other social bonds seem too tenuous or unreliable’ (1995, p. 24, italics in original). Women in the West are better educated, mobile and they expect to be treated in a certain way. Love has positive and negative elements and individuals are looking for freedom, which may mean following their own dream, rather than necessarily sharing a vision with a partner. People are focusing on themselves as individuals first and foremost, and only then do their other roles of woman, man, mother and father, follow.

Giddens (1990; 1991) has formulated an account of the reflexive project of self in which individuals’ identities are constructed by a constant reflection on, and a working and reworking of, their own individual biographies (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 2006, p. 322). According to Giddens, the self in modern society is ‘frail, brittle, fractured and fragmented’ (1991, p. 169) and the reflexive project of self is a method by which individuals are able to critically observe themselves in order to re-evaluate their past, present and future and ‘shape new values, norms and life patterns’ (Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 1999, p. 12).

The role of children in relationships

The place of children and their significance in society has changed throughout history. While children were once considered economic assets, they are no longer viewed in this

way. Bauman explains how children were once considered as producers whose birth improved the well-being of the family because of their potential as labourers. Children were also considered to be a bridge 'between mortality and immortality, between the abominable short individual life and a (hopefully) infinite duration of the kin' (Bauman, 2003, p. 41). Bauman argues that while children today may still represent a bridge, the term is understood in a different way, as representing a link to more durable relationships, in a time where family structures have become 'frail' (2003, p. 42).

Ideas and views about childhood have also changed and children have become objects of emotional consumption who 'are wanted for the joys of the parental pleasures it is hoped they will bring – the kinds of joys no other object of consumption, however ingenious and sophisticated, can offer' (Bauman, 2003, p. 42). The notion of children as economic assets has changed and they have become 'a symbol of innocence' and 'a source of amusement and pleasure' (Bittman & Pixley, 1997, p. 54).

The significance of children in relationships is echoed in the work of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim who argue that the child's role has become central to relationships:

The child becomes the last remaining, irrevocable, unique primary love object. Partners come and go, but the child stays. Everything one vainly hoped to find in the relationship with one's partner is sought in or directed at the child. If men and women have increasing difficulty in getting on with one another, the child acquires a monopoly on companionship, sharing feelings, enjoying spontaneous physical contact in a way which has otherwise become uncommon and seems risky...the child becomes the final alternative to loneliness, a bastion against the vanishing chances of loving and being loved. It is a private way of 'putting the magic back' into life to make up for general disenchantment. The birth rate may be declining but children have never been more important. (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p. 37)

Bauman describes the decision making process parents undertake in order to decide whether to have a child (2003, pp. 42-43). This process is likened to a balancing act, where individuals weigh up the emotional benefits a child brings versus the cost and impact they have on adult relationships and lifestyles. In Bauman's words, having children 'means entering an open-ended and irrevocable commitment with no "until further notice" clause attached' and he likens the creation of a family to being 'like jumping headlong into uncharted waters of unfathomed depth' (Bauman, 2003, p. 43). Giddens argues too, that having children involves a choice, which has to be thought through, rather than taken for granted (1992).

In late modernity the continual reassessment of self described by Giddens (1991) is also noted by Jenks as ‘critical to the experience of being a child, but more significantly, critical in terms of how adults now understand and relate to children’ (Jenks, 1996, p. 17). Giddens stresses that intimacy replaces parental authoritativeness (1992, p. 98). Jenks highlights the importance of children to the adult self-identity:

We need children as the sustainable, reliable, trustworthy, now outmoded treasury of social sentiments that they have come to represent our ‘nostalgia’ for their essence is part of a complex, late-modern, rearguard attempt at the resolution of the contradictory demands of the constant re-evaluation of value with the pronouncement of social identity. (Jenks, 1996, p. 21)

The family policy framework

While the discussion in the family literature involves individuals and their ability to make choices about relationships, it is also important to understand how ‘family’ is understood in terms of policy formulation in relation to the range of family experiences. Silva and Smart note:

...while personal choices appear as increasingly autonomous and fluid, they are in fact closely connected to social conditions that continue to produce tensions and anomalies. There is a lack of congruence between policies based on how families should be and how they actually operate. But this does not mean that we want to abolish institutional supports for family life. Rather, we see the need for many forms of family experiences to be supported by policy frameworks in order to enhance autonomous choices in living arrangements. (Silva & Smart, p. 2)

How families are perceived by institutions influences the type of family policies which are produced. Fox Harding explains how family policies can be contradictory because they reflect different views about the family by the state (1996, p. 177). Silva and Smart (1999) discuss the diversity of family forms and how these are treated differently according to the policy area:

...in Britain, the Children Act prioritises parenthood over marriage, but immigration law gives priority to legal marriage; laws regulating assisted reproduction repudiate the possibility of gay and lesbian parenthood, while adoption policy will allow for gay or lesbian (or single parent) adoption. Yet at the rhetorical level there is little tolerance for this kind of diversity and although policies are contradictory, the lack of political commitment to diversity means that new family practices cannot assume, or rely on, policy support. (Silva & Smart, 1999, p. 4)

Brannen considers the interpretation of children in relation to how policy frameworks are developed and practised (1999, pp. 143-144). She questions whether children should be treated as extensions of their parents or whether they should be seen as a stand-alone

category, that is, subjects who construct their own consciousness and life trajectories. Bittman and Pixley also note how idealised models of the family, ‘often claimed to be fostered or undermined by different family policies, are not only politically contentious but divert attention from the importance of economic and social policy’ (1997, p. 214).

While individuals in a relationship may feel they are in control, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim suggest that there are many and varied external forces shaping the decisions they make:

everything affecting the family from outside – the job market, employment system or the law – is bound to invade our private lives in a distorted and foreshortened form. Within the family (and all its alternatives) the systematically produced delusion is fostered that its members are in control and can pull all the strings and levers necessary to reverse any injustices between the partners. (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p. 36)

Zaretsky argues that the idea of the family as a private institution dates back to the nineteenth century liberal state when the state began intervening and taking responsibility for functions such as schools and hospitals (1982, p. 193). While some like Lasch (1977) view state interaction negatively, others like Zaretsky (1982) believe it helped to preserve the family. Fox Harding comments that the relationship between the family and the state is like a ‘contested and shifting boundary’ and one which changes depending on the ideological persuasion of the political party in power (1996, p. 108). Thus, the state both controls and helps families based on assumptions about family life that are inherent in the social policy framework. In order to understand intercountry adoption in the Australian social policy framework, it is important to analyse the literature on intercountry adoption, but first the gaps in the family literature will be discussed.

My research is about family relationships of choice in postmodern Western society. While the literature on ‘the family’ stresses the fluidity of the family form and the ability of individuals to have choice and flexibility in relationships, there are few references to adoption and even fewer to intercountry adoption. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim present some discussion about what happens when individuals are unable to have children, but pay very little attention to this topic (1995, pp. 121-127). Briefly considered is the use of assisted reproduction technologies, but no suggestions are made in the event that new technologies fail and the longed-for baby is not born. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argue that ‘Complications of the kind just described are of course the exception. Most couples who want children actually have them’ (1995, p. 127). For some people this is clearly not the case, yet there is no further discussion regarding alternatives to biological children.

While the family literature contains some consideration of infertility and abortion, adoption and intercountry adoption as chosen family forms are generally not examined. In a number of recent Australian books on the family, very little space is devoted to adoptive or intercountry adoptive families. Lindsay and Dempsey include a chapter about family change in which fertility, technology and voluntary and involuntary childlessness are discussed (2009, pp. 127-128). Reference is made to reproductive technologies as an alternative method of family formation, but intercountry adoption is not referred to as another option for family building. Adoption is mentioned briefly, but in relation to identity formation rather than as an alternative method of forming families.

Lindsay and Dempsey (2009, pp. 30-49) also examine a range of Australian families and relationships including: Indigenous Australian families, contemporary Aboriginal families, culturally and linguistically diverse immigrant families, lesbian, gay, bisexual or otherwise 'queer' couples and singles relationships. Intercountry adoptive families again do not feature in the discussion, thus highlighting they are an under examined group in the sociology of the Australian family.

Saggers and Sims highlight the diversity of family types in Australia and although adoptive families are considered one of the many types of families, they are not discussed in any detail (2005, pp. 66-87). Indigenous families, migrant families and same-sex families are discussed in greater depth and again, no consideration of intercountry adoptive families as a family type in Australia is given. This area is obviously one that requires further exploration, but first it is essential to understand the literature on adoption and intercountry adoption in order to examine how families are understood in this body of literature.

Adoption: Within national boundaries

Adoption as a topic has been extensively researched in the international literature and different types of adoption such as intercountry adoption, as well as transracial adoption, have been discussed as subject areas in their own right. Although this thesis focuses on intercountry adoption, it is worthwhile locating the intercountry adoption literature within the broader adoption literature in order to understand better the development of intercountry adoption and the influences on how it is managed and practised.

Adoption is a complex phenomenon, intimately linked to the social, economic and political factors influencing families in the societies in which it is practised. There are various

explanations in the literature for how adoption in its different forms has developed over time. This section examines the early history of adoption within national borders and then discusses the development of adoption across national borders, the practice known as intercountry adoption.

The popularisation of adoption is often associated with the Pharaoh's daughter finding Moses in the bulrushes on the River Nile. Although the Hebrew child was nursed and weaned by his birth mother, Moses was adopted by the Pharaoh's daughter and became a Prince of Egypt (Altstein & Simon, 1991, pp. 1-2; Harvey, 1980, pp. 15-16).

Throughout history, adoption has been practised in different ways and motivated by different reasons. Historically, adoption helped ensure the continuity of the group by providing a way for new people to become group members. It also provided a mechanism for finding substitute parents for children when needed and was a method of obtaining heirs, thereby solving the problem of male and female infertility (Benet, 1976, pp. 23-24). Adoption was practised initially within a society, community or religious group and was practised within the national boundaries of a country.

Benet (1976, pp. 22-23) discusses how classical societies such as Rome, China and India, as well as tribal societies in Africa and Oceania practised adoption. She writes that in all these societies, 'members of the extended family were the preferred adoptees and adoption was a transaction between the two sets of parents' (Benet, 1976, p. 23).

In Roman times, adoption was used as a method of acquiring an heir, thereby ensuring the continuation of a family's inheritance and property rights. The Romans had a two-step process to adoption. Simple adoption involved the arrangement of an adoption without the termination of parental rights, a process that could occur even when a Roman already had heirs. A full adoption in contrast, could only occur in circumstances when an heir was needed for a childless couple, the Roman was at least 60 years of age and the adoptee was no longer a minor (Benet, 1976, pp. 30-31).

In ancient China, the practice of adoption was linked to the Chinese worship of ancestral cults. After death, the person who inherited land was obliged to worship the dead ancestor in return for his inheritance. Adoption provided the mechanism for providing a childless couple with a descendent to worship the dead parents, thereby acknowledging and continuing the ancestral link (Benet, 1976, p. 32).

Under Hindu law in India, the rules surrounding adoption were thoroughly prescribed. Preference was given to a child from the same family, but the child could only be adopted if the adopter could have married the child's mother, for example, the adoptee could not be the child of the adopter's sister, and the child had to belong to the same caste as the adopter. Historically under Hindu law, orphans could not be adopted because adoption was seen as a transaction between two parties and without parents, the transaction was impossible. These rules changed, however, following the influence of British rule in India and orphans were later able to be adopted by Hindus (Benet, 1976, pp. 35-37).

In primitive societies supported by herding, and hunting and gathering, group cohesiveness was essential to the functioning of the society (Benet, 1976, p. 42). Because land was plentiful adoption was unnecessary as a means of ensuring inheritance. Primitive cultures also held different views about parenthood seeing it as a means of ensuring the 'solidarity and unity of the entire kin group' (Benet, 1976, p. 43). Kinship fostering was often practised in these communities and operated like an apprenticeship for a child, without changing the status of the child in relation to its parents. In Polynesia, for example, kinship fostering provided a mechanism for improving a child's future. By sending a boy to live with a relative, for example, a chief, the boy could learn discipline that would help his future advancement. A daughter on the other hand, may be sent to a relative who no longer had children living at home, in order to learn life skills and provide domestic help. In this way, parental roles were shared among family members, not in a formalised way like adoption, but on a community basis (Benet, 1976, p. 48).

According to Benet 'the patriarchal nature of Islam [also] militates against adoption' (1976, p. 27). Adoption is not needed to provide heirs because males can legitimate children without having married their mothers and can recognise any child of his wife, even though the child may be born from adultery. For Orthodox Jewish people in earlier times, adoption was not considered a viable option for childless couples. Since 'Jewishness' is passed from mother to child, considerations about the faith of the child influenced the feasibility of the practice of adoption (Benet, 1976, p. 28).

Adoption was not believed to exist in tribes of northern Europe whose society was thought to be based on age groups rather than on family groupings. Benet explains 'there is no evidence that the adoption of children was practised by these people...Chiefs were chosen by trials of strength, and the chief was thought of as father to his people' (1976, pp. 38-39). This idea of the chief being like a father to the entire society, was one which influenced the

development of feudalism in Europe where the feudal chief prescribed heirs based on blood lines, and property was distributed along patriarchal lines (Benet, 1976, p. 39).

Benet (1976) describes adoption as being very much the ‘product of a cohesive social order’. With the decline of the Roman Empire and the rapid social change that ensued, blood ties and feudal bonds became more important than adoption. Benet continues that ‘adoption was not reinstated in continental Europe until the French Revolution, and in the English-speaking countries until about the end of the nineteenth century’(1976, p. 54). Although adoption per say, may not have been practised during this period, there were some interesting changes in society which influenced policies for children and families and provide a backdrop to later developments in adoption. One such development was the introduction of the Child Migration Scheme, which is discussed in the next section.

The Child Migration Scheme: Crossing national boundaries

Although the beginnings of intercountry adoption are normally associated with the movement of children across national boundaries after World War II, children were crossing national boundaries prior to this time. With the introduction of the Child Migration Scheme in Britain in 1618, children began travelling to foreign countries to be ‘cared for’ by others. Although some children were adopted, many others were not. The introduction of the Child Migration Scheme, however, is important to the history of intercountry adoption because it represents the first time large numbers of children crossed international borders to live in countries other than their own. Triseliotis et al. note that the scheme was ‘a mass exercise in a kind of intercountry foster care and *de facto* adoption’ (original emphasis 1997, p. 181). In this sense, the Child Migration Scheme in Britain can be considered an important influence on what is known today as intercountry adoption. Since Australia is a former British colony, the following discussion of the Child Migration Scheme also provides background into factors influencing adoption legislation, policy and practice in Australia.

The Child Migration Scheme was preceded by the enactment of the Poor Laws in Britain. The Poor Laws were used to provide care for children who could not be cared for by their families because of death, parental absence or incarceration (O'Halloran, 2006, p. 16). The introduction of the Poor Laws saw the beginning of the state’s intervention into the private responsibilities of parents and families. The state’s involvement in the provision of care for

children included Child Migrant Schemes, institutional care for orphans or destitute children, fostering and boarding out programs as well as adoption (Benet, 1976, p. 15). Philanthropic organisations became involved in providing services for children through provisions outlined in the Poor Laws. Once placed with the Poor Law guardians, children entered workhouses and could later be placed for adoption (O'Halloran, 2006, pp. 17-18).

Life in the workhouses was extremely harsh. Children worked hard, as did their parents if they were alive and living with their children. Some children became apprentices in England while others were sent as child migrants to overseas countries. In 1618, Britain sent a group of orphaned and destitute children to live and work in the USA. This was the beginning of the British Child Migration Scheme which resulted in around 150,000 children being sent to Australia, New Zealand and, to a lesser extent, South Africa, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and the Caribbean (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 1).

The principle aim of the Child Migration Scheme was to send 'at risk' children to outposts of the British Empire. These were children who were, for example, homeless and had been placed in homes by their families or who suffered from abuse within the family. The children lived and worked in order to 'become solid citizens' (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 28). Initially, children as young as seven were transported to the colonies as well as juvenile prisoners from reformatory schools (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 29). Over time, farm schools and orphanages were set up in the colonies by philanthropic organisations like Dr Barnardos and The Fairbridge Society and religious organisations such as The Christian Brothers and The Salvation Army.

Bean and Melville describe the motivation for the Child Migration Scheme as based on political, economic and philanthropic motivations (1989, p. 33). The political rationale came during the 1850s, when Britain was keen to populate her outer colonies and at the same time, the colonies were keen to accept child migrants in order to boost population numbers. The belief was that children could be moulded into good citizens in the new colonies. Girls were especially beneficial as females were in short supply and were required as wives and domestic servants.

The economic benefits of the Child Migration Scheme were that the state saved money when the children were sent overseas to live. Since the colonies also needed a labour force, paupers were ideal for this role. Bean and Melville describe how the Child Migration Scheme 'was not just about moving children from one society in Britain to another,

overseas. It was about taking certain types of children and rearing them to fill certain positions in that society' (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 36).

From the 1870s through to around 1925, private philanthropists referred to as 'the child savers' by Bean and Melville became involved in child migration (1989, p. 28). Early philanthropists stressed the advantages of open spaces against city life since 'urban areas and particularly the larger cities, produced moral degeneracy and polluted the very soul' (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 38). Most children were sent from Britain to Canada during this time as it was seen as a safer destination than Australia during the gold rush. Canada was also in need of labourers and the transport costs to Canada were cheaper than to Australia (Bean & Melville, 1989, pp. 38-39).

Bean and Melville comment how 'the organisations concerned with child migration differed in quality, methods and philosophy – though, for the children, the end result was still exploitation and cheap labour' (1989, p. 59). While directors of the charities highlighted that children were well cared for and testaments were written accordingly, first-hand reports from the child migrants, tell of the hardship and exploitation they endured (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 59). Joe Jessop, for example, who was sent to live in the Fairbridge Farm School in Duncan, Vancouver Island, Canada in 1937 at the age of seven writes 'I was embittered at that time: the main question was, why am I here? However, you were too busy with survival. You had no money...When you got out on your own, you saw family life which we had never had in all our life' (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 17).

It is important to note that the child migrants invariably did not want to be sent abroad (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 60). Whether the children went in the 1880s or 1960s, child migration meant the children were cut off from their roots and were 'far too young to have any inclination towards farming or service in Canada, Australia or Rhodesia' (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 60). This is evident in the words of a child sent to Australia at the age of eleven: 'It was deeply traumatic for me as it was for most of the children. I think now, looking back, the whole idea of it worries me. They were taking children away, often from their parents, and just putting them out of the way' (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 60).

Despite the positive testimonials of the directors of philanthropic organisations, there was some disquiet in Britain about the Child Migration Scheme. In 1874, Andrew Doyle was commissioned to report on child migration to Canada. He found 'intolerable evidence of ill

treatment, overwork and physical abuse' (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 66) and concluded that the scheme was a method of 'providing cheap labour for Canadian farmers' (in Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 63).

According to Bean and Melville 'Doyle succeeded in revealing the ruthless exploitation of the children', but little changed as a result of his report (1989, p. 70). The Canadians were in favour of the scheme and were extremely supportive of two British women, a Miss Rye and Miss Macpherson, whose practices Doyle had criticised in his report. Doyle was a Roman Catholic and his research was discredited because his arguments were thought to be biased on religious grounds, against the two women who were Protestants (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 72).

Thus, despite some opposition, the Child Migration Scheme continued. This occurred even though as early as 1877, the scheme had been described as 'inhuman' and critics spoke of the 'total absence of efficient supervision' for the children (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 6). The British sent children to live overseas for nearly 350 years, ending with the last shipment of children to Australia in 1967 (Bean & Melville, 1989, p. 1).

The imperative for sending children to live overseas has changed today. No longer is there the need to populate new lands. The reasons children travel between countries for the purposes of adoption are associated with notions of childhood and family. The House of Commons Health Committee reported that 'child migration was a bad, and, in human terms, a costly mistake' and it is against this backdrop that they urged 'extreme caution' when considering applications for intercountry adoption (in Selman, 2002, p. 206).

The development of domestic adoption legislation

At the same time as the Child Migration Scheme was operating between Britain and other countries in the Empire, local adoption within a country's national boundaries was being discussed. In England at the end of the nineteenth century, adoption legislation was on the agenda. O'Halloran argues that the main resistance to adoption in Victorian society was the emphasis on 'blood lines' for the continuation of inheritance and the 'orderly devolution of family property' (2006, p. 19). Concern was also raised that adoption legislation would promote permissiveness and allow parents to avoid the responsibility of caring for their children.

There were a number of social concerns, which informed the debate about adoption legislation and contributed to its introduction. These social concerns included concern about baby farming, questions about how to care for illegitimate or destitute children and the situation of war orphans (O'Halloran, 2006, p. 20).

Adoption legislation was believed to be a solution to ending the practice of baby farming, which involved children being placed in 'the care' of others who then neglected and abused them. Another practice, which required legislative control, occurred when people who had cared for children from an early age, were forced to surrender them to birth parents when the children became economically useful. The carer in these circumstances had no way of legitimising the relationship between themselves and the child and, therefore, had to surrender the child to the birth parents. The situation for war orphans after the First World War was also of concern when people who cared for the children were 'without any guarantee of legal security for their voluntarily assumed care arrangements' (O'Halloran, 2006, p. 21). Legislative change in relation to adoption laws therefore, represented legal security and stability for these groups.

O'Halloran notes that 'The issue as to why England should continue to resist introducing legislation to regulate a practice that was good enough for her former colonies and good enough for her to send her children to would not go away' (2006, p. 21). Adoption legislation had already been enacted in 1873 in Massachusetts, USA, in 1881 in New Brunswick, Canada and New Zealand and in 1896 in Western Australia. The first adoption legislation was introduced in England with *The Adoption Act 1926* and resulted in the severing of biological blood ties and the construction of new ties with an adoptive family (O'Halloran, 2006, p. 21).

Originally, the adoptee had no knowledge of his birth family and the adoption was kept a secret. Over time, there has been a gradual freeing up of information and a move towards more open adoption that has been incorporated into legislation to varying degrees around the world. Legislation has also changed to accommodate children crossing national borders in the form of intercountry adoption.

The introduction of adoption legislation led to the establishment of policies and procedures for regulating domestic adoption. As social conditions changed around the world and countries experienced political instability and civil unrest, adoption progressed from being understood as a solution for children within a country's borders to being an option for

children needing care outside their own country. This marked the beginning of intercountry adoption and its development will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter. It is, however, necessary to mention that just as intercountry adoption grew from local adoption (and was influenced by other practices like child migration), the methods practised in intercountry adoption also grew from practices used in local adoption. Mende writes:

Intercountry adoption in all its aspects – legal, social, cultural and political – can be regarded only in closest connection with local adoption. For every social and cultural form of development – society’s attitude towards illegitimacy, divorce, abortion, family planning – affects first local child placing concepts and then also, in the course of development, either as a parallel phenomenon or reflex, the placement of children in foreign countries. (1976, pp. 67-68)

Since intercountry adoption grew from local adoption, there was a lag in the development of intercountry adoption practice. For example, the need for post placement services and supervision was recognised in domestic adoption, but Mende writing in 1976, details that no such provisions were made in relation to international adoption. Mende suggests this was probably due to the difficulties of having two countries involved in the adoption process and also notes that the development of procedures around selecting adoptive parents was slow to develop (Mende, 1976, p. 68).

Although intercountry adoption developed from domestic adoption, the meanings and significance attached to adoption may be different because of the international context. For example, the form of adoption practised among Polynesians within their own country, known as ‘family adoption’ or ‘kinship adoption’ when practised in an overseas context, can lead to very different outcomes. If a family sends their child to be adopted by relatives in the USA understanding that the child will have access to multiple opportunities, they do not expect the adoption to result in the birth parental rights being severed. In the next section, I outline the history of intercountry adoption in order to understand what factors influenced its development and to set the context for my fieldwork.

The development of intercountry adoption

Explanations for the practice of intercountry adoption have changed over time and various authors have discussed the motivations which have resulted in intercountry adoption becoming a recognised child welfare policy (Altstein & Simon, 1991; Pilotti, 1993; Tizard, 1991). Intercountry adoption has moved from being understood as a humanitarian response

to orphaned children after World War II, to being a means of satisfying childless couples in the West with children from the Third World (Altstein & Simon, 1991, p. 1).

Writers (see for example, Altstein & Simon, 1991; Lovelock, 2000; Pilotti, 1993; Resnick, 1984; Tizard, 1991) agree that intercountry adoption began after World War II, but opinions differ regarding how the development of intercountry adoption is classified.

Altstein and Simon (1991, p. 3) suggest that intercountry adoption has occurred in two phases: the first phase beginning in 1948 and lasting until 1953 and the second phase beginning in the mid 1950s and continuing through to the period when their book was published in 1991. They characterise the first phase as lasting ‘only about five years’ because during this time the children adopted were considered ‘racially and culturally similar’ to the Westerners who adopted them (Altstein & Simon, 1991, p. 3). The children adopted were from Germany and Greece and because of a similar Anglo-Saxon background; I presume they were seen as similar to the citizens of the USA who adopted them. However, this ignores the fact that the children spoke a different language and had different cultural experiences and values when they went to live in the USA. The second phase of intercountry adoption described by Simon and Altstein was also motivated by war, in this case the Korean conflict, but the children were characterised differently. Because the adopted children were of Asian background, they were seen as ‘racially and culturally different’ to the families who adopted them (Altstein & Simon, 1991, p. 3).

Lovelock describes the first wave of intercountry adoption as starting after World War II and lasting until the mid 1970s and the second wave as starting in the mid 1970s and lasting until her article was published (2000, p. 908). Lovelock (2000) distinguishes between wave one and wave two by highlighting the different motivations of adopting parents. In the mid 1970s, adoptive parents turned away from war-torn nations and countries with which the USA had previously been involved and began adopting children from Latin America. This trend is explained by Lovelock as motivated by increasing levels of infertility and problems experienced in trying to adopt domestically (Hoksbergen 1986 in Lovelock, 2000, p. 927).

In the next section, I will discuss my interpretation of the phases of development of intercountry adoption. My analysis differs in a number of ways from that proposed by the writers discussed previously. I believe intercountry adoption can be described in terms of

four phases of development and I discuss a different range of external influences on the practice.

Phase 1: Humanitarian response 1945-1975

In the aftermath of World War II, people in developed countries were motivated by humanitarian reasons to help children escape the hardships of war. Intercountry adoptions were arranged for large numbers of orphaned children from Germany, Greece, Italy, Austria, France, Latvia and Estonia. These children were sent to other European countries such as Denmark, the Netherlands and Belgium and to the USA (Altstein & Simon, 1991; Harvey, 1980, pp. 33-34; Hoksbergen, 1991, p. 142; Textor, 1991, p. 109).

Before attempting to discuss the numbers of children involved in intercountry adoption it is important to acknowledge the problems noted in the literature regarding estimations of the children involved in the practice (Kane, 1993; Selman, 2000b; Weil, 1984). Weil notes that historical data is limited because of the quality and quantity of the information available from both sending and receiving countries (1984, pp. 277-278). This results in uncertainty about the actual number of children leaving countries to be adopted abroad. The numbers quoted in the literature, therefore, are indicative of the number of children involved in intercountry adoption, based on the limited worldwide data available.

The children sent to the USA post World War II were mostly orphans from Germany and Greece but also included intercountry adoptees from Asian countries like Japan. The German and Greek children were available for adoption because of the destruction and chaos caused by World War II. Also contributing to this number were Greek children from the Greek Civil War in 1946 (Altstein & Simon, 1991, p. 3). Around 5,814 children were sent to the USA for adoption between 1948 and 1953, with 4,066 orphans entering the USA under the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 and the remaining children entered under the Refugee Acts of 1953 (Weil, 1984, pp. 280-281).

In Scandinavian countries, interest in intercountry adoption also arose at the end of the Second World War. Children who had been fostered in Sweden during the war were adopted by Swedish citizens when their birth relatives could not be found. Swedish citizens working abroad also adopted children in need of families during the late 1950s (Swedish Intercountry Adoptions Authority MIA, 2005, p. 3). Intercountry adoption also occurred in the Netherlands with children adopted from Greece, Austria and Germany (Hoksbergen, 1991, p. 142).

Hoksbergen (1991, p. 145) explains how Europeans believed they should help abandoned children in the post war period because they could afford to do so. Little consideration was given at the time to the political turmoil in the sending states or to the psychological or educational implications of intercountry adoption for the children. In the early days, there were no guidelines in the Netherlands for organising intercountry adoptions and anyone could act as an intermediary between aspirant adoptive parents and countries of origin. This lack of control during the early phase of intercountry adoption led to the later development of rules in the Netherlands to regulate the practice.

Although Weil describes the USA data on intercountry adoption as 'limited' it does give some indication of where children were moving from and going to, during the period from 1948 until 1962 (1984, pp. 282-283). In the USA, the number of children coming from Europe decreased in the mid 1960s. While there is uncertainty about why this occurred Weil suggests it may have resulted from improvements in birth control, greater acceptance of unwed mothers, a rise in the age of marriage and increased acceptability of locally adopted children (1984, p. 285).

From 1963 until 1975, the trend was for children from Asia to be adopted in the USA. The number of children travelling to the USA for intercountry adoption in this time from Europe was approximately 7,067, which included 2,976 from West Germany, 1,137 from Italy and 932 from Greece. In contrast, a total of 22,483 children came from Asia with most significantly, 14,684 children from South Korea. It is interesting to note that at this time, only 1,205 children were adopted from South America, and the majority of these children came from Colombia, a country which would feature prominently in the next period of intercountry adoption (Weil, 1984, pp. 282-283).

During the Korean (1950-1953) and Vietnam Wars (1962-1975), Asian countries became the significant source countries for intercountry adoption in the USA. From 1966 to 1976, approximately 32,000 children were adopted by USA families, with around 65 percent of the children coming from Asia, predominantly Korea (Altstein & Simon, 1991, pp. 3-4). The high number of Korean children available for adoption is attributed to a number of reasons. Miller (1971) and Benet (1976) both discuss the importance of blood lines and family structure in Korean society and note the social difficulties of accepting illegitimate children or mixed-race offspring of soldiers stationed in Asia during wartime (Tizard, 1991, p. 745). A paper written by the International Social Service (ISS) also suggests that the high number of Korean children available for intercountry adoption may have resulted

from an increase in children being abandoned because of the perceived efficiency of intercountry adoption procedures (International Social Service, 1975; in Weil, 1984, p. 282).

Children from Vietnam had already been entering the USA for adoption under a refugee program. In 1975, the South Korean Government offered around 3,000 children for adoption, although records vary as to the exact number. About three quarters of these children were sent to the USA and the remaining children went to other countries around the world, including Australia. Feigelman and Silverman (1979) discuss the criticisms of Operation Babylift as it became known, which showed that some of the Vietnamese children were not actually 'orphans' but had been placed in orphanages for their protection and were to be collected by their families after the war. Other anecdotal evidence also suggests that some parents sent their children overseas to access greater opportunities in the West (Zigler, 1976, p. 332).

Zigler questioned the motivation of the USA for accepting Vietnamese orphans from Operation Babylift suggesting it could be interpreted as a tokenistic gesture to assuage USA guilt over the war and to exert dominance over the Vietnamese people (1976, p. 329). While the airlift was originally met with enthusiasm by people in the USA, in time it became clouded by controversy. This was partly due to the aeroplane which crashed killing around 200 children and adults aboard, but mostly due to the lack of planning that accompanied the evacuations (Zigler, 1976, p. 330). Involvement of the USA in the operation also led to questions about why Vietnamese children were being helped, when children in the USA also needed care at home (Zigler, 1976, p. 335).

Until the 1950s in the USA, most people rejected the idea of inter-racial or transracial adoption, where adoption is practised within national boundaries but across racial lines. In some southern states of the USA inter-racial adoption was illegal at the time (Benet, 1976, p. 137). Some of the barriers to inter-racial adoption had been broken down, however, when the first Korean children were sent to the USA for adoption, 'intercountry adoption in the United States had an awakening effect on the domestic scene' (Benet, 1976, p. 137).

In 1958, the Child Welfare League of America in conjunction with the Bureau of Indian Affairs began a project called the Indian Adoption Project. This study looked at the outcomes for 395 Indian children placed for adoption with white families in the USA. In 1965, an inter-racial study began in the United Kingdom that explored the outcomes for 58

children of Asian, African and mixed-race backgrounds who were adopted into white families. Both studies showed positive results for the overall adjustment levels of the children and generated interest in the notion of transracial adoption (Benet, 1976, pp. 137-140). This positive feeling was further reinforced in 1971, when the Vietnamese children were sent to the USA for adoption.

Simon notes that while transracial adoption in the USA has never been the first choice of professional adoption workers, it has been used in cases where black families could not be found for black children (1984, p. 232). During the 1970s in the USA the placement of black children in white homes became a contentious issue and groups like the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) and black political leaders began opposing the practice (Simon, 1984, p. 229). They believed that black children could be better cared for in black families and that methods should be found to recruit black families more often (Altstein & Simon, 1991, p. 63; Simon, 1984, p. 229). Benet notes that inter-racial adoption in Britain met little opposition initially since minority groups were 'smaller and less well-organised' than black groups in the USA (1976, p. 158).

In addition to questions about the impact on a child's identity of growing up in a racially different family, were questions about the practical methods used to select adoptive families. This involved concern about the selection criteria for black adoptive parents and consideration of what criteria should be and whether some flexibility was needed in the process. This discussion led to the development of black adoption agencies which specialised in the adoption of black children into black families (Benet, 1976, p. 144). The debate about children growing up in racially similar families widened the debate about racial identity and led to the development of more flexible adoption practices, like foster placement with a view to adoption and the trialling of innovative methods for recruiting black families for children in care (Benet, 1976, pp. 150-157).

The fundamental argument against transracial adoption focuses on concern about the ability of a child from one racial background to thrive in a family with a different racial and cultural background. There is similar concern levelled at intercountry adoption because it also involves an adopted child growing up in a society that is different to its birth culture. Supporters of transracial and intercountry adoption argue that both practices provide a child with a family regardless of the cultural and linguistic diversity. A family is deemed more important than growing up in an institution even though the family may be racially different to the adoptee (Kirton, 2000, p. 67).

Kirton discusses transracial adoption in the United Kingdom and focuses similarly on concerns about the ability of minority ethnic children to form racial identities when raised by ‘relatively unsupported’ adoptive parents (2000, p. 66). While Kirton (2000) acknowledges similarities between transracial adoptees and children adopted from overseas, he also notes an important difference in relation to accessing the birth culture. For intercountry adoptees he argues, the geographical distance between the child’s birth country and adopted country may have an impact that is more negative on identity formation than for transracial adoptees who may have greater access to their birth culture resulting in less feelings of isolation (Kirton, 2000, pp. 66-85). Thus, identity formation remains an important issue in debates about intercountry adoption.

Pictures create empathy - News motivates aid

The humanitarian nature of this period of intercountry adoption was inspired both by wars and by the media portrayal of the impact of poverty and natural disasters on children. Hoksbergen notes how ‘Television broadcasts about the wars in Biafra, Korea, and Vietnam exerted a great influence by showing what those wars meant for millions of displaced and orphaned children in those countries’ (1991, p. 142). Chaponniere also comments on the wide media reporting of countries devastated by crises and how intercountry adoption in the 1960s and 1970s was ‘looked upon as a form of “relief”, or at least solidarity’ (Chaponniere, 1983, p. 3).

The language used in the literature during this time also reflected the rescue motivation by Westerners to adopt children from the Third World. Authors writing in the early 1970s referred to the countries involved in intercountry adoptions as ‘donor’ and ‘host’ countries. The word ‘donor’ has connotations that a country is giving away a child, while ‘host’ country suggests a country has received a child on a temporary basis. The language evokes images of organ donation and seems inappropriate to describe children moving from one country to another for the purposes of adoption.

The significance of the use of ‘donor’ and ‘host’ to describe countries involved in intercountry adoption is the implications it has on the relationship between the two countries. It may be that the words ‘donor’ and ‘host’ were used initially to suggest the suddenness of the practice in terms of it being a rapid response to a crisis. In this sense ‘host’ suggests that intercountry adoption was not seen initially as a permanent solution with its connotations of impermanency. Children were hosted or fostered by families in

countries like Sweden and the Netherlands during World War II and the idea was that children would return post war to their own countries, although this was not always possible. This kind of language is suggestive of the unequal relationship that exists between the countries sending children and those receiving children. It is this apparent inequality between the countries involved in intercountry adoption which has been interpreted by some as exploitation (Mende, 1976; Saclier, 2000).

Research studies

During the 1960s and 1970s there was concern about regulating intercountry adoptions and about the outcomes for the foreign children adopted from overseas (Pilotti, 1993, p. 167). Chaponniere discusses how organisations had been trying to protect children from 'commercial exploitation' which had been associated with intercountry adoption (1983, p. 2). Two important steps occurred in this period. A set of fundamental principles on intercountry adoption were developed at the European Seminar on Intercountry Adoption in Leysin, Switzerland in 1960 (which became known as the Leysin Principles). Further, international standards for intercountry adoption were placed on the reform agenda at the World Conference on Adoption and Foster Care held in Milan, Italy in 1970 (Pilotti, 1993, p. 167).

Lovelock argues that despite knowledge of the Leysin Principles they were rarely integrated into national legislation because they lacked enforcement capability. The Leysin Principles were not incorporated into legislation in either the USA or Canada, but were integrated into practice in New Zealand's national and domestic intercountry adoption policies (2000, p. 918).

During the late 1960s and 1970s, interest grew in the study of children who had been adopted from overseas. A number of studies were conducted with adoptees that studied the child's ages and stages of development. These studies evaluated development in relation to a cohort of children matched for age in the same country, in order to understand the implications of intercountry adoption on development. Research also investigated children adopted from overseas and observed their social interaction in a range of settings (such as school) and between settings (home and school) and included outcome studies and attachment research (Brannen, 1999, pp. 146-148). Research was also undertaken with adoptive parents in relation to their experiences of raising intercountry adoptees (Kirk, 1967).

Towards Phase 2

Chaponniere notes how after World War II poor families were forced ‘to let one or more of their children go’ because of prejudice against unmarried mothers with illegitimate children and the impact of war on war-torn economies (1983, p. 3). By the end of the first phase of intercountry adoption, the number of children involved in the practice was increasing and at the same time, the sending countries were changing. Western nations were experiencing a decrease in the number of local children available for adoption and prospective adoptive parents began looking towards overseas countries to find children for adoption (Chaponniere, 1983, p. 3).

Phase 2: A period of reciprocity 1976-1991

The next period of intercountry adoption lasts from the mid 1970s to the Romanian crisis in the early 1990s. Lovelock characterises her two waves of intercountry adoption as: wave one, ‘finding families for children’ and the second wave as ‘finding children for families’ (2000, p. 908). I believe there is a point between these two positions where both sending and receiving countries benefit from the process. I have called this a period of reciprocity which occurred from the mid 1970s to the early 1990s.

Akin to Lovelock (2000), my second phase acknowledges the elements of humanitarianism plus the declining birth rate, but does not have as its prime focus the obtaining of children for parents in the West. During my Phase 2, both developed and developing countries benefit from the arrangement of intercountry adoption. Intercountry adoption is no longer overwhelmingly motivated by Western nations reacting to a crisis in Third World countries. The situation becomes one in which there is a need for adoptable children in the West and an associated need to find solutions for abandoned children in developing countries. This situation represents a kind of mutual helping – there is still an element of need on behalf of the sending country, but the need is no longer one sided as there are people in developed countries who are keen to parent a child adopted from overseas. While there is an element of ‘the market’ in this relationship, it does not yet appear to be the overriding concern in relation to intercountry adoption at this time.

Phase 2 represents a period of growth for intercountry adoption as evidenced by the significant increase in the number of children involved in the practice, as well as an increase in the number of sending countries. Kane (1993) conducted a study which tracked intercountry adoption data supplied by 14 receiving countries in Europe, North America

and Australia between 1980 and 1989. Countries were required to receive more than 20 intercountry adoptions per year to be included in the study, and the following countries were represented: USA, France, Italy, Canada, Spain, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Switzerland, Australia and Finland. Kane (1993) noted, as do others (Selman, 2000b; Weil, 1984), that the quality of intercountry adoption statistics differ between nations and so do the definitions used to collect data. With this in mind, Kane compared data supplied by receiving countries with data supplied by sending countries to try and ensure statistical accuracy (1993, p. 326).

Kane's results suggest that at least 170,000-180,000 children were involved in intercountry adoption between 1980 and 1989, which represents a 62 percent increase in intercountry adoptions for the decade (1993, p. 327). Although data was collected from only 14 receiving countries, with the USA being the predominant country, Kane notes a steady increase in the number of countries involved in intercountry adoption (1993, p. 323). Kane identified 22 sending countries involved in intercountry adoption in 1980, 36 countries in 1985 and by 1989, the number of sending countries had increased to 68 (1993, p. 329).

Despite the high number of countries involved in intercountry adoption in 1989, the vast majority (90 percent) of children sent overseas at this time came from only ten countries including: Korea, India, Colombia, Brazil, Sri Lanka, Chile, Philippines, Guatemala, Peru and El Salvador (Kane, 1993, p. 329). This means that the other 58 countries contributed significantly fewer children for overseas adoption with some countries like Ethiopia, Madagascar, Yugoslavia and Turkey only beginning intercountry adoption during the 1980s. In the following section, I will discuss intercountry adoption in relation to the biggest sending countries during Phase 2 of intercountry adoption.

A change in Asian sending countries

By the mid 1970s, situations began to change in Asian countries in relation to intercountry adoption. By 1977, Korea, which had previously provided high numbers of children for overseas adoption, began phasing out the process and encouraging abortion and large-scale sterilisation as a means of birth control. Other Asian nations like Hong Kong and Singapore, also initiated authorised abortion programmes as a way of lowering fertility rates (Pilotti, 1993, p. 168).

In Vietnam post Operation Babylift, the new government initiated a policy to cease intercountry adoptions by 1979 (Pilotti, 1993, p. 168). Although Korea had also decided to

stop intercountry adoptions in the late 1970s, due to economic imperatives it reversed this decision in 1981. During this period, there was a decrease in the number of children adopted from Korea by citizens of the USA. In 1977 for example, 3,858 Korean children were adopted by people from the USA, a number that had dropped to 2,444 Korean adoptions by 1981. Following the reversal of the decision to cease intercountry adoption, there was a steady increase of Korean children to the USA, reaching a peak of 6,188 adoptions in 1986. Thus, for the USA, Korea remained a dominant source country into the 1980s with 62 percent of all foreign adoptions coming from Korea (Altstein & Simon, 1991, pp. 15-16).

Following the Olympic Games in Korea in 1988, a television programme commented on the shame felt by some Koreans in relation to intercountry adoption. Investigators described how Korean Government officials had requested the suspension of intercountry adoption during the Olympics in order to deflect attention away from the practice (Altstein & Simon, 1991, p. 17). This exemplifies the changing nature of intercountry adoption during Phase 2 when local issues in sending countries were influencing how intercountry adoption was practised. Because the Korean Government was criticised at an international level for its intercountry adoption practices, their response was to reduce the number of Korean children made available for adoption (Pilotti, 1993, p. 172).

The rise of Latin American adoption

Following the decline in children adopted from Asian countries in the mid 1970s, coupled with an increased demand for children by developed countries, Latin America emerged as a major source country for intercountry adoption during the 1980s (Pilotti, 1993, p. 168; Resnick, 1984, p. 275). During this time, Colombia, Chile, Peru, Ecuador and El Salvador became the main sending countries.

The increasing importance of Latin American countries as source countries is explained by Resnick (1984, p. 275) in terms of domestic factors. Children were available for intercountry adoption because of the impact of industrialisation on Latin American families, poor socio-economic conditions in the region and limited access and development of social services, especially for unmarried mothers. Weil (1984, p. 288) also notes that a number of countries in Latin America modified their laws in the mid 1970s to allow foreign adoptions to occur and Chaponniere stresses the 'unprecedented population growth in developing countries' which occurred at this time (1983, p. 3). An extremely appealing

aspect for Western adoptive parents of adopting children from Latin America, was that young babies were available for adoption (Resnick, 1984, p. 275).

In 1981, South America contributed 20 percent of the children available for intercountry adoption in the USA and by 1989; the region provided 37 percent of children. Colombia was the predominant country in the early 1980s accounting originally for 70 percent of the South American total, but following the discovery of a kidnapping ring, more restrictive regulations meant a decline in adoptions from Colombia (Weil, 1984, p. 288). Towards the end of the 1980s, other countries became the predominant suppliers of children from Latin America including: Brazil, Chile and Peru (Altstein & Simon, 1991).

Of interest in this period, is the lack of regulation initially in Latin American countries because of the rapid development of intercountry adoption in the region. In Colombia ‘scores of documented cases of scandalous abuses of parents and children’ occurred and the fact that different countries in Latin America had diverse regulations without clear guidelines gave rise to ‘questionable activities’ surrounding a number of intercountry adoptions (Resnick, 1984, p. 277).

It is interesting to note during Phase 2 that Korea and Colombia both reduced the number of children they supplied for intercountry adoption. Both had been leading sending countries in their respective regions and the reasons reside in a change of domestic policy. Both countries began developing domestic adoption programmes. In Colombia, local practices developed because of malpractice, but in Korea it seems it was due to international embarrassment and questions concerning why Korea (which was not considered a developing nation) was involved in intercountry adoption.

The crisis in Romania

Phase 2 of intercountry adoption ends with large numbers of children evacuated from Romanian orphanages following the fall of Ceausescu in the early 1990s. While much of this period can be characterised as a method of meeting the mutual needs of sending and receiving countries, the end is motivated by humanitarian concerns. Images and stories of Romanian children living in terrible conditions in overcrowded orphanages dominated the news, resulting in many children being adopted overseas (Selman, 2000a, p. 22). It is thought that up to 10,000 children left Romania for the purposes of adoption in the period from March 1990 until June 1991 (Pilotti, 1993, p. 172). In 1991 all intercountry adoptions

from Romania were suspended due to recognition by the Romanian government that more controls were needed to stop the flow of children out of the country (Dickens, 2002, p. 77).

Pilotti notes that until 1990, intercountry adoptees from Europe accounted for only 1-3 percent of children adopted by people from the USA (1993, p. 172). This figure included children fathered by USA servicemen stationed in West Germany who were still sent to the USA for intercountry adoption until 1981 (Altstein & Simon, 1991, p. 4). By 1991, following the Romanian crisis, European children accounted for 31 percent of children adopted through intercountry adoption by people from the USA. It is significant that in 1991, Europe was supplying a similar number of children to the USA, as were Asian and Latin American countries. In Sweden, the number of children coming from other European nations for intercountry adoption gradually increased between 1986 and 1991, rising to represent a significant 22 percent of all intercountry adoptions in Sweden in 1991.

Intercountry adoption becomes a permanent feature of child welfare

Phase 2 of intercountry adoption is characterised by ‘its evolution into a permanent feature of international child welfare’ (Pilotti, 1993, p. 173). This was achieved through the introduction of guidelines for the practice in the form of a Declaration on Social and Legal Principles Relating to the Protection and Welfare of Children, with special Reference to Adoption and Foster Placement Nationally and Internationally. This declaration was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1986, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 (Pilotti, 1993, p. 173). Inherent in these documents was the principle that intercountry adoption should only be considered when all other options in a child’s country have been exhausted. Intercountry adoption should therefore only be used as a last resort.

The implications of this philosophy for sending countries was that they were encouraged to consider domestic options like supporting birth parents to care for children or substitute arrangements such as foster care or domestic adoption in the birth country before considering intercountry adoption (Pilotti, 1993, p. 173). Thus, during Phase 2 there was a movement towards achieving more regulation in the practice of intercountry adoption. As Pilotti (1993, p. 173) noted, however, these initiatives have not always been successful and malpractice is still common. Reasons given include the use of intermediaries who work outside the law by being involved in practices including baby snatching, trafficking of

children and exerting pressure on pregnant women to give up their child for adoption (Lucker-Babel, 1991; in Pilotti, 1993, p. 173).

Research studies

Research studies during this time focused on individual outcomes for both local and intercountry adoptees and their adoptive parents (Pilotti, 1993). Undertaken in fields such as social work and psychology, the research explored behavioural and educational adjustment (for example, Cederblad, 1982; Hoksbergen, Joeffer & Waardenburg, 1987; Kim, Hong & Kim, 1979), attachment issues (for example Harper, 1986; Loenen & Hoksbergen, 1986) and issues of identity (for example Dalen & Saetersdal, 1987; Kuehl, 1985). These studies provided important information about the long term effects of intercountry adoption and Tizard observes that 'whilst the evidence is patchy and incomplete, it does suggest that in 75-80 percent of intercountry adoptions the children and adolescents function well, with no more behavioural and educational problems at home and at school than other children, and that they have close and mutually satisfying relationships with their parents' (Tizard, 1991, p. 754). The literature suggests that problems arise when the child is adopted at a late age or has experienced traumatic events prior to their adoption (Tizard, 1991, p. 755).

During this phase of development there is also a change in the type of language used in relation to intercountry adoption. Whereas in the earlier period the birth countries of children were called 'donor' countries, other phrases began to appear in the literature like 'sending countries' and 'source countries'. While 'sending' is quite unemotional, 'source' evokes images of a market for children that also has connotations of exploitation and post-colonialism.

Other words used in this phase suggested the social divide between countries sending children for intercountry adoption and countries accepting children. Terms like 'third world' countries and 'developing' countries were used in opposition to descriptions of the 'first world' countries and 'developed' nations where children were sent to live. These words highlight the social, economic and political divisions separating nations involved in intercountry adoption which is a central criticism of the practice (Chaponniere, 1983; Melone, 1976).

Following the international outrage at the way in which intercountry adoptions were arranged in Romania, calls were made for greater regulation from the international

community. Accompanying these calls was recognition of the declining numbers of children available for adoption in the West and the push by childless couples and single people to become parents. During Phase 2 there are still large numbers of children available for adoption abroad and while the market mentality for children is evident during Phase 2, it becomes more pronounced during Phase 3. After the early 1990s demand in Western countries increases and outstrips the number of children available for adoption from developing nations. It is this situation which is discussed below as Phase 3.

Phase 3: Market forces predominate 1991-2005

I believe there is a third phase or wave of intercountry adoption that is almost entirely driven by the need for children in developed countries and less by humanitarian and altruistic concerns. This period is motivated largely by individual need and characterised by market forces of demand and supply in relation to children crossing foreign borders for intercountry adoption. While the supply of children in the beginning of the 1990s remained high, towards the end of this period, changes were beginning to be seen.

Chaponniere notes ‘the very existence of a “demand”, perceived as such, in Western countries, acts as a stimulus to the creation of child “markets” in certain third world countries. At all events, there is not a shadow of doubt that it is in response to this demand that traffic in children for adoption occurs’ (Chaponniere, 1983, p. 4). This suggests that while a market mentality exists, the risk of abuse in intercountry adoptions will continue to occur and the possibility of profiting from the sale of children will remain attractive to kidnappers and traffickers.

This period saw the introduction in 1993 of the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption which stipulates legislative provisions for the regulation of intercountry adoption as well as provisions concerning adoptive parents (O'Halloran, 2006, p. 82). The Convention stressed the importance of considering a range of options for children needing care. O'Halloran notes how the introduction of the Hague Convention led to a change in intercountry adoption policy from an ‘adopter led’ to a ‘child led’ approach (2006, p. 82).

Despite the focus of the Hague Convention on the best interests of the child, some writers (Gailey, 2000; Hoksbergen, 2000; Selman, 2000a) comment that the focus seems to be on providing children for families. In this interpretation, the child becomes a commodity and the parents through association, are involved in a market for children. This raises concern

about issues like babies for sale and child trafficking both of which are morally and ethically wrong and are practices which are in direct opposition to the Hague Convention (Saclier, 2000, p. 57).

Gaily is also critical of whether all avenues in a child's birth country are explored before a decision is made to use intercountry adoption (2000). She argues that placement with other relatives may be an under-explored alternative to intercountry adoption. Another criticism of the practice is noted by Saclier (2000) who identifies the difficulties in establishing whether a child is lawfully available for adoption overseas. Thus, despite the attempts of the Hague Convention to regulate intercountry adoption, child trafficking continues to be of concern.

In order to understand more about the movement of children during Phase 3, I will now turn to the work of Selman (2000a; 2002) who attempted to replicate and update Kane's (1993) study which used data from 14 receiving countries. Selman (2000a; 2002) collected data from 18 countries, all of which had been included in Kane's original study plus some additional data from new sending countries. Selman updated his study again for the period 1998 to 2004 using data from 20 receiving countries (2006).

During Phase 3, Selman shows an overall increase in the number of children moving around the world for the purposes of intercountry adoption (2002). Kane's (1993) analysis in 1988 showed there were 19,327 intercountry adoptions, a figure which had risen according to Selman to 31,856 in the period 1997-99 (2002, p. 209). Selman comments that although this figure represents an estimate, he believes the actual figure could be higher due to discrepancies in the way statistical information is defined and kept (2002).

By 1995, China and Russia had emerged as the main source countries for the USA and many other countries. The rise in the number of children available for adoption from Russia has been attributed to the social and political changes that accompanied the fall of communism, coupled with the high costs of caring for abandoned children in institutions. In China, the 'one child policy' has resulted in high numbers of girls needing care, which has meant predominantly girls are available for adoption (Selman, 2000a, pp. 32-33).

Since the 1980s, there has been a significant change in the composition of sending countries. Six of Kane's top sending countries in Phase 2 are no longer represented in 1995 and 1998 (1993). This was largely caused by high numbers of adoptions from Russia and

China to the USA and an associated high number of adoptions from Russia to France and Sweden and from China to Sweden and the Netherlands (Selman, 2000a, pp. 22-23).

Selman attributes the changes in sending countries to a range of reasons, including domestic crises, a movement towards domestic adoption and suspension of intercountry adoption on either side due to, for example, reports of trafficking or illegal practices (Selman, 2000a, p. 24). In a later article Selman develops his argument further including explanations such as adverse publicity about intercountry adoption, the impact of ratification of the Hague Convention, and difficulties in establishing eligibility for intercountry adoption, as reasons for the changes seen in sending countries. (2006, p. 191)

China and Russia were the largest source of children worldwide in 2004 and 2005 but there were also regional differences. Children adopted into Italy mostly came from Russia and the Ukraine but no children were sent from China to Italy. In France in 2004 and 2005, Haiti and Vietnam were the main source countries with children from Ethiopia becoming increasingly popular as reflected in data from the USA, France and Spain (Selman, 2006, pp. 191-192).

From 1995 until 2004 the following countries have contributed high numbers of children for intercountry adoption around the world: Cambodia, Haiti, Guatemala, Kazakhstan, the Ukraine and Bulgaria (Selman, 2006, p. 190). Four of the countries found among Kane's top ten sending countries in 1989 - Sri Lanka, Chile, Peru and El Salvador, no longer appear as sending countries in 1995 and 1998. During this period, Korea substantially reduced the number of children available for intercountry adoption, by 1998 the Philippines was no longer in the top ten sending countries and Brazil had disappeared from the list by 2003 (Selman, 2006, p. 190).

Research studies

During Phase 3, research continued to focus on the development and trends in intercountry adoption around the world (Pilotti, 1993; Selman, 2000a, 2002; Triseliotis, Shireman & Hundley, 1997). Studies also examined outcomes for children adopted through intercountry adoption and included work on adjustment and functioning, as well as research on cultural and racial identification (Triseliotis, Shireman & Hundley, 1997). The introduction of the Hague Convention during Phase 3 also prompted research into the policy and practice implications of the Convention (Brennan, 2000; Duncan, 2000).

In addition to the scholarly sources such as the books and peer reviewed journal articles already noted, a growing number of works appeared during Phase 3, which were written by individuals with personal experience of intercountry adoption (for example, Armstrong & Slaytor, 2001; Burns & Burns, 2007). Some of the scholarly literature was also written by researchers with a personal involvement with the topic, for example the authors are intercountry adoptees or adoptive parents (for example Harper, 1986; Volkman, 2005; Williams, 2003) and some edited scholarly books also contain personal reflections about the intercountry adoption process and about experiences of this process (Armstrong & Slaytor, 2001). While birth mothers of locally adopted children have written about their experiences (Centacare Adoption Services, 1993; Robinson, 2000; Townsend & Perkins, 1991), absent from the intercountry adoption literature are accounts written by birth mothers of overseas adoptees. Thus, the personal accounts of intercountry adoption predominantly focus on the experiences of the adopted children and their adoptive parents.

During Phase 3, the language of intercountry adoption also changed and developed. Previously children who became intercountry adoptees were referred to as 'abandoned', 'homeless' or 'orphaned', but during this period they were predominantly called 'abandoned'. This may be a consequence of the legal terminology, but 'abandoned' sounds final unlike 'homeless', which could be a temporary situation or 'orphaned,' which suggests the child has no family. Saclier discusses how children who become intercountry adoptees may still have family living in the birth country, so to call these children 'orphans' is strictly incorrect (2000). The biological parents may no longer be alive, but other relatives may be able to care for the child - an option that Saclier suggests may not be explored fully. The abandonment terminology removes any reference to other family members and suggests the finality that the child is eligible for intercountry adoption.

Instead of using 'donor' and 'host' the more recent literature discusses children's birth countries as 'sending countries' or 'countries of origin' and where the children go to live as 'receiving countries'. The Hague Convention uses the term 'contracting states' to refer to the countries involved in intercountry adoption, which is suggestive of a relationship or mutual arrangement between the countries involved. One 'contracting state' is known as 'the State of origin' and the other contracting state is called the 'the receiving State' (Schedule 1, Chapter 1, Article 2, *Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption*, 1993).

During the period spanning the 1990s to 2005, demand for children in developed nations was higher than ever. It seems, however, there was a trend over this phase for sending nations to take more control over the process. This may be a result of the Hague Convention and its role in establishing regulations for intercountry adoption, but it seems that sending countries were making their criteria more stringent; for example China altered its criteria by allowing only couples to adopt, no longer accepting single applicants and decreasing the age requirements for prospective adopters.

There was also a growing recognition in developing countries that intercountry adoption might not be the best option for solving child abandonment and homelessness. This situation may have been influenced by the Hague Convention's emphasis on intercountry adoption as the 'last resort' but there seemed to be a growing awareness that country based initiatives like infrastructure development, foster care and domestic adoption programs are viable alternatives to intercountry adoption.

Furthermore, the wider international community has become involved in community development initiatives to support children in their local communities. In the Netherlands, this initiative is referred to as 'financial adoption' and involves children remaining in their home countries and receiving financial support from families and organisations abroad (Hoksbergen, 1991, p. 142). In Australian terms, the equivalents of 'financial adoption' are child sponsorship programmes structured through organisations like World Vision, UNICEF or Oxfam. These programmes encourage self-help by providing access to resources like clean water, seeds and education, thus decreasing the need to seek alternative care arrangements for children like intercountry adoption.

As fewer children become available for intercountry adoption and sending countries develop domestic solutions, the process of intercountry adoption continues to change. In order to source children, Western nations are approaching other countries to determine if intercountry adoption programmes can be developed.

Intercountry adoption seems to be moving into a fourth phase, which so far, is characterised by a high demand from prospective adoptive parents, fewer children available from overseas and a change in the nature of the children available for intercountry adoption. As the International Social Service emphasised, the type of child available for intercountry adoption is changing (ISS & IRCRCDF, 2008, pp. 2-3). More

children are now becoming available in sibling groups, the children are older and many have more complex needs in the form of disabilities, than previously encountered.

It seems that the high demand for children in developed nations results in developing countries taking more control over social policy initiatives. Developing countries can choose to keep the younger, fitter children for domestic adoption and send other children with more complex histories and needs offshore for intercountry adoption. It is too early to see the impact of the USA signing the Hague Convention, but indications point towards intercountry adoption entering a fourth phase where the type of children available for adoption will change and adoption criteria will be tightened.

Intercountry adoption as reflexive modernity?

Fisher (2003) and Weegar (1997) both note the scarcity of sociological research on the topic of adoption. Studies by Owen (1999) and Pringle (2004) are notable exceptions, and Pringle's work on intercountry adoption as reflexive modernity is especially significant. Pringle's (2004) paper: 'Adoption in Britain: Reflexive Modernity?' is one of the few examples of sociological research in the area of intercountry adoption and is theoretically underpinned by the ideas of Beck (1995) and Giddens (1992) (see also Owen, 1999). Pringle studied a group of single adoptive parents living in Britain who had adopted children from China (2004). Her study focused on how participants understood the meaning of family and how this influenced 'familial type' relationships they formed with others including biological relatives and non-related others. She explored the idea of reflexive modernity by interviewing participants who spoke about their personal experiences of intercountry adoption.

Pringle found that single adopters often re-examined their relationships with their immediate family and extended family after they adopted a child. They also reassessed their friendship circles and made new friends with other parents and adoptive parents. She noted the intensification of these friendships and how the relationships were self-consciously constructed (2004, p. 233). Pringle found that single adopters work hard to 'create new narratives of self, identity and belonging' and concluded that her study was an example of 'reflexive modernity in action' (2004, p. 239). Thus, by choosing to form a family through intercountry adoption, individuals were acting according to the processes of individualisation and reflexivity. In order to become a parent, individuals must take part in a state regulated intercountry adoptive process in order to make their choice a reality.

Intercountry adoption and postmodern family life

My analysis has shown that intercountry adoption as a topic has been defined quite narrowly in the literature. While the historical development of the practice has been examined and outcome studies conducted in many countries, intercountry adoption has not been approached often from a sociological perspective, taking into account wider social forces and analysing the process in terms of family choice. Generally, intercountry adoption is studied as a child welfare issue with an emphasis on the practice being in the 'best interests of the child' and not in terms of family formation. While some writers have attempted to expand the debate by examining intercountry adoption in relation to immigration and demographic trends, the literature is still defined fairly narrowly (Weil, 1984, Lovelock, 2000, Selman, 2002, Selman, 2006).

Pringle's study of single adopters is one of the few studies found which links intercountry adoption with broader discussions found in the family literature about individual choice and changing family relationships (2004). While Pringle conducted her study in Britain, a similar general approach can be used to analyse Australian intercountry adoption (2004). In contrast to interviewing single adopters with children from China, this study will capture a broader range of opinions from single adopters, as well as people who are part of a couple who have adopted from a range of countries, adoption professionals and support group representatives. My thesis will provide a sociological account of the Australian experience of intercountry adoption in order to highlight whether families formed in this way can be understood in terms of postmodern theories on family formation.

While much of the current analysis on family life emphasises the individual's ability to choose intimate relationships, there is little discussion of how these private relationships are formed in the public world. When individuals choose to form a family through intercountry adoption, it is a decision that involves the intersection of the private world with the public policy world operating according to dominant ideologies of the family. My thesis explores the intersection between these worlds in which individuals make decisions to form families through intercountry adoption and the methods used in the study are outlined in the next chapter.

2

Methodology

I realised it was no good trying to fit my research into a specific framework for the sake of having a framework to write about and call my own. My work represents a combination of research methods and is in fact influenced by the theoretical framework of family theory, including elements of feminist thought and postmodern thinking. It is anti positivist in the sense that the interviews did not assume that the researcher was the academic expert but that my background and experiences influenced the research relationship and how I conducted each interview. I brought my own past to the interview as did the interviewee.

All the way through I have been very concerned with the 'small picture'. Coming from a social work background and having worked in a post adoption environment, I wanted my research to have practical outcomes for people working and involved in the field. I wanted to come up with some recommendations which would influence the way the assessment is done. I came to realise that the focus for a PhD must be more than a policy analysis resulting in recommendations. What did I learn? Research is an evolving process and where you start is often not where you end up. Research questions change as does the research focus.

In the commercial work environment research is less about theoretical orientation and more about actionable results. The research process involved stepping up to the academic environment and doing research in a different way. Academic research is more thorough with a greater understanding of what type of research has gone before - I struggled for a long time to find a way of linking what interested me in the practical sense with the sociological literature. Things didn't really fall into place until quite late in my candidature when I discovered that linking my study with family theory was the best approach.

Perhaps this is an unconventional way to begin the Methodology Chapter, but it highlights the progression of my thinking during the development of this thesis. While the approach may be unusual, it is offered as a reflection of my thoughts on the challenges I encountered during the research process.

This chapter discusses the philosophical underpinnings of the study and provides a detailed outline of the research process. Discussion focuses on the selection of documents used

during the initial phase of the research, followed by an overview of the qualitative study undertaken. I outline how the empirical data was collected, including the details of the qualitative research methods used, sampling techniques for recruiting participants and how the research was conducted. The chapter concludes by discussing ethical considerations and some general comments about the validity of the research results.

Theoretical perspective

This study takes a constructionist view of knowledge. According to this perspective, ‘meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting’ (Crotty, 1998, p. 43) and the role of the researcher is ‘to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge’ (Robson, 2002, p. 27). Accordingly, this research uses interviews and observation in order to understand the multiple perspectives held by individuals about intercountry adoption.

Creswell argues that the goal of research using a constructivist worldview is to ‘rely as much as possible on the participant’s views of the situation. Often these subjective meanings are negotiated culturally and historically’ (2007, pp. 20-21). Constructivist research therefore, recognises that it is through interaction with other individuals and institutions that meanings are developed. In feminist studies, the interviewer is perceived as neither invisible nor objective and strives to interact with participants on an equal level by exchanging ideas in a meaningful way (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 666). It is through this type of interaction that the research promotes participants to speak using their own words and voice and in this way promotes a detailed understanding of their view of the world. In order to understand the personal experiences of the intercountry adoption process, I needed to understand the constructed reality of people involved in the process and the context of the social world in which these opinions occur. This exploration began by drawing on an array of documentary evidence.

Analysis of documentary data

English argues that patterns of adoption have changed in Australia ‘in response to a range of dramatic changes in the material, demographic, cultural and political aspects of Australian society’ (1990, p. 16). He also asserts that ‘Adoption has usually been discussed in isolation from movements in the wider society. However, to really understand adoption practice, particularly the development of intercountry adoption, it must be seen in the

context of wider social change' (English, 1990, p. 16). This thesis uses a variety of documents to tell the story of intercountry adoption in Australia and the social factors which have influenced its development. The documentary evidence provides the backdrop for my empirical work.

In a paper titled 'Intercountry adoption: The context of recent developments and the need for research', English (1990, pp. 19-20) proposed a study on intercountry adoption to be completed in conjunction with the University of New South Wales and the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS). My investigations show that although fieldwork for the study was completed, the results were never published. Attempts were made to contact Brian English and personnel at the University of NSW, but without success. Email correspondence with the Department of Community Services led to confirmation by two researchers involved in the original data collection that the research was never published.

While my research will not achieve the original goals of the project begun by English, it will extend his 1990 work on the context of intercountry adoption in Australia and provide data on intercountry adoption from then until the present (2009).

Documentary analysis was conducted in four areas for this thesis. Firstly, the areas covered by English up until 1990 were revisited and reported in relation to the period 1990 to 2008. This information was collected from the Australian Census data published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Social Trends data which were accessed both online and through the State Library of NSW. The type of information collected included marriage and divorce rates, household information, family information, birth rates and completed family size, rates of ex-nuptial pregnancies and ex-nuptial births, fertility rates and figures on the use of new birth technologies. Chapter Three contains the discussion of this information.

To make sense of the statistics, it was necessary to secondly consider the accompanying social policy changes which occurred during the time when intercountry adoption was beginning to occur in Australia. This was achieved by reading social policy documents and books about social policy. The third area of documentary investigation involved accessing the Australian adoption and intercountry adoption statistics in order to better understand the trends in intercountry adoption. The Australian collection of intercountry adoption statistics began in 1979 and since then they have been collected by three different

organisations: The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), WELSTAT and The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). An analysis of these statistics was useful in identifying trends in the numbers of children adopted from overseas, their gender, age and country of origin as well as facts about their adoptive parents including age and whether or not they had other children. An overview of local adoption statistics also allowed for some discussion of the trends in both domestic and intercountry adoption in Australia.

The final document type selected for analysis was Australian state and federal parliamentary inquiries into adoption. Especially relevant for this thesis was the Parliamentary Inquiry into Overseas Adoption in Australia (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2005) which was released in November 2005. The analysis of these documents allowed for a broader understanding of adoptive parent and welfare agency opinions as well as providing insight into the politics of intercountry adoption and how the state views the practice of family formation.

Additional documentary evidence was collected during the study from a range of state, territory and Commonwealth Government websites. These websites were invaluable for accessing the data, as in the case of AIHW statistics, as well as providing additional information about intercountry adoption. The parliamentary website, for example, was used to access the final report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Overseas Adoption as well as the submissions and summaries of the public consultations held for the inquiry. Websites were also used to locate and download information for use in my analysis. Search engines, library website catalogues and databases were also extensively used to locate books, journal articles, newspaper articles and other resources.

Around the time of this study (2005-2009), intercountry adoption was also a topic of interest in the local and international popular press. Many newspaper and magazine articles profiled celebrity intercountry adoption and provided commentary on the topic (Ellis, 2006; Jameson, 2006; Maley, 2007; O'Dwyer, 2006; Reuters, 2006; Russell, 2009; Schmidt, 2006; Scott, 2007; Waterstreet, 2009). Television programmes (Brockie, 2006; Murray, 2008) and radio discussions (Aedy, 2008a, 2008b; Barclay, 2008) also provided context for this study and highlighted a range of issues including: community concern with the process by celebrities, discussions about child trafficking and concern with government regulation of intercountry adoption and its policies and practices.

Using qualitative research methods

The qualitative research approach seeks to explore topics, understand issues and describe phenomena (Punch, 2005, p. 19). For the purposes of answering the research questions, which were outlined in the introduction, it was crucial to explore the perceptions and experiences of a range of stakeholders in relation to intercountry adoption. As this is not a scientific study with hypotheses to prove or disprove, a qualitative approach allowed information to emerge and unfold during the course of the research. The research design was also suitable for examining a sensitive topic like intercountry adoption in order to reach a deep understanding of the issues involved.

Designing a qualitative study can be described as ‘an ongoing process that involves “tacking” back and forth between different components of the design’ (Maxwell, 2005, p. 3). This was my experience with the formulation of the research questions which began as loosely defined ideas and became clearer and more defined as the study progressed. This exemplifies how qualitative research is not a linear process which begins with a problem and proceeds through a sequence of predetermined steps before reaching a conclusion, but is a more creative and spontaneous process.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews

The semi-structured, in-depth interview was the chosen research tool for this study. In-depth interviews are a purposeful conversation between the researcher and participant where the researcher focuses on the participant’s ‘perception of self, life and experience’ which the participant expresses in his or her own words (Minichiello et al., 1995, p. 61). It is a method whereby the researcher gains access to the individual’s world in order to understand their interpretations and motivations (Minichiello et al., 1995, p. 61).

This method was chosen because it represented the best way of understanding participants’ thoughts, experiences and feelings about intercountry adoption. It allowed participants to communicate their own interpretations of their experiences in relation to the intercountry adoption process. Rice and Ezzy observe that ‘In-depth interviewing is a privilege’, which allows the researcher to understand a particular aspect of the participant’s life in an intense way (1999, p. 52). I certainly felt privileged during my interviews with prospective adoptive parents and current adoptive parents, who spoke very openly and honestly about their experiences as they described the challenges they faced.

The semi-structured, in-depth interview approach was selected because it is believed to produce a more positive exchange between the researcher and participant, is less threatening, and can empower those involved to provide their own interpretations and meanings (de Laine, 1997). Thus I was able to investigate issues raised by participants, rather than adhering rigidly to set questions, which occurs in structured interviews (Minichiello et al., 1995, p. 65). During the interviews, participants raised a number of interesting issues that were then incorporated into the interview schedule and asked in subsequent interviews (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 59). Another benefit of the semi-structured approach is that it allows the researcher to ask additional questions in order to clarify meaning.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted, where possible, with people living in the greater Sydney metropolitan area. Those living outside this region in NSW were interviewed by telephone, as well as two participants in the Sydney sample whose preference was for a telephone interview. Both face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted with adoption professionals and support organisations around Australia and the rationale for this approach will be discussed later in this chapter.

The advantage offered by face-to-face interviews is that it allows for rapport to develop more quickly than over the telephone. This method also seems to create an atmosphere of trust where the participant feels comfortable talking about a range of issues, especially more emotive ones, like intercountry adoption. Face-to-face interviews also allow for observation of body language and any perceived inconsistencies between what is being said and how it is said.

While telephone interviews enable data to be collected quickly and cheaply across geographically diverse regions (Thomas & Purdon, 1994), the disadvantage in qualitative research terms, is that they detract from the ability of the researcher to establish easy rapport with the participant. This means that telephone interviews may not provide the subtlety of understanding that may be achieved by an effective face-to-face interview. The medium may also influence the researcher's ability to gain insight into the participant's answers or to question fully their answers.

The interview schedule

Prior to conducting the interviews, five separate interview schedules were developed for use with prospective adoptive parents, adoptive parents, adoption professionals, Contract

Adoption Assessors (CAA's) and support group representatives in the study. These interview schedules are found in Appendices 1-5.

Each interview schedule had a slightly different emphasis depending on which participant group was being interviewed. All started with fairly general questions which were designed to engage the participant and establish rapport. A number of themes were identified in relation to intercountry adoption which needed to be covered in each interview but questions around these themes were not asked in a predetermined order and were covered at any point during the interview. For prospective adoptive parents for example, the interview schedule was divided into a number of parts which coincided with the parts in the intercountry adoption process and for support organisations it began with discussion of the participant's role in the organisation.

The benefit of the interview schedule was to provide prompts for the researcher during the interview, but to be flexible enough to allow participants the freedom to express their own thoughts and experiences (Minichiello et al., 1995, pp. 81-83). Questions were not always asked in a particular order and not every question was asked in each interview. The line of questioning was very much directed by the participant's answers with the interview schedule providing a framework for the interview.

Ethics approval for the study was obtained through the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Sydney on 1 November 2005. Fieldwork was conducted between July 2006 and March 2009. The main reasons for this extended period in the field were because of difficulties encountered in obtaining adoptive parents to interview, as well as problems in arranging some of the interviews with adoption professionals. A total of 57 interviews were carried out: 45 face-to-face interviews and 12 telephone interviews. The duration of the interviews ranged from 50 minutes to 120 minutes. I tried to be as flexible as possible with dates and locations of interviews, in recognition that people were generously giving up their time to be interviewed. Consequently, interviews were conducted during the day, evenings, weekdays, and weekends and were available either face-to-face or by telephone.

Data recording procedures

With the permission of participants, both the face-to-face and telephone interviews were tape-recorded. In addition, I took hand-written notes in case the recording equipment failed. All tapes were transcribed verbatim for analysis. When participants became upset

during the interviews, the tape recorder was stopped and started again once the participant felt able to continue.

The decision to tape record each interview influenced where interviews could take place. In order to get a clear recording, an enclosed, quiet space was required. For this reason, homes, offices, schools or enclosed study rooms in local libraries were used for face-to-face interviews. The intimacy and privacy afforded by the home environment was preferred, but was not always possible to arrange. Two interviews were conducted in open plan settings – one in an outdoor café and the other in a restaurant and in both cases, the quality of the recording was affected.

The majority of the face-to-face interviews were conducted in the homes of participants. This resulted in a relaxed and friendly environment where participants felt comfortable to discuss issues surrounding intercountry adoption. A few of the interviews with prospective adoptive parents and current adoptive parents were conducted at the participant's workplace and the majority of professional interviews were conducted in offices.

Notes were written at the end of each interview as sometimes interesting comments were made after the formal interview was finished and the recording equipment turned off. A short time after finishing each interview, I wrote field notes and memos which included biographical information about the participant as well as reflections and insights into what had been discussed. As Maxwell suggests 'memos not only capture your analytical thinking about your data, but also *facilitate* such thinking, stimulating analytic insights' (original italics in text, 2005, p. 96). Notes were also kept about issues which required further exploration in subsequent interviews.

Interviews with prospective adoptive parents

In order to obtain the most accurate understanding of applicants' reflections and experiences of intercountry adoption, the decision was made to recruit people who had successfully completed the intercountry adoption assessment process, reached the stage of approval and whose applications had already been sent to the overseas country. This group was selected in the belief that their experiences of the process would still be fresh in their minds, which would enable them to talk easily about their opinions.

Sampling techniques with prospective adoptive parents

I had no contact with prospective adoptive parents and was unsure how to recruit this group. I suspected that prospective adoptive parents negotiated directly with the Department of Community Services (DoCS) and although they may have had some interaction with the wider adoption community via support group membership, I was uncertain how to contact them. Prior to beginning the study, I consulted Mary Griffin who is the Director of Adoption and Permanent Care Services of DoCS in NSW to discuss my research proposal. Together we decided the best way to recruit prospective adoptive parents was with the help of the department. At a later stage, I entered into a Research Agreement with DoCS to recruit prospective adoptive parents for the study. The process of entering into this agreement with DoCS and the implications it had for my study will be discussed in a later section of this chapter called 'Observations, problems and limitations'.

Prospective adoptive parents were recruited in the following way. The department identified a group of prospective adoptive parents from their records who had reached the approval stage of the assessment process. Of the 24 people selected, 12 had been approved within the last three months and 12 had been approved within the preceding six months. A decision was made to try and recruit equal numbers of males and females in order to see if opinions about the intercountry adoption process differed according to gender.

One of the aims of the study was to describe and interpret the experiences of prospective adoptive parents and current adoptive parents in relation to the intercountry adoption process and intercountry adoption in general. The aim was not to make generalisations about the distribution of the findings to an entire population, therefore the sampling strategy reflected this approach. As Rice and Ezzy (1999, p. 43) suggest, however, sampling in qualitative research does not proceed without any guidance. In this study, a systematic sampling method was used to select participants which meant that DoCS selected every third person on their list of prospective adoptive parents (van Krieken et al., 2006, p. 619). This method was chosen to reduce bias and the possible inclusion by DoCS of people who they knew held particular views about the process.

The envelopes were addressed by DoCS and the researcher received no identifying details about recipients. This was done deliberately because of privacy and confidentiality concerns. People who were interested in participating in the study were requested to contact me directly. This method of recruitment whereby participants self-selected to be

part of the sample meant that DoCS had no knowledge of who took part in the study. This was also a very deliberate part of the recruitment strategy as desk research and informal conversations with workers in the field suggested that anonymity would be important if people were to volunteer for the study, given the powerful role of DoCS in relation to their chances of becoming parents.

Participants contacted me by email or telephone and arrangements were made for an interview. Prior to telephone interviews, participants were sent a Participant Information Sheet (See Appendix 6) and a Consent Form (See Appendix 7) which they signed and returned prior to the interview. Consent Forms were also signed prior to the face-to-face interviews.

The initial response rate was poor and the letters were mailed again to the original 24 people, to maintain confidentiality for the five people who responded, and to an additional 16 people. Because more males than females responded to the initial mail out, the second mail out was skewed in such a way as to maximise female responses. Four letters were sent to males and twelve to females in the second mail out.

The response rate to the second mail out was good and the 16 semi-structured interviews (8 male, 8 female) were conducted with prospective adoptive parents. Some of the people who responded to the second mail out were actually from the original mail but found themselves in a position to be involved in the study.

Sixteen prospective adoptive parents living in NSW were interviewed in the study. Participants lived in both the greater Sydney metropolitan area as well as in rural locations around the state. Eleven interviews were conducted face-to-face and five were carried out by telephone. The location of the face-to-face interviews included eight homes, two offices and a study room in a local library.

Interviews with adoptive parents

The second part of the study involved interviewing adoptive parents who had undertaken the intercountry adoption process in NSW and who had adopted their child in the past five years. By talking to this group, I hoped to learn how adoptive parents viewed the process and discover in what ways, if any, the process had impacted on their experience of parenting an adoptive child. Adoptive parents who had adopted within the last five years were chosen because their experience of the intercountry adoption process was still felt to

be quite recent. These interviews were also seen as a possible method of highlighting any gaps in service delivery from the perspective of adoptive parents.

Sampling techniques with adoptive parents

Emails were sent to all the intercountry adoption support groups in NSW requesting help with recruiting participants for the study. The email outlined the details of the study and included an attachment of an advertisement seeking adoptive parents for the research (See Appendix 8). Support groups were requested to send the email to their membership who would then contact the researcher directly if interested in participating.

Response rates were not high and in order to increase the number of participants, the technique of snowball or chain sampling was used (Minichiello et al., 1995, p. 161; Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 45). Five adoptive parents were contacted who had been interviewed and asked whether they could pass on the details of the study to others they knew in the adoption community. This yielded an extra participant, but I still needed more participants. I decided to email the intercountry adoption support groups again, asking for their help by sending out another email request to their membership. This time I was successful and completed 16 interviews with adoptive parents who had adopted in the previous five years in NSW. Nine interviews were conducted with females and seven interviews with males. Twelve interviews were conducted face-to-face in nine homes, two office locations and a quiet neighbourhood restaurant and the remaining four interviews were completed by telephone.

Interviews with adoption professionals

The decision to include adoption professionals in the sample was to add depth and breadth to the study. Since adoption professionals have ‘hands on’ experience of the intercountry adoption process, it was important to get their reflections and opinions about the process and how it works. In NSW, adoption professionals from the intercountry adoption section of the Department of Community Services (DoCS) were invited to participate in the study as well as Contracted Adoption Assessors (CAA’s) who were contracted by DoCS to conduct intercountry adoption assessments in NSW.

Before beginning the fieldwork, I completed some initial interviews with staff at DoCS to gain general background knowledge about the intercountry adoption process. As the role of the Attorney-General’s Department has recently changed, a representative from the Attorney-General’s Department was interviewed in order to understand better the

implications of this new role and the changes for intercountry adoption policy and practice around Australia.

Australian states and territories differ in relation to intercountry adoption legislation and how intercountry adoption services are organised and delivered. It was therefore necessary to interview adoption professionals in the other states in order to understand this range and diversity of professional opinion which may have implications for intercountry adoption policy and practice around Australia.

When planning for this study began, there were high numbers of intercountry adoptions occurring across a number of Australian states. In the ACT in 2004-05 for example, 60 percent of all adoptions were intercountry adoptions (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2005, pp. 5, 14) and my initial desk research indicated that Queensland intercountry adoption services are run quite differently to other services around Australia. In South Australia in 2004-05, intercountry adoptions accounted for 96 percent of all children adopted in that state and in Victoria 82 percent of all adoptions in 2004-05 were from overseas (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2005, pp. 5, 14). Thus, in order to get a well balanced and detailed understanding of the issues around Australia, interviews were conducted with adoption professionals Australia wide.

Face-to-face interviews were carried out with adoption professionals in NSW, Victoria, ACT and South Australia because of the high proportion of intercountry adoptions recorded in these interstate locations. This enabled the detailed opinions of adoption professionals and a high level of interaction in order to obtain the depth of information required for my analysis. While face-to-face interviews were preferred, this was not always possible due to financial constraints. Part of the travel costs were supported through successful applications to the PhD Research Travel Grant Scheme and the Postgraduate Research Support Scheme and the remaining interviews were conducted by telephone.

Sampling techniques with Contracted Adoption Assessors and adoption professionals

Contracted Adoption Assessors (CAA's) in NSW were sent an email from DoCS containing details of the study. The CAA's were asked to contact me directly if they were interested in participating. This method of contact was used in order to minimise any conflict of interest between the CAA's and their employer, DoCS, by ensuring DoCS had no knowledge of who participated in the study. A separate interview schedule was

developed for interviews with the Contracted Adoption Assessors, which can be found in Appendix 4.

Adoption professionals employed by DoCS in the intercountry adoption section received an email from the Director inviting them to participate and contact the researcher directly. Professional adoption workers in the other States were recruited using a list supplied by the Director of Adoption and Permanent Care Services. Adoption professionals were sent an email outlining the nature of the research, a Participant Information Sheet and an invitation to participate. Telephone contact was made to confirm willingness to participate and to make arrangements for an interview. A Consent Form was signed prior to each interview.

Before interviewing adoption professionals, internet searches were completed to locate background information on the intercountry adoption process in each jurisdiction. Each state and territory welfare department has information on adoption services on their website and my original desk research located basic details about intercountry adoption in each location including statistics and an overview of the assessment process in each state. A general interview schedule was developed (See Appendix 3) and additional questions incorporated as appropriate for each state and territory.

Five face-to-face interviews were conducted with Contract Adoption Assessors in NSW and two face-to-face interviews with adoption professionals. A further ten interviews were conducted with adoption professionals around Australia. Five of these interviews were conducted face-to-face and the remaining five were conducted by telephone.

Interviews with support organisations

Support group representatives were incorporated into the study sample to add breadth to the opinions studied and to hear from another target group involved in the area of intercountry adoption. These organisations provide support and practical advice for prospective adoptive parents before and during the assessment process as well as post placement support once parents return to Australia with their child.

A list of intercountry adoption support groups was developed using a number of sources including: the DoCS website (Department of Community Services, 2008), the Post Adoption Resource Centre website (The Benevolent Society, 2006) and an adoption newsletter (Adoptive Families Association of the ACT, 2006). Contact was made with a number of support groups both in NSW and in the other Australian States including

Queensland, Victoria and South Australia, where high numbers of intercountry adoptions relative to local adoptions were recorded.

Sampling techniques with support organisations

First contact was made with support organisations via email. An explanation of the research was given and a request made to discuss the possibility of an interview. If individuals self-selected to participate, then interviews were arranged and consent forms signed. Prior to interviewing support group representatives, I completed internet searches to locate background information on each organisation. This information was used as stimulus during the interview and incorporated into the generic interview schedule used with support groups can be found in Appendix 4.

Nine face-to-face interviews were completed. Five interviews were completed with support groups in NSW and four interviews with support groups in other Australian states. Most of the individuals interviewed were formal representatives of the organisations while some were interested members.

Data analysis

According to Minichiello et al. data analysis involves the researcher looking for meaning in the data collected and systematically arranging the information in the search for new ideas (1995, p. 247). Analysis of the data for this study was done by analysing each of the interview transcripts. Maxwell stresses the importance of taking the time to read through transcripts and observational notes before beginning to code the data and suggests that notes and memos be written as the research process unfolds (2005, p. 96). During the study, research notes were made after every interview and memos were made about how the information seemed to be unfolding. Writing notes helped me to form tentative ideas about coding and to begin interpreting the interview material.

The initial read-through approach identified themes and patterns in the research data, which led to the development of coding categories. These coding categories were initially quite broad and related to specific topics covered in the research. As the study progressed, the coding became more defined and developed into analytical coding which Richards describes as ‘coding that comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning’ (2005, p. 94). The modified coding system provided the structure for analysing the remaining interviews and was achieved using computer software called NVivo 8.

Using NVivo 8 does not replace the need for the researcher to analyse and interpret the research data. It is essentially a method for organising and storing data which makes the coding process less daunting (Richards, 2005, p. 96; Ritchie, 2001, p. 166). The researcher is still responsible for developing the coding system and critically analysing and making interpretations based on the interview material. Using the NVivo program provides the framework for sorting and searching the coded categories and makes the data easily accessible. Although I was unfamiliar with the program before the study, using NVivo 8 was a very efficient way to manage the project.

I began coding the data and at the same time, interpreting significant linkages between various themes and writing notes about the data. Rather than beginning with a set of predetermined codes, the codes were developed from the data itself and my interpretations of the themes described by participants. This analysis occurred simultaneously with the fieldwork and helped to develop a good overall picture of what the data meant in relation to the intercountry adoption process. This research process also meant that the interview schedules were refined during the study.

Narrative analysis was also used to understand the stories adoptive parents and prospective adoptive parents told in the study. While my methodology did not specify the use of narrative interviews, what the participants said during the interviews can be analysed using a narrative style of analysis. This method is in keeping with Bruner's ideas about analysing the narrative construction of reality through interview material without specifically conducting the interviews as narrative interviews (Bruner, 1987, 1991; Flick, 2005, p. 201). This type of analysis is helpful in understanding how participants' interpreted their own behaviour in relation to family formation and intercountry adoption. It does not necessarily relate to the facts of the process, but the underlying social construction of what participants said about why they chose intercountry adoption and the stories they tell themselves about the process. Such an analysis may also prove useful in examining the relationships between families and intercountry adoption (Flick, 2005, p. 202).

Ethical considerations

Confidentiality was an extremely important issue for participants in this study and they were assured that their identities would remain anonymous. This was particularly the case with individuals in the prospective parent and adoptive parent sample because they did not want involvement in the project to jeopardise their application. This situation has

influenced how the results have been reported, so while some biographical data was collected during the interviews it will not be overtly used to describe the sample for reasons of confidentiality.

Similarly, participants are not described in relation to the countries where they have adopted from or hope to adopt from in order to protect their anonymity. Keeping this in mind, when I have used direct quotations in my results, pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of participants. The quotations have also been edited, without changing their meaning, to improve readability. I understand the reluctance of participants to be identified and am extremely grateful for their participation in the study.

In my role as researcher I aimed to treat participants with honesty and respect (Minichiello et al., 1995, p. 206; Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 41). I answered questions as they were asked of me, for example, common questions included: Why are you doing the research? Are you an adoptive parent? Do you have children? I tried to empathise with participants when they spoke of their inability to conceive a baby or when they remembered back to the pain of that time. There were certainly times during some interviews when individuals became upset and cried. For some people, particularly men, it seemed to come as a shock that they were crying unexpectedly midway through an interview and there was some degree of embarrassment on their part. I showed concern, stopped the recording and only continued when they felt able to do so.

Research validity, bias and reflexivity

The qualitative research was not conducted in order to find the ultimate truth about Australian families and intercountry adoption. Instead, my study examined, through the use of multiple interviews, the opinions, beliefs and experiences of people involved in the intercountry adoption process. These interviews have been analysed and interpreted in order to understand the process some individuals go through in order to form their family through intercountry adoption. I have also investigated the role of the state in managing intercountry adoption and examined this type of family of choice, in the context of contemporary Australian attitudes towards the family. By adopting this approach, I acknowledge my position as a researcher who is influenced by subjectivity, but who seeks to minimise its effects (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 32).

Rice and Ezzy argue that 'reflexive research acknowledges that the researcher is part and parcel of the setting, context and culture they are trying to understand and analyse' (1999, p. 41). This means that the researcher should reflect on their role in the research process. During the interviews when discussing my reasons for doing this study, participants often asked what kind of relationship I had with DoCS. I said I was not employed by DoCS but had been helped by the department to recruit the prospective adoptive parent sample. My motivation for making this clear was to communicate to participants that I would listen to what they had to say, regardless of whether it included any negative comments about the department. This represents my own bias in the research process in thinking that participants would alter their comments if they believed the research was conducted by DoCS or on behalf of DoCS.

Another form of research bias relates to participants' recollection of the events and their recount of the experiences of the intercountry adoption process. Recollection of these events from the past may be unreliable or participants might lie or choose not to tell the whole story. Participants may be reluctant to describe their true motivations, for a certain path of action to the interviewer or they may respond according to what they think the interviewer wants to hear.

Observations, problems and limitations

There were a number of limitations in the study which will be discussed in relation to the sampling procedures used, working with the Department of Community Services and with the bureaucracy.

Difficulties were encountered when recruiting participants for the study. Because the subject matter was sensitive and participants were required to think and talk about personal details surrounding their decision to adopt a child from overseas, I suspect that some people were reluctant to take part in the research. It was a struggle to recruit participants for the prospective adoptive parent and adoptive parent sample. This was an issue in terms of the time taken in the recruitment phase of the study and the frustration at my inability to complete the fieldwork.

Another limitation related to the unanticipated consequence of the sampling strategy used to recruit prospective adoptive parents. I expected first time prospective adoptive parents to reply to my letter and had not considered that this group could also include adoptive parents who had already adopted from overseas or people with biological children. In

hindsight this added another dimension to the discussions as they were able to talk about their first and subsequent experiences of the intercountry adoption process. Although unintentional, this ‘mistake’ led me to developing a sense of how the practice has changed and evolved over time.

That participants were asked to self-select to participate in the study may also have skewed the sample towards people with less than positive experiences with the Department of Community Services in NSW. This may have resulted in a less comprehensive range of views on intercountry adoption being captured.

By only interviewing prospective adoptive parents and adoptive parents living in NSW, the findings are less extensive than if other states and territories had been included. There was also limited representation from adoption professionals and support groups in states and territories other than NSW. Despite these limitations, however, the study was able to capture valuable information on intercountry adoption in Australia.

In addition to obtaining ethics approval from the University of Sydney, I also had to obtain approval from DoCS. A detailed research proposal was written to explain the research design, how the study would benefit DoCS and how the project related to DoCS’ Corporate Priorities and Research Agenda. It was a 32 page document!

The initial proposal was rejected by DoCS and I spent the next three months trying to understand why it was rejected and how the decision could be reversed. I contacted various sections of the department and eventually in March 2006 received written permission to commence the study. The explanation given was that a mix up had occurred between my proposal and another one they had received on adoption.

In addition to the acceptance of the research proposal by the Department of Community Services, a Research Agreement signed by the University of Sydney, DoCS and myself was also required. After ongoing discussion and clarification about privacy legislation in relation to how DoCS was helping recruit the sample, the Research Agreement was signed on 19 June 2006. This was more than six months after sending the original research proposal and it was a very frustrating and time consuming experience. Fieldwork could only begin after the document was signed and interviews began in July 2006.

DoCS was helpful in a practical sense in terms of sending letters to the prospective adoptive parents, emails to the Contracted Adoption Assessors and employees and making

staff available for interviews. They also allowed me access to key staff for fact finding interviews in the initial stages of the research process. Attendance at two workshops was endorsed. This provided valuable information on the process and the way in which the education programme operated. This resulted in first hand knowledge of the education seminars which was beneficial and provided background information for formulating the interview schedules for adoptive parents and prospective adoptive parents. The department also gave me access to the WELSTAT statistics from their library and provided a desk and access to a photocopier while accessing this resource.

There was a huge variation in relation to how the various bureaucracies in the other Australian states and territories acted as gatekeepers of information on intercountry adoption. In some states, my request for interviews with staff went smoothly, while with other states it was very complex and time consuming. My request for a one hour interview with a staff member working in the intercountry adoption section of the child welfare department resulted in a range of experiences. In two states, I was asked to write and submit a research proposal in order to arrange an interview. In one state, I was required to submit a research proposal including a copy of my completed ethics application with all amendments, evidence of ethics approval as well as all supporting research instruments like the Participant Information and Consent Form and interview schedules.

On reflection, I wondered if my experience was similar to that of applicants – becoming tangled up in the paperwork and red tape, feeling like very little was happening and that time moved extremely slowly. Working with some states was very straightforward, while with others I experienced the multi-layered frustrations of bureaucracy first hand.

Understanding intercountry adoption

The first large scale study of intercountry adoption in Australia was conducted by Ian Harvey in 1980 and was a quantitative study with 93 adoptive families of Vietnamese children who were resident or had originally lived in NSW. Also included in the study were 25 adoption professionals (Harvey, 1980, pp. 110-111). Although this method allowed for large numbers of people to be interviewed, I turned to qualitative methods in this research in order to gain a greater depth of information in a similar manner to the studies conducted by Owen (1999) and Pringle (2004) in Britain.

The aim here is to understand the broader issues influencing families of choice in order to see whether Australian intercountry adoptive families reflect some of the ideas found in the

literature on family life. Did participants for example, write their own biographies as suggested by Giddens (1991), do children play a specific role in family relationships as outlined by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) or does reassessment of relationships as described by Pringle (2004) occur in the Australian setting? The method chosen was guided by the advice of Fontana and Frey who wrote ‘to learn about people we must treat them as people, and they will work with us to help create accounts of their lives’ (2000, p. 668). Before reporting the findings from the interviews, I turn to the documentary evidence on intercountry adoption in Australia to provide the backdrop for my fieldwork.

3

Intercountry adoptive families: The Australian context

I think it's important to have more than a line drawing. You need a really well coloured in picture of who that family is and what they're like and how they operate and what they like to do. Who's in their life? What do they laugh at, what do they cry at? (Rachel, Adoption Professional)

Adoption as a topic is usually not discussed in relation to wider social change, but in order to understand Australian intercountry adoption it is important to outline the context in which family formation occurs (English, 1990, p. 16). Australian families are influenced by a wide range of social, economic and political factors. They are also affected by social structures, institutions and individual needs and preferences. It is essential to understand what is happening in Australian family life in order to understand how different families are viewed and interpreted by policy makers.

Rachel (Adoption Professional) recommends gaining a good understanding of any family who wants to adopt from overseas and in this chapter, I will provide a detailed picture of how intercountry adoptive families have developed in Australia and the policy context in which they operate. In Chapter One I discussed the literature on the family and the literature on intercountry adoption and established that little research exists investigating the interaction between the general trends in family structure and intercountry adoption. In this chapter, I will begin to outline the factors that have influenced the development of intercountry adoptive families in Australia and discuss how these families compare with other Australian families today. I will discuss the diversity in family forms including families formed through domestic adoption and intercountry adoption in order to provide the context for my fieldwork which will be reported in later chapters.

Changes in marriage and divorce in Australia

Changes in marriage and divorce rates reflect wider social changes, which have an impact on family life, especially in relation to family formation. Marriage rates have fluctuated in Australia since 1901. They have decreased during times of depression and recession, for example in the 1930s, and have increased at other times such as during and immediately following World War I and II. The crude marriage rate which represents the number of marriages registered in a calendar year per 1000 of population, reached a high of 12 marriages per 1000 population in 1942. The number of marriages has gradually decreased since this time with the latest figures recorded in 2005 showing a rate of only 5.4 marriages per 1000 of population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008d).

Another change that has occurred in relation to marriages over time is that Australians tend to marry at a later age. In 1995, the median age of marriage for women was 27 years which rose to 30 years in 2005. For men, the median age of marriage in 1995 was 29 years which also increased in 2005 to reach 32 years. This trend has been attributed to the increased incidence of young people staying in education for longer and the increasing number of people living in de facto relationships (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008d). The fact that men and women are marrying later has implications for when and if, they will bear children. This issue will be discussed in further detail below.

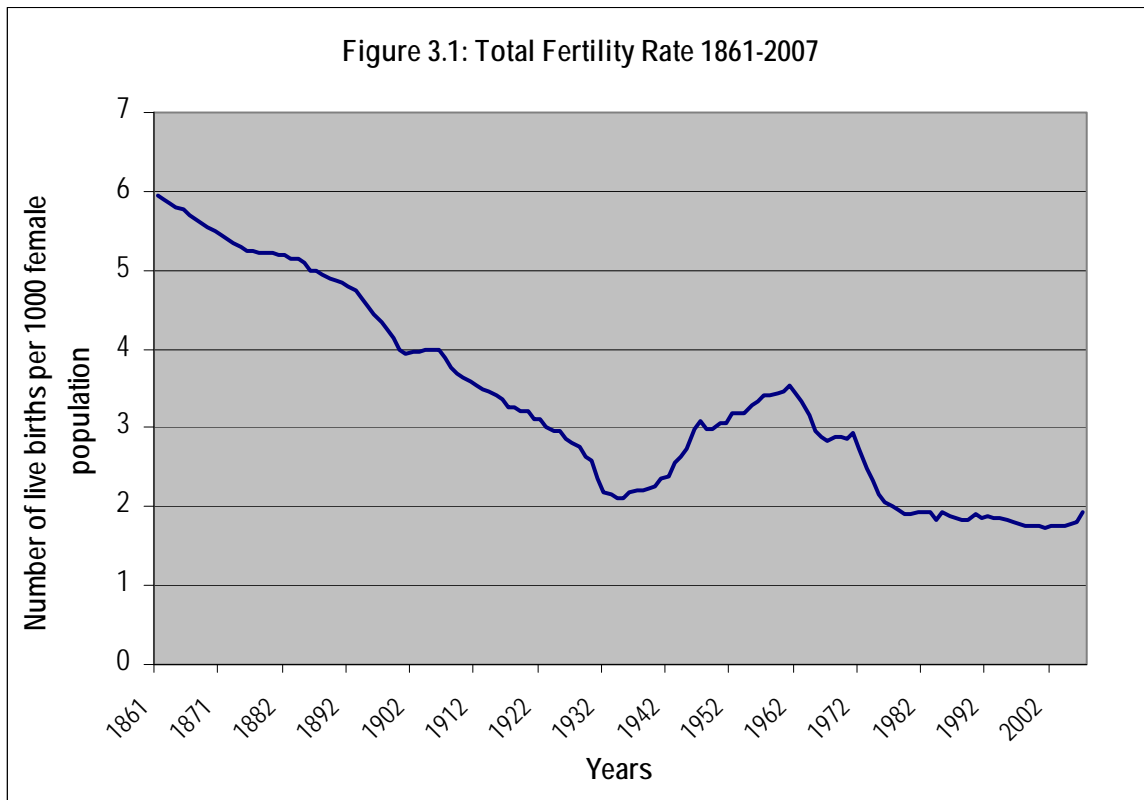
Trends in the proportion of the population who are either married or living in de facto relationships directly impact on fertility rates which in turn effect how families are formed. In 1986, for example, almost three quarters (74 percent) of people aged 18-44 years were either married or in a de facto relationship. By 2006, in contrast, only around 51 percent were cohabiting (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008b).

Accompanying a decline in marriage rates is a rise in the crude divorce rate. This rate is calculated as the number of divorces in a calendar year per 1000 of the population. Following the introduction of the *Family Law Act 1975* by the Commonwealth Government, divorce rates in Australia increased sharply for a few years but have now levelled off. The new law meant that divorce could be granted on grounds of irretrievable breakdown of a marriage and was measured by the separation of spouses for at least one year. Since the late 1970s, the crude divorce rate has remained between 2.4 and 2.9 divorces per 1000 of the population. In 2005, the crude divorce rate was 2.6 divorces per 1000 of the Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008d).

Australian birth rates

Although the marriage rate is declining, people are still having babies. In fact, the highest number of births was recorded in Australia in 2007 with 285,000 births registered (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008c). The previous record occurred in 1971, when there were 276,400 births registered (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008a).

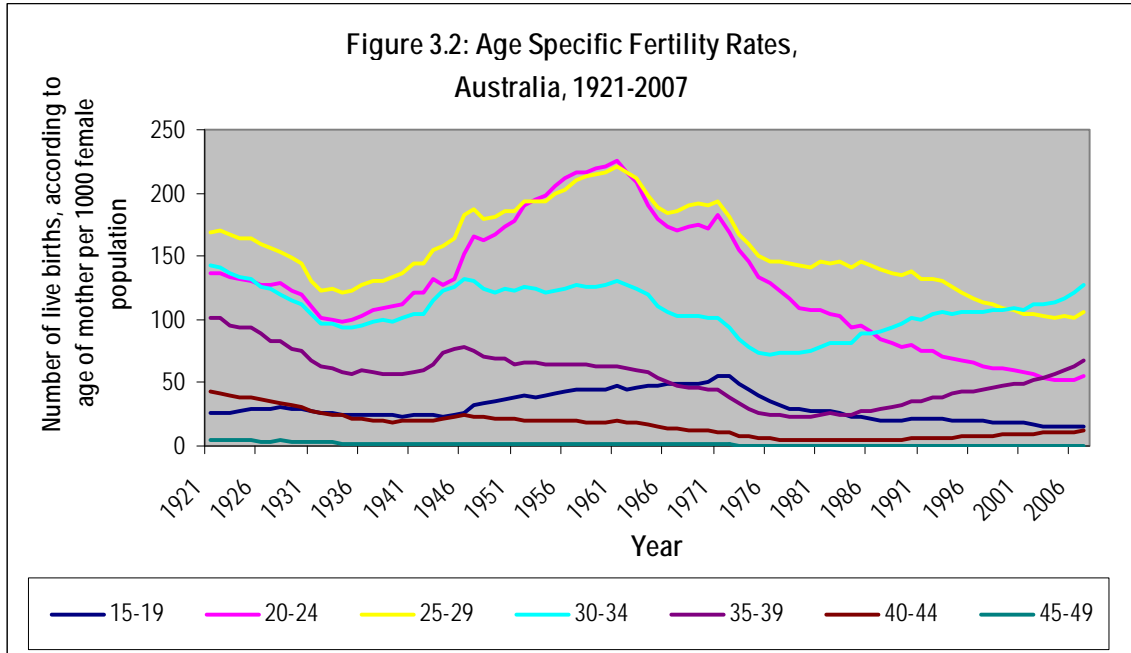
One way of measuring fertility is to look at the Total Fertility Rate (TFR), which is a hypothetical measure of the average number of children a woman would bear during her lifetime if she conformed to the current age-specific fertility rates (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008c). Figure 3.1 highlights the historical decline in the TFR, since 1861. Since 1970, there has been a noticeable decline in the fertility rate.



Source: Australian Historical Population Statistics 3301 2004 Table 5.4

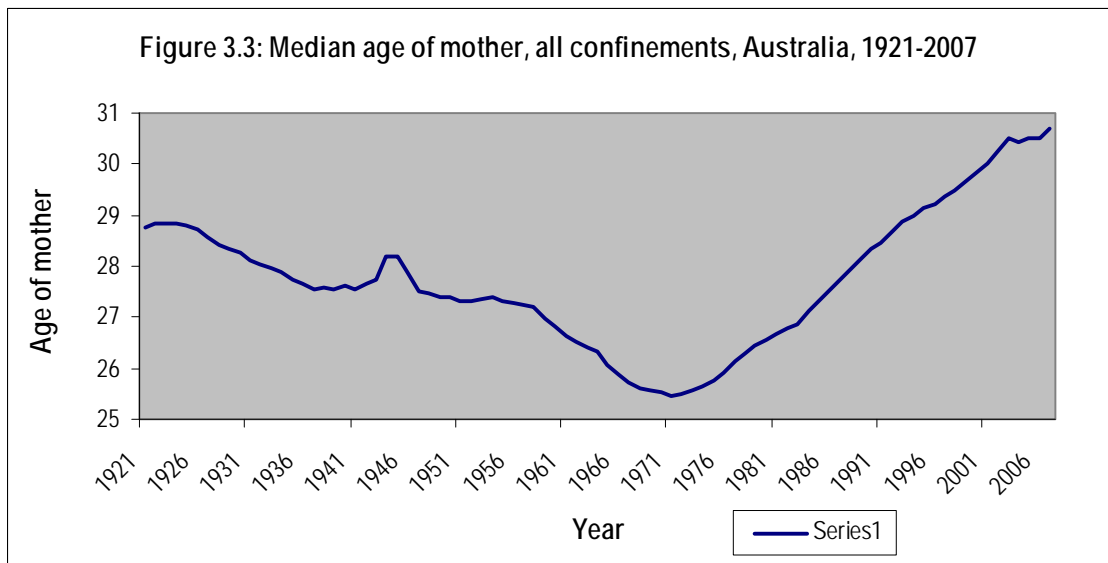
In Figure 3.2 the age distribution of women having children is shown. It is interesting to note the changing pattern associated with the age at which women give birth. Women have moved from having babies during their younger years to giving birth at later ages. Taken together, Figures 3.1 and 3.2 show that over the past thirty years Australian women have been having fewer babies, later in life.

This delay in giving birth means a reduction in the time available for women to conceive and an increased likelihood of women remaining childless (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008b). A delayed start to child-bearing also has implications for people who need to use alternative methods of family formation if unable to conceive naturally.



Source: Australian Historical Population Statistics 3301 2004 Table 39

There has been a steady increase in the mother's age when giving birth to children. The median age of an Australian mother's nuptial confinements has risen from 25.7 years in 1975 to 30.8 years in 2006 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008a) (See Figure 3.3).



Source: Australian Historical Population Statistics 3301 2004 Table 37

Associated with declining fertility in Australia was the increased freedom that accompanied the availability and use of contraception. Once women were able to control their fertility they had greater access to a range of opportunities. Although a drop in fertility rates was popularly attributed to the ‘pill’, other social factors were operating that had an impact on women’s decisions regarding their fertility and family choices. Browne notes how ‘a quiet change was taking place amongst Australians with respect to what they considered a desirable family size and how children should be spaced’ (1979, p. 13).

Women’s participation in the labour market increased, as did their educational qualifications. In 1986, 59 percent of women aged 18-44 years were employed. By 2006 this figure had increased to 70 percent of women being employed in this age group. Likewise, in education in 1986, seven percent of women aged 18-44 years had a Bachelor’s degree or higher and by 2006, this had increased to twenty-five percent of 18-24 year olds. By spending longer in education, women reduce the likelihood of having children while studying, and may delay childbearing after gaining a qualification in order to establish themselves in a career (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008b).

Family diversity

Australian families are becoming more diverse and there is a trend towards smaller families. The number of families with children has declined and there has been an increase in the number of couple families without children (those who have not yet had children and those whose children have left home) and one-parent families (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, 2008d).

It is interesting to note that families are identified in the census data by the presence of related people who usually live in the same household. This definition does not allow for ‘family-like’ relationships to be counted when people do not share the same household and are not related. In terms of Beck et al. (1995) and Giddens (1992) the relationships of choice are not able to be registered as families, even though the people in these relationships may consider them as ‘family like’ in the sense that they provide support, love and assistance. In the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), a category exists which is called ‘couple family with natural/adopted children only’ and I wondered if this category could be analysed in detail in order to look more closely at how these families are formed. Following communication with the ABS, I discovered that such an investigation is not possible through the provided statistics. This suggests that the ABS views natural and

adoptive families as one category and give adoptive families the same standing as families formed through biology.

In an effort to portray the diversity in family forms, the ABS in its 'Picture of the Nation' (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006) publication, has collected information on children living with same-sex couples. In 2006, approximately 3,200 children were living with same-sex couples. Thirty eight percent of children were reported to be the natural or adopted children of either parent while 57 percent were reported to be the step children of the same-sex couples. Same-sex couples can adopt in Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 34) and there is currently a Legislative Council Inquiry being conducted by the Law and Justice Committee in NSW into adoption by same-sex couples (Parliament of New South Wales, 2009). This classification of same-sex families suggests that they are considered a legitimate type of family, but are seen differently to natural and adopted children.

The decline in Australian family size emerged in the 1880s and has continued downwards ever since. In 2005, the average household size was 2.5. Browne (1979, p. 123) explains the reduction in family size during the twentieth century resulting from an increase in the health of children and a belief in the notion of an independent and secure old age. The decline in infant and maternal mortality rates, which occurred towards the end of the nineteenth century, meant that large families were no longer necessary, as family members were likely to survive until adulthood. The introduction of the Commonwealth Old Age Pension resulted in individuals relying on state provision rather than needing the family-based care provided by large numbers of children. Thus, both these factors have influenced and contributed to Australian views about the desirable family size.

During the 1970s in a context of widely available contraception, an increasing proportion of women moved away from the more traditional role of 'stay at home' wife and mother, towards paid employment, either in combination with parenting or without having children at all. At the time of the 1996 Census, 11 percent of women aged 45-49 years had never had a child (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002, p. 2)

Why people remain childless

A growing proportion of Australian women and their partners are remaining childless. Estimates for the year 2000, suggest that 24 percent of women in their reproductive years will not have children (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000). This phenomenon also exists

in other developed countries including the United Kingdom which has recent estimates of permanent childlessness of 20 percent and in the USA which has an estimated rate of childlessness of 22 percent (Qu, Weston & Kilmartin, 2000, p. 15).

A variety of reasons have been given by men and women for the decision to remain childless (Marshall, 2005, pp. 228-232). These range from a desire to pursue education and a career, to simply having a preference to live without children (Weston & Qu, 2001, pp. 12-14). For some, the barriers are the costs associated with raising children; both in time and money, while for others, contributing factors may involve health concerns such as the fear of passing on a genetic defect to a child. Beck-Gernsheim also acknowledges the dilemma faced by women who may have a strong desire for children, but recognise the huge impact of this decision on their lives (2002, p. 73). Having children is weighed up against what this decision may mean in terms of increased workloads, reduced leisure time and financial risks. For some individuals, therefore, remaining childless is a considered decision.

For other people, however, childlessness continues to be involuntary (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002). Involuntary childlessness may be influenced by the fact that some people are neither married, nor in a stable relationship in which to have children. Others may experience fertility issues or medical conditions which impact on their ability to conceive a child (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002). Voluntary childlessness of a temporary nature may become involuntary in circumstances where women delay having children and later find they are unable to conceive a child.

According to Michael Chapman, fertility rates in Australia have 'remained fairly stable with one in six couples experiencing problems at some point in their lives' (Field, 2008). Molloy et al. comment that 'many women are currently unable to complete their reproduction by their mid 30s, and so run the risk of "social" (age-related) infertility' (2009, p. 247). These women do not have fertility issues, however, they are unable to conceive for a number of reasons including lack of a partner or a desire to develop their career.

Infertility and involuntary childlessness

Infertility is one factor that influences the choices people make about family formation. Infertility is defined as the state of diminished or impaired capacity to conceive or bear

children (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare National Perinatal Statistics Unit and Fertility Society of Australia, 2008, p. 1). Carr et al. explain that infertility is neither an absolute condition nor an irreversible one, but is a clinical continuum (2005). Other factors such as age, when people meet a partner, education and workforce participation also have an impact on when people decide to begin a family. By contemplating a family later in life, some people will experience fertility problems. There are a number of options available to these individuals including remaining childless, attempting to use assisted reproduction technology (ART), or undertaking adoption or fostering. Understanding the outcomes of fertility treatments has implications for how people choose to form a family and this is why assisted reproduction technology will be discussed in the next section.

A number of assisted reproduction technologies are used in Australia and around the world to overcome infertility including invitro fertilisation (IVF)², intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI)³ and gamete intrafallopian transfer (GIFT)⁴. The following discussion is based on figures on fertility treatments undertaken in Australia and New Zealand during 2006. The majority (91 percent) were reported by Australian fertility centres and the data for the remaining nine percent came from centres in New Zealand. Of the treatment cycles reported in 2006 (53,543 in total) just over one fifth (23 percent) resulted in women becoming pregnant but only 17 percent resulted in live births (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare National Perinatal Statistics Unit and Fertility Society of Australia, 2008, p. xi).

In 2006, the average age of women who underwent fertility treatment was 35.6 years that was slightly higher than the average age of 35.2 years reported in 2002. There has also been an increase in women older than 40 years having fertility treatments. This figure rose from 14.3 percent in 2002 to 16.1 percent in 2006 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare National Perinatal Statistics Unit and Fertility Society of Australia, 2008, p. 44).

Women aged 28 years had the highest rate of pregnancy per initiated cycle and women aged 26-31 years had a higher rate of live deliveries per initiated cycle than women of any other age groups (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare National Perinatal Statistics Unit and Fertility Society of Australia, 2008, p. 47). After the age of 31 years, the ability of

² IVF occurs when eggs and sperm are combined in the laboratory for fertilisation outside the body and replaced in the uterus

³ ICSI, in which a single sperm is injected into an egg for fertilisation outside the body and replaced in the uterus

⁴ GIFT, in which eggs and sperm are placed in the fallopian tubes for fertilisation inside the body.

women to give birth decreased progressively. By the time women were 45 years or older, there was only one live delivery per 117 initiated cycles (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare National Perinatal Statistics Unit and Fertility Society of Australia, 2008, p. 47).

This information implies that the success rate of using assisted reproduction technology declines with age. This fact is compounded by the way in which people live today, for example, they are partnering later, delaying childbirth, experiencing fertility problems and then considering ART at an older age, which has an impact on its effectiveness. After trying ART and being unsuccessful, the options available for family formation are very limited. At this stage people consider either remaining childless or look for parenting alternatives like fostering and either domestic or intercountry adoption. Before examining the early history of adoption in Australia and the social conditions in which adoption laws were enacted, I will discuss some observations about participants in this study in relation to the overall data presented on Australian family life.

How the study sample reflects Australian data on families

Infertility was by far the biggest reason for people in the study turning to intercountry adoption to form their family. Fourteen out of 16 adoptive parent participants and ten of the 16 prospective adoptive parent sample reported infertility as their reason for pursuing intercountry adoption. Of the 24 participants who experienced infertility, some understood the reason for their infertility, while for others it was unexplained infertility or secondary infertility after successfully having a biological child. Seventeen participants out of 24 had tried IVF in order to have a family, but none had been successful and had eventually decided to build a family using intercountry adoption.

All participants who were part of a couple were married, as this is one of the common criteria stipulated by overseas countries. Twenty-eight participants out of 32 were married and the remaining four participants were either single adoptive parents or single applicants waiting to adopt.

The mean age of male adoptive parents in the study was 43 years and the mean age for female adoptive parents was 38 years old. The youngest adoptive parent interviewed was 33 years of age and the oldest adoptive parent participant was 50 years of age. In the prospective parent sample, the mean age for men in the study was 42 years and for women

it was 40 years. The oldest participant in the prospective adoptive parent category was 48 years and the youngest prospective adoptive parent interviewed was 33 years.

These ages reflect the general trend in the population in terms of people being older when forming families. Some participants were younger because they made the decision either not to pursue IVF or to limit the number of attempts of IVF. While some couples in the study had been married a long time, for example, between ten and twenty years, the delay in forming their family was due to the fertility problems experienced and the time spent trying to have a biological family. Each of the single applicants had no partner at the time of the adoption or adoption assessment and all had established careers before deciding to start a family. This trend is in keeping with the general population where delaying childbirth is often associated with completing education and workforce participation.

The households, in which intercountry adoptive children live, broadly reflect the current picture of smaller households of Australian families. The majority of households consisted of two parent households with an adopted child and/or other children. The other children were either other adopted children or biological children of one or both of the couple. In a few single parent households, the intercountry adoptee lived alone with the adoptive parent. This is in keeping with the distribution of two parent and single parent households in the Australian community.

Participants in the study were asked to describe their occupation and the results reflected a range of occupations, many requiring university qualifications, but not all. This result is similar to other studies worldwide which suggest that intercountry adoptive parents tend to be more highly educated, work in skilled occupations and have higher than average income levels (Hoksbergen, Joeffer & Waardenburg, 1987; Smith, 1997; Tizard, 1991). I now turn to discuss the development of adoption and intercountry adoption in Australia by investigating the development of adoption legislation and practice in relation to the placement of children needing care.

The changing nature of adoption in Australia

Adoption is an issue that has always been regulated separately by each Australian state and territory. Adoption legislation therefore differs throughout Australia. During the late 1800s, social disapproval of single mothers and their illegitimate children was high. The common method of providing care for these children was to place them into

institutionalised care, which catered for large numbers of children in a highly structured environment (Horsburgh, 1978, p. 19). Some mothers with few alternatives abandoned their illegitimate children, while others paid couples to care for them, a practice known as baby farming (Swain & Howe, 1995, pp. 100-101).

In time, opinions changed about how best to care for orphans and illegitimate children and the practice of individual, rather than institutional group care developed. This became known as 'boarding out' and involved families being paid a small allowance by the state to care for a child. Initially the family provided work for children, for example, boys worked on farms or as apprentices and girls did domestic work. The current system of foster care developed from this model of caring for children in families in the community (Marshall & McDonald, 2001, p. 27).

Adoption of Children Act 1886

In 1886, Western Australia became the first Australian state to pass adoption legislation. The impetus for the introduction of the *Adoption of Children Act 1886* occurred during the Western Australian gold rush in the 1880s. During this time, labour was scarce and children became useful as workers. Some parents reclaimed their children who had previously been in long-term foster care to work and supplement the family income. The Western Australian laws were enacted to allow children to remain with adoptive families and not be removed when they became economically useful to their birth families (Marshall & McDonald, 2001, p. 19).

Adoption laws in NSW

The first adoption law in NSW was heavily influenced by the Western Australian legislation. The NSW *Child Welfare Act 1923* confirmed the adoptive parents as the legal parents of the child and attempted to provide more long-term security for children and their adoptive parents (NSW Law Reform Commission, 1992, p. 9). Society at the time frowned upon both the abandonment of children and the placing of children into the care of others. During the beginning of the 1900s, thinking began to change and mothers who chose adoption for their children were increasingly perceived more favourably. The practice of adoption still raised some concerns, however, as people believed that children born from 'socially inferior' or 'immoral' women would inherit these characteristics and therefore be unsuitable for adoptive families (Swain & Howe, 1995, pp. 10-11).

After the 1940s, attitudes towards adoption changed and it became more popular as a solution to the problem of illegitimate children. As a consequence of World War II, the number of children born out of wedlock increased and society placed great value on the notion of the family and family values (Gilding, 1991, p. 111). At the same time, there was social stigma attached to being infertile and childless and adoption of a baby was seen as the solution to both these problems (Marshall & McDonald, 2001, p. 103).

Around this time, studies were conducted on the issue of bonding between parent and child. John Bowlby was an influential researcher on childhood bonding and attachment and in 1952; he prepared a monograph on these issues for the World Health Organisation (WHO). Bowlby concluded that early maternal deprivation was likely to cause adverse behavioural problems for a child, but that the child was capable of bonding with a person other than its mother, provided the person was available shortly after birth (1952, p. 157). Thus, adoption became seen as a convenient method of solving infertility and illegitimacy (Marshall & McDonald, 2001, p. 8).

During the 1950s, an increase in the number of private adoptions in NSW, caused concern for authorities who were unable to ensure proper adoption procedure was followed. There were also additional risks of placing children with parents who were inadequately prepared as suitable adopters (Marshall & McDonald, 2001, pp. 35-36; Thompson, 1971, p. 59).

In 1967, the *Adoption of Children Act 1965* came into force in NSW. This new adoption act incorporated a number of important changes including prohibiting private adoptions in NSW unless the child was related to the prospective adoptive parents. The new act also ensured that only approved adoption agencies in NSW were able to conduct adoptions (NSW Legislative Council - Standing Committee on Social Issues, 2000).

In practical terms, the introduction of the 1965 Act meant there was no contact between the adoptee and the birth parent once the adoption was finalised. This practice enshrined the idea that a 'clean break' from birth parents would allow adoptees to thrive in their new adoptive family. The *Adoption of Children Act 1965* also stipulated that once an Adoption Order was made, a new birth certificate was issued showing the adoptive parents as the adopted child's only parents (Marshall & McDonald, 2001, pp. 37-38). The legislation stipulated that even as an adult, the adoptee had no right to access their original birth certificate without authorisation from the court. In keeping with the increased secrecy

surrounding adoption, there were restrictions placed on adoptees and birth parents having access to any information concerning an adoption (O'Halloran, 2006, pp. 236-237).

The 1960s

During the 1960s, adoption was perceived as a positive solution for all concerned. For adoptive parents, adoption was seen as a solution to infertility or as compensation for the death of a child during childbirth. For the birth mothers and their families, adoption was considered a solution to the shame of illegitimacy and provided the children with the hope of a better life – two parents, a stable home environment and financial stability (Marshall & McDonald, 2001, p. 32).

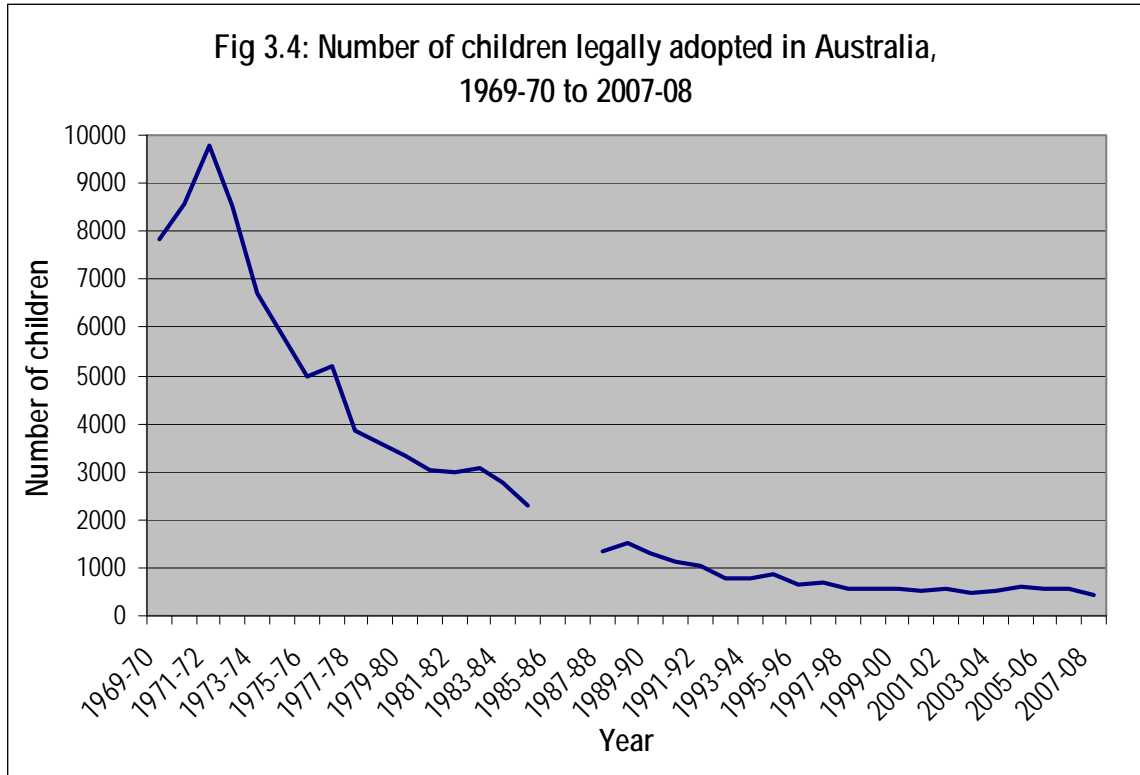
Browne (1979, pp. 78-79) explains how illegitimacy was interpreted at the time by different people in different ways. For some, illegitimacy represented society's declining moral values with contraception contributing to this decline. It represented the failure of society to teach young people about sexuality and how to control their fertility. For others, illegitimacy was interpreted more positively as a method of rearing children outside marriage and was seen as another, less traditional, family form.

The social stigma attached to having illegitimate children had an impact on the way unmarried pregnant women were treated and perceived. The information contained in the Final Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Past Adoption Practices 1950-1998 (NSW Legislative Council - Standing Committee on Social Issues, 2000), was written from submissions and personal accounts of people who lived through the experience. It showed that many women were sent away from their families in order to conceal their pregnancy and circumvent public shame on families (NSW Legislative Council - Standing Committee on Social Issues, 2000, p. 69).

Some women were sent to maternity homes operated by the major churches and others were sent to private agencies or hospitals. These places provided accommodation to unmarried women before and sometimes after the birth. Other single women were boarded out with relatives in far away places or with people in the community who provided board in exchange for work. Contact with family, friends and the child's father was often limited (NSW Legislative Council - Standing Committee on Social Issues, 2000, pp. 72-89).

Many women reporting to the inquiry spoke of feeling as if they had no part in the decision to have their child adopted. Many felt that adoption was a decision made by others because it was socially responsible and the 'right choice' (NSW Legislative Council - Standing

Committee on Social Issues, 2000, pp. 81-84). The number of children available for adoption in Australia peaked in 1971-72 when 9,798 adoptions were recorded. The peak number of adoptions in NSW also occurred in 1971-72 when 4,539 children were adopted (See Figure 3.4).



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Adoptions Australia 2007-08, Table A1 p 36

In the early adoption statistics, collected between 1969-1974, all adopted persons were counted and no differentiation was made according to the type of adoption. In 1974, adoptions were separated for the first time into two categories: relative adoptions and non-relative adoptions where the parent and child were unknown to each other. What follows is a snapshot of some of the characteristics of non-relative adoptions in Australia. Initially intercountry adoptions were counted in this category, and were later counted differently.

In 1974-75 non-relative adoptions represented almost 70 percent (69 percent) of all adoptions and by 1984-85 they had decreased to just under half (49.6 percent) of all adoptions. By 1997-98, non-relative adoptions had grown again as a proportion of all adoptions and represented almost three quarters (73 percent) of all adoptions (WELSTAT, 1990, p. 2). In the initial adoption figures from 1974-75, local non-relative adoptions would have accounted for the majority in this category and by the late 1990s, there were

far fewer local adoptions by non-relatives and more intercountry adoptions in this category.

Children adopted by non-relatives tended to be much younger than those adopted by relatives. In 1982-83 for example, 92 percent of children adopted by non-relatives were under 5 years of age compared with only 16 percent of children under 5 years adopted by relatives (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1984, p. 6)(Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1984, p. 6). Of those children under 5 years who were adopted by non-relatives, just under three quarters (72 percent) were aged under 1 year (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1984, p. 6).

Across both relative and non-relative adoptions in 1987-88, the proportion of males (45 percent) to females (52 percent) was similar (WELSTAT, 1990, p. i). Another interesting characteristic of non-relative adoptions was that nearly all persons were born ex-nuptially, for example in 1980-81, the figure for ex-nuptial non-relative adoptions was 93 percent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1982b, p. 5). In the same year, 55 percent were born to mothers in the age group 15-19 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1982b, p. 5).

The picture today is very different with local adoptions accounting for a mere 16 percent of all adoptions, only 19 percent of mothers are under 20 years of age and 69 percent are unmarried (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, pp. 19-20). These are not direct comparisons as the categories used to collect data changed in 1998-99, which makes comparisons with earlier figures difficult. What it does show, however, is a general trend towards, less adoption of Australian born children to non-relatives, significantly fewer born to birth mothers younger than 20 years and an increased incidence of women with children living in married or de facto relationships.

Changing social attitudes during the 1970s and 1980s

Similar to situations elsewhere around the world, the 1970s was a period of rapid social change in Australia. Society began to show greater tolerance of sex outside marriage, which meant that there was less stigma attached to children born in this way. Government initiatives reflected this growing tolerance, and unmarried mothers were given access to public housing initiatives and financial help. The Supporting Mothers' Benefit was introduced in 1973, which meant that single, young women could keep their babies without the support of their family or the baby's father. Payment of this benefit was not, however, automatic and administrative constraints deterred some women from applying (Summers, 1981, p. 449).

While it is unlikely that the Supporting Mothers' Benefit encouraged pregnancy, it did enable an unmarried mother to choose between keeping her child or surrendering it for adoption. Prior to 1973 this degree of choice simply was unavailable and after this time, the tendency to keep a child moved from 71 percent to 81 percent in 1974, and to 82 percent in 1975 (Browne, 1977, p. 38). The introduction of the Supporting Mother's Benefit was also significant because it offered some measure of social acceptance of single motherhood. Marshall and McDonald note how 'adoption began to be seen by some as the exploitation of powerless young single mothers for the benefit of middle-class couples with fertility problems' (2001, p. 10).

Throughout the 1970s, perceptions of women in society changed and initiatives for single women such as access to contraception, abortion and family planning – previously restricted to married women – gave women the ability to avoid unwanted pregnancies. As noted by Browne 'Fertility control had importance to society collectively and to the individual personally' (1979, p. 2) and the pill 'was the first, one hundred percent reliable, technology of fertility control to emerge' (1979, p. 5). At the same time, it brought discussions about private, individual behaviour like the debate about women's needs versus the needs of society in relation to reproduction, into the public sphere (Browne, 1979, p. 5). During this time, women's roles in relation to their sexuality, status in the family and community, and workforce participation changed and evolved (Gilding, 1991, p. 118).

Views about adoption also changed during this period. Adoptees and birth parents became dissatisfied with only having access to non-identifying information and they lobbied for access to identifying information. This information was essential to help them identify and trace the other parties in their adoption (Picton, 1976). Those in favour of this position argued strongly that every person had a right to know his or her origin, while those against were scared of the potential impact this information could have on their lives. Some adoptive parents were worried about damaging the relationship with their adopted child, and some birth parents feared the consequences of people knowing they had given birth to an illegitimate child (Marshall & McDonald, 2001, pp. 43-45).

The introduction of the *Adoption Information Act 1990* heralded a movement away from the secrecy provisions of the *Child Welfare Act 1965* to a more open approach to adoption. Under the 1990 Act, birth parents (if named on the original birth certificate) and adopted

people over 18 years had exactly the same rights to information, contact and privacy. Adoptive parents had very limited rights under the Act (Armstrong, 1998).

In February 2003 the *Adoption of Children Act 1965* and the *Adoption Information Act 1990* were replaced by the *Adoption Act 2000*. The new legislation and its regulations stipulate how adoptions in NSW are legally arranged and approved, and provide guidance on how records and information relation to adoptions can be accessed by the relevant parties. The *Adoption Act 2000* is the legislation used in relation to both local and overseas adoptions in NSW (*Adoption Act 2000*, 2003).

In 2006 there was a review of the *Adoption Act 2000* undertaken by the NSW State Government. Community members and organisations were invited to write submissions commenting on the efficacy of the 2003 adoption act. Following community consultation, the amendments to the *Adoption Act 2000* were incorporated into the Adoption Amendment Bill 2008. The amendments in relation to intercountry adoption stipulate that eligibility criteria will now focus more on adoptive parenting capacity and these criteria will be included in the Regulations of the act. Another change is that prospective adoptive parents are now able to lodge an application for adoption while still undergoing fertility treatments (Burney, 2008). The issue of infertility and intercountry adoption will be discussed further in Chapter Four of this thesis.

While annual numbers of adoptions have fluctuated over the past decade, the overall pattern in Australia has been a continuation of the downward trend which began in 1972-73. From the early 1980s until the late 1990s, the number of local adoptions by non-relatives as a proportion of all adoptions has declined. In 1980-81 for example, there were 1,388 adoptions of Australian born children to non-relatives which fell to 178 adoptions by 1997-98. In 1998-99 this category changed to become 'local placement adoptions' which excluded adoption by carers (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2002, p. 6). The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare suggests that comparisons between the former category 'Australian born children adopted by non-citizens' and the current category 'local placement adoptions' are not appropriate as it does not represent a true comparison (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2002, p. 7).

In 2007-08, there were only 440 adoptions recorded in Australia and 125 of these occurred in NSW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 36). This is the lowest number of adoptions recorded in Australia since 1969-70 when the first adoption figures

were collected and represents a 23 percent decline in adoptions from the preceding year 2006-07 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. v). The figure of 440 adoptions quoted includes all types of adoption in Australia: local, intercountry adoption as well as 'known' child adoptions. Separate data on different types of adoption was not collected until 1982-83 when the category of 'children adopted from overseas' was added as a category. This type of adoption will be discussed in the next section.

The beginnings of intercountry adoption in Australia

The media coverage during the Vietnam War exposed Australians to the plight of women and children living in the Vietnamese war zone. Bowers suggests the coverage resulted in 'a groundswell of emotion' which began intercountry adoption in Australia (1984, p. 16). As the Vietnam War neared its end in early 1975, the South Vietnamese Ambassador asked the United Nations for help in caring for the high number of abandoned children. On 3 April 1975, President Gerald Ford of the USA signed Operation Babylift and over 3000 children were airlifted out of Vietnam. While numbers vary, approximately 1300 children were sent to Canada, Britain, Europe and Australia (Martin, 2000).

While Operation Babylift has become associated with the beginning of intercountry adoption in Australia (English et al., 1990, p. 18; Harvey, 1980, p. 39; O'Halloran, 2006, p. 242), overseas adoptions from Vietnam occurred before 1975 (Brennan, 2005, p. 86; Williams, 2006, p. 276). Picton reports that some Australian families had adopted children from overseas as early as the 1960s and suggests it 'reached its climax towards the end of the Vietnam war' (1986, p. 162). Williams notes that Western humanitarian workers estimated that several hundred Vietnamese children were adopted by Australians prior to 1975, although no official statistics exist (2006, p. 276).

Operation Babylift involved the airlift of children from Vietnam to Australia after the fall of Saigon in 1975. Two flights flew from Vietnam via Bangkok to Australia as part of Operation Babylift (Le et al., 2007, p. 29). One flight arrived in Sydney on 5 April 1975 bringing 215 Vietnamese children and the other flight arrived in Melbourne on April 16 with 77 children (Harvey, 1980, p. 39). Intercountry adoption at this time represented a humanitarian response by Australians to the crisis in Vietnam and therefore had its roots as a form of aid for developing countries.

The actual number of children who were evacuated from Vietnam to Australia has been variously reported. Ian Harvey (1980, p. 39) quotes a total of 292 Vietnamese children who came as part of Operation Babylift, but other sources cite 274 children (Le et al., 2007, p. 29), 281 children (Le, 2005, p. 30) and 286 children (Horswill, 2007). This uncertainty about the number of children evacuated is indicative of the context in which the airlifts occurred. Intercountry adoption was a new phenomenon in Australia and government processes and regulations had previously concerned only local adoption, not international adoption. Perhaps this variance in numbers of children coming to Australia is a reflection of the 'newness' of the practice and the speed with which Operation Babylift occurred.

Headlines in Australian newspapers at the time of Operation Babylift included: '500 war orphans will be flown here. Saigon grants exit visas for children', 'Operation Babylift Mums rush waifs - more on way' and 'Orphans fly in to VIP Hello' (cited in Le et al., 2007, p. 29). In NSW for, example, interest was high for adopting a Vietnamese war orphan. Over a period of three weeks in April 1975, over 4,000 adoption application papers were sent to people interested in adopting a Vietnamese child and by the end of the month, 600 completed applications had been received (in Harvey, 1980, p. 41).

Early articles suggest that the development of intercountry adoption in Australia occurred in a relatively ad hoc way (Bowers, 1984; Picton & Calder, 1982). Bowers notes how adopting children from overseas was seen as a good alternative to the possibility of waiting years for a local placement. She explains how people organised their own intercountry adoptions either by travelling to the country of choice or through embassies, churches or overseas aid organisations (Bowers, 1984, p. 16).

Initially it seems there were disagreements between people wanting to adopt children from overseas and the Australian authorities. Bowers observes that conflicts occurred between prospective adoptive families who had a 'sense of urgency' about adopting a child and the authorities who acted in a more cautious manner. This situation resulted in some families defying Australian authorities and personally pursuing adoptions abroad, others battling the system and some forming pressure groups to campaign for changes in the system (1984, p. 16). Picton and Calder explain how Australian families seeking permission to adopt children from overseas were 'met with strong resistance and antagonism' but believed this was 'understandable as both parties were operating in an area with few established guidelines and little practical experience' (1982, p. 12).

Early intercountry adoption policy and practice seems to have involved little regulation, which perhaps resulted from the demands of the crisis and the need to find families quickly for the Vietnamese ‘orphans’. Bowers asserts that ‘little if any counselling or assistance was offered’ to applicants and that they had minimal assessment from the department (1984, p. 16). Initially, prospective adoptive parents were issued with a letter from the Department of Youth and Community Services (YACS – now called DoCS) and were required to notify the department on their return to Australia with the adopted child. Bowers suggests that ‘The department gave no guidelines or limitations, and the family was left to facilitate their own adoption by whatever means they could’ (1984, p. 16).

Parent groups were instrumental in helping facilitate the early intercountry adoptions and in time, attention turned to regulating the practice (Bowers, 1984, p. 19). Picton and Calder (1982, p. 10) describe the movement towards a push for uniform adoption legislation across Australian states and territories which has also been noted by Fopp. Fopp regarded uniformity in state and territory legislation as desirable but considered it difficult to achieve (1982, p. 50). There was also debate at the time about the role of the government in providing services for intercountry adoption and the belief that ‘State Welfare authorities need not necessarily take a principal role in intercountry adoptions’ (Picton & Calder, 1982, p. 11). This was during the time when adoptions could be organised by individuals without written approval from Australia. For example, countries like Taiwan initially did not require official Australian approval (Picton & Calder, 1982, p. 11).

Writing in the early 1980s, Picton and Calder discuss the role of the state in relation to intercountry adoption. They describe those who believed that prospective adoptive parents and the organisations who represented them were ‘responsible and capable’ of running intercountry adoptions. On the other side were those who believed that ‘intercountry adoption is so hard to regulate and in any case represents such a small number of families that it does not warrant the time, effort and difficulty it presently demands’ (1982, p. 12). They concluded that ‘the truth probably lies in the middle’ (Picton & Calder, 1982, p. 12).

The debate in the early 1980s revolved around decreased government involvement in intercountry adoption. Picton and Calder were of the opinion that two standards cannot exist for adoption and if the government is involved in domestic adoption then it should play a role in international adoption. They believed it was not in the child’s best interests for the government only to be involved when the child arrived in Australia. Limited

government involvement had resulted in some prospective adoptive parents making their own arrangements for adopting a child without formal assessment and then ‘successfully bulldozing’ Australian authorities for entry into the country (Picton & Calder, 1982, p. 13).

Picton and Calder argue that the real issue in intercountry adoption is ‘a failure to develop coherent, coordinated systems of assessment, approval and support’ (1982, p. 13). They believe that the ‘state must accept a role in helping people to be moral and responsible in the situation by developing an appropriate system to facilitate the making of intercountry adoptions’ (Picton & Calder, 1982, p. 13). While this statement is made in the context of Australians being able to facilitate their own private adoptions during the 1980s, it is an interesting reflection on the development of intercountry adoption policy since then. During the fieldwork for the present study, there was discussion about ideas of harmonising and streamlining intercountry adoption policy across Australia. These are the new ‘buzz’ words in relation to intercountry adoption and replace old notions of uniform legislation. Discussion about the development of coherent intercountry adoption policy will be discussed in Chapter Six.

Australian families formed through intercountry adoption

Rosenwald compiled a history of Australian adoption statistics and noted that a variance existed in the reported figures, which she attributed to discrepancies and inconsistencies in the collection of adoption statistics (2007, p. 18). National adoption data has been collected by a number of organisations over the years. Adoption statistics are currently collected by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), which has been collecting adoption statistics since 1990-91. Previously, adoption statistics were published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) with data collected by the National Working Party on Welfare Statistics (WELSTAT) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1982a, p. iv). WELSTAT was a joint state and territory project concerned with improving the standards of social welfare statistics and was established by the Social Welfare Ministers in 1976 (WELSTAT, 1990). The ABS in association with WELSTAT collected adoption data from 1979-80 until 1984-85. From 1987-88 until 1989-90 WELSTAT (then known as the Standardisation of Social Welfare Statistics Project) reported on adoptions collected from the WELSTAT National Data collection (WELSTAT, 1990).

Adoption statistics have traditionally been collected and reported in Australia according to the financial year, rather than by calendar years, which is sometimes used in overseas reporting. The suggested reason for this approach is that the states and territories report administrative data annually according to the financial year, including reports on expenditure and services, therefore, the national reporting by the AIHW is consistent with this approach (Hunter, 2009).

No data was collected in the years 1985-86 and 1986-87 and following discussions with DoCS, AIHW and ABS, I have been unable to establish why this was the case. It is possible that adoption data was not collected due to the change over from ABS to WELSTAT (Rosenwald, 2007, p. 18). However, since WELSTAT was originally involved with ABS in the data collection for the publications from 1979-1984, this explanation seems unconvincing.

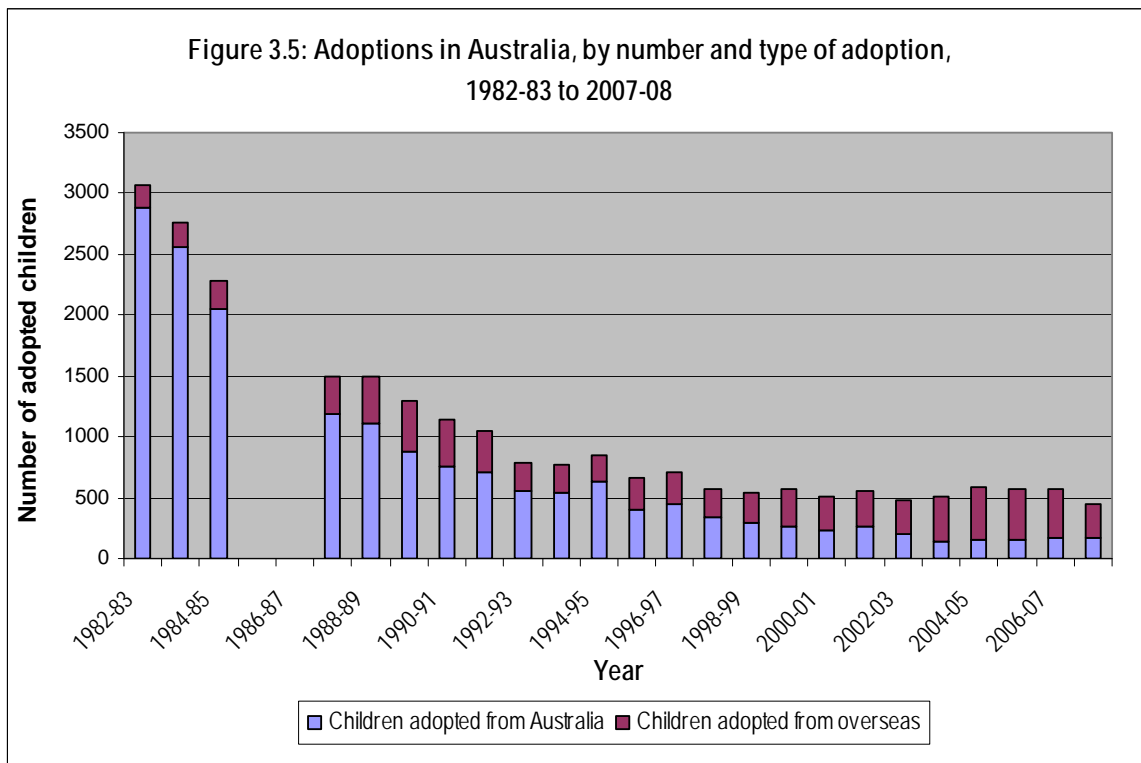
Reference in the adoption statistics to persons born outside Australia and adopted by non-relatives, appears first in an ABS publication in 1979-80 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1982a). The initial data is irregular with some states unable to provide complete data in some years. In 1987-88, data was available for the first time with a breakdown according to the 'country of birth of adopted person' (WELSTAT, 1990, p. 29). This data does not appear to have been reported completely until 1990-91 when all states and territories were able to provide information on an overseas child's country of birth (WELSTAT, 1992b, p. 28).

One type of intercountry adoption is excluded from the AIHW's collection of adoption data because it is not the responsibility of the Australian state and territory departments who are in charge of adoption. These adoptions are those completed by Australian citizens or permanent residents who have lived overseas for 12 months or more and have adopted a child through an overseas government authority or agency. According to the AIHW, the prospective adoptive parents need to show they were not living overseas in order to bypass Australian regulations in relation to intercountry adoption. If they have lawfully adopted the child according to the birth country's adoption laws then the child is allowed to enter Australia under an adoption-specific visa (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 18).

In 2007-08 there were 100 such visas issued for children who were adopted through overseas agencies or authorities by people who had been living overseas for 12 months or

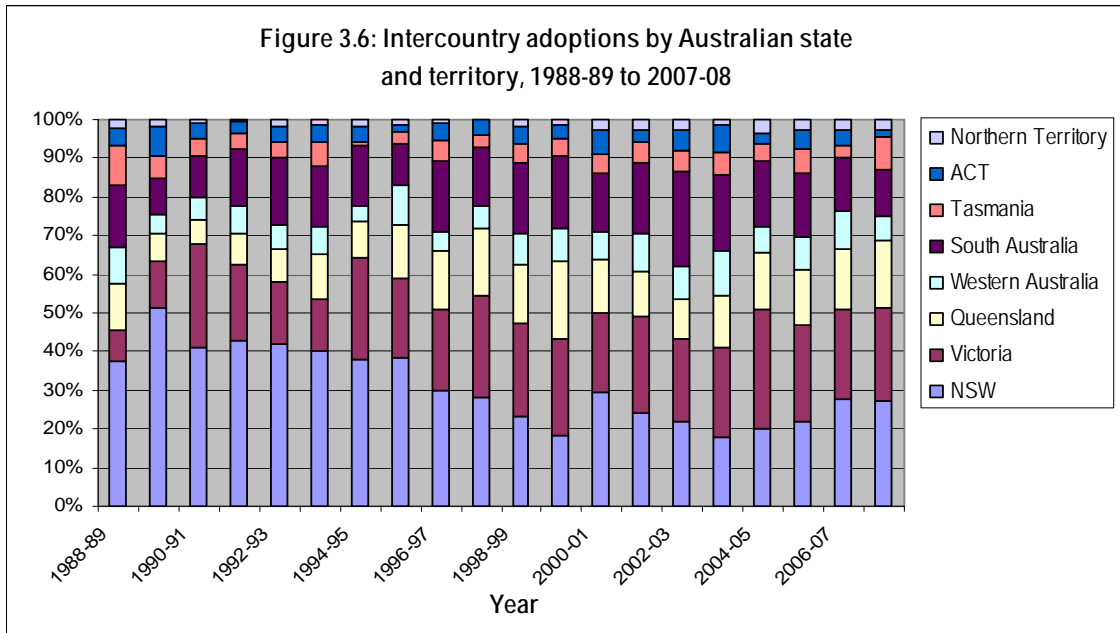
more. This represented a 10 percent decrease from 2006-07 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2008, p. 18). In 2007-08 the visas were issued from 41 countries compared to 37 countries in the previous year (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 18). These figures suggest that fewer children are coming to Australia in this way, but that they are coming from a slightly more diverse range of birth countries than previously.

Since the first large scale group of children arrived from Vietnam in 1975, the number of intercountry adoptions in Australia has fluctuated over time. Between 1982-83 and 2007-08 there were 7,240 children brought to Australia for adoption by Australians. Figure 3.5 shows the number of children adopted from overseas between 1982-83 and 2007-08 in relation to the number of local adoptions. Although intercountry adoptions occurred before 1982-83, this year represented the first time that reliable statistics were kept Australia-wide for this type of adoption. Figure 3.5 shows that the number of children adopted locally since 1982-83 has decreased, while the proportion of adopted children from overseas has increased, making intercountry adoption the predominant form of adoption in Australia.



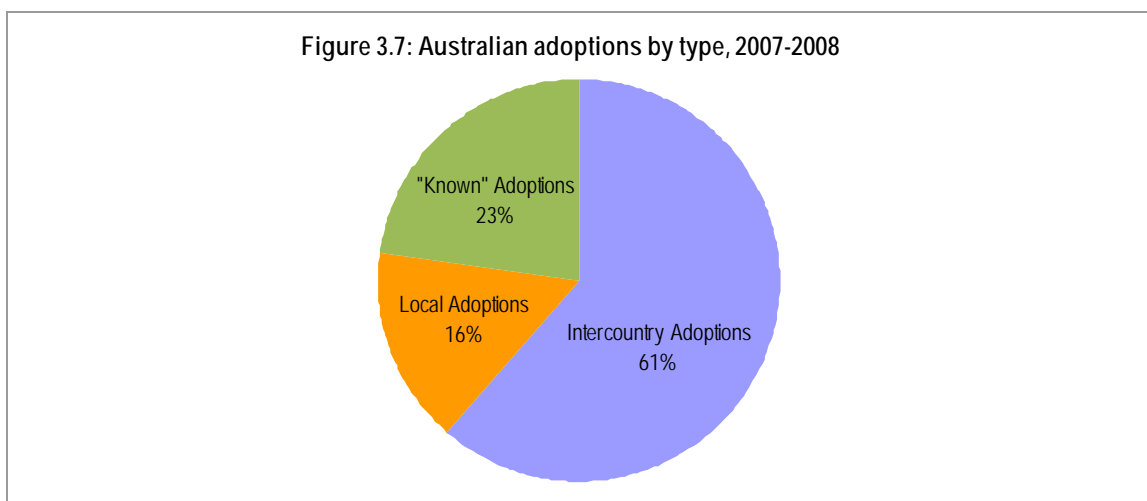
Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Adoptions Australia 2007-08*, Table A4, p 38

The next Figure 3.6 shows the breakdown of intercountry adoptions per state and territory around Australia. It only shows data from 1988-89 as this is the first year when data was available for all Australian states and territories. The data shows that NSW, Victoria and South Australia are the states accepting most children for intercountry adoption.



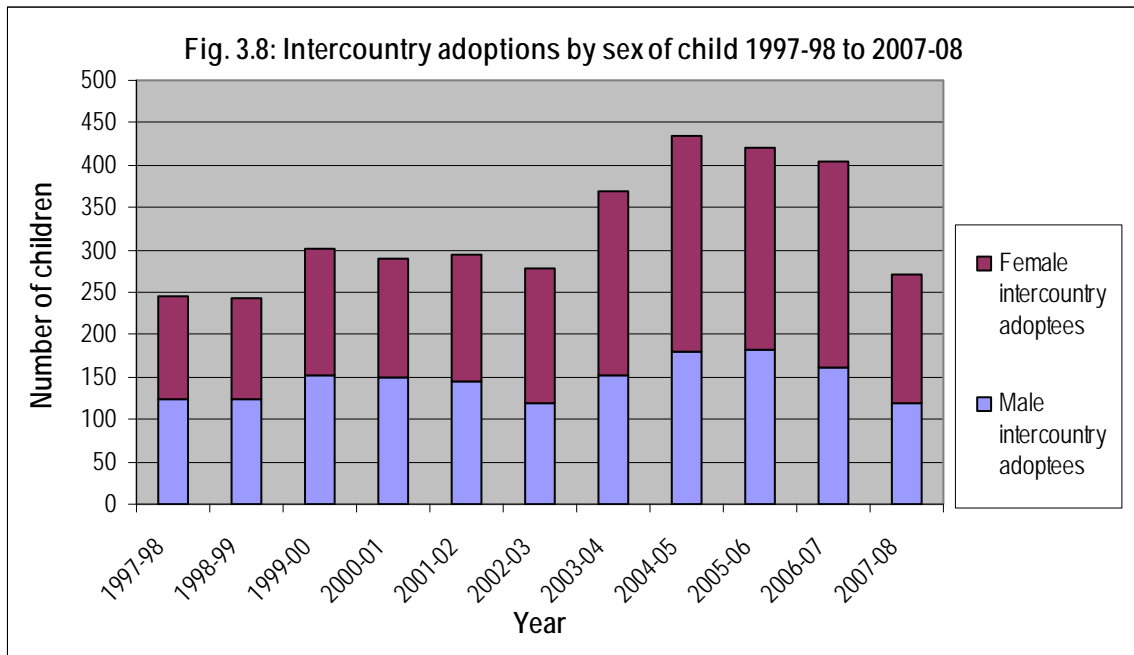
Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Adoptions Australia 2007-08, Table A9, p 42; WELSTAT Data Collection 1988-89; WELSTAT Data Collection 1989-90

The situation today is one in which intercountry adoption is the dominant form of adoption in Australia. Figure 3.7 shows the breakdown in the different types of adoption conducted in Australia. In 2007-08 intercountry adoptions account for 61 percent of all adoptions, 16 percent were local adoptions and 23 percent were ‘known’ child adoptions. From 1998-99 there was a change in the terms used to collect adoption data. Between 1988-89 and 1997-98 the category ‘local non-relative adoptions’ included adoptions by foster parents and carers. From 1998-99, adoptions by foster parents and carers were included in a new category called ‘known’ child adoptions since this better reflected the previous relationship the child had with the foster parents or carers prior to the adoption.



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Adoptions Australia 2007-08, Table A5, A6 & A9, pp 39-41

In the first few years when separate statistics were collected for overseas adoption, there were slightly more boys adopted than girls were. Beginning in 2001-02, there has been a growing trend in Australia for more girls to be adopted than boys. This trend can be attributed to the increased number of girls being adopted by Australians from China because of the one child policy and a preference for Chinese families to keep boys rather than girls (See Figure 3.8).



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Adoptions Australia 2007-08*, Table A3, p 37

In 2007-08 the majority (92 percent) of children coming to Australia for intercountry adoption were aged less than 5 years (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 16). When collection of intercountry adoption statistics began in 1997-98, 80 percent of children adopted were aged less than 5 years. Over time, therefore, there has been an increase in the proportion of children in this age group. It seems strange that this is the case as International Social Service has noted increases in the age of children being adopted through intercountry adoption (ISS & IRCRCDF, 2008). These trends may have affected countries where adoption numbers are higher, and will become a trend in future years in relation to intercountry adoptions in Australia.

The data on age of intercountry adoptive parents suggests that there have been increases in the age of adoptive parents in the '45 years plus' category. It is interesting that in the last two years, that the AIHW has incorporated a new age category into the data collection (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 45). From 2006-07 onwards data is now collected on adoptive parents aged 45-49 years, 50-54 years and 54 plus years. This is

perhaps in recognition that the trend in older adoptive parents is continuing and the more detailed age breakdown provides a better understanding of this development.

Information about children coming to Australia in sibling groups is also complicated by the incomplete data that is available for the earlier years of intercountry adoption. Originally, the number of children in sibling groups from overseas was collected and counted in the same category as locally adopted sibling groups. This may be the result of local non-relative adoptions and overseas non-relative adoptions being initially counted in the same category.

Since 2002-03 when discrete data was available for intercountry adoption sibling groups, there seems to be no fixed trend with the number of sibling groups arriving in Australia with numbers fluctuating. In 2002-03, there were 29 sibling groups (58 children) (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2003, p. 46) who came to Australia for intercountry adoption and the latest figures show there were 11 sibling groups (24 children) who came to Australia in 2007-08 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 44). The fact that there is no pattern suggests that Australia is yet to experience the trend noted by the International Social Service already perceived in some other receiving countries in relation to increased numbers in sibling groups (ISS & IRCRCDF, 2008).

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare do not collect data on children with special needs entering Australia, and nor do the Attorney-General's Department. It seems that no definition of 'special needs' exists in relation to intercountry adoption. There is a wide diversity of what could be classified as special needs. For example, special needs could be interpreted in relation to the age of the child or the type of background they come from, or whether the medical condition they have is considered lifelong or a treatable medical condition. There is also the problem of whether the definition of special needs is interpreted in terms of Australia's understanding of special needs or whether it relates to the overseas countries' definition of special needs. This situation is further complicated by the fact that a child may not experience problems until after arrival in Australia. All these reasons make it difficult to comment with certainty on the adoption of children from overseas with special needs in Australia, but it is clear that data collection would be enhanced if a working definition of special needs in intercountry adoption could be agreed upon.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare also collects data on other members of Australian intercountry adoptive families (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 34). This data is collected in relation to the families into which the child from overseas becomes a member. In 2007-08 around half of all intercountry adoptive families had no children (51 percent), just over a quarter had adopted children only (29 percent), around one seventh had biological children (15 percent) and 4 percent had both biological and adopted children (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 18). This suggests that for many, the motivation to adopt has come from infertility related issues. These figures exclude intercountry adoptions from New South Wales, as this state was unable to report on the composition of the families formed through intercountry adoption. It is strange that this information is unreported as these details would be known to DoCS through the application and assessment data.

Single people can apply to become intercountry adoptive parents in some states and territories in Australia, but the eligibility criterion is dependent on the legislation in each state and territory and is also influenced by the overseas country to which applicants are applying (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 35). Separate information on single adopters is only collected in relation to the marital status of the adoptive parents. In all other factors, for example, the age of adoptive parents or the composition of family, the singles data is contained within the couples data (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 45). This makes it difficult to comment on single people as a group of intercountry adoptive parents. It may reflect the assumption that couples are the norm for adoptive parents and in fact in 2007-08 registered married couples accounted for 96 percent of intercountry adoptive parents, followed by single people representing 3 percent and de facto married couple representing less than one percent (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 17). This skew towards married couples is attributed to the criteria set by the overseas countries in order to be eligible to become an adoptive parent.

Where children came from during the 1970s and 1980s

In this section I will discuss some of the changes which have occurred in relation to sending countries for intercountry adoption. In the first adoption statistics released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1982a), 66 children were recorded as 'children born outside Australia and adopted by non-relatives'. This figure is unreliable, however, as it does not include 519 non-relative adoptions in NSW where the birthplace was unknown but does include 21 non-relative adoptions from South Australia

where the birthplace is not known (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1982a, p. 9). By the end of the 1980s, non-relatives adopted three quarters of all adoptees in Australia. This figure includes both local and overseas children adopted by non-relatives.

The number of intercountry adoptions increased from 127 in 1980-81 to 420 in 1989-90 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1982b, p. 5; WELSTAT, 1992c, p. 30). Of the children born overseas and adopted by Australians, 70 percent were female, and 30 percent were male. Just over three fifths of the children born overseas and adopted by non-relatives were aged less than one year and the majority (56 percent, 235 children) of children adopted by Australians were born in Korea. In November 1989, Korea advised the closure of its program with Australia and 'requested that no new applications be forwarded (WELSTAT, 1992a, p. 13).

There were 2,031 children adopted from overseas during the decade of the 1980s (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1982b, p. 5, 1983, p. 6). This is only an indicative figure as no statistics were kept for two years (1985-85 and 1986-87) and in the early years of the 1980s, the statistics were not complete due to inconsistencies between Australian states and territories in relation to data collection.

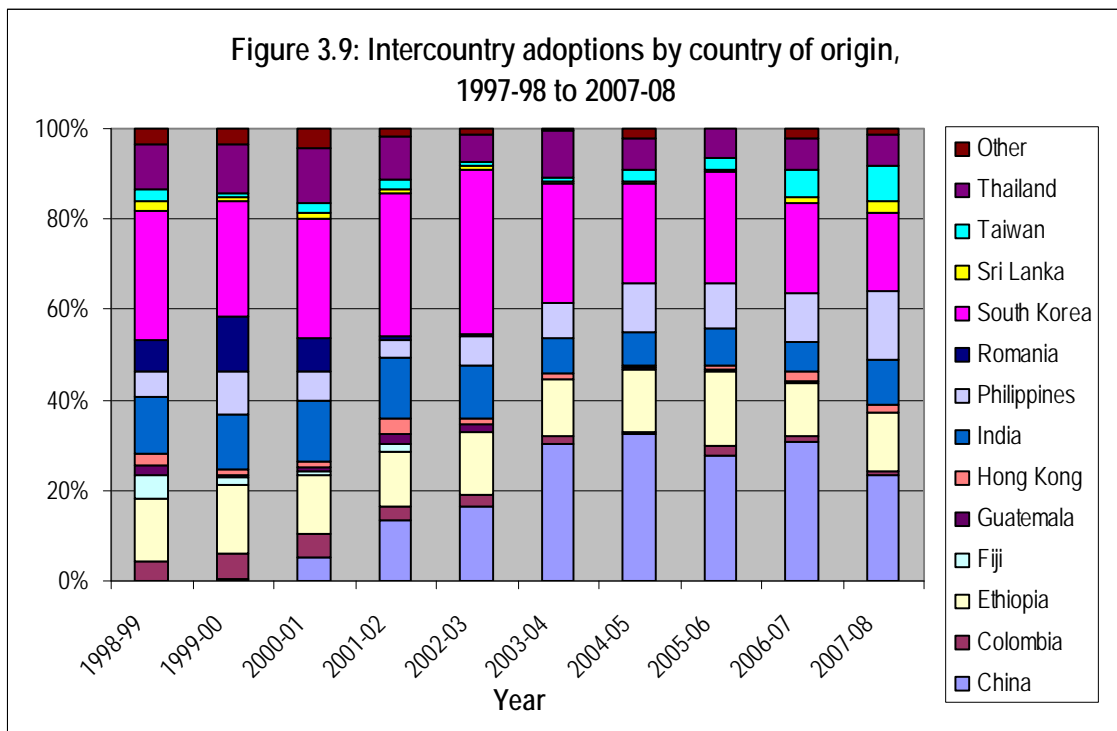
Australian intercountry adoption in the 1990s

The number of intercountry adoptions decreased in the early 1990s until it reached a low of 222 overseas children adopted in 1993-94. The numbers fluctuated until 1999-2000 when the figure increased to 301 intercountry adoptions. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare suggests the increase was due to ratification of the Hague Convention by Australia in 1998. The year 1999-2000 was the first full year in which the Hague Convention was in force in Australia, which allowed intercountry adoptions to be finalised in the country of origin and meant the 'numbers were slightly inflated' (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2002, pp. 6-7). There were a total of 2,497 children adopted from overseas during the 1990s (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 38).

In 1990-91, almost 90 percent (88 percent) of children adopted into Australia were born in Asia. This figure fluctuated during the decade and ended with Asia accounting for just over 60 percent (62 percent) of children. This reflects a decrease in the significance of Asian countries as birth countries, particularly South Korea. South and Central America began the 1990s contributing eight percent of children for intercountry adoption and in 1999, eight percent of children were still arriving from this region. In the mid 1990s, it was a

different situation, however, with South and Central America contributing higher numbers of children for intercountry adoption. The number of children coming from this region peaked in 1992-93 when 58 children (26 percent) were adopted by Australians and by 1995-96, this number had decreased to account for 23 percent (62 children) (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, various years).

The 1990s saw the emergence of African nations as important countries of origin for Australian intercountry adoption. In 1990-91, very few children came to Australia from Africa (only two children representing 0.5 percent). By the end of the 1990s, African countries were contributing 15 percent (46 children) to the total of children available for intercountry adoption. The ‘other’ category was high from 1992 onwards and this can be attributed to children coming in small numbers from over 40 nations which were not categorised separately (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2002, p. 43). Figure 3.9 shows the intercountry adoptions that occurred in Australia according to the country of origin for the period 1998 to 2008.



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Adoptions Australia 2007-08, Table A10, p 43;
 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Adoptions Australia 2005-06, Table A5, p 38

Just as Australia came late to intercountry adoption in relation to other countries around the world, the trends in relation to the phases of intercountry adoption described in Chapter One have also occurred later. European countries and the USA began their involvement in

intercountry adoption post World War II, whereas Australia's involvement only began with large numbers of children after the Vietnam War in 1975.

The rise of Latin American countries as sending countries occurred in other nations during the 1980s, but did not happen in Australia until the 1990s. Likewise, Asian countries especially Korea, had decreased in importance in USA intercountry adoptions, for example, by the end of Phase 2 (end of 1990s). This trend came later in Australia. During the early 1990s, fewer children were coming to Australia from Asian countries, but China, Korea, Thailand, the Philippines and Taiwan remain high suppliers of children for Australian families today. Perhaps this is influenced by the location of these countries in close proximity to Australia.

In relation to Romanian adoptions, these also occurred later in Australia than in other countries. In the USA, for example, the majority of Romanian adoptions occurred in the early 1990s, while in Australia, the number of children adopted from Romania peaked in 1999. By 2003, all adoptions from Romania to Australia had ceased (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 43).

While the phases in the development of intercountry adoption resonate with familiarity for countries with a long history of intercountry adoption, Australian trends have occurred at a different rate due to, I believe, our later introduction to the process and less well established relationships with overseas nations requiring intercountry adoption. Australia's prior experience with the Child Migrant Scheme, transracial adoption in relation to Indigenous Australians (discussed later in this chapter) and high numbers of local children available for adoption during the 1970s, may also have contributed to the slower development of intercountry adoption in this country.

Australian intercountry adoption 2000 – 2008

There have been a total of 2,761 children adopted from overseas between 2000-01 until the most recent statistics available in 2007-08 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 38). This number is attributed to the implications of Australia signing a bilateral agreement with China in 1999 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2002, p. 6). Whereas South Korea was the predominant sending country from the 1980s until the latter part of the 1990s, China has emerged as the major contributor to intercountry adoptions during the twenty-first century. In 2007-08, China contributed 23 percent of children (63 children), South Korea contributed 17 percent (47 children) and 15 percent (41 children)

came from the Philippines. In 2000-01, Asian countries contributed 68 percent (197 children) which increased to 85 percent (316 children) in 2003-04 due to the increase of children coming from China. In 2007-08, Asian countries contributed 85 percent (229 children) to the total number of children coming to Australia for intercountry adoption.

Conversely, South and Central America as a source region has declined significantly beginning the decade contributing 9 percent (27 children) and by 2007-08, only sending 5 children (2 percent) to Australia for intercountry adoption. African countries as sending countries remained relatively constant during this time. In 2000-01, 13 percent (37 children) came from African countries, which increased to 17 percent (70 children) in 2005-06 and now stands at 13 percent (36 children) (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 41). Australia currently has programmes with the following countries: Bolivia, Chile, China, Colombia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Hong Kong, India, Lithuania, Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Thailand (Australian Government Attorney-General's Department, 2009).

In reference to the phases of intercountry adoption outlined in Chapter One, and discussed previously in this chapter, Australia like other nations has, since 2005, experienced a sharp decrease in the number of intercountry adoptions. This is a trend reflected around the world and as Selman (2009, p. 143) notes, the decline which began in 2005 was accelerated in 2006, resulting in all major receiving countries experiencing a fall in the number of intercountry adoptions.

Each year in Australia since 2005, total numbers have declined and according to the latest figures there has been a sizeable decrease in overall numbers of children adopted from overseas (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 38). Numbers peaked in 2004-05 with 434 intercountry adoptions recorded and since then it has steadily declined with 421 intercountry adoptions recorded in 2005-06, 405 in 2006-07 and the latest figures show only 270 intercountry adoptions recorded last year (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 38). While Australia has experienced Phases 1, 2 and 3 at a slower pace than other countries, we seem to be experiencing similar conditions currently. I believe this signals our entry into Phase 4 of intercountry adoption, which is represented by a downturn in the overall number of children adopted from overseas.

In the early days of intercountry adoption, Australia used a 'lead-state' approach to manage intercountry adoption programmes with overseas countries. This meant one state or

territory developed a relationship with an overseas country and then liaised directly with that country on behalf of Australia. The lead state liaised with the authorities in the overseas countries and was given a quota of available children, who were then allocated to the various Australian states and territories. This system was used during the 1980s and 1990s.

Under the lead state approach, operational matters were handled by each individual state and territory and each jurisdiction forwarded applications directly to the overseas country (Attorney-General's Department of Australia, 2009). This system has now changed and while the states are still in charge of operational matters, the Commonwealth Government through the Attorney-General's Department now manages and coordinates programs with overseas countries.

The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption

In 1990, a report was prepared for the Hague Conference which recommended measures be taken to ensure obtaining parental consent through duress, buying and selling of children and child abduction in relation to intercountry adoption were put to an end (Brennan, 2000, p. 185). Two international agreements were instrumental in the formulation of the Hague Convention. These documents were the UN Declaration on Social and Legal Principles relating to the Protection and Welfare of Children, with Special Reference to Foster Placement and Adoption Nationally and Internationally (December 1986), and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (November 1989) (Brennan, 2000, p. 186). Duncan (2000, p. 41) notes how the latter focused discussion on the rights of the child in relation to intercountry adoption and Van Loon (2000, p. 1) comments how Article 21 in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child deals specifically with intercountry adoption. Together these two documents became the guiding principles behind the establishment of the Hague Convention, which embodied standards and safeguards between cooperating institutions around the world.

The Hague Conference on Private International Law is a global inter-government organisation. Its aim according to Article 1 of the Statute of the Hague Conference is 'to work for the progressive unification of the rules of private international law'. This work is achieved by the Hague Conference through the negotiating and drafting of multilateral treaties, known as 'Hague Conventions' (Hague Conference on Private and International Law, 2006).

The Hague Convention of 29 May 1993 on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (Hague Convention) aims to establish uniform procedures to be followed by the countries who are party to the Convention. It is one of the most widely ratified conventions and States that have ratified the Convention have the legal obligation to apply its principles. There are currently 78 contracting states to the Hague Convention (The Hague Conference on Private International Law, 2009).

The Hague Convention operates through a system of national central authorities and reinforces the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (*Hague Convention*, 1993 Schedule 1). Its purpose is to ensure that intercountry adoptions are made in the best interests of children and with respect for their rights. The Adoption Convention also aims to prevent the ‘abduction, the sale of, or traffic in children’ (*Hague Convention*, 1993 Schedule 1).

The scope of the Convention is outlined in Chapter 1, Article 1 of the Hague Convention and is:

- a) to establish safeguards to ensure that intercountry adoptions take place in the best interests of the child and with respect for his or her fundamental rights as recognised in international law
- b) to establish a system of cooperation amongst Contracting States to ensure that those safeguards are respected and thereby prevent the abduction, the sale of, or traffic in children,
- c) to secure the recognition in Contracting States of adoptions made in accordance with the Convention (*Hague Convention*, 1993).

In December 1998, Australia ratified the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. The Attorney-General, Daryl Williams, said at the time:

The Convention establishes uniform standards and procedures between countries, including legally binding standards and safeguards, a system of supervision to ensure that these are observed, and channels of communication between authorities in countries of origin and countries of destination for children being adopted. (Williams, 1998)

The Hague Convention was implemented in Australia by the *Family Law Act 1975* and the Family Law (Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption) Regulations 1998 (Australian Government Attorney-General's Department, 2009). The Principal Central Authority for the Convention in Australia is the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department. It is the role of the Attorney-General's Department to report to the Hague Conference on Private International Law on how Australia is adhering to the policy. Under the Convention, each

Australian state and territory has established its own Central Authority that reports back to the Attorney-General's Department or Principal Central Authority (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2005, p. 11). This role is normally filled by the Human Services Department in each jurisdiction and in NSW, the Central Authority for intercountry adoption is the Department of Community Services (DoCS). Participants in this study were asked to comment on their impressions of the Hague Convention in relation to intercountry adoption in Australia and these results are reported in Chapter Seven.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2005, p. 6) the increase in the number of intercountry adoptions in Australia in the early part of the twenty-first century is linked to the ratification by Australia of the *Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption*. This resulted in a streamlining of the process for intercountry adoptions and the signing of a bilateral agreement with China in 1999. Currently 37 percent of Australian intercountry adoptions are classified as 'Hague adoptions'. This means the children come from countries, which have ratified or acceded to the Convention before a child's file is sent overseas (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 71), and are party to the Hague Convention, an increase from nine percent in 2001-02 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2002, 2009). The remaining 63 percent are 'non-Hague adoptions', which are arranged with countries with which Australia has a bilateral or other agreement and which had not ratified or acceded to the Convention before the applicants file went overseas. 'Non-Hague adoptions' include adoptions from Taiwan, Thailand, Ethiopia and South Korea (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 71).

Indigenous issues and adoption

Intercountry adoption in Australia occurs against a backdrop of the removal of thousands of Aboriginal children from their families. Pringle describes the 'horror and shame' associated with the 'stolen children' and the fact that 'there have been calls to abolish [adoption] it entirely as a policy option' in Australia (2004, p. 225). Like the separation of Aboriginal children from their families and culture, intercountry adoption also involves separating children from their birth families and traditional way of life.

For much of the twentieth century Aboriginal children were removed systematically from their families in order to promote assimilation into white Australian society. This was achieved through government legislation, which aimed to 'protect' Aboriginals and was

implemented by each state and the Northern Territory by the Aborigines Protection Board or Chief Protector of Aboriginal People. Between 1915 and 1940 these Boards could remove Aboriginal children without parental consent and with no formal court hearing (Chisholm, 1985). Aboriginal children were not removed because of proven abuse or neglect, but on the basis of skin colour (Parkinson, 2003, p. 165). It was assumed that the lighter-skinned children or 'half castes' would be more easily integrated into white society if they were removed from their families and raised in dormitory style children's homes, or in white families (Walker, 1994, p. 32).

The intervention by the Aboriginal Protection Boards into Aboriginal family life was, no doubt, designed to serve the interests of the children as seen by the Board. The Board's reflection of the children's interests, however, reflected societal views towards Aboriginals as a dying race (Chisholm, 1985). Although the 'protection' policy changed after the 1940s, there were still large numbers of Aboriginal children removed from their families, but this removal occurred under general child welfare laws rather than legislation directly targeting Aboriginals. Parkinson (2003, p. 165) notes how the child welfare legislation affected Aboriginal families differently to others in the community. As Aboriginal people had no access to social security entitlements until 1966, they were unable to access the social support available to other non-Indigenous families, which had an impact on their ability to keep Aboriginal families together (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997, p. 33).

As a result of child welfare intervention in Aboriginal communities, adoption is 'a particularly sensitive issue for Aboriginal people' (Parkinson, 2003, p. 165). The way Aboriginal people were treated by previous governments during the Stolen Generations, is also highly political. In the latest adoption statistics, only four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were adopted and these children were adopted into Indigenous families. Over the past 17 years, only 96 Indigenous children have been adopted into Aboriginal and other Australian families. Of these 96 children, 53 were adopted by 'Indigenous Australians' and the remaining 43 were adopted by 'other Australians'.⁵ This low number reflects the reluctance of Indigenous Australians to use adoption as a method of caring for

⁵ Adoptive parents are included in the 'Indigenous Australian' category when at least one of the parents identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Where the indigenous status of the parents was not known, the adoption was included in the 'Other Australian' category (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p 25).

children who are unable to remain living with birth families or in Indigenous communities (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 25).

During the period from 1910 to 1970 when Aboriginal children were removed from their families, Australia was a country in need of population growth. The ‘White Australia’ policy was the approach taken by Australian governments from federation in 1901 until the late 1960s. This policy had its origins in the 1850s when miners resented the work methods of the industrious Chinese on the Australian goldfields, leading to violence between groups in the community. Tensions also flared in Queensland when hard-working Pacific Islanders were seen as threatening the jobs of Australian workers. These ‘challenges’ to Australian jobs and way of life reinforced the importance of accepting only white European migrants into Australia (National Communications Branch & Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2007b). As Browne notes ‘Australia needed people, and people of a particular kind – preferably Australian-born, but failing this, of British stock, and failing this, of white European origin’ (1979, p. 5).

At the end of World War II, Australia experienced labour shortages and there were concerns about the need for population growth in order to sustain the future economic growth of the country (National Communications Branch & Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2007a). Until then, there had been opposition towards accepting non-European migrants into the country. In 1949, however, the Minister for Immigration, Harold Holt under a Liberal Country Party Coalition, allowed 800 non-refugees to stay in Australia. This represented the first step towards a non-discriminatory immigration policy and in 1957, non-Europeans who had lived in Australia for a minimum of 15 years were allowed to become Australian citizens.

In March 1966, it was announced that Australia would accept migration applications from well-qualified people who were judged as suitable applicants, able to integrate into Australian society with useful qualifications for the nation. This announcement heralded the end of the ‘White Australia’ policy and the beginnings of non-European migration in Australia. In 1973, the Whitlam Labor Government removed race as a discriminatory factor in Australia’s immigration policy and currently applications are received from people from any country regardless of ethnicity, culture, religion or language, as long as they meet the criteria set out in Australia’s immigration law (National Communications Branch & Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2007b).

Policies that promoted assimilation and integration of Aboriginals into white Australian society were dominant when the 'White Australia' policy was in place. White policy makers believed they were acting in the best interests of Aboriginal children but over time, Indigenous Australians would tell their own stories of the devastation and destruction caused by such policies. Walker notes:

Literally thousands of Aboriginal adults live with the trauma caused by these removal policies. Many of the mothers and fathers who had their children taken away are guilt and grief stricken. Their children are traumatised by the thought that they were unwanted. Identity conflicts rage in these children – now adults who have lived most of their lives as non-Aboriginal people. (1994, p. 32)

The 'Bringing Them Home Report' (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997) documented the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were taken from their families and culture, and raised in white families. Much of the report involves people who were removed from their families telling their personal stories of removal. In the foreword to a book about the 'stolen children', Sir Ronald Wilson, a member of the committee who wrote 'Bringing Them Home' said:

The National Inquiry disclosed that many of our fellow Australians are still suffering from the wounds inflicted by past laws, practices and policies which, notwithstanding that they may have been devised with the best will in the world, were ill-conceived and led to gross violations of human rights.

It is not too late for the nation to gain release from the burden of this shameful part of its history. (Bird, 1998)

When Kevin Rudd became Australian Prime Minister in 2007, he promised to say 'sorry' to Indigenous Australians for the hardships they endured during the Stolen Generations. The previous Prime Minister, John Howard, had refused during his eleven years in office to commit his Liberal and National Party Coalition Government to an apology.

Mr Rudd acknowledged in this apology the past wrongs inflicted on Aboriginal Australians by white Australians. He recognised the implications of the social policies of earlier times and the resulting family break ups where children were separated from close relatives and brought up in a different culture. According to the Prime Minister's speech in February 2008:

...We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry. (The Australian Newspaper, 2008)

I believe there are some similarities between the child welfare practices that resulted in the removal of Aboriginal children, and intercountry adoption. Aboriginal children were removed from their families and culture, as is the case when overseas children are brought to Australia for adoption. While the intercountry adoptees are not forcibly removed, except in cases of child trafficking, the result is the same - separation from family members and removal to a foreign culture.

The link between these issues was raised spontaneously by participants in the study. It is noteworthy that the interviews with adoption professionals and adoptive parents were conducted in late February 2008, only weeks after the Prime Minister delivered his 'Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples' address. This may have contributed to indigenous issues being 'top of mind' among participants and while I do not believe my personal opinions about these issues influenced my analysis, it became an area of interest and worthy of further exploration because it had been both noted by Pringle (2004) in the literature and raised spontaneously by participants in the study.

Of interest was how participants rationalised their choice of intercountry adoption against the backdrop of discussions about the Stolen Generations and the removal of Aboriginal children. While some recognised there could be an argument linking the removal of Aboriginal children and children adopted from overseas, most discounted this link because in their own minds the children they adopted were not stolen but given up freely for adoption and the social circumstances of sending countries today was seen as vastly different to Australia in the 1950s and 1960s.

For professionals the link between intercountry adoption and earlier Aboriginal child welfare policies was more clearly articulated. This may have arisen because of the group's broader understanding of social policy, a greater knowledge of the issues involved and a lack of personal or emotional involvement in the practice of intercountry adoption.

Many Australians supported saying 'sorry' to Aboriginal Australians and indeed Kevin Rudd found it so significant that the 'sorry' ceremony was held before the first parliamentary sitting of his new Labor Government. Widespread recognition of the detrimental consequences of removing large numbers of Indigenous children exists alongside a level of acceptance in the Australian community for the practice of intercountry adoption. At the time, authorities are quoted as believing that the removal of Aboriginal children from their parents was the best option for the children who would benefit from being brought up in white households. Although the majority of children from overseas are not taken from their parents, the belief exists that children will be better off in a developed country with access to education, greater opportunities and to family life. Thus, although the context is different, I think it is possible to see that similarities exist between intercountry adoption and the Stolen Generations.

The apology to Aboriginal Australians also recognises the power of biological bonds that existed between Aboriginal children and their families. These themes have been explored by Aboriginal people who discuss the difficulties the Indigenous Australians face in tracing biological families, as well as the problems experienced as a result of growing up in a non-Aboriginal family (Committee of the Sixth Australian Conference on Adoption, 1977). These discussions suggest that the new bonds formed via adoption or fostering into white families were not as strong as the biological bonds which were broken by the removal from their families (Committee of the Sixth Australian Conference on Adoption, 1977).

When some adult intercountry adoptees living in Australia tell their stories, they describe similar feelings to those described by Indigenous Australians. Intercountry adoptees have written about feelings of loss and identity dilemmas as a result of growing up with a different family in a foreign culture (Armstrong & Slaytor, 2001). Given the context of the Stolen Generations, it is interesting that there is little commentary in the Australian community comparing the two child welfare practices. The practice of intercountry adoption appears to be legitimised because of the orphaned or abandoned status of the children involved. Opponents in the literature on intercountry adoption debate how the practice assumes the superiority of a white culture over others (Gailey, 2000; Melone, 1976; Saclier, 2000). There is also little discussion in Australia about the social context in the overseas countries that results in children becoming abandoned, including issues such as poverty, homelessness and inadequate social provision for families.

Gehrmann writes ‘Despite the fact that children relinquished in the intercountry adoption program are clearly not ‘stolen’, connections between the Stolen Generation and intercountry adoption continue to be made, with racist world views that focus on a child’s pigmentation being the only possible link’ (2005, p. 16). This opinion does not recognise the reality of some intercountry adoptions in which children have been stolen from their families, rather than orphaned or willingly relinquished to authorities. A recent Australian book by Julia Rollings documents how two of her children were taken from their mother and sold by their father to become intercountry adoptees from India (2008). News reports and magazine articles also discuss similar stories of children kidnapped from their families and sold to orphanages for intercountry adoption (Callinan, 2008; Russell, 2009; Ryan & Parnell, 2008). While clearly not all children are stolen, evidence exists that some children are kidnapped from their families, which is a similarity with children from the Stolen Generations.

I believe, however, that the comparison between the Stolen Generation and intercountry adoption goes deeper. I disagree with Gerhmann’s opinion that comparisons between Aboriginal and intercountry adoptees are based on racist views (2005). Aboriginal children were removed in the belief that they would be better off living in a white family or institution run by white people, in the same way that people believe that children from overseas will be happier living with a family in Australia. Both practices result in a child’s removal from their family and culture. Like Indigenous Australians, abandoned children are not responsible for their circumstances. They cannot help living in poverty and their families have few options to care for them. Gehrmann (2005) asserts that comparisons between intercountry adoption and the Stolen Generations continue to be made and yet, I have found few scholarly articles connecting the two practices.

Stories of the Stolen Generations are a reminder of what could happen to children removed from their families and cultural heritage through intercountry adoption. There are several generations of Indigenous people in Australia who experienced removal from their families with devastating consequences. While the removal of Aboriginal children was on a larger scale, the powerful stories these people tell should not be forgotten, but provide points of reflection for further discussion on intercountry adoption.

Contemporary issues in Australian adoption

The context for debate about intercountry adoption in Australia includes calls from politicians to increase our fertility rate, record numbers of children living in the care of state governments, concerns in relation to immigration policy and reviews of adoption legislation. In 2005, there was an inquiry by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services into overseas adoption in Australia and following the public consultation for this inquiry, calls were made for improvements to the process. Newspaper articles (Jameson, 2006; Maley, 2007; O'Dwyer, 2006; The Sun Herald, 2008) often appear about the practice, and forums occur on radio and television (Aedy, 2008; Barclay, 2008; Brockie, 2006; Murray, 2008; Sara, 2009). Thus, it is an issue that is topical and generates public interest in the Australian community.

Between 1977 and 1981, a Commonwealth/State Intercountry Adoption Committee met regularly to 'monitor arrangements and develop standards' in intercountry adoption (Joint Committee on Intercountry Adoption, 1986). With the production of guidelines outlining standard procedures for intercountry adoption, the Committee lapsed in 1982, as it was believed that it had fulfilled its role. In 1983, after much preliminary work, the guidelines were adopted by the Council of Social Welfare Ministers (Joint Committee on Intercountry Adoption, 1986).

In 1985, the Council of Social Welfare Ministers once again expressed concern about the intercountry adoption program. The Council resolved to:

Seek the agreement of the Commonwealth Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs to establish a Joint Committee to determine strategies for the effective and efficient management of intercountry adoption services, with a view to enhancing a coordinated Commonwealth, State and Territory approach to the service. (1986)

In October 1986, the final report was submitted to the Council. The document titled 'The Report to the Council of Social Welfare Ministers and the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs of the Joint Committee on Intercountry Adoption together with the Ministerial Response to the Report' (referred to as the Joint Committee Report) outlined the then-current situation in Australian intercountry adoption and made proposals for the future conduct of the programme. The report recommended a coordinated state and federal approach to intercountry adoption and the establishment of principles and procedures to guide its practice.

The Joint Committee on Intercountry Adoption recognised the need for improvement in Australian intercountry adoption policy. The resulting policy reacted to the situation then and provided some useful guidelines for practice. The report neglected, however, to consider the long-term implications of Australia's involvement in intercountry adoption. The Committee did not address the philosophical basis of Australia's involvement in intercountry adoption and showed little appreciation of the broader social issues surrounding the policy area (Young, 1988).

In November 2005, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services released 'Overseas Adoption in Australia', a report on the inquiry into adoption of children from overseas. The inquiry was conducted 'after reviewing the 2003-2004 Annual Report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare' (AIHW) (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2005, p. Foreword). The role of the AIHW is to collect and publish national data on adoptions, and the organisation is funded by the community services department in each state and territory.

It is unclear from reading the report, which aspects of the AIHW report led to the establishment of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Human Services. When contacted, the AIHW was also unclear about the motivations for the inquiry. Attempts to interview the Chairman of the Inquiry, Bronwyn Bishop, in order to clarify the background factors and motivations behind the inquiry were unsuccessful. I therefore presume that the inquiry was politically motivated. Certainly, the way in which the results were reported, as well as anecdotal evidence from participants in my study who presented evidence at the hearings, suggests that the inquiry was motivated by more than the AIHW annual report. Perhaps constituents waiting to adopt had complained to the government about the process or government members had an interest in promoting 'family values'. As I received no replies to my communication, I can only imagine these were the reasons behind its existence.

The Standing Committee on Family and Human Services received 274 submissions and took evidence from 100 witnesses in 12 hearings conducted around Australia. The Committee's terms of reference were to 'inquire into and report on how the Australian Government can better assist Australians who are adopting or have adopted children from overseas countries (intercountry placement adoptions) with particular reference to:

- any inconsistencies between state and territory approval processes for overseas adoptions; and
- any inconsistencies between the benefits and entitlements provided to families with their own birth children and those provided to families who have adopted children from overseas'. (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2005)

In Chapter Three of the report, reference is made to the assessment process for prospective adoptive parents wanting to adopt a child from overseas. Adoptive parents are described as having to meet two types of eligibility criteria – qualitative and quantitative criteria. The qualitative assessment involves an assessment by professionals into the suitability of the applicants to adopt a child from overseas. The assessment usually involves a visit to the applicant's home and interviews cover a range of topics including: personal characteristics, parenting skills, family relationships and financial circumstances. The requirements are generally outlined in each state and territory's adoption legislation and regulations (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2005, p. 44).

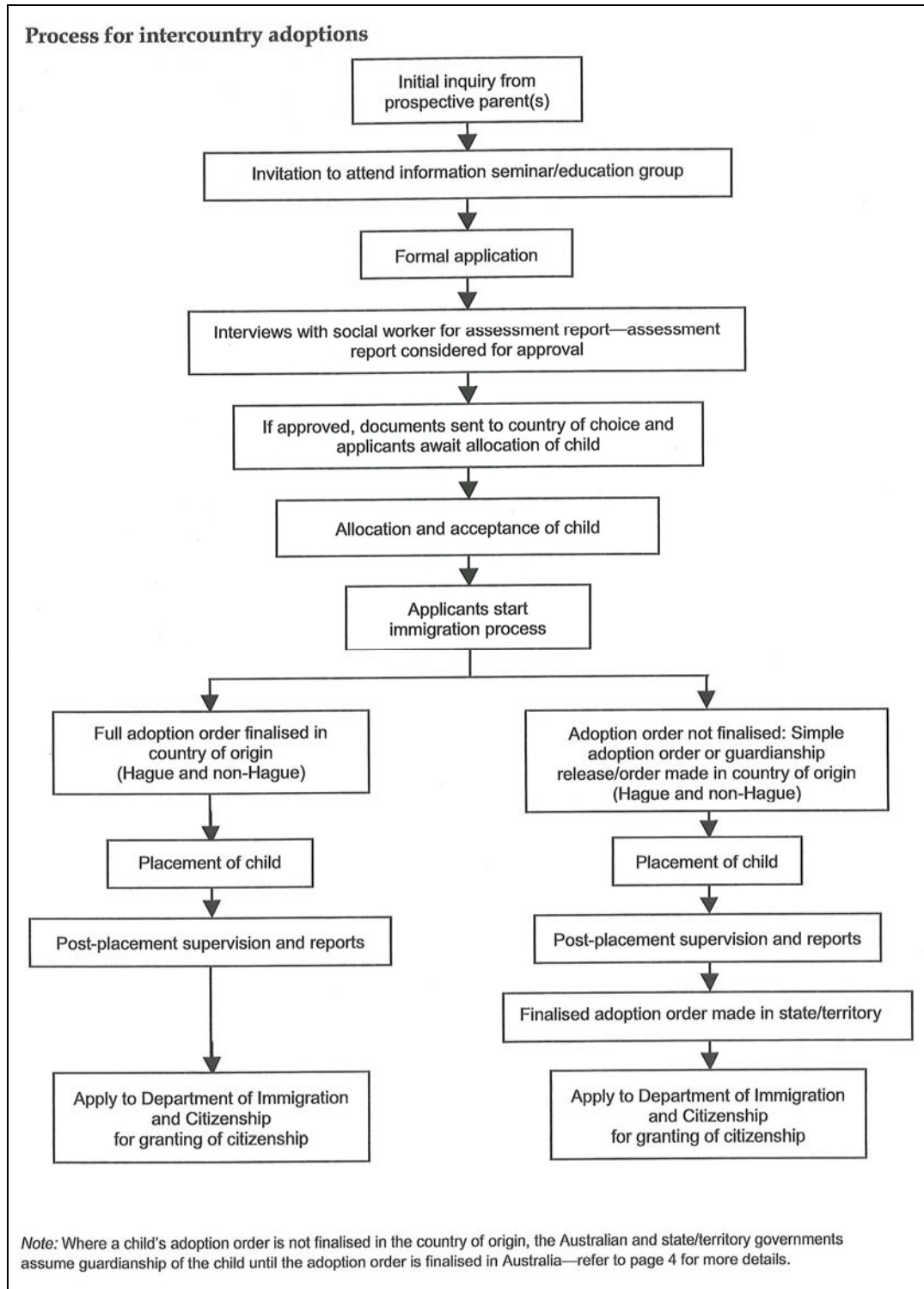
Although adoption legislation differs around Australia, the general process is relatively similar across Australian jurisdictions (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009, p. 3) (Figure 3.10). As my qualitative study involved participants who went through the process in NSW, it seems relevant to outline the specific process for applicants in NSW. The process for intercountry adoptions in NSW begins with an initial enquiry from prospective adoptive parents. Prospective parents complete an expression of interest form for the Department of Community Services (DoCS) and they are invited to attend an information seminar. At the conclusion of the seminar, prospective adopters receive a formal application that they complete and return to DoCS.

After receiving the application, DoCS invite prospective adoptive parents to begin the interview process with a Contracted Adoption Assessor (CAA) who is either a social worker or psychologist. At the conclusion of the interview process, the CAA writes an assessment report, which is considered for approval by the Department of Community Services. If successful, the applicant(s) documents are sent to the country of choice and applicants wait for the allocation of a child.

The process differs a little depending on the country in which the Adoption Order is finalised – that is, whether the Adoption Order is finalised in the child's country of origin or in Australia. If the Adoption Order is finalised in the country of origin this occurs prior to the placement of the child in Australia. Once the child is living in Australia, DoCS

provide post-placement supervision and write progress reports. An application is made to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to grant Australian citizenship to the intercountry adoptee.

Figure 3.10 Intercountry adoption process



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Adoptions Australia 2007-08, p 5.

If the Adoption Order is not finalised in the country of origin then the child comes to Australia with a simple adoption order or guardianship release order made in the country of origin. The child is placed with the Australian family, DoCS makes a number of post-placement visits and then writes a post-placement report. After finalising the Adoption Order, an application can be made to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to grant the child Australian citizenship (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2005, p. 12).

The qualitative aspect of the intercountry adoption process and how the state manages this area of family policy, is that which I am examining in this study. Other than briefly mention this aspect the inquiry focused on the quantitative aspects of the approval process, highlighting the differences and inconsistencies between different states and territories in Australia. The inquiry concluded that ‘there is considerable variation between the jurisdictions in their minimum criteria’ (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2005, p. 52).

States and territories differed in terms of criteria in relation to age, marital status, eligibility of same-sex couples to adopt, length of relationship, family restrictions, whether ongoing infertility treatment is allowed, if pregnant applicants are allowed to participate in the process and citizenship requirements (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2005, pp. 50-51). The inquiry found that eligibility criteria for adoptive parents vary across Australia. The legislation differs as does the criteria for adoption in each state and territory. Overseas countries also differ in relation to the criteria that applicants must fulfil in order to become adoptive parents.

The Commonwealth Government responded to the inquiry into overseas adoption in Australia. In the introductory comments, the Commonwealth Government says that the recommendations from the inquiry ‘create a blueprint for systematic change in the way the adoption of children from overseas are handled’ (The Attorney-General's Department, 2006, p. 1).

One of the most significant results of the Commonwealth Government’s response is that it has accepted the recommendation for the Commonwealth to enter into negotiations to have an enhanced role in overseas adoption. This entailed renegotiation of the Commonwealth – State Agreement for the Implementation of the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect on Intercountry Adoption (‘the Commonwealth–State

Agreement') with the states and territories. After significant negotiations with the State and Territory Governments this was achieved in July 2008 (The Attorney-General's Department, 2006, p. 2).

Recommendation 3 from the House of Representatives Standing Committee's report relates to the assessment process. Recommendation 3 (paragraph 3.43) states:

In renegotiating the Commonwealth-State Agreement, the Commonwealth shall ensure a greater harmonisation of laws, fees and assessment practices, including:

- more general, principle-based criteria in legislation
- more robust, transparent and documented practices; and
- standardised assessments across the jurisdictions.

These harmonisations should be developed in consultation with stakeholders such as adoption support groups, adopted children and adoptive parents. (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2005, p. 60)

Despite accepting the recommendation, the Commonwealth acknowledged the difficulties in meeting it; '... the Commonwealth cannot dictate outcomes as the operational aspects of overseas adoption will remain primarily a State and Territory Government responsibility (The Attorney-General's Department, 2006, p. 2). This acknowledgment hints at the complexities of a system, which has different layers of government with different levels and types of responsibilities.

Since the re-negotiation of the Commonwealth-State Agreement, the Australian Attorney-General's Department (AGD) has taken a more central role in intercountry adoption with the states and territories maintaining an operational role. This follows the fulfilment of one of the recommendations from the 'Overseas Adoption in Australia report' which sought that the Australian Government assume primary responsibility for the establishment and management of Australia's intercountry adoption programs (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2005, p. xx).

In its new role, the AGD has been involved in implementing many of the 27 recommendations from the 'Overseas Adoption in Australia report'. Study participants also discussed the following additional issues: the establishment of the National Peak Overseas Adoption Support Group, harmonisation of intercountry adoption policies and practices and aspects of opening new programs with other overseas countries. Discussion of these issues by participants in this research will be reported in Chapter Six.

On a state basis, New South Wales has undertaken a number of reviews of its intercountry adoption services (Department of Community Services, 2005b, 2006; KPMG, 2004b). I have been able to access some of the reports mentioned above, while others are not available because they were internal departmental documents, unavailable for public use. The fact that these reports are confidential suggests that the reports contain information of a sensitive and political nature. An inability to access these documents makes it difficult to understand the rationale for current intercountry adoption practices in NSW. These reports must, I imagine, provide a rationale for the current situation in which DoCS is seeking to outsource intercountry adoption services. I can only imagine that this is motivated as a cost-cutting measure, perhaps not initially but over the longer term, and a desire to get 'back to basics' and target local children with local problems.

Intercountry adoption services in NSW are currently regulated by the Department of Community Services (DoCS) and DoCS is the only organisation accredited to run intercountry adoption services in NSW. The NSW legislation does, however, allow other agencies to apply for accreditation to undertake intercountry adoption and allows organisations like Anglicare, Centacare and Barnardos, to arrange local adoptions.

NSW is currently seeking Expressions of Interest from charitable and not-for-profit organisations to provide intercountry adoption services. This is said to have come about due to a review of adoption services by the Department of Community Services in 2006, which I have not been able to access. According to the media release announcing the decision to seek an outside agency to run intercountry adoptions in NSW, the Acting Minister for Community Services David Borger said 'The review recommended that the Department outsource the management of intercountry adoptions to a non-government, not-for-profit organisation to allow the Department to focus its energy and time on finding stable and permanent homes for vulnerable children in foster care' (Borger, 2008). Expressions of Interest closed on 11 February 2009, and DoCS is still in the process of assessing the applications in order to choose a preferred agency. The preferred candidate will then be required to seek accreditation with the NSW Office for Children – the Children's Guardian in order to become eligible to provide intercountry adoption services in NSW.

The development of non-government or charitable agencies potentially providing intercountry adoption services in NSW is interesting on a number of levels. Participants in this study made comments in relation to outsourcing intercountry adoption services. Many

were of the opinion that DoCS as a service provider had a conflict of interest in its roles. By this, they meant that the department had a conflict of interest between providing services for local children versus providing services for children adopted from overseas. There was the additional dilemma of the department providing child protection services as well as child placement services, which will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Six.

On another level, the idea of outsourcing is also interesting because this method was tried and rejected in South Australia. The Australians Aiding Children Adoption Agency (AACAA) was approved to provide intercountry adoption services in the late 1980s between Australia and designated overseas countries. This included providing most of the casework services to applicants like assessment services of prospective adoptive parents, education, liaison with overseas authorities and the provision of post-placement supervision and post-placement reports (KPMG, 2004c, p. 3). The Adoption and Family Information Service (AFIS), (a section of the Department of Families and Communities in South Australia which is the equivalent of DoCS in NSW) retains the role of Central Authority and has the ultimate responsibility for approval or non-approval of applicants. AFIS maintained responsibility for the long term accountability of the program (KPMG, 2004c, pp. 2-3)

A review of intercountry adoptions and post-adoption services was conducted in South Australia in 2004 (KPMG, 2004c), together with a second report commissioned by consultants KPMG (2004a). Although neither report recommended terminating the services of AACAA directly, they did make many recommendations to improve service delivery. There had, however, been a serious allegation made against the agency which criticised its professional practice and judgment and there were suggestions that AACAA had acted improperly (KPMG, 2004a, pp. 1-2). Based on the information contained in both reports (KPMG, 2004a, 2004c), plus confidential information available on the specific case, the South Australian Government decided to in-source intercountry adoption services through the Department of Families and Communities and AFIS has been providing all intercountry adoption services since that time.

It will be interesting to see the outcomes of the tendering process in NSW for organisations selected to undertake intercountry adoption services in this state. Based on the experience of South Australia, however, it would seem important to ensure that the organisation is well monitored and mentored by DoCS in order to achieve a service that is ethical,

provides a high quality service with clear accountabilities and service performance mechanisms.

Conclusion

In earlier times, if people were unable to have children many decided it was 'god's will' and accepted their childlessness. Today with the advent of new technologies, people are given the option to keep trying to have biological children, or if they find themselves without a partner, the new technologies also allow another route to parenthood. This chapter has analysed written sources in relation to the Australian family and intercountry adoption in Australia and shown the diversity of family patterns which exist. What is needed to add more depth to this story are accounts of the personal experiences and reflections of individuals who do not accept childlessness, but instead look for alternative pathways to parenthood. When the new technologies fail, adoption and intercountry adoption are often the last chance for adults to have a family with children. The next chapter outlines my findings in relation to individual motivations for intercountry adoption, bringing personal experiences into the discussion.

4

Why choose to form a family through intercountry adoption?

Carl is a prospective adoptive parent living in NSW. He described how important a family is to him.

I guess for us it's the nurturing thing and seeing a child grow and sharing yourself with them and contributing to their life and upbringing. And obviously getting feedback which is obviously a positive thing for us. I think it is a natural instinct to nurture and sharing and helping someone grow. (Carl, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

My research findings are based on 60 in-depth interviews conducted with current adoptive parents and prospective adoptive parents like Carl, living in NSW. Adoption professionals and support group representatives around Australia were also interviewed during the study. In this chapter, I discuss what participants told me about the factors involved in forming their families through intercountry adoption. I also consider whether these factors differed between men and women.

Chapter Five continues the discussion of my research findings and examines similarities and differences between adoptive and biological families and looks at the significant relationships formed by intercountry adoptive families. Chapter Six discusses broader questions related to Australian intercountry adoption such as the role of the state in the provision of intercountry adoption services and Chapter Seven examines the global nature of intercountry adoption, examining the factors influencing its practice in Australia and around the world. Taken together, Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven combine to present a complete picture of my fieldwork results.

Reasons for choosing adoption

Giddens (1992), Beck (1995) and Beck-Gernsheim (2002; 1995) suggest that individuals make choices about the types of relationships they form and that these relationships of choice are not necessarily based purely on biological connections. They suggest that intimate relationships can be formed by people in many ways. The participants in this

study clearly made a choice to start familial relationships using intercountry adoption. For many, this was a response to infertility but a few were also motivated by humanitarian reasons. The single women in the study made the choice to adopt from overseas because they had no partner and wanted a family and others had formed new relationships and wanted the chance to share a child with their new partner. In order to understand families formed through intercountry adoption, it is important to consider the reasons behind the decision to adopt a child.

The need to have a child

Participants in this study were driven to form a family through intercountry adoption because of their need to have a child. For many this was considered a natural need and Theo described it as ‘a yearning to be a parent’. They saw having a child as an extension of their relationship if they were a couple and as a way of providing additional meaning in their lives.

Andrea described parenting as the ‘ultimate project’:

Well it's not a project, but we have done so many things together. I think if you can raise a happy child that is one of the best things in life you can do. We could be really rich and money is not necessarily going to make us happy. We are very quiet in life and it's family and friends and relationships where you get life satisfaction from. I don't care if I was a neurosurgeon and we had a mansion or whatever, I still think that longing would be there. I looked at studying, I looked at travelling, lots of other things, and trying to find what was really important to me, and this was something I really wanted to do. (Andrea, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

John also commented on the naturalness of having a child, and how parents put some of themselves into their children:

I think just having a child and passing onto a child your own experiences, watching them grow to take on a personality of themselves I suppose we're trying to create an alter ego for ourselves in a way. And also I suppose I won't use the word done thing, but at the same time it's something that's natural. It's a very natural thing to be a parent rather than not be a parent. (John, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Others described the need to have a child as being embedded in the human makeup. Stacey, an adoptive parent, described this need as ‘a primal urge’ and Theo saw it as ‘something that's inbred in human nature’. Likewise, Natalie expressed the need to parent in terms of maternal instinct:

I think it has a lot to do with maternal instinct, but not consciously. It wasn't that I thought ok I'm getting older and I'm not in a relationship that kind of thing, it was just a very

gradual kind of thinking that I want to be a mum. (Natalie, Single Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Many participants acknowledged that having children is a societal norm, which seems to follow inevitably after marriage. The following quotations highlight this idea:

But in our mind, at that time, getting married meant that we wanted to have children and that was a society sort of thing...We had all these financial objectives and career objectives but they were nothing without the children in the picture. They just – you know – they sort of became pretty shallow and hollow without it. (Stacey, Adoptive Parent)

The reason that people become couples is the idea that okay we become a couple, then we will raise a child. (Theo, Support Group Representative)

Also associated with the need to parent was recognition by participants that their own need could simultaneously meet the needs of a child. Cassie, an adoptive professional, described her understanding of the motivations displayed by adoptive parents with whom she works:

Well, acknowledging that this is largely for my own needs. And I obviously will be meeting the child's needs too, but it can never be seen as a totally altruistic thing. I think you're fooling yourself if you think you're not going to get something out of it yourself. (Cassie, Adoption Professional)

Thus, participants in the study reflected the thinking of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim who noted that 'Having a child, looking after it and providing for it can give life new meaning and significance, can in fact become the very core of one's private existence' (1995, p. 107). The inability to have a child and not experience the joy they bring was the prime motivating force behind participants looking at alternatives, like adoption, as a means of making their family.

Infertility

The majority of couples in this study chose intercountry adoption to form their family because fertility issues meant they were unable to have biological children. Many other studies have also found infertility to be the most common reason leading to a decision to adopt from overseas (Berry, Barth & Needell, 1996; Hoksbergen, 2000; Hollingsworth, 2000; Tizard, 1978). As Rachel, an adoption professional, explained:

It's a fair proportion where intercountry adoption is their last chance to become parents, their only opportunity. (Rachel, Adoption Professional)

Many, but not all couples in the study, having established their infertility, then looked for other alternatives to form their family. For many this meant pursuing fertility treatments like IVF:

I guess most people go through that logical course – try to have kids naturally, maybe go through some programs, maybe IVF, whatever. I feel that is kind of the logical thing and then come to somewhere in their life where they say it's not going to happen and then make this decision. (Stefan, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Not all couples in the study who were infertile made the decision to pursue IVF. Many did, but not all. For those who chose IVF, many said they attempted multiple cycles of IVF because they were driven by the need for a child.

I guess once we started, we were so determined to become parents that I think we had our blinkers on to other ways of becoming parents. It wasn't until we realised there was no way that we were – we were going to achieve a pregnancy ourselves that we considered adoption. (Karen, Adoptive Parent)

Pursuing IVF treatments was described as demanding both physically and emotionally on both partners, but particularly for women whose bodies were undergoing treatment. Many in the study had multiple attempts at IVF over many years before deciding they needed to look for another alternative. IVF was described as being hard on relationships and expensive. It was also described as confronting when unsuccessful, especially in terms of dealing with the loss of the idea of having your own child. These findings are similar to those described by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, p. 122) and Aaron expressed this opinion below:

She was the one that had to put herself through what was I think, certainly in retrospect, you know, a very difficult physical experience as well as an emotional experience of having to – to go through that. (Aaron, Adoptive Parent)

One participant, who was reluctant to use IVF, tried it in the end because she felt the social pressure of the medical profession, as well as the expectation of others. Andrea explained:

We were quite reluctant with IVF, we really kind of feel pushed into it by the doctors a bit...I regret the IVF a little bit, I guess we gave it a go on one hand. On the other hand it was expensive and I feel I kind of wasted a fair bit of time... Everyone that I said to that I'm adopting it's like, have you tried IVF? (Andrea, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

One couple who decided not to pursue IVF chose this option because they were concerned about the long-term consequences of the procedure. Stefan noted:

We have certainly seen success with it but we felt that you just don't know if in 20 years time, people are going to find that it has caused cancer. So it was just unknown from a medical point of view in the long term. (Stefan, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

It was interesting that even though logically people knew that the success rate with IVF was relatively low and declined with age, emotionally, a few still believed it was a fall-back position which could work for them. Despite the media highlighting the limited success rate of IVF, some still believed that if they found themselves infertile that IVF could be used to produce a baby. Diane explained:

I think the way IVF is sold to you, how it's been sold to us as a generation, you always think you have that to fall back on – when you're in the IVF thing, and once you are in a certain age group, it's probably not practical or perhaps not going to work as well as you thought it would. (Diane, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

While some in the study had become pregnant using IVF, none had carried a child to term and therefore had pursued the option of intercountry adoption in order to build their family.

And I think the success rate perhaps isn't as high as they think, so they think it would be easier and perhaps better for them to adopt a child who needs them rather than go through all this pain and then perhaps not have a child at the end. (Theresa, Adoption Professional)

IVF was chosen by many in the study, as their first response to infertility, but this was not always the case as outlined by Jane:

The majority of them have been through IVF and it hasn't worked for them. We have a very small number who have chosen not to go through IVF when they found out they're infertile. (Jane, Adoption Professional)

Some participants did not take the path of IVF, and instead proceeded directly to adoption:

We decided that we wanted children, we couldn't have them so we were going to adopt. The big decision was to adopt and then it was more finding where we could adopt from. (Ken, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

While writers like Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, pp. 121-127) briefly discuss the impact of infertility on individuals, they do not consider alternative options for infertile adults when fertility treatments fail. My results showed that there are a variety of ways people cope with infertility and that intercountry adoption is one option that still allows them access to parenthood. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) leave the reader with the impression that once technology has failed, then having a child is no longer possible. This study takes a step further and describes how intercountry adoption can be another option that allows individuals to fulfil their desire for a family.

For participants who were part of a couple, infertility seemed to be the biggest reason for pursuing intercountry adoption. Not being in a steady relationship was the biggest factor why single people adopted from overseas in my study. For some, infertility was caused by medical problems and others experienced unexplained infertility. Some people with unexplained infertility needed to try to understand the reasons for their problem, while for others like Andrea, knowing the cause of the infertility was less important:

They don't know what our issue is. Initially we were both kind of, well, we want to know, what's the problem? We both kind of feel now that we don't really need to know, we don't really care if it's my fault or his fault, we as a couple can't have a child. (Andrea, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Infertility was also cited as the reason for adopting from overseas because of a number of other reasons including, partnering later in life and delaying childbirth. For some this was a result of second marriages and for others the establishment of a career had come before thoughts of childbirth. This is in keeping with more general trends in the community in relation to mothers having their first child at an older age, having completed education and establishing a career. Diane explained:

I had always wanted children, but Russell and I didn't get married until we were in our late thirties. I think I'm one of the first waves of women who probably just left it too late really. (Diane, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Theresa, an adoption professional, concurred with this sentiment:

Often they've left it until a bit later because they've had a career first, or they've perhaps married a little later, and realised that having a child isn't that easy. (Theresa, Adoption Professional)

Completing the family

Another reason given for forming a family through intercountry adoption was when couples experienced infertility after having biological children and used intercountry adoption as a method of completing their family. This situation occurred when participants were keen to provide siblings for their children, as was the case with Max.

The main one was to have a second child. I didn't see it as a disadvantage for our biological daughter to be an only child, whereas my wife wanted to have a second child. (Max, Adoptive Parent)

Wanting siblings for an adopted child was also given as a reason for using intercountry adoption a second time in order to complete a family. As Diane explained:

I guess it is a bit easier because we have got Jonathan, so you don't have this awful want to have a child, but I really do want to have another child and for him to have a sibling and just enjoy them. (Diane, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

According to one adoption professional, a few people use intercountry adoption as a way of balancing their family with a child of a different sex. This was not mentioned by participants in this study but was made as an observation by a professional in the field. Jane said:

And then we have a small percentage of people who have children already and they want to complete their family through adoption. Sometimes it's because they have one sex of child in their family and you know – we've had several people who've had families of two or three boys and they've wanted a daughter to complete their family and they've chosen adoption for that. (Jane, Adoption Professional)

Four single people were interviewed in this study and the main reason they chose intercountry adoption was because they did not have a partner but still wanted a family. For these women like Natalie, the need to parent was greater than the need to produce biological children:

What was the crunch for me was when I went to the seminar and they were talking about adoptive parents versus birth parents and the need to be a parent. I found for me it was more important to be a mum than it was to give birth. (Natalie, Single Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Humanitarian reasons

It was mostly adoption professionals who mentioned that people were motivated to form intercountry adoptive families for altruistic reasons. Few participants described altruism as their main motivation. While adoption professionals believed that humanitarian motives played a role in the formation of intercountry adoptive families, they saw it as only a small role as is expressed below:

There is a small core that, however that is very minute, that is out of humanitarian reasons. (Richard, Adoption Professional)

Some people, the minority of people are motivated out of a desire to help a child in need. They've often grown up with that idea. They've always had in the back of their mind that they might do this one day. (Cassie, Adoption Professional)

There are some people that are motivated by altruism; they think that intercountry adoption will save a child. (Rachel, Adoption Professional)

While acknowledging that only a small proportion of people are motivated by humanitarian ideals, adoption professionals believed that private motivations for a family are far more powerful in choosing intercountry adoption than are humanitarian motives.

I think there's an element of altruism in it, that they think that they are rescuing a child who needs a family, where again, in reality, everybody's fighting for that child so they're not ... if they weren't doing it, somebody else would nab the child very quickly, so that's not an issue. (Danielle, Adoption Professional)

Harriet, a Support Group Representative, summed it up by saying:

Some people are interested in supporting children from other cultures who come from disadvantaged backgrounds who have no other means of, having a quality of life. So if their own country can't support them this is a way, I guess it's a humanitarian thing as well as, you know, contributing to your own family. (Harriet, Support Group Representative)

This interpretation of intercountry adoption as a reciprocal arrangement could explain Madonna's rationale for adding to her family.⁶ Madonna reportedly paid high amounts of money to the Malawian Government in order to enlarge her family. Those who think positively of Madonna's actions praise her altruism. Those opposing her actions decry her ability to use her position and privilege to adopt an overseas child.

Engel et al. comment that 'many families who adopt internationally do so out of an altruistic belief that they can offer a child more opportunities than their countries of origin' (2007, p. 267). My findings support this belief that Australian intercountry adoptive parents felt they could offer a child material possessions and a loving family in contrast to them living in an institution in their birth country. While Engel et al. (2007) believe that adoptive parents are mostly motivated by altruism, however, my findings suggest that although it may form part of their motivation, participants were largely driven by a personal desire for a child.

Religion

Religious beliefs were rarely mentioned as a reason for pursuing intercountry adoption, but it was noted that the incidence of people choosing intercountry adoption for religious reasons seemed to have increased. It was because of this perceived increase, that religion is mentioned as a motive for choosing intercountry adoption.

⁶ The pop star, Madonna, has adopted two children (David Banda and Chifundo 'Mercy' James) from the African nation of Malawi. Both of the adoptions were surrounded by controversy because although the children lived in an orphanage, they both had birth relatives living in Malawi.

We've had quite a few people who are now talking about what we loosely refer to as the God Squad. And the God Squad is a little bit concerning. I mean I'm talking more on a personal level it's concerning because they're wanting to adopt because God has spoken to them or their religion is saying they need to adopt... And the response was well, I'm doing it because of my religious beliefs. And there's concern amongst some of us that there's a sense of the 'saving the child' concept coming through. (Emily, Support Group Representative)

Adoption professionals also described preferential adoption as a reason why some chose intercountry adoption. While no participants in this study described their motivations in this way, preferential adopters were described as an emerging category of intercountry adoption by adoption professionals. This trend has previously been noted in the literature by others (Feigelman & Silverman, 1979). Hugh described the motivation of preferential adopters in this way:

The term it's often given, sometimes less than positively is preferential adopters. People who are choosing to adopt as a way of forming a family without necessarily even considering their own physical capacity to have biological children. (Hugh, Adoption Professional)

Explanations for choosing intercountry adoption

Participants were also asked why they chose intercountry adoption as a method of forming a family over other choices available such as fostering and local adoption. Building on their initial reasons for adopting, the major reason for choosing intercountry adoption was an inability to have biological children coupled with a desire to form a family.

We want to become families and that's why we are adopting from overseas. (Emily, Support Group Representative)

Forming a family through intercountry adoption was also seen by some, as an alternative if other options to have a family did not eventuate. As Aaron noted: 'Yeah, it was a fall-back position, absolutely'. This sentiment was said to be reinforced by some fertility clinics that were reported as presenting intercountry adoption in this way. According to Theo:

And what you regularly had was the fertility clinics saying, why don't you put your name down for an adoption as a fall back position? If this doesn't work then you've got that as another option to proceed. (Theo, Support Group Representative)

Fostering seen as impermanent and unpredictable

When asked why intercountry adoption was the preferred option over fostering, most participants responded that they believed that fostering was an impermanent arrangement, involving children with difficult backgrounds as well as contact with their birth parents. In

contrast, intercountry adoption was perceived as a method of creating permanent life-long bonds.

The argument then is that we want to become families and that's why we are adopting from overseas and that's different to caring for a child in the context of well, the caring can last a year, two years or maybe 10 years, but you're not really a family as such. (Emily, Support Group Representative)

Intertwined with this idea, was the notion that fostering does not allow entitlement to a child and prospective adopters were seeking a child to call their own. As Richard, an adoption professional explained:

Oh, it's a sense of ownership I think. And I don't think that we are explaining foster care well enough. (Richard, Adoption Professional)

Lara also highlighted the importance that adoptive parents feel about ownership and attachment to a child in the long-term as opposed to the short-term nature of providing foster care:

If you adopt from overseas, you kind of know that that child is not going to go anywhere. They're going to be with you. So, there's not only ownership but also the attachment and you know you form strong bonds. What happens with fostering if those bonds have to be broken? And that's very difficult for everybody concerned. (Lara, Adoption Professional)

Another disadvantage of fostering described by participants was the perception that foster children often came from disadvantaged backgrounds, which would mean difficulties for foster carers. This view was expressed well in the following quotes by Harriet and Stefan.

Yes, but I think there's a perceptual thing around that – that foster children come with a lot of baggage. And you know, there is likely to be family around that you'll have to probably deal with at some point or other. (Harriet, Support Group Representative)

So we took a view that the kind of key things were we didn't want to get foster children. We didn't want to get kids that had lots of problems, and fostering kids have come from drugs. (Stefan, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

It seems contradictory that intercountry adoptive parents are unwilling to take foster children with a known history and yet are prepared to take overseas children where there may be little information about their heritage. Lara suggested this stems from the strong desire for a child. Prospective adoptive parents therefore can pretend that there will not be problems even though professionals have described intercountry adoption as a 'lucky dip'. This contradiction is highlighted by Lara:

First of all, you may not know the background so you can pretend that there's nothing wrong. Possibly the Chinese adoptees you know nothing about their backgrounds so you can pretend that it's not there. Mostly with the local children needing families, there's a lot of information about the background so you can't pretend that there's nothing happening, there aren't any hereditary conditions or genetic predispositions towards mental illness or something else. (Lara, Adoption Professional)

Naomi highlighted another disadvantage of foster care. She described how parents have a greater desire for a baby or younger child, which may be available through intercountry adoption, rather than an older foster child who comes with memories of a different life. This echoes the thinking of early philosophers like John Locke, who believed that the mind is a blank slate at birth which can be written on by life experiences (Lowe, 1995). In terms of intercountry adoption, this idea relates to the notion that some parents believe they can have a greater influence over the development of a young baby rather than an older child. Recent research has shown (Verrier, 1993), however, that even very young children have memories they carry with them which originate even earlier than birth and can influence their behaviour.

I think, people want this little baby that can be moulded and they have the perception I think, maybe very subconsciously, that, you know, if you get a baby that it's got no memories. It's very different to getting an older child, which is usually the case with foster care. (Naomi, Support Group Representative)

Again, the contradiction between not wanting a foster child, but happily accepting a child with an unknown history from overseas is made clear. Naomi suggested that these issues may not initially be apparent, but may arise later in the child's development.

But I guess they forget though that intercountry adoption has all that too. It's just that it kind of arises in later years when the child's old enough to understand what's going on. So I think that whole blank slate mentality of, you know, if I get a child when it's a baby it's like a blank slate. I can create it, I can mould it, it can, you know, develop into who we are and what we want probably is what encourages people to adopt inter-racially. (Naomi, Support Group Representative)

Participants also interpreted the involvement of birth parents in the lives of foster families negatively. They were concerned about the possibility of conflict between birth parents and themselves and worried about the perceived lack of clarity about who had decision making control for the child. Some, like Justine were also wary of birth parents because of the stereotyped image as she explained:

It's not like an open adoption, which I'm quite in favour of in America. It's nothing like that in that you don't get a chance to develop a relationship with a parent anyhow. You don't ever get to speak to the parent; you never even see the parent. It's all done through

DoCS, which in some cases would be a great relief to you because you wouldn't want the parent to know where you live. (Justine, Single Adoptive Parent)

Another Adoptive parent, Miles also agreed that contact with birth parents was an undesirable aspect of foster parenting:

So you're forced to have contact or knowledge of the biological parents, I think many of the foster kids are older, so they've got a lot of history that they come with and we had one friend who I think has fostered two kids now and it just didn't sound like much fun at all (laughter). (Miles, Adoptive Parent)

Although all the single people in this study were either adoptive parents or prospective adoptive parents, they were of the opinion that fostering was more available to single people than intercountry adoption. This comment was made in light of the decision by China to cease allowing single people to adopt, and the lengthy waiting times that people experienced adopting from Ethiopia, the only other country accepting single Australian applicants. As Justine said:

I know a lot of singles who foster and that's become the default thing for singles now, permanent foster care. (Justine, Single Adoptive Parent)

While there was recognition among participants of the need for foster parents in Australia, intercountry adoption was certainly the preferred option.

I would say the department doesn't really promote intercountry adoption. It makes the service available but it doesn't promote it. I think they are trying very hard to promote foster care because we have so many kids and just no families for them. (Harriet, Support Group Representative)

Local adoption not considered an option

While some in the study had originally pursued local adoption, they were deterred after making an initial inquiry for a number of reasons. One of the most convincing arguments for not proceeding with local adoption was the overall lack of children available in Australia. As Harriet noted:

I think it's a national trend, there are very few local adoptions per year, you know, like a handful, so it's really not a viable avenue to pursue if people want to adopt. (Harriet, Support Group Representative)

There was also concern about the method in which adoptive parents are chosen by birth parents from a 'pool' of applicants. Some were concerned that their age would count against them as they felt that birth parents would be more inclined to choose younger parents for their child. Others, like David were critical of the method of selection by birth

parents. There was the feeling that while they could be successfully assessed for the pool, they may never be chosen as adoptive parents. This lack of certainty was a major deterrent to the consideration of local adoption as a method of family formation.

With all the best will in the world, you might think you're the best parents or could be the best parents, but it comes down a little bit to the marketing document and you could be sitting in a pool of people for I don't know, I honestly don't know how it's managed. We wanted a defined outcome. (David, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

As with foster parenting, a perceived disadvantage of local adoption was the possibility of birth parent involvement, given the current emphasis on open adoption. In open adoptions, contact with birth relatives is encouraged and some in the study felt this would be difficult to manage and make parenting more demanding. They also believed that children born overseas were in greater need of parents than were children born locally as Theresa, an adoption professional, explained:

I think one of the reasons that they choose intercountry rather than local is that the opportunities for birth parents to interfere aren't there with intercountry. But mostly, people go and choose intercountry because they see a need for adoptive parents for children from overseas much more strongly than they see the need for adoptive parents in Australia. (Theresa, Adoption Professional)

Intercountry adoption seen as predictable

Unlike fostering and local adoption, intercountry adoption was perceived as having a predictable outcome. Participants recognised that while the process may take time, in the end, they would receive a child. In a sense, they felt they were ensured a child as Malcolm observed:

At least we felt if we went into the overseas adoption pool - and it's an awful term but I think it's fairly accurate, that there was an outcome that would be in a reasonable time frame. I mean neither of us were getting any younger and ultimately there were certain time or age limits within the overseas adoption process that you need to meet in terms of qualifying as well. (Malcolm, Adoptive Parent)

This view was not reflected by adoption professionals, who held more realistic views about overseas adoption programmes. They discussed how programmes opened and closed as the needs of the countries changed. Examples were given of Korea, which had previously been a big source country for Australia and which in the last few years had scaled down its programme in order to focus on domestic adoption. There were other examples highlighted by professionals such as the impact of countries signing the Hague Convention and changing philosophies about the practice, which were believed to be influential on countries supplying children to Australia.

For adoption professionals therefore, there was not the same level of certainty expressed about applicants being able to adopt a child. This uncertainty is hinted at by Elizabeth who suggested that while a child may have been a certainty in the past, now with extended waiting times and countries opening and closing programmes, a child may not be a certainty in the future.

So, up until now at least, people who sent their paperwork to an overseas country, they knew that eventually, there is a baby. (Elizabeth, Adoption Professional)

Jane, another adoption professional also confirmed that while applicants believed they would ultimately get a child, this might not always be the case:

While we say to people our expectation is once they are approved and their file goes overseas, they should end up with a child. But there are no guarantees with that. I mean every so often for any number of reasons somebody's file falls down – you know somebody won't get the child that they so desperately wish for. (Jane, Adoption Professional)

The absence of birth parents was perceived positively in relation to intercountry adoption. Because children in some countries like China must be abandoned in order to be eligible for intercountry adoption, the chance of finding information about birth parents was rare. While some in the study were relieved by this, others wanted to learn as much as possible about the origins of their adopted child. These participants recognised the importance of such information for their child in the future. As Justine explained:

I wished I knew Hetty's birth mother and I would be very happy to have her involved in her life in some way. (Justine, Single Adoptive Parent)

Similarly, Harriet noted:

I personally would have liked to have been able to find out about family but yes, I have talked to some people who are relieved actually when there is no information about family because it's one less thing to have to manage, I suppose. (Harriet, Support Group Representative)

Factors influencing the decision to adopt from overseas

Participants identified a range of factors that influenced their decision to adopt a child from overseas. One factor that influenced many participants was the ethnic diversity found in the Australian community. There was the feeling that a child adopted from overseas would fit well into the community because of the varied racial mix found in Australia.

I think, there is a fairly big Asian population in Australia now and I don't think it's going to be nearly as nasty as it was 20, 30, 40 years ago. (Andrea, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Opposing this view, were those who expressed concern that despite an increase in the diversity of the Australian population that racism still existed. This was considered a problem for raising a child from a different ethnic background in Australia as Diane commented:

But I guess I'm always aware that Australia isn't as welcoming to people from another background as you would like them to be, so you worry a little bit for your child. There is only so much you can protect them from in terms of racism, and I've lived in the inner city and around Chinatown, and I've seen some shocking incidents myself of treatment from Anglo Saxon to Chinese people. (Diane, Prospective Adoptive Parents)

Another negative aspect of adopting from overseas was concern that some prospective adoptive parents saw intercountry adoption as an exotic experiment.

And some people are very attracted to the exotic nature of having a little black baby or interesting cultural influences in their family or that sort of thing. (Danielle, Adoption Professional)

Views of family and friends considered

While the majority of prospective adoptive participants did not express concerns about how their family and friends would react to the idea of having an intercountry adoptee in the family, some mentioned they had considered these relationships prior to the adoption. One adoption professional noted that this question was discussed during the assessment process, and stressed the importance that candidates consider the reaction of other family members to an intercountry adoption:

...their extended family's view of the adoption and whether it's going to cause any issues in terms of genealogy and Uncle Joe who was in the Second World War... and you know, racist attitudes that might be held and how to deal with that sort of thing. (Danielle, Adoption Professional)

Other participants acknowledged the need for considering the views of extended family members and the impact such views might have on the outcome of the overseas adoption.

There are some managing, you know, your extended family and their expectations and their thoughts and feelings about intercountry adoption. (Harriet, Support Group Representative)

Stefan described his concerns in the following way:

It's not an issue for us and our immediate friends but how are grandparents going to deal with it. We hadn't really thought that through. So how's the rest of our community I guess going to react. (Stefan, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Many described the support they had experienced from family and friends and how important this was to their ultimate decision to adopt. Natalie illustrated this by saying:

I feel this affinity for some reason, with adoption. I don't know any adopted people; I haven't had any close experience of it myself. It just for some reason, it just feels right. I feel that through the way that family and friends have been so supportive and the way the process has gone for me, it feels like it has confirmed that decision for me. (Natalie, Single Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Another influence on the decision to adopt from overseas was knowing other people who had chosen this way to form a family. Personal contact with other intercountry adoptive families instilled confidence in people to believe they could become intercountry adoptive parents. Miles explained:

We were made aware of an intercountry adoption weekend that they have and I really saw the connection between these kids and their parents, well adoptive parents and you know mummy, daddy, love you, all that sort of thing. And it was just a kind of a turning point, I think for me because before I was worried about all of that. (Miles, Adoptive Parent)

Meeting the overseas country requirements is essential

In order to adopt from overseas it is essential for prospective adoptive parents to be familiar with the requirements of the participating countries and to consider whether they meet these criteria. Some people may be excluded from adopting from certain countries, for example, because of their age, length of marriage requirement or special requirements regarding religion. Andrea and Max highlighted the importance of religion, and meeting the marriage requirements when adopting from overseas.

Not going to church has a big bearing on adopting children. (Andrea, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

But we decided to adopt and basically, because of our age and marital status, China was the only country that was an option because many have various restrictions regarding you know criteria, how long you have to be married and things like that. (Max, Adoptive Parent)

Another consideration for participants deciding to adopt from overseas was the age of the children available for intercountry adoption. Many felt very strongly they wanted to adopt a baby or younger child rather than an older child who was perceived as having a past that could have a negative impact on the adoptive family. As Carl explained:

She more or less said you'd get a toddler or a child of about six months. That was significant and so Korea was one of the best programmes where you got the child early. (Carl, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Others were also influenced by where the child had lived prior to intercountry adoption. Participants believed foster care had a number of advantages over institutionalised care. They believed that foster care indicated that a child was able to develop a close relationship with a carer rather than institutionalised care, which did not promote this kind of attachment. Thus, many saw foster care as more advantageous but if they could only adopt from China and the child was from an orphanage then they accepted this too because it was the only way they would become a parent. Both Stacey and Aaron described the benefits of foster care prior to adoption in this way:

I also thought the foster care programme would assist us in reducing the number of attachment and social problems that might occur from their early times in care. (Stacey, Adoptive Parent)

Also in China, we knew that they were more likely to be in a large institutional setting rather than in a foster care, whereas in Korea we knew that they'd be in a single foster care home, like with a foster mother. So they'd probably have a more secure attachment with a single caregiver than in China where they may be in a foster care situation or they may be in a larger kind of institutional setting with multiple caregivers. (Aaron, Adoptive Parent)

Another aspect of intercountry adoption which influenced decision-making was the practicalities of the overseas programme in terms of how fast it was moving and the logistics of collecting the child.

Yes, it was moving quite fast at the time, the waiting time wasn't so long, it was also one of the less expensive ones, and it was closer, so if we want to take Jonathan back, it's a little bit closer for us to go there. (Diane, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

You had to take five weeks off work to go to Colombia to actually go through their legal processes, so we said no to that, and then it came down to basically China or South Korea. (Ken, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Also important for some was whether adoptive parents had an affinity with a particular country and its culture. This affinity led some to feel strongly about adopting from a particular country.

I think we had an attraction to South America and Bolivia I think at the time. We'd never been there either but we liked South American Music and Bolivian and Peruvian music. We enjoyed that and so we sort of tried hard to get to Bolivia. (Carl, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Decision to remain childless

While all the prospective adoptive parents and adoptive parents in the study had made a commitment to adopt a child from overseas, there was recognition by a few that intercountry adoption may not be the right path for everyone. Theo described this well when discussing his experiences with childless couples:

Look, we know many people who are childless, couples who would make fantastic parents, and at some stages, they considered adoption and for some people– you know it’s a very big thing to consider and they can’t get their head around it. And then they’ll get to a point in their life where they – where they kind of I suppose move past that and then just go on with their lives. (Theo, Support Group Representative)

Thus, there was a whole range of reasons why people chose to use intercountry adoption to form their family. I wondered if there were any differences between men and women in relation to their experiences of intercountry adoption and these are discussed in the following section.

Gender differences in relation to intercountry adoption

I wanted to discover whether men and women differed in relation to how they reacted to the concept of intercountry adoption, as well as to the process. Because both male and female adoptive and prospective adoptive parents were interviewed, I was able to gain some understanding of gender differences.

During my recruitment for prospective adoptive parents, male prospective adoptive parents responded more quickly to my invitation to participate in the research than females. This initially surprised me as I previously had thought that women would be more interested in taking part in the study. I had no real basis for this assumption but just thought women would be more interested in talking about their experiences and taking part in a research study. I learnt through later interviews, however, that some women who had experienced multiple attempts at IVF, followed by the stress involved in the intercountry adoption assessment process, just needed a break and the last thing they wanted to do was to participate in research.

When recruiting the adoptive parent sample, I struggled to get enough participants to interview and tried a number of approaches before re-contacting the support groups and asking them for assistance again. My experience in recruiting adoptive parents was the

other way around. I had more women reply than men, and eventually I made the pragmatic decision to interview the people who had responded rather than sticking to the 50-50 outline. I am not sure why this was the case. Perhaps women with children were either stay at home parents or worked part-time and were, therefore, able to make time more easily for an interview. In the next section I will discuss the gender differences found with couples first, followed by a discussion of the findings for single people adopting from overseas.

Different levels of interest between men and women

During the interviews, it became clear that some women in relationships were initially more interested in pursuing intercountry adoption than their partners. For these women, it took their husbands some time to ‘come around’ to the idea of using intercountry adoption to form their family. Diane described her situation in this way:

I was always interested in the idea of adoption. My husband was a little less willing.
(Diane, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

The women in this situation attributed their husband’s reluctance to a number of reasons, including their husband’s uncertainty about bringing up a foreign child and concerns over what others would think about having a child adopted from overseas. This initial reluctance by some men can be seen in the following words from Max, an adoptive parent:

Lexie: I wonder if you can tell me, what led you to the decision to adopt a child from overseas?

Max: My wife. It wasn’t my decision to do so, I mean – obviously, it was in the end, but it wasn’t my preferred decision... my sense is that women are all for it from day one and the men need to be brought across a little bit.

Explanations differed in relation to why men and women should have various reactions towards intercountry adoption. Some saw the issue of caring for abandoned children in terms that are more global and felt that intercountry adoption may not be helping the problem or providing good outcomes for children:

His concern is you know are we doing more damage and contributing to the problem.
(Andrea, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

For others, the reasons for reluctance about intercountry adoption were more personal and tied up with the male’s inability to father a child, as a number of participants explained:

Purely male ego that he felt that he wasn’t capable of having that seamless attachment with a child that wasn’t his or his biological make. So it was just his upbringing, and I just let

him ponder it and one day he just turned around and said I can do it. (Stacey, Adoptive Parent)

I had an issue about us not being pregnant. So for me it was about the issue of not being able to father a child. More of not going through the whole process of pregnancy. It was something we were looking forward to. (Mitchell, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

For one couple in the study, it was the husband who was keener to pursue intercountry adoption than his wife and as Kay explains, this situation arose because of her focus on having biological children, while her husband had already moved on to consider alternatives. Kay explained:

No, you know what; it was probably the other way round, if anything. When I knew I was getting pregnant that was my focus. I wanted our own children, but that was my focus at the time, and we didn't know the problems and so I said, yes, I'm very happy to look at adoption, but right now we're going for our own, and he was wanting to, 'well, why don't we look into it at the same time?' (Kay, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Similarly, Jane an adoption professional confirmed how one partner might be the main force behind a decision to pursue intercountry adoption:

I mean you find with adoption, one in a couple generally is pushing more than the other one and I don't see an issue with that, but I need to know that the second person, even if they're not as sort of I suppose deep-seatedly wanting an adoption that they are there for the first one. And that by the time things progress they are fully on board and they are committed to this process. (Jane, Adoption Professional)

For others in the study, the desire to form a family through intercountry adoption was reported as a choice made by both partners from the outset with similar levels of commitment. Ann expressed the sentiment in this way:

For me and also for my husband, the main concern or interest was being a parent and parenting a child and the biological side of things for us fortunately was not paramount. So we were both – both of us very keen to start doing the adoption process and getting stuck into that. So I didn't have to persuade him, and he didn't have to persuade me. (Ann, Adoptive Parent)

Women often were the 'prime mover'

In couples, men and women seemed to play different roles in relation to the intercountry adoption process. Some men, when asked about the sequence and timing of events in the process, were unable to answer, as their wives had taken the lead role in filling in forms and monitoring the process. They would say things like 'perhaps you should talk to my wife' or 'my wife keeps a diary of all that'. The reasons given by women for this were

twofold. For some their rationale for taking the lead role was that they often had more time to complete the paperwork, as was the case with both Christine and Carrie:

Yes. Mostly it's because I have more time on my hands, too, than my husband. He was working five days, I was working three or four, and my job I could juggle around to suit myself, my own hours, so that's probably why, too. (Christine, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

I have done pretty much all of the written stuff and I also have more time on my hands and so I do all the phone calls. So certainly, a lot of the running around and paperwork have come to me. (Carrie, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

In addition, others explained the reasons as more complicated and involving the notion that women had more of a vested interest in the outcome of the intercountry adoption process. Some believed that women were keener to ensure they adopted a child as explained by Kay and Edwina:

I work part time so I did have more time on my hands definitely. I do think it is perhaps a male-female thing... I have perhaps more motivation and desperation or whatever you want to call it. The drive. (Kay, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

It is what we are designed to do, I think, even if the biology is taken out of it you can't take out of it all of the innate urges to become a mother, I think particularly for the mothers. With all of my girlfriends who have adopted I know of one situation where the process was generated by the husband. The rest, it's all been pushed for by the women. (Edwina, Support Group Representative)

Another illustration of the higher degree of involvement in the process comes from anecdotal observations made by participants in relation to, for example, motivation levels to read about the process and investigate intercountry adoption in general. For some this was also related to women having more time available, while others perceived it as being driven by a greater motivation for a positive outcome.

Well I'm more the avid reader and so I probably do more of the reading and convey a lot of those stories and ideas to my husband. I think he doesn't like to probably hear a lot or have a lot of opinions made on adopting because he would like to experience it for himself, rather than have preconceived stories and notions and ideas. (Carrie, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Single applicants are highly motivated to pursue the intercountry adoption process

Once single applicants had decided on intercountry adoption as the way to form their family, they seemed motivated to move as quickly as possible through the process. This motivation may be related to recognition that the process takes longer for single applicants

than for couples. Previously in China, single applicants were only allocated every six batches, which meant that the waiting time for a single applicant was significantly longer than for a couple. Although China no longer accepts single applicants, the only other country now accepting single applicants from Australia is Ethiopia where long waiting times apply. Therefore, the speed with which single applicants completed the process may be motivated by the reality of the waiting process. That is, if they can get through the process as quickly as possible in Australia, then their wait for a child may be shorter. Justine commented on her experience:

Oh, I don't know, once I made up my mind I got really committed to it really quickly and I never looked back, I never had a second of doubt. And I moved very quickly on everything I could control and do. I got really involved very early on in the adoption community and went to picnics and met people and talked to people. (Justine, Single Adoptive Parent)

Conclusion

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), Giddens (1992) and Bauman (2003) all discuss the decision-making process individuals go through in deciding whether or not to have children. Bauman (2003, p. 44) suggests that people need to calculate the risks involved in having children and consider the joys of parenthood versus the self-sacrifice and lifestyle changes that having children demands. For participants in this study, the risks were not associated with decisions about whether or not to have a child; rather, their concern was focused on not being able to have children. Participants did not discuss the risks associated with adopting an overseas child, often of unknown parentage. They had made the decision to have a child and intercountry adoption was one of the only paths to achieve their goal. The findings in this chapter have begun to tell the story of individuals choosing families through intercountry adoption. The next chapter examines the nature of the relationships formed by intercountry adoptive families in order to understand whether these relationships reflect postmodern thinking about individualisation and 'do it yourself' biographies.

5

Intercountry adoptive family dynamics and relationships

I think the biggest thing for people is that they want to be a family. And I don't know that it matters how it's formed whether it's through biology or whether it's through adoption, it's the fact that people want to have a family. They want to belong; they want to have the joys of raising children. You know they want to have that experience; they want to share their life story. (Jane, Adoption Professional)

The word family means something different to everyone. For Jane, family is about belonging and sharing. In this chapter, I focus on understanding how participants perceived the Australian family, discussing how they see themselves and if they see similarities or differences between their own family and biological families. Also considered is how others in the community see families formed through intercountry adoption and how participants believe their family fits with other families in society. The nature of relationships for intercountry adoptive families is also examined in order to understand the significance of the relationships formed, to these families of choice.

What is the Australian family and how is it understood?

Participants in the study differed in relation to how they saw the Australian family. A few participants like Patrick and Cassie believed the definition of the Australian family was still the nuclear family consisting of mum, dad and the kids. Patrick and Cassie described the Australian family in the following way:

I still see a family being a mum and a dad and then kids, I don't know, a number of children whatever you like, that's the way I see it. (Patrick, Adoptive Parent)

Generally speaking in Australia, families consist of one or two biological parents and children, but families now can be blended, so there's a non-biological parent there as well or has been or will be in the future. Sometimes there's the grandparents, but you know, basically it's a variation on the nuclear family. (Cassie, Adoption Professional)

Far more participants in the study, however, believed that the Australian family was more difficult to define. There was a sense that families in Australia are changing and have become more diverse. Many participants commented on this diversity and some suggested that Australians are becoming more accepting of the diversity:

But the first thing that comes to mind is that we are, you know, the family is so varied now – it's not just mum and dad and two children. It can be mum and mum, it can be dad and dad, it can be mum on her own, dad on his own, blended, step, multi-cultural, foster care, permanent, I mean it's enormous. I think it's variable, I think it's changing. (Jessica, Adoption Professional)

I think the Australian family still works on the core of mum, dad and some kids. But I think where alternative families used to be seen as the exception and as being not quite right dear, I don't think society's like that any longer. (Theresa, Adoption Professional)

The thing that defines Australian families is diversity. I guess that's how I would define it and that's what makes it so beautiful too... but I think there's still a long way to go before we're still readily accepting of diversity within families. But I think it's growing. You know it's happening. (Samantha, Adoption Professional)

While some still described the family using labels like 'blended family', 'single parent family', 'adoptive family', many more described the family in terms of the relationships formed between members and the significance of these relationships for family members. The focus on intimate relationships is more in keeping with newer ideas on the family by sociologists like Beck (1995), Beck-Gernsheim (2002; 1995) and Giddens (1992), and these notions were reflected by participants in the study. Typical comments made about the Australian family included:

The Australian family. I guess you know, to me the family is just people who – care about each other more so than they care about others, like if they had to choose, would choose each other over a stranger, another person, a colleague or whoever. (Tanya, Adoptive Parent)

A group of people who love and support each other. So it doesn't necessarily have to be mum and dad and children but it can be a group of people who might define themselves as a family because they love and support each other and want to do that permanently. (Lily, Adoption Professional)

I think the idea of family's constantly changing. Maybe I would perceive it more as a group of people with a strong bond and relationships as opposed to – you know in terms of incorporating step families and – and you know adoptive families and families that you know are friends. (Elizabeth, Adoption Professional)

No, I don't think there is a norm because really a family is a group of people connected, maybe connected by blood, connected by circumstance who live let's say live under the same roof. (Malcolm, Adoptive Parent)

A family can be anything. It's really your support system I think it's any combination of people really who love each other and care about each other and you know and give that sort of life support that you – that you need through life. And I think you know especially people who sort of define it as a mother and father and two point whatever children are completely off the mark. (Charlotte, Adoptive Parent)

A family as seen by participants is about love, connectedness, support and not just about biology. The idea that families do not have to be formed from biological connections alone, is especially significant for adoptive families as this broader definition of the family encompasses a variety of family forms including the adoptive family.

How do families formed through intercountry adoption see themselves?

Another issue considered during the study was how adoptive families view themselves, how they believe others in the community see them and whether differences exist between adoptive and biological families.

How intercountry adoptive families see themselves

The vast majority of participants in the study saw their family as being just one of the many types of families that exist in Australian society. As Leonie explained:

I know many, many nuclear families but I have a lot of friends who don't have children who I would call as a family. I have friends who are gay, I have friends who are single but live together and have got children so I just suppose I see it in all its unorthodox patterns and I'm one of those as well. (Leonie, Single Adoptive Parent)

One common theme that united intercountry adoptive families was the belief that their families had been formed because children from developing nations needed homes. They believed it was far better for children to grow up in a family environment rather than living in an orphanage or institution. Miles articulated this view:

Just going over there gives you an appreciation for it's a third world country. So in terms of the opportunities, the schooling, the attention, the love, the family that he has here. And so instead of being, I guess, lost over there, he's got a loving family. (Miles, Adoptive Parent)

Adoptive parents believed they feel the same way towards their children as biological parents feel towards their children. In this sense, they perceived themselves to be no different to other families. Karen explained:

Well, the same really. I mean (pause) - I don't feel any different towards Tilly. I don't have a biological child. But I couldn't possibly love her anymore. (Karen, Adoptive Parent)

Intercountry adoptive families feel grateful to have been given the opportunity to form a family through adoption. For many, adopting a child from overseas was their only option for being parents. Many, like Donna, were extremely happy to have been given the opportunity to create a family in this way:

We are just as lucky as the kids. We've chosen to build our family that way and we're not saviours, we're just enjoying our life with our kids. (Donna, Adoptive Parent)

Many believed that because they had experienced difficulties in having children, that intercountry adoptive parents were less likely to take their children for granted. This opinion was expressed by Justine:

I honestly think that adoptive parents don't take their children for granted as much, that there is always a sense of oh my God, isn't this wonderful, every day... like I cannot believe that I've got this child. (Justine, Single Adoptive Parent)

In addition, some felt that intercountry adoptive parents were extremely committed towards their children because of the difficulties many had experienced in order to have a family. Andrea commented:

I like to think that they're all just that bit extra special because they've gone that extra mile to really have this family. Their family definitely comes first over their careers and other things in their life, that's the choice that they've made. I think from our point of view it's definitely been a choice for us. (Andrea, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

People in the study understood that by adopting a child from overseas, they were also adopting a new culture. People differed in their interpretation of how this would evolve in their lives, but there was certainly acknowledgement that the cultural aspect of intercountry adoption had enriched the lives of their family. As Justine and Claudia both commented:

I think it makes me a much better person being a parent of an internationally adopted kid. Much more inclined to be multicultural, much more interested in China. You know, I think these kids are very good ambassadors for their countries even though they don't live there. (Justine, Single Adoptive Parent)

Well, I think, for me it's been a really positive thing, I mean, I love the fact that I've been introduced to a whole new culture myself and I love that culture. It's, you know, really lovely and vibrant, sort of thing. I think it's added a whole new dimension to my life. (Claudia, Support Group Representative)

Concern was expressed that a decline in the number of families formed through intercountry adoption may result in adoptees questioning their family structure and the legitimacy of their type of family in Australian society. Stacey illustrated this point:

The numbers are dwindling in my community of intercountry adoptive families and my children can see that. I want them to see it's normal and there's no stigma attached with these children because they start believing there is stigma attached because they're not in our community. (Stacey, Adoptive Parent)

Also raised during the interviews was the focus of the intercountry adoption process being on the adopted child rather than an acknowledgment of the needs of the adoptive parents. This is an extremely sensitive area because all the legislation stipulates the need for a child-centred approach, but this focus created confusion for some applicants who felt they were undertaking the process for themselves too. Kay explained this dilemma well:

This is where I had a little bit of disagreement on what they were saying. You are adopting for yourself, I believe. They kept saying, you've got to get it out of your head that you're adopting for yourself. You've got to be adopting for the child, and I still find that hard to – you've really got to start off with, we really want a family and we want to adopt. (Kay, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

How do families formed through intercountry adoption think others in the community see them?

I think it is becoming a little more within people's understanding of what families are, but I reckon it's still reasonably foreign to people. (Harriet, Support Group Representative)

As suggested by Harriet's words, a wide spectrum of views was expressed by participants in relation to how they felt the Australian community perceived intercountry adoptive families. These opinions ranged from people thinking the community held positive views towards these families to those who believed that society held negative perceptions of intercountry adoptive families.

The positive views

Many participants believed the view that people in the community saw the children who had been adopted from overseas as being 'lucky'. Much anecdotal evidence was given during the interviews of people having experienced this attitude from friends, relatives and strangers. Adoptive parents gave examples, as did adoption professionals who had been told stories by their clients. Typical comments included:

The overwhelming public perception was that the child was lucky because they came from a very poor place and the adoptive parents were wonderful for adopting them. I think that was a common community belief and certainly lots of adoptive parents report that walking down the street, people say, aren't you wonderful, isn't he lucky. (Rachel, Adoption Professional)

Oh, they're so lucky, you're such wonderful people. (Donna, Adoptive Parent)

People look at you as being very altruistic in terms of, isn't that fantastic that you're looking after a child who doesn't have a family to look after them. (Malcolm, Adoptive Parent)

One adoption professional also commented how community perception of the practice seemed to have changed since the mid 1970s, when adopting children from the Vietnamese airlift was seen as a humanitarian act. Rachel explained:

I think more in decades past it was seen as a humanitarian act. I think it's a bit different now. (Rachel, Adoption Professional)

Participants believed others were more accepting of intercountry adoption if they had personal knowledge or contact with people who had formed families in this way. They felt the personal connection heightened understanding of the difficulties some people had experienced in trying to become a family.

But I would say that unless you're personally touched by it through friends or family, the majority of the public don't have any understanding or a very, very limited understanding of what it's all about. (Charlotte, Adoptive Parent)

I think there's a lot more acceptance within Australia and people don't think as far as my friends and everything go, people don't look at it and think oh, you're adopted, you know? There's a lot more acceptance here. (Ann, Adoptive Parent)

Many adoption professionals believed that limited, specific knowledge of the practice meant that the community lacked understanding about the complex issues facing intercountry adoptive families as Richard explained:

So I think in the general public it's kind of seen as a wonderful good thing to do without much insight in terms of like what are the outcomes for children, what are the effects on families and those children and how does it affect those overseas countries as well. (Richard, Adoption Professional)

Many adoptive parents and adoption professionals felt that part of the community's reaction was based on an element of curiosity. Families formed through intercountry adoption were seen as being unusual and novel. Harriet observed:

Like people tend to stare a bit and, you know, people ask questions like oh, is that your child? You know, how could that be your child? (chuckling). What's happened there? (Harriet, Support Group Representative)

Participants reported differing degrees of coping with, and answering questions posed by others about adoption. If well-meaning, then the research suggested that adoptive families

were more inclined to answer questions – as long as the information required was neither too personal, nor exposed too much information about the child.

When someone asks me a question, I feel obliged to be polite back and try to put a positive spin on things. (Donna, Adoptive Parent)

When community members were perceived as being nosey or making inappropriate comments, then adoptive parents reported they were unlikely to answer politely. This was the case with Karen, Leonie and Patrick:

And then the next time it was this elderly lady. I think she was a grandmother and she had her grandkids and we were at the beach and I was with my mother's group and she walked past and she yelled out, where's she from? And at the time, we lived in Harrington. I said oh, we live in Harrington. And she goes, that's not what I mean. And I just turned around and walked away. (Karen, Adoptive Parent)

I've had to deal with people being very nosey about you know, do you know her parents and, are you keeping in touch with them and, is she an orphan? And lots of very sort of invasive questions. (Leonie, Single Adoptive Parent)

Generally, no, we don't feel the need to tell strangers his entire story. People, I mean, we've told close family members and close friends, they know his story. It's his story it's not ours really. Well, it's ours in one sense, but it's really his story about coming here, so we don't feel the need to tell every stranger about it. (Patrick, Adoptive Parent)

As with earlier discussions about factors influencing the decision to adopt from overseas, the multicultural nature of Australian society was seen as a factor influencing community attitudes towards these families. Since Australia has become an ethnically diverse nation, many in the study like Ann, expressed the opinion that intercountry adoptive families fit well into the community:

The whole cultural thing is changing and, you know, I think there's a lot more public awareness and people are being educated. Australia is a very multicultural society and I think, you know, now there's a lot more understanding and acceptance of intercountry adoption. (Ann, Adoptive Parent)

Theresa, an adoption professional also highlighted the acceptance of difference by others in the community:

But now very much our community is such a multiracial community that people do accept people of other race quite easily. But I don't think anyone knows heaps about it until you're involved personally. You know, until your church has a family that's adopted a child from overseas or, you know, your next-door neighbour adopts. (Theresa, Adoption Professional)

Despite these comments about the changed ethnic mix in Australian society, there were those participants who spoke of racism in the community. As Lara suggested, some racist comments may come from the older generation.

There are some races and I guess now, there would be the grandparent's age group you know who still remember the wars and there's some degree of racism maybe from some of the older generation - maybe not so much from the younger. (Lara, Adoption Professional)

The increasing visibility of adoption-related issues in the media was also raised by participants as a factor relating to how the community perceived intercountry adoption. The media coverage of high profile celebrities like Madonna and Angelina Jolie was seen as increasing knowledge about the topic.⁷ Chapter Seven contains more discussion on the global nature of intercountry adoption, but it is important to note here that the media has had an impact on how the Australian community perceived the practice. Richard, an adoption professional suggested that 'adoption is very much romanticised by the general public and by the film stars who get all that kind of publicity', while Ann commented on the increased prominence of intercountry adoption in the media.

It was just there in the background but people didn't really know a lot about it, but in the last few years I think there's been more media coverage because I've cut a lot of the articles out of the paper on adoption and all of a sudden people would say to me, did you read that article in the paper the other day. (Ann, Adoptive Parent)

The negative views

Many people in the study felt that as a practice, intercountry adoption was more accepted today than it had been during the 1970s. The perceived negative community attitudes towards intercountry adoptive families were seen as belonging to a continuum of opinion, which ranged from seeing intercountry adoption as exploitation to seeing it as a solution for infertility. Cassie, Emily and Malcolm explained these views:

I think there's all sorts of views. Some people would definitely see it as exploitation and that we should be working to keep the children in their own countries and be cared for there. I'm sure there's people that think that. Other people think it's a means of solving infertility. It's just a solution to that problem. Other people think it's the meeting of the two needs, so it's a win-win situation. (Cassie, Adoption Professional)

Well, I think the general public will see adoption as, isn't it a wonderful thing what you've done for that child? Again, it's the gratitude. Others will see it as we need to save these children and give them a home and others will say well, why can't you adopt or do fostering so we can look after our own. (Emily, Support Group Representative)

⁷ The actor, Angelina Jolie, has adopted three of her six children from the overseas countries of Cambodia, Vietnam and Ethiopia.

But then there's the other side that, do we have a right to take them out of their cultural environment? (Malcolm, Adoptive Parent)

The corrupt practices reported in the media in relation to intercountry adoption were also highlighted as reasons why the community may have formed negative views about the practice. Sally noted:

And they think that by us adopting those children that we exploit you know poverty and religious issues within the countries to take those children and unfortunately, there is, baby-trading, that because there's someone to take them that they will give their children up. (Sally, Support Group Representative)

Similarly Max, commented that:

You know some of the media coverage has been negative so that's their only connection to it, you know so because it's easier to report the sensationalist sorts of things like this Hanan baby scandal. And recently there was a story about this Dutch diplomat who handed back his child, aged seven because they felt that there were cultural disparities or something between this poor child and the parents. (Max, Adoptive Parent)

Another negative perception noted was that some people in the community believed families had purchased the children from overseas and a number of people had been asked how much their child cost. This view was thought to be influenced by high profile celebrity stories in newspapers and magazines that report about the money reputedly paid for children by celebrities.

I know that there are stories of people where adoptive families have said someone has gone up to them and asked them how much their child cost, you know. So, I think there's that view as well that people are just paying for children. (Elizabeth, Adoption Professional)

Perceived similarities and differences between adoptive and other families

During the 1960s David Kirk undertook research in relation to the differences between adoptive families and biological families (1967). He wanted to understand how the roles and norms of adoptive families differed or coincided with biological families. The focus of Kirk's work was on 'the ways in which adoptive parents regarded themselves, what picture they had of themselves and of their roles' (1967, p. 58). The research led him to develop a theory of adoptive relations based on the ideas of 'acknowledgement of difference' and 'rejection of difference'. The term 'acknowledgment of difference', according to Kirk, involved adoptive parents understanding and acknowledging that some differences exist between the situation of natural and adoptive parenthood while 'rejection of difference'

involved a denial or withdrawal from this acknowledgement (1967, p. 58). Kirk found that both of these feelings were often present in the replies he received from individual respondents in his study.

My research also considered perceptions about adoptive parenting and biological parenting and while I found both sentiments - 'acknowledgement of difference' and 'rejection of difference' present in the sample - individuals seemed to be predominantly one or the other, rather than a mixture of both as noted by Kirk (1967). This may result from the context that adoptive parents are now receiving more education about intercountry adoption with an emphasis on the importance of incorporating elements of the child's cultural background into their upbringing. This could result in making adoptive parents more accepting of the differences between themselves and biological families, especially in the case with children adopted from overseas where the visual differences are clearly visible to the whole community.

A few participants in the study saw the intercountry adoptive family as being the same as families with biological children, but many more spoke of the added complexities of parenting an adopted child from overseas. Prospective adoptive parents without personal experiences of parenting a child were more likely to minimise the perceived differences between adoptive and biological families, while adoptive parents were often already experiencing differences in parenting an adoptive child. Comments were also made that suggested that all families are different, depending on the individuals who are in them. This seemed to be a measure to minimise the impact of adoption in a family as noted by Samantha.

But I see differences from one biological family to another as well. So I think families are different from family to family. (Samantha, Adoption Professional)

Most in the study believed that intercountry adoption added an extra layer of complexity to parenting. As Patrick explained:

I suppose there's an extra level of complexity in raising the child and I think it's important that you do keep the culture so that they can feel like that they fit somehow – I mean, they'll never, ever feel like they're part of their birth culture, I don't think, but I think having a level of understanding might help that adjustment. (Patrick, Adoptive Parent)

Professionals stressed the importance of adoptive parents understanding that parenting a child born overseas was a different experience to being a birth parent. Richard emphasised this opinion when he said:

We are cautious about adoption in terms of the experience of being an adoptive parent in that there are a number of unpredictabilities that people may not be aware of and that's where we alert people that often we don't know the background of the children. The future development of children is less predictable and there are some higher risks as compared to being a birth parent. (Richard, Adoption Professional)

Many participants commented that the cultural differences of children adopted from overseas meant that families formed in this way were different to biological families. That intercountry adoptive families needed to combine two cultures in bringing up their children was seen as highly relevant to the differences these families encountered. As Patrick acknowledged:

So I think they're raised differently in that with a biological child the only culture is the culture you live in, whereas adoption – there's the birth culture, as well as the culture you live in. (Patrick, Adoptive Parent)

Not only were these cultural differences clearly visible to the outside world in intercountry adoption, but families were also cognisant of the fact that they needed to educate and prepare their child for comments made by others in the community in relation to their differences.

Yes, I think they are different, I mean I think you can't deny that you've got children who have come from another culture and other country, and that's their experience. That will never leave them. And it's interesting because some families try really hard, I think, to keep that culture alive for the children and to acknowledge it and respect it. And other families just think oh well you know, you're Australian now and you're part of our family and there's no need to participate in anything to do with your other culture. (Harriet, Support Group Representative)

I think you do need to prepare yourself 'cause it is different parenting a child from another culture when - you know because you do really need to adopt the culture as well and you know educate yourself about those things so you can incorporate it into the child's life. (Karen, Adoptive Parent)

Participants spoke of how they expected behavioural and identity issues to emerge during adolescence. Here are some examples to illustrate these points:

I suppose the major concerns are simply an adoptive one in the sense that later down the track there are always going to be additional issues to just the general issues you have with kids when they get older. You know the whole who am I identity, you know fitting in, explaining you know why the child is abandoned, the whole scenario. Yes, so it's sort of added challenges to something that's already not easy. (Max, Adoptive Parent)

I think it is different and it will be increasingly different as she gets older and will probably go through different issues and you know like this identity thing. I keep sort of you know coming back to that. I think it's going to require you know a lot of sort of work as a parent

to prepare her for that stage. I think that's something that will be sort of quite unique compared to your average you know Anglo teenager. (Leonie, Single Adoptive Parent)

The child's different ethnic background meant that children adopted from overseas looked different to their adoptive parents, and as Karen noted 'we get a bit more attention than biological families because you know we stand out'. Standing out in the crowd also had implications for children, as they grow older in relation to identity development and feelings about themselves. This issue was something that adoptive parents felt was important to acknowledge, especially as children aged and began to wonder how to incorporate differences into their psyches.

I met a Vietnamese adoptee who was like you know in the Babylift and we had this amazing conversation and she told me the things that she had hated - and she reckons that you know every single time she went to the supermarket you know it would be like where's she from? And it always made her feel different - so she always felt she was between two countries. (Leonie, Single Adoptive Parent)

Another difference highlighted by participants, was recognition that children adopted from overseas come with a past that they bring with them into their new adoptive family. Past experiences in birth countries were seen as influential on the child's ability to bond and attach to adoptive family members. These experiences might include abandonment, trauma or living in harsh circumstances and participants believed they influenced a variety of behaviours including how intercountry adoptees related to other people, their sleep patterns and behaviour in general. As expressed by Lorraine:

This child has this whole other sort of like connection that has to be taken into account. Like even if you can't find them (birth parents), or even if you don't want to find them or whatever else, like it's still there. (Lorraine, Support Group Representative)

Adoptive parents felt strongly that children adopted from overseas might experience difficulties in attaching to their adoptive parents because of their early life experiences. Previous trauma and past experiences of intercountry adoptees were seen as contributing to potentially disruptive attachments within adoptive families.

I think you can't just pretend that we're a family with a kid who looks like us, who's our biological child. That would be doing her a disservice. We have to be very aware of the issues, and also the issues around attachment. The fact that she had been through a lot of trauma before she came to us and we had to do a lot of things that we might not have done with a biological child because we really had to work hard to establish the bonding and make her feel secure. (Rebecca, Adoptive Parent)

Participants also described how eating behaviour might also be influenced by the child's life before becoming part of an adoptive family. For example, if children lived in

orphanages where food was scarce, they may react differently to food in Australia as Laurence described:

The young kids they go straight to the table and that goes on for about six months when they come to Australia, because purely there wasn't enough food at the orphanage... So the children are obsessed with food in the first few months. (Laurence, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

In addition to the impact of early experiences from their country of origin, the age of children at the time of adoption was also seen as influential for family adjustment. The older child was felt to bring a different set of complexities because they had memories of living in their birth country and experiences of another life. Sometimes, older children had difficulties adjusting to family life in Australia and the adoptive parents struggled with parenting these children. This finding is in keeping with research results showing that older adopted children on arrival experience difficulties adapting to their environment (Tizard, 1991; Triseliotis, 1991). As Danielle, an adoption professional explained:

The fantasy of parenthood isn't the same as the reality. It's much more challenging and harder and draining than most prospective parents think. And sometimes the adoption isn't as smooth as they would have hoped and the fit isn't perfect especially older children. I think people vastly minimise the impact of adopting a child over two because of their previous life experiences. (Danielle, Adoption Professional)

It was also recognised that it might be necessary to treat intercountry adoptive differently to biological children, again because of the circumstances they experienced prior to arriving in Australia. As Tanya pointed out:

I guess just realising that you may have to treat adoptive kids a little differently, at least for the first you know, few years or so, than you would normally parent a biological child, if they have certain issues that maybe you can't just control crying, or there's certain things that you may not be able to use, that milestones are not going to be necessarily the same. (Tanya, Adoptive Parent)

The way in which intercountry adoptive families are formed was also seen as a differentiating factor between themselves and families formed through biology. Participants spoke about their families being very much a planned process in response most often, to an inability to have a biological child. Max illustrated this point by saying:

Yeah, I mean anything involving adoption is a much more planned, sort of I would say programmed. You can't just sort of have an adopted child. Like you can't just get adoptively pregnant or something and decide okay, we're going to keep the child or you know. I mean usually you don't sit down and go as the first thing, we're going to have an adopted child. Okay have a child, so they try and have a child, that doesn't work, they try

different other things, so it's usually the end of a very long process that's you know really not a natural one. (Max, Adoptive Parent)

Many participants commented on the difficult process they endured in order to have a family, in contrast to the perceived ease with which others formed biological families. Opinions differed in relation to how participants felt about this. Some felt resentment that adoptive families had to undergo the extensive assessment process regulated by the government in order to form their family, while others saw it as a necessary mechanism to ensure the right people were selected as adoptive parents. The following quotes highlight these opposing views:

It's an interesting thing, you go through all this to adopt a child but then you don't go through all this to try and conceive a child and raise that child so – somebody said to us it's like you've got to get a license to adopt a child, but you don't need a license to just – as they put it, pop a child out. (Patrick, Adoptive Parent)

I guess it was just a feeling of other parents don't have to do this, you know? What've I got to do this for? (Miles, Adoptive Parent)

And I believe in assessment because like before I started to adopt, I read a lot of stories about adoption and there are just so many horror stories about the kinds of people who used to be allowed to adopt children, and they were monsters you know? Like the things they did to those children were just horrendous and so I'm really pro-assessment (laughs). I think people should be assessed and I don't think just anyone should be allowed to adopt. (Lorraine, Support Group Representative)

Also discussed was the perceived stigma attached to adoptive families, which was not present in biological families. This stigma has been observed by others (see Fisher, 2003) and appears to be linked to the idea that adoption is 'not quite as good as having your own child' as Max and Ann both explained.

I don't know in some way there's probably some sort of a stigma or something attached to adoption. I mean when people talk about adoption I think in a lot of cases, the initial sort of emotional response is negative not like, oh great. Sort of more like, oh you poor thing or it must have been hard or you know something along those lines. (Max, Adoptive Parent)

Well, for me - 'cause I think that there have been a few people who've kind of thought it's second best, adopting. And for Frank and I there is no dispute whatsoever, you know? We are just so lucky that we have him and I'm very glad that I didn't get pregnant because I would never of had the opportunity to have my child that I have now. (Ann, Adoptive Parent)

The challenges of parenting an adopted child from overseas

Based on the differences between adoptive and biological families discussed in the preceding section, it follows that participants believed that adoptive parents also faced a range of significant and challenging parenting issues. Comments were made based on their own experiences as adoptive parents or by professionals based on feedback from others who had experienced these circumstances.

Cassie, an adoption professional highlighted the importance of children being encouraged by adoptive parents to develop a positive regard for their country of origin. This was seen as an essential role of the adoptive parent in order to help the child understand its heritage and to promote discussion around why they came to be adopted in Australia. She explained:

But if their parents are able to inspire them with a sense of the place that they have come from, has all of these fascinating parts to it, it's own beauty, but also a realistic understanding as to what the problems, the social and economic problems might be in that country which helps them to make sense of why they've come to Australia, why they couldn't stay there. That helps them to come to terms with the difference. (Cassie, Adoption Professional)

Another element to any discussion about cultural heritage and life prior to adoption, was that adoptive parents needed to be sensitive and aware that intercountry adoptees may not always want to be reminded of their differences. Participants pointed out that adoptees' interest in their birth culture and heritage may increase and decrease in importance during childhood as noted by the following participants:

I think sometimes the children get to a stage where they don't want to talk about it, they won't have any connection with the idea that they are adopted, and sometimes it's the parents who pretend that you know well not pretend, but they – they just want to keep a distance from all of that. (Claudia, Support Group Representative)

We can never take away I believe from a child their birth culture. I mean it's got to be there all the time in their life, I mean to what degree it's in their life will depend on that child. Some children will really want to embrace that side of it and learn more about it, others will just want to – yeah, I know it's there and I know that's where I came from and I'm comfortable with that. (Theo, Support Group Representative)

Adoptive parents were also seen as needing to incorporate into their parenting acknowledgement of their child's early history. It was felt that adoptive parents needed to

recognise that intercountry adoptees may have difficulty integrating each part of their story and may feel that they don't belong anywhere. This was highlighted by Emily:

Parents saying they're in Australia now, they're Australian and I think they lose the sense of how important it becomes to a child later on when they feel they don't fit, they don't fit here, they don't fit in their own country. (Emily, Support Group Representative)

Linked to the child's early history, was the fact that little documentation often existed about the circumstances in which the child was found, or about their birth family. This lack of information added another degree of uncertainty to parenting, as adoptive parents had little or no knowledge of earlier experiences or possible medical conditions. These unknowns were believed to present difficulties for parents in bringing up their children as noted by Claudia and Max:

But your expectations are that you're going to have a normal baby, and a normal life like you'd have if you had to have children of your own. But it doesn't always happen and there often are problems, and you cannot then turn around and go, well of course it's because you're adopted, you know, it's got nothing to do with me. (Claudia, Support Group Representative)

With an adopted child, we're much more in two minds about how we should respond to the child's behaviour. You know whether it's something that we've got to take into account because she was a year in the orphanage first and this has happened and she was neglected, that we then shouldn't let her cry as much. (Max, Adoptive Parent)

Also important for parents was not only recognition of the cultural implications of adopting a child from overseas, but also acknowledging that the characteristics and their behaviour have a basis with their biological family. This made parenting an adoptive child very different to parenting a biological child as described by Lara:

In adoptive families, you cannot afford to deny the existence of the birth parents and possibly siblings. They have to be somehow incorporated into that new family, whether there's information about them or not. You know that they exist. You know every child has a birth mother and a father somewhere else. And they must become part of that child's understanding of who they are. Sometimes with very limited or no information but they must be recognised and accepted as part of that family to some extent. (Lara, Adoption Professional)

Some parents also said they struggled to understand the difference between normal age-related behaviour and behaviour that could be the result of adoption. This presented challenges for some participants in relation to discipline. For parents with biological children, there was the added dilemma of whether they should treat the adopted child differently or similarly to their biological child as Max explained:

Quite a lot of the kids have sleep problems, you know and to what degree you should try and overcome those by applying sort of the standard family thing about totally controlled crying to semi controlled or whatever you want. Or whether you take the child into your bed and just go hey the kid's adopted and needs all the support and love and care it can get. You know it can be quite destructive then on other relationships within the family. (Max, Adoptive Parent)

While those around the child may not profess racist attitudes, it was seen as an important parenting issue to equip children with the vocabulary and skills to respond to comments made by others, as they grow older. Stefan explained:

When the child is at home not going to school, it is a very cocooned world to a degree. So the big thing is how are you going to arm the child for the obvious things that happen at school when they're 6 and they go you're adopted. All those kind of things that are thrown at them as a negative. The realisation that there is a whole responsibility to educate the child so emotionally, self esteem wise so they will know how to respond to that situation. (Stefan, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Another significant area for parents was the recognition of the losses that children experienced prior to joining their Australian families. The ability to try and understand the world from the child's perspective, and having an open mind to the impact such early experiences could have on child development were seen as extremely important, in addition to loving and caring for the child. Typical comments included:

And for some of them like I said, you know the parents, I mean love and nurture and all that type of stuff is important but the other side of it is that you do have to have some understanding that those kids are going to have some emotional needs that are going to be different. They're going to need, at times, some reassurances that other kids may not need. (Theo, Support Group Representative)

So we need to provide the best possible parents who understand those losses, and who can work with them on not ever getting rid of their grief completely, because everybody has that bit left there, but to enable them to fulfil their potential. (Theresa, Adoption Professional)

Another parenting issue raised was how to cope with the curiosity of the public and their questions about intercountry adoption. Attitudes on this point differed, as did the ways in which adoptive parents responded to questions. Some participants said when their children were younger, they strove to explain and answer questions honestly and openly. As children grew older and could understand the conversations, adoptive parents reported they were less inclined to answer questions and instead either ignored the questions or answered very simply. Patrick explained how they respond to questions and Donna recounted an article she had read on this issue.

She's had some odd questions from strangers and I guess we're pretty guarded about what we tell people, like, some people we'll just say, look, yeah – like if it's obvious, they look at us both and go is he yours? Yes, he's ours, yeah. We might say, he's adopted but sometimes we'll just say, no, he's our son. (Patrick, Adoptive Parent)

I'm reading an article about when you have a racially mixed family, it is like a society thinks you should answer the questions. A lady who wrote back in and said, I'm now an adult but both me and my brother when we were young we were adopted and we painfully stood there and endured our parents honestly answering every question they got...some of the most embarrassing moments of our childhood. We just wanted them to shut up and walk away. (Donna, Adoptive Parent)

Emily, a support group representative summed up the challenges of parenting a child born overseas and stressed the importance of having a strong support network - an issue that will be discussed in the next section.

So the important thing in terms of the parenting is to feel supported yourself, and to be able to handle it. There's an added pressure on parents, especially in adoption, that we need to be perfect parents. And I think that's because we've gone through an assessment process and, (pause) we feel that having been assessed to parent, we need to be good parents, and we have to present as being really good and perfect and everything's okay. (Emily, Support Group Representative)

Adoption professionals like Rachel, highlighted the different skills required by parents bringing a child from overseas into their family. She felt that flexibility and a willingness to learn were important requirements for adoptive parents.

Well my experience is that, people that have a history of being interested in learning new things, and flexible and open to different kinds of people and different experiences, move into adoptive parenting more smoothly than people that have had very regimented and rigid and planned lives. (Rachel, Adoption Professional)

Danielle, another adoption professional noted that having an adopted child from overseas placed additional stress on a family. She explained:

Having a child through intercountry adoption is much more stressful than having nine months to get used to the idea that on this day or around about there some time, you're going to have a baby and it's going to sleep for 20 out of the 24 hours. Whereas intercountry adoption, they arrive and you've got a ball of energy for half of the day, at least. It's much more of an assault on couples. (Danielle, Adoption Professional)

How people reconcile their family formed through intercountry adoption

Aaron described the difficulties people who build their family through intercountry adoption have in reconciling the adoption in their own minds:

There are some trade-offs...This is a very complex issue and you know there is no right – well like any ethical domain there is no right answer. (Aaron, Adoptive Parent)

Mostly participants in the study described their motivation to adopt from overseas in terms of their need to have a child rather than being motivated by humanitarian reasons. A few gave this explanation again when talking further about the ethics of intercountry adoption, for example, Malcolm explained:

For us going in it was totally you know - we just wanted a family and that was it. (Malcolm, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

By far the most common response in answer to the question - how do families reconcile their choice to form a family through intercountry adoption - was the answer that intercountry adoption offered a child a family. On a rational level, as discussed in the previous section, participants noted that positive and negative attitudes exist towards intercountry adoption, but for the vast majority, intercountry adoption provided a child with a family and a home they might otherwise never have experienced.

The reality of it is that at the time we adopted our son, if we hadn't adopted him, he would have gone to the orphanage and lived there. (Ann, Adoptive Parent)

The distinction was often made that a family in Australia was a better outcome for a child than living their life in an institution. In addition to providing a child with a home, intercountry adoption could also offer children access to opportunities they would never have had access to in their own countries. These opportunities included emotional support in terms of love and nurturing but also material opportunities like access to education. Charlotte and Harriet illustrated these views:

But I guess the countries that do allow it are being realistic. At least those children are finding a family and hopefully a better future in whatever way that is. At least they'll...you know in terms of an education and a family, and I'm not always saying that it's an easy road for the children, but it's certainly better than being in an orphanage. (Charlotte, Adoptive Parent)

They have opportunities to move beyond that into having really great quality of life and I would say if they had stayed in their own countries at a certain age, they would've been

kicked out of the orphanage and they'd have to survive on the streets without any skills and without, you know, any possessions or anything. So yeah, I think they're much better off being here than staying in that kind of environment. (Harriet, Support Group Representative)

This view was qualified by some, who said they believed the best option for the child was to remain in their birth country and culture. However, since this option was impossible in some countries, then intercountry adoption was the next best thing. Intercountry adoption was seen as a solution because of poverty, the social stigma attached to single parenthood, political rules like the one child policy in China, or because the country lacked the infrastructure to set up local services for adoption. Some adoptive parents saw the need to 'step up to the mark' in order to help these children.

Like I know, it breaks my heart and I say to my oldest, you know I wish someone had domestically adopted you. I wish your extended family could have adopted you. I wish your birth mother could have brought you up. But, given none of those were an option, we can't turn our back on it... On the practical every day level, they have no choice and you know we can't sit there and turn our back and say well fine, let them rot in an institution. (Stacey, Adoptive Parent)

It is a conundrum. Participants argued that intercountry adoption is not about saving children and yet the language used when describing why they have, is filled with allusions to saving children from life in an orphanage as illustrated by Stacey's words above.

While some people expressed the belief that domestic adoption in birth countries was the best outcome for children, when asked about the implications of this view on their own experience of adoption, the reaction was quite different. Participants explained that either local adoption in the birth countries was not an option at the time they had completed their adoption, or that domestic adoption was something they felt that overseas countries should be moving towards in the future. As Aaron, explained:

If Korea could work towards a system whereby all its children were absorbed locally, I would support that, you know, and I don't think I'm being hypocritical in saying that. Even though I've got a Korean child myself. I mean to say that you know, I would like to see the day come when Korea did not adopt any children overseas, that's not being hypocritical, that's just saying well that's the way they should move towards, you know? (Aaron, Adoptive Parent)

Some people genuinely believed that children would be better off in their birth country than being adopted overseas. Those who had successfully completed the intercountry adoption process could safely express this opinion knowing that they had their child.

In some respects there also seemed to be a question in participants' minds about the value of family versus the value of culture. The views expressed indicated that it is better for a child to live in a family and miss out on some culture, than to live in an orphanage. If an Australian family can provide both a home and family with some cultural input, then participants believed the child is better off here than in their birth culture.

Another opinion expressed was that in a perfect world, intercountry adoption would not exist, but since it is not a perfect world, then the practice has a role to play in family formation. Intercountry adoption was also described as helping many people – the child is helped, the adoptive family is helped, the country is helped, and Australia is enriched by the presence of the children as described by Aaron below. It is interesting that the birth family is missing in this interpretation. Perhaps it could be argued, that the birth family is helped because they no longer have to care for a child for which they were unable to provide. However, writers in the field would argue that it is the structural constraints in sending countries that make it impossible for birth families to keep their children, and that birth families do not view this situation positively (Chaponniere, 1983). Aaron suggested:

I mean there were obviously goods accruing to people, families like my family and other families who are desperate for a child and provide a child a loving home, there are goods accruing to the child itself, him or herself, there are perhaps goods accruing to the country that are having to give up the child. You weigh up all those things and work out which is the greater good or the greater net good. (Aaron, Adoptive Parent)

It seemed that people rationalised the practice of intercountry adoption because of global problems like poverty and war, or due to social problems in a country of origin. Participants did not consider these problems to be their responsibility, but instead they saw themselves as part of the solution.

Significant relationships for intercountry adoptive families

Weeks et al. (2001) and Weston (1991) comment on the significance and types of relationships formed by families of choice. They discuss the importance of forming strong bonds with others, which in the case of non-heterosexual individuals often involves forming strong bonds with other same-sex people. With intercountry adoption, the study found that friendships were often based on shared similar experiences of adoption. While some in the sample drew support from their own biological families, others drew significant support from other intercountry adoptive families. These families became, for

some participants, their support network and provided the same sense of support often associated with biological families (Finch & Mason, 1993).

Friendships

Samantha, an adoption professional emphasised the importance of relationships for families who have adopted or are in the process of adopting a child from overseas. She said:

It's a really challenging role that these people take on and that's why we try and encourage them to not only come along to these seminars, but keep talking and keep researching and connecting with the adoption community and other families who've done this, and who are going through the same process as them. Because I think that, you know, while in those joyous moments of becoming a family, they may not realise it, but I think it's important to have a great deal of support along this journey for themselves but also, very significantly for their kids. (Samantha, Adoption Professional)

Many people commented that attendance at the seminars resulted in the formation of firm friendships. For some people these friendships had endured and people continued to meet after the allocation of their children.

You know, we had a lunch and everyone brought food. And we've actually kept in touch with those people and once a year we'll get together. I mean, we come from all round the state, some from very far away, one girl I see every week. (Edwina, Support Group Representative)

For others, friendships were initiated through the social worker who suggested they contact people she knew for information about intercountry adoption. As George explained:

We sort of met friends through her, she sort of gave us people's information to ring and get information off them. And we've become real good friends with them. (George, Adoptive Parent)

The basis for these friendships seemed to be common experiences in terms of parenting a child from overseas and as Edwina said 'it's a great feeling of connectedness'. Friendships between intercountry adoptive families were supportive on a number of levels. The parents provided support to one another as well as promoting interaction between their children. It was hoped that the ability of children to meet up with others, either from the same nationality or adopted from overseas, would continue throughout childhood and be a source of strength for them. The importance of friendships during adolescence was described as especially important. Christine described her friendship with other intercountry adoptive parents like this:

We've got really close friend and you're on the same level as these other people, you can understand where they're coming from and they can understand where you're coming from. (Christine, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Karen explained her hopes for the friendships continuing between children in her playgroup:

We have a playgroup once a month with the Ethiopian group so we were lucky that when we were allocated there were a few other families that were allocated around the same time, so it's actually really nice for them 'cause I think it'd be so nice, to have those friendships into adulthood really. (Karen, Adoptive Parent)

Ann further articulated this point by explaining why she stressed the importance of the relationships between intercountry adoptees:

And I think it's so important for the children to hopefully have those connections now and later in life, because again something they said in the seminar, there might be things that the children want to talk about with one another and not talk to you about their adoption. (Ann, Adoptive Parent)

Some in the study believed that other adoptive parents were better able to understand their experiences rather than other friends because they were 'on the same journey'. This was in contrast to some family and friends who while supportive, lacked identification with the issues as Stacey and Theo explained:

We have to call on other adoptees' mothers to support us through what I call issues where we need support from our loving family and they just – they haven't been on the same journey, so they're not going to ever get it, you know. (Stacey, Adoptive Parent)

So quite often, it's hard to get support from other family members. They don't fully understand I suppose what people - what turn in the road - has got people to that point because adoption as you'd be aware of there's a lot of infertility issues, and other issues like that which are all a part of that whole mix. (Theo, Support Group Representative)

Friends in the adoption community were also seen as valuable sources of information as Leonie noted:

Everything I learned about adoption has been through friends I've made in the adoption community, and just listening to their stories and what they've been through and some of their trials and tribulations. (Leonie, Single Adoptive Parent)

There also seemed to be good friendships formed between people who already had children and those who were waiting, again Leonie explained of a group in her local area:

You know I met a group of women - you know - that I'm quite good friends with, and a group of us have met - you know - we met for maybe two years. We'd have dinner every

six weeks and it included three women who were waiting which was me, and three women who had children. So we know all their kids and listening to their stories and we were able to build a network. (Leonie, Single Adoptive Parent)

For some people, friendships had changed after the adoption. For example, Leonie explained how she no longer had as much contact with some of her older friends, yet had developed new friends with other mothers and children in the community.

There's a few that have changed. A few older friends who don't have children that I would see a lot, they sort of don't come visiting or it all seems a bit hard or they're like excited for me, but they've sort of pulled back a bit. But you know that's okay...I've definitely expanded into meeting more parents, and I'm meeting some you know women in particular I had hardly ever seen because we just had different hours and that's been great. (Leonie, Single Adoptive Parent)

My study showed, as did Pringle (2004), that the impact of adopting a child from overseas often results in a reordering and rethinking of relationships and friendships. This not only occurred with single adopters in my sample but also with parents who were part of a couple. Pringle concluded that her study was 'an excellent example of reflexive modernity in action in the shaping of selves and the making of family and kinship' (2004, p. 239). My study also explored 'reflexive modernity' but in the context of Australian intercountry adoption, and found that these families also shaped relationships around their family formed through intercountry adoption. The formation of relationships with other intercountry adoptive families, as well as developing new friendships with families in the community, also showed participants making deliberate choices in their own biographies. This is a reflection of the transformation of intimacy and family life noted by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995).

Relationships within families

Some participants in the study were unsure initially of how their family would react to their decision to adopt from overseas. Many said, however, that they had been, and continued to be, very supportive of their decision. Ann and Miles commented:

I wasn't sure, I thought they would be positive, but look, he's like any grandchild, they absolutely adore him and love him and, you know, there's absolutely no discrimination – and I think it's been a very positive thing for them because, you know, they have a child from another culture. (Ann, Adoptive Parent)

You just don't know, you never broached that subject with them before, you don't know whether they'd be happy about it but you know, it's turned out – he's just – he's great with them and they're great with him and they couldn't be happier for us, as a couple. Yeah. (Miles, Adoptive Parent)

The importance of support from family members was stressed, both during the process and when the child arrived. A few described their anguish at not knowing how their family would react. The comment was made that more distant relatives were unsure how to respond, whereas close relatives normally responded more positively and appropriately as Malcolm explained:

My mother and Philippa's parents were very supportive of John coming in. Obviously because they're along for the ride as well, and it's not necessarily the prettiest process but it is a process nonetheless. I suppose even things like your siblings, your brothers and sisters, how they react particularly if they've got biological children themselves. And I suppose you take another step further out you're talking about cousins and things like that, so I think the further away from the direct process itself they are, probably the more difficult they find to understand what's expected in terms of their reaction. (Malcolm, Adoptive Parent)

Interaction with members of the community

Participants in the study stressed the importance of developing links with the cultural community from where their child was born. This seemed to be the ideal way of incorporating the child's culture into their everyday life. Some, like Justine and Karen actively pursued friendships within the birth community of their children as they explained:

I have a lot of Chinese friends. I have a lot of Chinese people come in to our house so she talks to them and plays with them and talks to their mothers. (Justine, Single Adoptive Parent)

So I guess because we've fallen in love with Ethiopia basically. We've got you know a couple of families who've immigrated to Australia from Ethiopia who we've met and become quite close to so we feel like we've got a really close affinity to Ethiopia. (Karen, Adoptive Parent)

One adoption professional also stressed the importance of making links between the adoption community and other cultural groups in the community. Theresa illustrated how the Ethiopian, Chinese and Korean communities were supportive of the intercountry adoptees in her state:

You know, like it's as open as you want to be. And I think that works within the community too. You know, we have quite a bit to do with the Sudanese, Ethiopian community here 'cause it's a big one and they've been very supportive of Ethiopian adoptions here. We have a lot to do with the Chinese community here, the Korean community, 'cause they give us Korean lessons. (Theresa, Adoption Professional)

Stacey, acknowledged the importance of making links with other adoptees, but also making these cultural links with the wider ethnic community from where your child was born:

We can't just be talking about them linking with the adoption playgroups because that should not be their only link to Koreans. They've got to link to the Korean community. I see like a roadmap for me on how I can do it with the kids now, and link in with second generational Koreans. I found out about all these fantastic things that they do in Korea in the holidays with their kids. How Korean families here who the kids don't speak much Korean, they send the kids back. And I just think that we should be communicating to people, making it easier, it's not just about hanging out with adopted Korean kids. (Stacey, Adoptive Parent)

For others such interaction was seen as an important aspect for their child, but the difficulties of providing this kind of interaction were also noted. Some participants spoke of their involvement with the ethnic community being limited to attendance at social occasions like the Chinese Lantern Festival or Chinese New Year celebrations, while others as mentioned in the previous section, formed firm friendships within the community. While most in the study said they tried to interact with their child's original community or would do so once they had adopted their child, it was also noted how despite good intentions, this was one aspect of family life that could become neglected. Stacey gave an example of this point:

We've got to link in to the communities that they come from and the communities here in Australia are very keen to help us. I went through all the experiences that you know the same group of people went through and I came through and we all had all these idealistic views and whatever else, and only a few of us who are continuing on with language lessons and the rest they've let – they've just let it go. (Stacey, Adoptive Parent)

This is one area where there seems to be a difference between what participants say they believe and their actions. The majority believed interaction with birth culture was important, but when it came to enacting it, it did not always happen. The interaction did not occur for a range of reasons including: lack of time, lack of motivation and pressure from family who were not aware of the importance of creating links for the adopted child with their birth culture. Rebecca explained:

Yeah, I think it's like there's so many people in my family have said to me why are you doing these things, she's just Australian now. She's your daughter, she's Australian. And I have to sort of say no, that's – yes, she was born in China and that's a big part of her story. You know, and like in the same way I was born in Germany but now I'm Australian and I'm living in Australia, but it's still a part of who I am. (Rebecca, Adoptive Parent)

Relationships with support groups

Many in the study reported they had made significant relationships with others through their involvement in the various support groups. Often these supportive friendships had begun during the education phase of the adoption process. For Karen, the early relationships formed have remained important to herself and her family:

But I think it's actually good to build those friendships you know with people so that if you do have issues when you become a parent you've got that support network built in, people who've been there and done that. (Karen, Adoptive Parent)

Molly, a waiting parent, described how important the relationships formed through the support group have been to her:

You know that's another reason that the support group is just so important, just to make friendships with other people who are on the same journey and who are going through the same you know ups and downs. Like you have days where you just know it's going to happen, everything's going to be fine and you're feeling really good about yourself (chuckles). And then you have other days and you just sit there and you go, what am I doing, you know? It's just so important to know that other people are doing that and other people have the same ups and downs. (Molly, Single Prospective Adoptive Parent)

The support groups were also seen as a way of fostering relationships within a particular community of adoptees and their parents. Some of the support group representatives explained how they often facilitated meetings between people who had adopted from a particular country in order to provide support for new or waiting parents. Claudia emphasised this role of the support group:

And often people just want to talk to someone else who's been through that situation so we just connect people up. It's more on a personal level than anything formal...Yeah, well also if they've got other people in the area with similar aged children, I put them together and I think that helps a lot. (Claudia, Support Group Representative)

The support provided by these groups also involved disseminating information via newsletters, websites, chat groups, personal conversations and organising seminars on topics such as attachment. The following comments outline the ways in which support groups encouraged adoptive parents to meet other intercountry adoptive parents.

So families who are applying will often call me and ask me a lot of questions...the people who have the passion and the drive to find out information are the waiting parents and the support groups who want to reassure families who are waiting. So, you know, we have a vested interest in it. (Edwina, Support Group Representative)

And from playgroups and talking to people. And there is a big support group on the internet, and like I said, people are really willing to help because they know what the process is like. (Mitchell, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

But there is a group called Australians Adopt China. It's a web group and they do emails and meeting up, but it is more a web based group. It's a support group but they don't kind of organise things. It's just a kind of forum. It's also good to read about other people's experiences. (Natalie, Single Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Relationship with the assessor

Some participants said they had formed a good relationship with their assessor during the assessment process, and might contact them later if they required help. This was not the experience of all participants, however.

And you know we really like her and we get the impression she really likes us 'cause she rings us from time to time and yeah. So it's a relationship you know kind of been built over the whole thing and – and like I feel that I could talk to her if there was an issue. Like I wouldn't necessarily seek outside help. I'd go to her because you know she's been doing it for so long. (Karen, Adoptive Parent)

Emily also noted:

I know some families do contact their social workers when they're reaching, you know, a point of either anxiety or they're having issues. (Emily, Support Group Representative)

Conclusion

My interviews show that there are a range of reasons why adoptive families feel different from families with biological children. Intercountry adoptive families look different, they face different issues because of the past histories of their children, and they have challenges related to bringing up adopted children. Relationships with other intercountry adoptive families were found to be especially important to participants because of the support and understanding they afforded both parents and children. The friendships were also felt to be especially important during adolescence, so intercountry adoptees could talk to others who might be experiencing similar emotions and challenges. While the support of family members was considered important, the support from other adoptive parents who had experienced similar experiences was seen as essential.

Families formed through intercountry adoption see themselves among the diversity of families found in Australia.

Families are made in different ways. Some families have got mum and dad and two kids or one kid, and some families have got two mums or some families have got two dads and, yeah, some families have got biological kids and some families have got kids that are adopted. (Rebecca, Adoptive Parent)

Rebecca tells her daughter that all families are different, and it is how policy makers deal with this diversity that will be discussed next in Chapter Six.

6

The Australian domestic policy environment

I think another influence on the assessment process is the burden that's on the state. Like in terms of the life of a child potentially. The responsibility I guess to know the ins and outs of that family well enough to be able to match a child to that family whose needs are going to be able to be met there. (Rachel, Adoption Professional)

Rachel raised some important issues in relation to the role of the state in the provision of intercountry adoption services in Australia. She emphasised the responsibility of the state in selecting intercountry adoptive parents, the importance of strong assessment procedures and the central focus of the process being on the child and its needs. This chapter examines how the Australian state, meaning the state and territory governments as well as the Commonwealth Government, manage intercountry adoption services domestically in Australia. I discuss how participants understood the policy environment in which intercountry adoption operates, and examine the personal experiences of adoptive parents and prospective adoptive parents with intercountry adoption policy and practice in NSW.

How is intercountry adoption perceived as a policy area?

Intercountry adoption: Low priority

Participants believed that intercountry adoption policy in Australia was not considered a high priority, by either the Commonwealth or state governments. Typical comments about the government's view of intercountry adoption highlighted ambivalence about the issue and a belief that it was insignificant because of the low number of children involved. Donna and Charlotte both explained:

Well what's in it for Australia? Why should the Federal Government really give a damn? That's the impression I get. (Donna, Adoptive Parent)

I think they view it as a nuisance because it's just a blip. I just think that no one's really wanted to take it on and because it's comparatively such a small number of children that are

adopted from overseas each year, it's not a big enough group of people to cause anyone you know to pay any attention. (Charlotte, Adoptive Parent)

When participants were asked to describe what kind of policy issue intercountry adoption was, responses varied. Most described it as a child welfare policy, because it was about children. As Lara described:

Yeah, definitely child welfare. It's about the needs and welfare of children regardless of where they come from. (Lara, Adoption Professional)

Others saw it more broadly as a social policy or a family policy because of the emphasis on forming families through the process. A few participants also considered intercountry adoption as an immigration issue because of the strict requirements for bringing a child into the country and because it was seen as adding skills to the Australian community. As Leonie and Tanya explained:

The way it's conducted is a very bureaucratic immigration process with heavy vetting on your suitability to protect the children that you're going to bring into Australia. (Leonie, Single Adoptive Parent)

I guess it's a way of increasing the market in Australia and the skill base, the labour base all that sort of stuff...But it's a way of doing that, of building connections with other countries, I guess satisfying some obligations in the global community. (Tanya, Adoptive Parent)

Most, however, did not consider intercountry adoption as an immigration issue because the number of children entering Australia was perceived as too low. This point was highlighted by Margot:

The numbers aren't big enough for it to be part of immigration policy I wouldn't have thought. (Margot, Adoption Professional)

Personal and political issue

Intercountry adoption was described by participants mainly in terms of being a personal, private issue because it was the mechanism that allowed them to become a family. There was also a sense, however, that intercountry adoption was becoming more of a political issue, perhaps not political for the whole of the community, but certainly political for those in the adoption community.

The politicisation of the issue was attributed to a number of factors including the federal inquiry into the Adoption of Children from Overseas, which was chaired by Bronwyn Bishop (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services,

2005) and the increased media exposure of the issue both domestically and internationally.

As Patrick and Danielle commented:

I guess it's becoming more political because it's being raised in political circles. It's being raised in political circles through the media or directly. People are writing letters to their local members about it, I think, those that are involved in the process, about cost and process and I know it's been talked about at the Prime Minister's level because I know Deborah Lee-Furness has spoken to the Prime Minister about it or is going to. (Patrick, Adoptive Parent)⁸

I think for a long time it was seen as a nuisance. It seems to have gotten a higher profile since Bronwyn Bishop did her review. Now they seem to be more serious about it. (Danielle, Adoption Professional)

Lily also explained:

It's got a political agenda at the moment, because it's all in the papers at the moment with Deborah Lee-Furness building that up and she's talking to every politician under the sun at the moment. (Lily, Adoption Professional)

There was a sense that if intercountry adoption became more of a political issue, then the process would change for the better and the government would be more inclined to be involved in the issue. As Justine noted:

I think it can be a political issue and I think it should be in some ways because there's a lot of problems. (Justine, Single Adoptive Parent)

The fact that intercountry adoption is a complex issue with many stakeholders and interest groups was also seen as adding to the political nature of the debate. Charlotte illustrated this point:

Lexie: When you say very political, what do you mean by that?

Charlotte: Because there's lots of different interests and it's not straightforward. (Charlotte, Adoptive Parent)

Since the client group was mainly middle class, well educated and articulate, this aspect also added to the political nature of the topic. Intercountry adoptive parents were seen as increasingly voicing their opinions to governments, particularly in relation to perceived problems with the system. This was considered a recent phenomenon and one that was

⁸ The actor, Deborah-Lee Furness and her husband, Hugh Jackman, have adopted two children from the USA. Although the couple began the adoption process in Australia, they did not complete it here and their children were adopted under the US system.

linked to the increased awareness of the issue. Kirsty and Elizabeth both commented on this:

I does tend to be a middle class issue, and the middle class are more educated and more politically vocal whereas if it were more a working class issue, then I don't think it would get as much attention in a sense and I think they often feel bound to respond to the political pressure that the adults place on them. (Kirsty, Adoption Professional)

I understand that there are very strong adoptive parent lobby groups in some states and territories who get things done because they lobby so hard. And I mean some of the families that are intercountry adoptive families, I mean a lot of them because of the costs I guess, are well-educated, articulate, you know probably some of the people sitting up (chuckle) high. (Elizabeth, Adoption Professional)

Another adoption professional commented on the focus of the government inquiry in the following way:

If you look back at the Bishop Inquiry and the focus that took, that was very little about the needs of children and very much about the needs of people who would like to adopt. (Richard, Adoption Professional)

This seems to be a dilemma for intercountry adoption policy since the legislation both domestically and internationally stresses the importance of the practice being in the best interests of the child. Yet this seems to be at odds with some adoptive parents who believe that their needs should also be considered and incorporated into intercountry adoption policies.

Who should the policy focus on?

How people understand the emphasis of the intercountry adoption policies appeared to have an impact on how they reacted to the policies and processes in Australia. This was explained well by Kirsty, an adoption professional:

I mean our client is the child, our focus is the child who may not even be born yet and this whole issue about we're there to find families for children, we're not there to find children for families. It's very difficult for a lot of applicants to accept that and so you end up with issues like Deborah Lee-Furness says she's fixing the system and she's going to make it easier for adoptive parents and I think well, this isn't about the adoptive parents, this is about the children and the expectation that there are millions of children sitting over there just waiting for families...

I don't think a lot of the policymakers or people who maybe are in a position to influence policy really understand that this is about the children rather than the parents. I still think that they see the parents' needs as being ahead of the children's needs because they know the parent. The parent is here, and the parent may well be saying, this is about a child in Ethiopia but really, the pressure is on for them to get a child, not for that child to be placed with someone but for them to have the child. And I think while ever it's the parents who

are doing the arguing, they're arguing for their own interests. So I think because policymakers at this end only see the party at this end, they're not really responding to the children's needs. (Kirsty, Adoption Professional)

The role of the Australian Government in intercountry adoption

As outlined earlier in Chapter Three (p. 128), responsibility for intercountry adoption in Australia is shared by the Commonwealth, and state, and territory governments. Since the signing of the Hague Convention by Australia, the Commonwealth Government's Attorney-General's Department (AGD) has become the Australian Central Authority, with each state and territory having the role of Central Authorities. In this discussion, 'the state' is taken as meaning all levels of government involved in the design and implementation of intercountry adoption policy and practice, unless otherwise noted. Commenting on the role of the Attorney-General's Department, one adoption professional said:

And I think that you know intercountry adoption is something that does in some ways transcend the usual boundaries of the division of government responsibilities. You know it is a psychosocial issue, it is a social policy issue, it is a legal issue. My personal opinion, I think we've got a good balance in Australia, having the operational responsibilities sitting within human services, community welfare departments, where there is an organisational history and expertise in human services. And then at a national level sitting within a legal department where there is a strong organisational culture and history in legal policy, because it does transcend both sides. (Hugh, Adoption Professional)

Participants in the study were asked about their impressions of how the Attorney-General's Department was performing in managing the existing overseas programs, considering potential new programmes and coordinating a national policy in relation to intercountry adoption. Opinion varied, but mostly participants spoke positively about the increased role of the Commonwealth Government in relation to intercountry adoption. Sophia, for example, believed it showed Australia fulfilling its role in the global community:

It's addressing the needs of vulnerable children and we recognise that Australia has a role to assist vulnerable children in foreign countries that need a family. (Sophia, Adoption Professional)

Participants felt that the Attorney-General's Department, by virtue of being a Commonwealth Department, was in a good position to liaise with overseas countries about current programmes and to discuss opportunities for future programme development. The AGD was seen as having greater resources as well as access to wider diplomatic avenues for researching new programmes.

I guess there are advantages being within the Commonwealth system because the Commonwealth, it's set up to deal with external affairs whereas state departments almost by definition aren't. So there are some inherent elements of intercountry adoption that is probably easier for it to sit within the Commonwealth and represent Australia as a whole. (Hugh, Adoption Professional)

Some participants described the current system as 'more rigorous', 'based on a strategic plan', and 'a very transparent process'. The current situation was contrasted with the previous 'lead state' approach discussed in Chapter Three (pp. 126-127), where one Australian state had the responsibility for liaising with another country on behalf of Australia as a whole. Most, but not all, saw the current situation as representing a positive development. Sophia explained:

So we had a very fragmented model before...but the Commonwealth is the conduit, they're the point at which these things may or may not happen. They have the diplomatic connections, they have the infrastructure, they have the resources to do that far, far better than the states and territories ever did. (Sophia, Adoption Professional)

Some, however, had questions about the orientation of the AGD in relation to intercountry adoption and were unsure about whose best interests the department was representing. Lara described her thoughts in this way:

I have mixed feelings. I think the AGD is doing it because they want to maybe to some extent, meet the needs of the people, of the adults in Australia who want to parent. There's definitely some of that in my local group. Yeah, why else would they be going to visit different orphanages and organisations? (Lara, Adoption Professional)

Those who were not as positive about the current role of the Commonwealth Government highlighted that the relationships and goodwill built up by the states and support groups over years with overseas countries had become redundant. Jessica commented:

I think that where people are apprehensive for the future though, is that as the Attorney-General's Department itself comes to terms with how difficult it is to enter into new relationships and the fact that that might not be possible and certainly in the short term, a lot of the harmonisation work being undertaken is, oh, how shall I say this – it's a little bit difficult to separate policy and procedure from your operations and the states retain the practice wisdom and the operations wisdom...By and large these are legally qualified staff and I guess the anxiety is that without coming from an operational, a social work background, that's not as easily done in a Department like the Attorney-General's. (Jessica, Adoption Professional)

In contrast to the view described above, was one that saw the government's involvement as bringing transparency and legitimacy to the process as Lara and Naomi both noted:

I guess the good thing is they're not a parent group. They're not a particular you know religious group or something else. They're actually a federal government department which

I think provides some safeguards as far as the safety of the children in those countries are concerned so that if a program is established, those children are definitely available for adoption. (Lara, Adoption Professional)

It says that we don't actively promote children to be put in a position where they're commoditised and encouraged to be orphaned to meet the needs of wealthy families who want a child. And what it says is that Australia is really about just addressing the child's needs which is making sure that adoption is not a first priority and that, you know, we do look at other methods first. (Naomi, Support Group Representative)

While there were positives seen in relation to the Commonwealth Government's involvement in intercountry adoption policy, there was some concern voiced by professionals about the need to consider the broader issues in relation to intercountry adoption. On one side, the issue is that the federal government is considering expanding intercountry adoption programmes with overseas nations. In contrast, some participants questioned the rationale for this expansion. Jessica expressed her opinion in this way:

Having said that, they are working with a number of countries, which might in the future meet the criteria and it's good to have dedicated resources to be able to monitor that actively and develop relationships with that country. That said, I guess the question has to be why? Why are we doing it? Why do we think it is a good thing? It's just such a vexed and complicated area. Whose needs are we meeting? Would those children be taken up by other countries? Is there a need for Australia to do this when we have permanent care children sitting here who don't have a family? I mean, it's so complex and you get obviously different views depending on which stakeholder you're speaking to. (Jessica, Adoption Professional)

Those in favour of expanding programmes with overseas countries seemed to be concentrating on what they perceived as the end result – more children and reduced waiting times. As Claudia and Karen pointed out:

I think a lot of the sources for adoption are drying up. I know, you know, Korea used to be a big goer and now that's almost not happening and, like, Columbia used to be a source of children, quite a big source – yeah, so I mean if these countries want to adopt their children out and they're happy to do that, I can't see why Australia can't, perhaps, organise some government-to-government process with them. (Claudia, Support Group Representative)

There's so many parents wanting to adopt and you know everyone comes to adoption for all different reasons and I guess the sad thing is that you've got to wait so long and you're not getting any younger as you sit in the queue and wait... I know they do have plans to establish new programs and I really do think that they need to either expand the current programs or explore new programs. (Karen, Adoptive Parent)

Commonwealth payments

Given that the Commonwealth Government has taken a greater role in the management of intercountry adoption, and has implemented many of the recommendations from the

Standing Committee Report on Overseas Adoption (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2005), participants voiced a few concerns that questioned the government's philosophies underpinning intercountry adoption policy. Originally, the Commonwealth Baby Bonus payment was not paid universally to all parents, because there was an age requirement in relation to the child.⁹ Since children adopted from overseas are often older on arrival, it meant that their adoptive parents were ineligible for the Baby Bonus. Some in the study said this situation changed when pressure was placed on the government by the outcomes of the inquiry and adoptive parents are now in receipt of the payment.

Following lobbying, intercountry adoptive families are now also eligible for a Maternity Immunisation Allowance. In both cases with the Commonwealth benefits (the Baby Bonus and the Maternity Immunisation Allowance), access was originally denied to intercountry adoptive families, but after lobbying, adoptive families were made eligible to receive the payments. Although not originally considered equal to other families, these changes suggest that the federal government is beginning to recognise intercountry adoptive families in a similar manner to biological families.

The Government funding is not being put into adoption...Well, you know, to start with, not all adoptive families were eligible because it was only for children under two. So it's sort of giving that message that the best, you know, the correct way to add to your family is biological and adoption is not really as valuable or as mainstream. It's sort of sidelined. (Rebecca, Adoptive Parent)

This is an example of a government sending mixed messages as discussed by Fox Harding (1996, p. 221), resulting in a policy context in which communication can be interpreted as contradictory and confused. It also shows that biological parenting is 'sanctioned and rewarded by a variety of benefits which are conferred on the new parents' (Kirk, 1967, p. 12) as opposed to those that were not originally extended to adoptive parents, but have now been incorporated into the policy framework.

Another area of social policy in which contradictions exist in terms of government provision and family policy is with IVF. Currently (in 2009), individuals receive a Medicare rebate for costs incurred in relation to IVF. There is, however, no fee relief for the costs involved in intercountry adoption except for a hardship provision, for people who

⁹ The Baby Bonus was introduced in 2001-02 and is a payment by the Australian Commonwealth Government to families following the birth of a baby or the adoption of a child. In order to receive the payment, parents must meet the relevant eligibility requirements.

require help with the costs associated with adoption. This suggests that from a policy perspective, biological families are perceived more favourably than families formed through adoption.

I kind of wish that the government didn't put so much money into funding IVF through Medicare and put a little bit more towards you know intercountry adoption where there are you know kids already who exist rather than trying to create kids. But that's a whole other story. (Karen, Adoptive Parent)

There appears to be a contradiction in policy rationale. The then Howard Liberal Government hosted the inquiry into overseas adoption, formed plans based on the recommendations from the inquiry that informed the Commonwealth-State Agreement (Attorney-General's Department, 2008), 'set the blueprint for the future', and funded a federal department and gave it managerial responsibility. Yet, the entitlement by intercountry adoptive families to the Baby Bonus only became a reality after the Inquiry. Thus, initially the Howard Government did not grant the same status to families formed through intercountry adoption as it did to biological families.

Since the Rudd Labor Government came to office in November 2007 there have been a number of changes in relation to intercountry adoption which include further implementation of recommendations from the Inquiry into Overseas Adoption. The Peak Group was established in May 2008, the State-Commonwealth Agreement has been re-signed and other changes have occurred in relation to family policy. The recent budget has foreshadowed changes to the Medicare rebate for IVF which are due to commence in July 2010. The changes mean that patients will pay more out of pocket expenses than currently because of changes to the Medicare safety net (Robotham, 2009).

The question is whether such a policy direction is merely a cost cutting measure because of the global financial crisis, a way of stopping doctors from overcharging or whether it represents a shift in thinking about families formed using reproductive technology. If the cost cutting measures with IVF mean less families are potentially formed then what are the implications for how the Rudd Labor Government views families and in turn, family policy? The changes in relation to intercountry adoption suggest that the government is positively disposed towards families formed in this way, but it is difficult to understand what the policy environment is in relation to biological families. The messages coming from the government are unclear in relation to family policy and it is, therefore, difficult to

understand how intercountry adoptive families are perceived in relation to other family types in the Australian policy environment.

Harmonisation, uniformity and streamlining

During the interviews, participants gave examples of how they believed the intercountry adoption process had been streamlined. Some talked about a decrease in the number of times finger-printing was required, and others spoke of how paperwork was processed more quickly with their second application. Also discussed were the words ‘uniformity’ and ‘harmonisation’ in relation to intercountry adoption. One adoption professional highlighted the differences between the two ideas:

I guess to my mind harmonisation is about lifting practices and policies and procedures to improve things and I guess at the same time bringing them together so that there is a level of similarity and comparity. I guess uniformity would be to say that everything’s the same everywhere but not necessarily improved. Uniformity could imply that you bring things down to the lowest common denominator. But either way, it’s an absolute statement whereas I guess harmonisation is a shared direction. Streamlining to my mind implies that things work faster and with less impositions, depending on who’s using the term. (Hugh, Adoption Professional)

Ideas about harmonisation and uniformity in policy and practice led some in the study to suggest that intercountry adoption should be federalised rather than provided on a state and territory basis. Federalising adoption was viewed positively by some because they thought the consequence would be a more streamlined approach resulting in adoptive parents being allocated children more quickly. Others recognised the difficulties inherent in this approach due to the differences in state adoption legislation. They thought instead that the Attorney-General’s Department was performing appropriately with discussions about harmonising practices across Australia. Patrick noted how inconsistent policies were around Australia.

And there’s just a little bit of an inconsistency across the board in Australia I think, like ones – what one state does and what another state does just seems to be very different. (Patrick, Adoptive Parent)

Hugh commented that harmonisation is preferable to uniformity because it allows for the state and territory differences that exist across Australia. He explained:

The notion of having absolutely harmonised – or I guess the alternative would be absolutely uniform practice, is probably not a reality, and in some ways, I don’t know that you would want the same system operating in Darwin that you would want in Sydney. There are fundamental differences in geography and in size and demography of different Australian jurisdictions. So I don’t know that uniformity in and of itself is necessarily the

best outcome and certainly, the Standing Committee's recommendation and more importantly I guess the recommendations that were accepted by government were very clear in looking at harmonisation and not uniformity as a means and ends to itself. (Hugh, Adoption Professional)

The anti-adoption debate

One of the discussion points in the Standing Committee Report on Overseas Adoption in Australia (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2005), was that there was 'a general lack of support for adoption – both local and intercountry adoption – in most of the state and territory welfare departments...the lack of support ranged from indifference to hostility' (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2005, p. viii). This has been interpreted as meaning that Australia has an 'anti-adoption' culture. Participants were asked about their impressions of the adoption culture in Australia and many adoptive parents and prospective adoptive parents supported the anti-adoption view and gave a number of reasons for this opinion. Some felt the anti-adoption culture had arisen because of the history of the Stolen Generations and because of early adoption practices in Australia during the 1960s and 1970s. There was also a view that the anti-adoption culture was more common amongst social workers than within the general community. As Charlotte and Justine explained:

Because I think the social workers that run DoCS or at least, in my experience have grown up with the aftermath of the sort of '60s and '70s adoption problems which you know - well locally more than anything with women who were forced to in different ways to give up babies. And so you know I think Australia like other Western countries there's a lot of negativity about that as well as the Stolen Generation. So, it's very hard to drag out and put into the light because I think it's just an underlying philosophy. I can't put it any - any other way. (Charlotte, Adoptive Parent)

I think it's the adoption culture. Australia needs to be more positive towards it and I can see that the Stolen Generation and a lot of those things have fed into an anti-adoption culture in Australia. I still think we've got one and I would like to see that change and I think that the anti-adoption culture is bigger amongst political and professionals such as social workers than it is amongst the general community. (Justine, Single Adoptive Parent)

Adoptive parents and prospective adoptive parents confirmed the findings of the Standing Committee Report in relation to Australia having an anti-adoption sentiment, yet professionals did not confirm this. Adoption professionals believed that Australia's history in relation to children needing care was complex and needed to be considered when examining current intercountry adoption practices. As Hugh noted:

Look, anti-adoption culture - I don't know that that's a fair comment to make...In a country like Australia we have a very interesting and very complicated history with things like the Stolen Generation, Children of the Empire. A whole range of past practices to do with

long-term foster care, permanent care, that whether or not they're directly related to intercountry adoption, they certainly inform the greater community debate on those issues. And naturally they must have an effect. (Hugh, Adoption Professional)

Another adoption professional described how she felt the anti-adoption sentiment came from the method used in the community consultations by Bronwyn Bishop:

And so what her [Bronwyn Bishop's] formula was, question them on how many children there are in care, then find out how many of those got adopted in the last financial year or last period, and it's always not enough for her. And then she'd say well that proves you're anti-adoption. And now that I'm moving on to your figures about intercountry adoption and how low Australia's intercountry adoption numbers are, I can see very clearly that you're completely anti-adoption, all of you in all the public services. (Sophia, Adoption Professional)

Jane, however, noted that sometimes the system in which social workers operated could be biased against adoption. She explained:

There's an old adage here that they see adoption, I mean as you're bringing children in and all they're going to do is clog up the welfare system...For some reason there's just been a very negative spin put on adoption per se, not just necessarily overseas adoption but the overall view from senior management is you know one that they really would prefer that – I think they'd like it if we just disappeared tomorrow you know (chuckle). (Jane, Adoption Professional)

Participants also thought that adoption professionals because of these views were creating barriers to the building of families through intercountry adoption. While some in NSW reported they found the education seminars very negative, others believed they were pitched at the right level. In fact as Naomi pointed out, realistically portraying the possible outcomes of intercountry adoption was often interpreted by applicants as holding negative views towards the practice and, as being anti-adoption.

I guess what they're trying to do is counteract the complete naiveté of prospective adoptive parents coming into a system, where all they're thinking about is we want a child, we want a child and we want it desperately and you've got these people who have years of experience on the other hand, kind of saying hey, slow down a bit, you need to consider this, this and this. And I guess, you know, they're really just trying to, yeah, balance out the perspective that the prospective parents come in with and, I guess, when people for the first time are hit with reality it can feel negative and it can feel yucky. (Naomi, Support Group Representative)

Another influence on perceptions of Australia's anti-adoption culture were the stringent rules in place to regulate intercountry adoption. As Jane pointed out:

But with adoption, particularly overseas adoptions, we're asking people to basically walk across burning coals and jump through hoops and do all sorts of things and I think this is where people get that sense from that there's so many restrictions and difficulties put in

their face and this is what people perceive as the anti-adoption culture. (Jane, Adoption Professional)

The role of state and territory governments in intercountry adoption

Intercountry adoption policy and practice is complicated in Australia because of the differences in state and territory legislation, and by the different departments involved around the country. While overall, the increased role of the AGD was viewed positively by participants in this study, there were still issues arising from the differing legislative and regulatory provisions operating around Australia.

Child welfare focus or child protection?

Participants raised questions on a state level about which department should be responsible for intercountry adoption. These issues were raised both in NSW as well as in the other states and territories around Australia. While many saw the focus of intercountry adoption at a state level on children and families, there was the feeling that the location of intercountry adoption within a child protection agency was not the most suitable location. A number of participants raised concerns about staff with child protection backgrounds working in adoption. Tanya and Theo explained:

I think it's difficult when DoCS' main focus is on child protection and not on adoption and I think that's the case in all of the states from what I know. So you know, they're almost two opposing things. So they look at adoptive parents from the point of view of child protection which is part of adoption as well, but a lot more focus on support rather than you've done something wrong, prove to me that you're not. It's the guilty until proved innocent versus the other way around. (Tanya, Adoptive Parent)

My argument has always been that quite often in most states we've actually got the whole adoption department in the wrong department. I'd rather see it residing under the Attorney-General's Department or the Department of Communities rather than Child Safety, 'cause when you read the Child Safety website and what Child Safety is about, it's about you know protecting neglected, abused children. (Theo, Support Group Representative)

The issue was also raised that because intercountry adoption is located within a child protection department, that the area is inadequately funded because the majority of funds are allocated to child protection matters. As Simon commented:

We know that they don't put many resources into it at DoCS because their primary focus is child protection in NSW and that's where they put their resources. There are very few people dealing with intercountry adoptions yet it's an incredibly popular thing for families

to want to adopt now and they're not putting any additional resources into it. (Simon, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Focusing on local children or overseas children?

Participants in the study commented that within state departments there seemed also to be some confusion whether state governments should focus on helping local children or overseas born children. The opinion expressed was that departments were uncertain of their obligations in relation to local versus global issues as Abigail commented:

Also looking at the needs of children within Australia and I think that's quite difficult particularly for the department I would say. I think that it's difficult to kind of see where it fits in because although these children do need care I think it's also hard to see how they weigh up. What about all the children who actually need families here, who need permanent care, so that's something that I think is taken into account? (Abigail, Adoption Professional)

Lorraine also noted:

I was having a conversation with one of the people in the department and they were sort of saying that you know like there should be a better emphasis on local adoption and local children, like children who need foster care and things like that. And that they sort of like were a bit annoyed about the fact that so many resources were going to intercountry adoption when these aren't really our children, if you know what I mean? (Lorraine, Support Group Representative)

Who should pay for intercountry adoption services?

If intercountry adoption is understood as another way to form families then some states argued that the costs should be subsidised by state governments. If intercountry adoption services were not seen as core business because the policy did not involve children living in Australia, then the onus would be on applicants to pay for the service. NSW has developed a user-pay system while other states have not taken this approach. There appears to be a difference in philosophy in these approaches that includes anomalies in government policy, increasing service expectations, questioning the value of the practice in relation to other government services provided, and different ideologies in relation to accessing services. These opinions are outlined below:

But it should still be taxpayer funded like other things that we're already doing are taxpayer funded. I just don't buy the argument that this should be entirely user pay. If that's the case then let's not fund in any way IVF, let's make that entirely user paid, it certainly is not. I know that you know, the majority of our IVF cycles were Medicare funded you know, and if that's the case, well this has to be as well. (Aaron, Adoptive Parent)

Successive Ministers have always wanted to steer away from cost recovery, because they felt like it quickly reeks of feeling like people buying children and also the kind of clients that we would have is – or are having would say like I pay for the service, why don't you approve me, like then it becomes a right to a child because you have paid for it I suppose. (Richard, Adoption Professional)

That's right. Because New South Wales doesn't believe that adoption is their core business. Therefore, you know, they need to get some money back to manage their core business. Luckily, here they feel that adoption is one of the opportunities that children have to find a family. And, if our core business is children, then we shouldn't be having core business that is only available for the wealthy. (Theresa, Adoption Professional)

If applicants had to pay the full cost of the service, it also suggested to participants that the government was unsupportive of families formed through intercountry adoption. Because the state government is unwilling to subsidise the fees, then the logic followed that they did not see intercountry adoption as a legitimate way to form a family. As Patrick explained:

I think it's saying that, you know, it's not something they see as worthwhile. They don't see it as a way of forming – well it seems to me a way of forming a family. Yeah, that's how, I guess that's how strongly I feel – we feel about it. (Patrick, Adoptive Parent)

Emily also commented:

You know if - if you're looking at the user-pay system you want to know who you're dealing with. You want to have a return on your – the money that you're paying. (Emily, Support Group Representative)

While the user-pay model of payment was a contentious issue in the current study, funding of intercountry adoption services has always been an ongoing issue in NSW. Marshall commented in 1984 that:

there is strongly divided opinion about whether the costs to applicant parents should be borne in the main, by the applicants, or whether overseas adoption should be subsidised. Even where there is agreement that the service should be government funded, there is disagreement about whether this should be a matter for the Department of Youth and Community Services (now called DoCS) or for the Federal Government'. (Marshall, 1984-85, p. 95)

In the current research, it was not suggested that the Federal Government should subsidise the process in NSW, but the current user-pay system was not universally accepted as the best approach for the provision of intercountry adoption services.

A service for children or a service for families?

The issue of payment is also linked with the dilemma about who is the state's client for intercountry adoption services. Is the client the adoptive parent, the unknown child from

overseas, or the country of origin? Working out who is the actual client of the service has an impact on what kind of policies are put in place and how the service operates. It also has implications for the cost of providing the service, whether the cost should be born by the state government or subsidised through the state government or whether clients of the service should be paying the full cost or part of the costs associated with the service. Also of importance, are questions about how the state views the families formed through intercountry adoption, and whether they are considered 'legitimate' families. Kirsty described the dilemma for state service providers:

Now it's because these children can't be placed locally, can't stay within their own culture and the countries can't accommodate them that they then end up being placed. But I think there's still this confusion about whose service this is, or for whom is this a service. Is this a service for the children or is this a service for the families? (Kirsty, Adoption Professional)

Intercountry adoption policy in practice across Australia

Telfer notes that many people pursue intercountry adoption in response to infertility and it becomes for them, a final chance of parenthood. He comments also that 'The bureaucratic hurdles that must be negotiated constitute, for some, a barrier between a state of childlessness as incompleteness and the transformation from couple to parents' (Telfer, 2000, p. 73). Therefore, it is easy to understand the importance of the process to applicants who are trying to become a family. In this section, I will discuss participant opinions about the process that applicants undergo in order to become intercountry adoptive parents. Due to the variation in adoption legislation and regulations around Australia, education and assessment procedures also differ around the country. I begin by outlining the findings in relation to the states and territories based on comments by adoption professionals and support group representatives. The information presented for NSW which then follows, will be more detailed because of the in-depth interviews conducted with adoptive parents and prospective adoptive parents living in NSW.

Overall response to the process

Intercountry adoption applicants come from a variety of backgrounds. They may be older or younger, they may be angry about their inability to produce a biological child or not

have tested their fertility. However, they are unified in their desire to complete the process successfully in order to receive a child. As Richard illustrated:

I think when they're in the process the focus is give me a child, give me a child and that will be my happiness...And so there's a core of angry people. There's also a core of anger about the fact that people have to adopt, and they cannot have a birth child, and that there's some underlying anger there. So, and then there is the mystique about the assessment. There are bureaucratic processes that people need to go through that very quickly is turned against the Department or against the government as being anti-adoption and rather than seeing like, you know, in many ways there are only a few children that overseas countries make available for adoption, and the frustration that people feel about having to go through those processes become the brunt of political pressure with people saying like why don't you do it quicker, faster and more. (Richard, Adoption Professional)

Participants recognised that the adoption of children from overseas must be regulated in order to protect the rights of children, but the process was described as being long and complicated. This point was highlighted by prospective adoptive parents and current adoptive parents as well as by adoption professionals. Typical comments included:

My thoughts are that I just think the process here is way too long... I don't denounce the process and everything that we've gone through, but if it could just be done, I mean I think it can all be done in, this end, six to nine months. It's the time frame that has really got to us, I think. (Kay, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

I really just felt we were just meant to jump through a certain set of hoops whether they think that you know if you jump through x amount of hoops and you know don't go mad that you know that's some sort of a show of your dedication to wanting to adopt. (Charlotte, Adoptive Parent)

And – and you know as much as you brief people, you don't actually prepare them that much apart from telling them it's an intrusive process. (Malcolm, Adoptive Parent)

They're concerned and they're stressed about the waiting times, which is really difficult. (Abigail, Adoptive Professional)

I guess all that I can comment on is that the process itself is incredibly complex. It involves so many variables along the way and so many variables about different families and children who are adopted, that each case is completely different. (Rosemary, Adoption Professional)

The process was described by some as bewildering, and the emotional reaction was often one of anxiety and uncertainty as outlined by participants below:

My intercountry adoption experience is you are sort of in the land of unknown for a lot of the time. I suppose Australian adoption may be the same. But you sort of fill out your paperwork and you're in limbo a lot of the time until they tell you you're accepted, and then the paperwork goes overseas and you're sort of in limbo again and sort of no one gives you a heads up unless you ring them. There's no sort of continual contact. (George, Adoptive Parent)

Maybe she'd see something in us that was not perfect parent material, something that was fairly simple, maybe you've got your shoes on the wrong feet, there was just something she would spot that would just ruin the whole thing. We felt a lot of pressure of that, being perfect parents, without any idea what that is but just wanting to be that. (Ken, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

I think you have all these expectations or kind of ideas in your head what it's going to be like and you are, or I was, just a little bit sort of nervous or something. You felt like you were being judged or you thought you were going to be graded in a way [laughs]. I guess it reminded me a little bit of going back to school. (Kay, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Many also found the process frustrating as described by Miles:

The key frustration is all that waiting and then particularly once you're allocated too, because you've got a picture, you know this is going to be your son or your daughter and you're just wondering what's happening to him in the interim. (Miles, Adoptive Parent)

A few participants described that they felt genuinely scared in case they said the wrong thing during the process, that it would ruin their chance of becoming parents. John and Sally described their fear of the process:

People are so scared the whole way through this process. Fear is the overwhelming driving force. (John, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

They are so scared if they step out of line or do something wrong they won't get a baby, a child, that their file will be buried. (Sally, Support Group Representative)

Max outlined his thoughts on the arbitrary decision-making involved in the procedure:

I can't even remember what you're told, but basically, you just sort of feel that you know it's up to this one person to decide your appropriateness to be an adoptive parent. I mean I feel the level of scrutiny for this process in a way is crazy considering that you know any couple can go out and have kids with absolutely none. Like having your own children well you just go and have sex and you have children. The level of scrutiny of the four or three hour sessions, I mean in some way it is sort of seen as a bit of an arbitrary decision making process. (Max, Adoptive Parent)

Some participants were keen to finish the process and saw it as 'hoops to jump through' as outlined by Michelle.

For something that we felt quite scared about at the beginning, by the end of it we felt very relieved. (Michelle, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Despite the anxiety and fear applicants felt towards the process, Jessica, an adoption professional, described how Australia had a good reputation for providing high quality applicants for intercountry adoption:

All of them are quite different but all of them, I think almost without exception, the feedback that they give to Australia is that they really like the Australian applications, they're really impressed with the quality of our home studies and the quality of our applicant. (Jessica, Adoption Professional)

Response to the written application

Adoption professionals explained that the important aspect of the written application was that applicants provided adequate information on their health and backgrounds in order to understand their eligibility to complete the process. If applicants were not within acceptable health limits then they would have difficulty completing the process. Therefore, the written application was used as a screening device to see whether applicants should proceed through the entire process.

The other aspect of the application deemed to be important by adoption professionals was the 'life story', which was a written account by applicants of their life, including reflections of their family experiences and upbringing. The writing of the 'life story' according to adoption professionals, allowed applicants to think about why they were adopting and to look at their own history in order to understand what kind of parents they might become. Adoption assessors described this as helpful as it provided valuable information for discussion during the assessment.

I think especially writing their life stories. Some people struggle with them. But most people find it a very valuable exercise because they have to look at their own lives, their own family origins and how that family functioned. How they're now functioning as adults and everything in between almost. (Elizabeth, Adoption Professional)

Consideration of the type of child applicants were willing to accept was also understood as a useful part of the written application. This gave adoption professionals an indication about the thought processes people used and questioned personal motivation for being involved in the process.

Most participants described the NSW application form as 'detailed' and applicants varied in terms of the time it took them to complete the paperwork. Some completed it almost as soon as they received it (at the end of the education seminars), while others took the complete six months to finish. Below are some reactions to the application forms from participants in this study:

It's a long process and it's tedious in a way. But looking back it's something that I suppose has to be done. It is just one of those things. I know a lot of people complain but you just have to go through it. There is a huge amount of things, there is a life story to prepare, there is a police check. (Carl, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

It probably needs to be that detailed. You'd hate to think they can just sort of roll up and just fly up and get an adopted child, type of thing, but when you're doing it, it does feel way over the top. (Ken, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

So the view we took was that this thing is a long process...so rather than wait three months mulling it over and then you've just lost three months. We just said we're 45 and so let's go. So we put our paperwork in pretty much straight away. (Stefan, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Writing the life story was often one aspect of the application form spontaneously raised by participants. Some found writing their life story a complex and daunting task, while others saw it as part of the process they had to get through to get their child. A few participants commented that they had enjoyed writing about their lives. This variety of opinion is highlighted in the following quotes:

Finding the time was probably the challenge, certainly writing it wasn't hard. I've never found writing particularly hard, I do a lot of writing for work, so I quite enjoy writing the personal stuff. (Aaron, Adoptive Parent)

I think it's a good idea. I think however, it is difficult for some people you know who might not be – you know for me I like writing, I'm interested in writing. So, that was great. For my husband who isn't a writer – you know that's a struggle. It was a real hard job and he had to sort of write something and then I sort of you know tidied it up round the edges to make it presentable. But again, to just write your life story, seems simple but isn't always simple for everybody. (Charlotte, Adoptive Parent)

For those who found writing their life story beneficial, it was mainly because it gave them an opportunity to think about their lives, to reflect on their own upbringing and how this would have an impact on how they would parent. In the process, some learnt things about their partners and themselves and others saw the process as preparation for the assessment interviews.

I guess when we had to write our life story it was a good exercise to compare my childhood and life to my husband's. And it kind of gave you a bit more of a deeper understanding 'cause I guess you know your parenting style usually either mirrors your parents or is totally the opposite depending on your experience (chuckles). So yeah, I guess it was good to see you know to see 'cause I obviously learnt things I would never have learnt about his upbringing unless we had to sit and write it down. Nothing major, just little things, but I guess it told me a little bit more about who he was. (Karen, Adoptive Parent)

So even though at the time you sort of think oh, go back and try and dig through the memory, but it was probably helpful and it got you ready for talking through it with our social worker. (Michelle, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Yeah, and it was good in a way 'cause it made you also explore some of the things, like you know, why are you adopting and to really get to some of those issues and make you think about it yourself. (Tanya, Adoptive Parent)

Deciding what type of child participants were willing to accept was described by a few as being quite challenging. In their minds, they had only contemplated adopting a child, they had not really thought about the type of child. For some, this meant researching the various disabilities in order to understand their implications on development and behaviour and for others honestly thinking about the care they thought they could provide. Kay explained:

Are you willing to take a child with a deformity or – you try to be honest with yourself, I guess, as well, and when it's just a piece of paper and you're filling in a questionnaire and you're not talking to someone about it, it's quite, you know, it's a hard question and just to write a simple answer – I didn't find very easy to really explain how I felt, whether I would be happy about adopting a child with a deformity, a disability or something, so that was probably the hardest thing. (Kay, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Criticism of the process

While a detailed application was considered necessary for first time applicants, a few people commented that it seemed superfluous for second and even third children. They believed as Stacey described below, that the department already had enough information on the family and, therefore, the whole process was unnecessary. According to Stacey:

Now when it comes to the second and third child, I think you should be able to fast track and I think you should be focused on other issues in terms of the due diligence and that. You really should be able to just sort of tick a box and wait, and know that it's going to take however the required time in terms of the gap of your child. But there's no way you should be going through the whole process again. And for a third, let me shoot someone. (Stacey, Adoptive Parent)

Many participants were critical of the amount of documentation required for intercountry adoption. Obtaining all the necessary documentation including finger-printing and medicals as well as having paperwork notarised was described as time consuming and expensive as Max and Patrick explained:

Because the document process was a nightmare, there was all the DIMIA stuff which was shocking and then there was all the paperwork relating to yeah the official side, like our birth certificates, marriage certificates, passports, visas...I think there were like, I don't know it would have been close to 15 or 20 documents that we had to have in I think triplicate. You know, with JP signed copies of each. (Max, Adoptive Parent)

I think it certainly gets the stress levels – 'cause I think one of the things in intercountry adoption is it's very, very easy to get stressed with the system and very, very easy to get stressed with the whole process, just because there's a lot of paperwork, there's a lot of time consumed, there's a lot of dead time if you like – like time where you don't hear anything. (Patrick, Adoptive Parent)

Perceptions of intercountry adoption education

Some observations about intercountry adoption education around Australia

Australian states and territories offer different types of education to intercountry adoptive applicants. In some jurisdictions like South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), the first education seminar is a brief information session. In this introductory session, basic facts about intercountry adoption are discussed, an overview given of the framework for the country programmes Australia has in place and details provided about the process. In contrast in NSW, for example, applicants are required to buy a book called 'Considering Adoption' (Adoption & Permanent Care Services NSW Department of Community Services, 2005) and the first face-to-face contact is a two-day education seminar that occurs after an expression of interest has been made.

Attendance at educational sessions is not compulsory in all states and territories. For example, in the Northern Territory this is not a mandatory requirement, but education segments are organised by the Adoption Unit of Family and Children's Services throughout the year. In NSW and South Australia, attendance at educational sessions is, however, a compulsory part of the intercountry adoption process. The location of the education component within the whole intercountry adoption process also differs across Australia. In some states like NSW and Western Australia the education seminars are completed prior to completing the application and assessment, whereas in Victoria, the educational sessions come after aspirants have completed their application.

Seminars are also run differently across the Australian jurisdictions. In NSW, applicants are required to attend two consecutive days of seminars, while in Victoria they run on one day a week over a three-week period. In the smaller jurisdictions, the education seminars are offered less regularly and in the larger states, the seminars are run more regularly because of greater demand. In the ACT, for example, seminars are run once every six months and in NSW, at the time the fieldwork was completed, seminars were being held once a month. In some of the larger states like Victoria and Queensland with dispersed populations, training is also offered at irregular times in regional centres, for example, in Townsville in Queensland and Ballarat in Victoria. In the Northern Territory education segments are run in both Darwin and Alice Springs. In NSW, training is only available in Sydney and in South Australia it is only held in Adelaide. An innovation in Queensland has been the development of online education to allow regional applicants to have the

alternative to complete training via the internet, rather than attending face-to-face seminars.

In many states, including Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, ACT and Tasmania a short information session is the first face-to-face contact applicants have with the department. Often this is a two-hour introductory meeting that discusses issues surrounding adoption. Some states and territories focus their education sessions specifically on intercountry adoption while others cover intercountry adoption, and local adoption as well as permanent care. The ACT, for example, has moved towards incorporating local, intercountry adoption and permanent care into their seminar programme and participants foreshadowed that this was also the plan for NSW. The rationale for this approach was the similarity of issues involved and the opportunity to tell people about the range of options existing to care for children. As Lily observed:

The issues actually aren't that different, even though people think adopting a child from another country is going to be very different but the reality is adoption, wherever you come from how you process that and how you manage that is the same. With intercountry adoption, you do have the additional issues of race and managing that but then we also have that in local. A lot of families are being placed with interracial children through the local program too. So that's one and the second one is that when people come to the seminars, often they haven't been exposed to the variety of options available for them. So by having a seminar that is generic, it gives people an opportunity to look at all the options which includes intercountry, local and permanent care... but also the big message that we're saying is that really adoption doesn't change whether the child arrives here by an aeroplane or in a car. (Lily, Adoption Professional)

In NSW, the seminars are run by contracted adoption assessors, in Victoria, the sessions are run by workers from the Department of Human Services and in Western Australia the education seminars are provided by the non-government sector. In some states and territories the education remains ongoing throughout the intercountry adoption process, for example, in South Australia, ACT, Western Australia and Tasmania. Individual departments offer this ongoing education once people have completed the assessment, are approved and waiting for a child to be allocated. This is viewed as a method of keeping people involved, interested and learning more about the issues.

Adoption education was seen as a tool for encouraging people to think about a range of issues that could arise when parenting a child born overseas. It was construed as a method to enhance adoptive parents' understanding of the various people involved in adoption, and the range of losses that the child and birth parents may have experienced before reaching the point when the child was adopted. As Jessica explained:

So looking at the adoption triangle, looking at empathy for birth family, understanding their own motivation to adopt as well as the fact that adoption is born through loss. We then look at grief and loss...and we talk about the grief and loss that the intercountry adoptive child brings with them. (Jessica, Adoption Professional)

The way in which intercountry adoption education is delivered across Australia is mainly a mixed method approach involving small group interactive exercises, PowerPoint presentations, watching DVDs and guest speakers who can be local birth parents, intercountry adoptees or adoptive parents.

When asked about the content of intercountry adoption education, the following topics were mentioned as being included in seminars:

- Adoption and adoption issues
- Adoption triangle
- Motivation for adoption
- Loss and grief issues
- Culture
- Search and reunion
- Talking to children about their adoption
- Racism and managing racism
- Identity
- Attachment issues

Professionals highlighted a number of important messages as being essential for applicants to understand during the education process. They stressed the importance of applicants understanding that the focus of intercountry adoption is on the child and not the parent. As Cassie and Elizabeth both explained:

And you try and rearrange people's thinking to think about the child's needs and interests and finding a family for the child. We're not about finding a child for a couple. (Cassie, Adoption Professional)

And I also think a big thing that sometimes we have to remind people of is we're looking for families for children you know that this is about children who need families. I mean, our service isn't about finding children for families. So, we really need to put the child in the centre of the room and we need to know they have an understanding that this is what our focus is and their focus should be as parents of an adopted child. (Elizabeth, Adoption Professional)

Rachel also stressed the importance of applicants understanding the need for flexibility both during the intercountry adoption process, as well as once they were back home living with their child. It was also deemed essential by Margot for applicants to understand that

the process is lengthy, will be challenging, and that applicants are not guaranteed a successful outcome.

We really prepare people for just how hard it is, how long it's going to be, how resilient you need to be, you need a strong relationship, that there are no guarantees in any of this, that programs change all the time and so on. So I think all along, right from the beginning we just try and give people realistic expectations about the process and about adoption. (Margot, Adoption Professional)

One point of difference was how the issue of infertility was handled during the education seminars. In some states, loss and grief in relation to infertility was covered during the education sessions, while in others this was not the case. The absence of the infertility discussion was because professionals felt it would be discussed during the assessment process and it was thought to be too personal an issue to be discussed with strangers. Alternatively, other professionals felt that prospective applicants needed to comprehend and grieve the loss of 'the dream' of a biological child in order to meet the needs of a child adopted from overseas.

We talk a lot about the importance of the adoptive parents having allowed themselves to grieve their loss particularly of parenting a biological child, and how important it is for them to be 100 percent emotionally available to assist their intercountry adopted child in dealing with their own grief and loss. (Jessica, Adoption Professional)

In some jurisdictions, education was offered to prospective adoptive parents as well as to other members of the prospective adoptive family. In one state, for example, grandparents and other close friends and family were invited to attend a course called 'Taking the Isolation out of Adoption'. The focus was to learn about providing support for the prospective adopters during the process as well as when they arrived home with a child. Theresa explained the rationale behind this initiative:

I run it for grandparents, Great Aunt Maud's, next door neighbours, anybody who's going to be involved with that couple, to talk to them about the process that their couple has gone through and why, and to work through some of the scenarios that have happened to people on return with their children and – and garner their support for what needs to happen when they come home. (Theresa, Adoption Professional)

Education in NSW

Some participants felt the tone of the seminars was pitched at an appropriate level to provide them with information about what life might be like with an adopted child from overseas. Others believed that the presentation was too negative and focused on the 'worst case' scenario. These opposing opinions are illustrated by the following quotes:

I think the thing, the good thing was that it was very child focused... It was really what was going to be best for the child. So really, you know, making you think through and making sure it would be in the best interests of the child. And also really hammering home the importance of keeping the child's culture alive and really embracing the culture. (Rebecca, Adoptive Parent)

That was like a roller-coaster – I remember it very clearly. There were times when we thought this is great, this is an exciting thing, and then there were times where they made us feel, through the information they gave us, it made you feel oh boy, should we just give up – like it is so hard that we should just give up now. (Michelle, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Many said attendance at the seminar resulted in the formation of firm friendships. Some tried to submit applications at the same time as the friends they had made in the hope of possibly travelling overseas together when children were allocated. Some said they realised they were not alone after attending the seminars and found that others had experienced similar disappointments to themselves on the path to becoming parents. Some of the friendships formed were supportive during the process and continued to be so after the children arrived.

Opinion differed about the length of time spent discussing infertility issues during the seminars. Those who were unsupportive of the emphasis on infertility tended to be single applicants, people who were infertile due to medical reasons, and those who felt the issue was far too personal to discuss in a room filled with strangers. Those who were supportive of discussing infertility felt the exercise helped them recognise that other people had experienced similar problems and that they were not alone in their feelings of loss and grief.

It was very isolating as a single, as well, I guess. And I also thought it was probably quite isolating for people who were fertile because it was a lot to do with infertility. (Justine, Single Adoptive Parent)

One of the spontaneously mentioned positive aspects of the seminars in NSW was the presence of the guest speakers. This was especially the case with the adoptive parent guest speakers. Participants felt that meeting people who had completed the process and were already parenting children born overseas, helped them recognise that they were capable of performing a similar role.

I think we both found the seminar very helpful. I think it was good. It was informative and I mean, for me the best thing was that you actually got to see parents who'd adopted and they brought the children along. So that was wonderful because it made it a lot more real. (Rebecca, Adoptive Parent)

Response to the assessment process

Some observations about intercountry adoption assessments around Australia

The majority of the states and territories used contracted social workers or psychologists to undertake the assessments. In NSW, for example, these workers are called Contracted Adoption Assessors, in Queensland they are known as Adoption Contract Workers and in Western Australia, they are called Adoption Assessors. In the Northern Territory because applicant numbers are relatively small, the assessments are completed by a contracted worker from South Australia and are occasionally completed by departmental staff according to need.

Most jurisdictions conduct around four to five interviews with couples and four interviews with single applicants. Normally at least one assessment must be conducted in the applicant/s' home. Single applicants cannot apply in every state and territory as the legislation precludes intercountry adoption by single applicants in some jurisdictions like Queensland. The spacing between interviews differs around the country. In NSW, assessment interviews are normally spaced around two to three weeks apart with the rationale that this gives applicants time to think about issues between interviews and read widely on the topic. In other states, like South Australia there is the belief that once applicants reach assessment stage they have made a decision and do not require additional time. Thus, the assessments in South Australia can be completed in a few weeks. In the Northern Territory, because of the use of the contracted worker, the assessment is often conducted over a few days but the interviews are intense and concentrated. Margot and Jacqueline expressed their thoughts on the timing of interviews below:

I mean by the time people get to this stage I would have thought they've done their thinking, they've had their education, their compulsory education. They've been through an interview, they've probably done lots of reading and lots of thinking and they're ready. That's how it seems to me. Like they're ready. (Margot, Adoption Professional)

It's so that they've got time to think about things in between time, do a bit of reading, a bit of homework, discussion with friends, and each other, family. I say I could do it in a week, if I saw you every day of the week, sort of thing. But we want you to actually have time to process some of this stuff that I'm asking you and talking to you about. (Jacqueline, Adoption Professional)

Adoption professionals differed in their observations about the role of the intercountry adoption assessment process. Many felt that the assessment was both an opportunity for

education as well as containing an element of checking on the suitability of people for adoptive parenting. Others placed more emphasis on the assessment process as a tool for approving or rejecting applicants. Cassie and Lucy illustrated these opinions:

It's education and preparation because I know that the vast majority will be approved anyway. Mind you the vast majority should be approved 'cause you're just looking for average people. (Cassie, Adoption Professional)

The assessment will provide a recommendation for a delegated officer to consider whether a couple are suitable or not...so it really needs to consider, not only the issues of whether they're going to be suitable adoptive parents but whether they're equipped and ready to adopt a child from another country. (Lucy, Adoption Professional)

Most adoption professionals felt that if applicants reached the assessment stage they were likely to be approved. While a few applicants had not been approved, the sense was that eventually applicants are approved if they proceed through the complaints system in the state or territory. This is interesting because the process itself seemed to engender high levels of anxiety amongst applicants, which seems contradictory if most people are approved. I put this to some of the participants who responded in the following way:

I think it's a very educational role really. You know you're presenting them with a lot of information and by asking certain questions, getting them to think about their own lives...in some respects I see that as the major role, you know us actually assessing them and recommending them for approval is sort of a bit of a – yeah it's a bit – it's a fait accompli really that they're going to get through. (Jacqueline, Adoption Professional)

It's a safeguard. It is a safeguard for extreme cases. And that's why it's really not just an assessment. It has to be preparation and education. (Cassie, Adoption Professional)

It was common for people to say that applicants self-selected out of intercountry adoption at various stages of the process. For some, this occurred after the initial information session or following education, but normally people seemed to realise themselves or were helped to realise by the adoption assessor that intercountry adoption may not be the best option for them.

I suppose that is what I have done with some people who I've initially thought, oh you know this just doesn't seem right for these people. And I've hoped at the first interview that I can try and get them to maybe see that perhaps it really wasn't what they wanted after all. (Jacqueline, Adoption Professional)

On other occasions, I've pushed issues with people to the point where they've withdrawn themselves. I just came back and refocused on issues that I thought they were naive or blocking or something...so yeah, I prefer to have people drop out. (Danielle, Adoption Professional)

States and territories also differed in how the determination of approval was made. In some states like South Australia and Victoria, a team consisting of various representatives made the final approval decision. In NSW, the Contracted Adoption Assessor makes a recommendation in relation to an applicant's suitability to adopt against the criteria for assessment for adoptive applicants. If the manager of casework agrees that the applicant has satisfied the assessment criteria, then a recommendation for approval can be given. If, however, the casework manager does not believe sufficient evidence has been provided, then the matter is referred to the Director of Adoption and Permanent Care Services who has the delegation to decline or approve applicants (Griffin, 2009).

The assessment process in NSW

The quotes below highlight the diversity of opinion in relation to the assessment process used in NSW to select adoptive parents for children born overseas.

It was very thought provoking ...she made us think hard about how we would handle certain situations and how we'd learnt from our family upbringing and how we'd learnt from our previous relationships and how we would deal with difficult family and child issues. (Simon, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

So it did give us an opportunity to explore some things I guess that we wouldn't have thought of doing, but in terms of dealing with issues like, for example, IVF, no, it didn't help me deal with that. (Harriet, Support Group Representative)

Life's a journey, there's no doubt about it and this (the assessment) is a stepping stone; it's a part of that journey. Dealing with the issues are part of that journey, I didn't get there through the process. I was there already. (Stacey, Adoptive Parent)

Samantha belonged to a group of participants who saw the assessment process as an opportunity for personal development and growth. This group believed it was a forum for examining personal issues like infertility, relationships and their own childhood and that discussion and self-examination could make them better parents. This group embraced the idea that the assessment process was important in their quest to parent a child born overseas.

I think the assessment process also gives applicants an opportunity to explore things about themselves and their experience of being parented themselves and reflect on their roles as parents. (Samantha, Adoption Professional)

Although applicants were focused on achieving their goal of parenthood, some engaged more with the assessment process than others. They saw the value of the preparation seminars as providing prospective parents with information that would benefit them when

they became parents. They enjoyed the exercises where they were invited to ‘put themselves’ in the shoes of the other parties to adoption – the birth parent and the child – and understood more fully that the emphasis in intercountry adoption is on the child and his/her needs rather than those of the parents.

I thought it (seminar) was very well run and put together...it opens your eyes to the reality of what it is, it’s not just about getting a child. There are issues here you know, I got to thinking about it from the birth mother’s point of view, from the birth family’s point of view as well as your own point of view so, from that I found it, yeah we both found it fairly helpful and useful. (Patrick, Adoptive Parent)

For this group, the assessment was really a means of understanding the commitment necessary to parent a child born overseas. It was not seen as a means to an end but as part of the process that would ultimately make them better parents.

Malcolm and others, acknowledged that time should elapse between assessment interviews in order for applicants to digest the material discussed in each session. While still wanting to get through the assessment and be approved in a timely manner, these participants welcomed the need to discuss personal issues that could have an impact on their parenting ability.

But you have to digest the bits of information one at a time so it’s good that the process takes a while or the approval process takes a while to go through, although it seems to take forever when you’re actually in the middle of it, because it allows you to digest a little bit of information at a time. (Malcolm, Adoptive Parent)

Others like Carl and Cassie believed that the assessment process could act as a conduit between earlier experiences of family life and parenting a child from overseas. People in this group felt they had resolved any issues that might have an impact on their ability to parent a child and did so independently of the assessment process.

The Assessor was keen to make sure that if there were any unresolved issues that we confront those and make sure they didn’t influence our decisions and that sort of thing. All that was discussed and it was all positive. We haven’t got any unresolved issues. But it’s all positive and the Assessor took us through that and I guess she had to make sure that everything was ok with those. (Carl, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Well, the assessment’s as good as the social worker really. And it’s what you make of it. I think there’s plenty of scope for it to be a really positive experience for everybody. And really helpful in preparing them, if that’s what they want. (Cassie, Adoption Professional)

Participants like Diane, saw the education component of the intercountry adoption process as important, but did not engage with it to the same extent as did others. Many viewed the

small group discussions about topics such as infertility as issues that others should have contended with prior to attending the seminar sessions.

I really resented the way they broke us up into groups and we had to talk about our infertility. Like as if you have a big label, 'infertile' on our foreheads, and I'd never actually thought of myself in that way. There were people with horrific stories of miscarriage and that, and to be broken up into groups and having to share these stories with strangers, I don't know that was the best way to do it. (Diane, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Leonie believed that the assessment process was a 'necessary evil' in the overall process of adopting a child from overseas. Like some others, she viewed the assessment as something applicants were obliged to undertake in order to reach the goal of parenthood.

Oh, it was definitely a process to be gotten through. (Leonie, Single Adoptive Parent)

Some recognised the importance of education but were focused especially on learning about the intercountry adoption process in terms of what was expected of them and how long it all would take. While they saw the information presented as valuable, they were more interested in understanding the practical aspects of parenthood as noted by Ken:

I wanted to know what the end was and what I had to do to get to that end. I didn't want to know about is this the birth mother, is this the natural mother, is this – you know, you go there wanting to know more about what you have to do to get to the adoption point. (Ken, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Participants like Ken, believed that by the time applicants advance to the assessment stage that they 'should have made up their minds' about intercountry adoption and examined their attitudes and thoughts about themselves in relation to parenthood. This group was keen to progress with the process and get their child.

Yes, well a kind of test to get through to the next stage. Everything you did you feel like, you write your life story, you fill out all the forms, you hand it in and you're just trying to pass. When you pass that, you think oh – then you go on to the next step and you think, I've just got to pass this step. (Ken, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Some in the study, felt they told the Contract Adoption Assessor what she wanted to hear.

So instead of it being a preparation process, it's more like they're going to be the policeman that's going to say yeah or nay, you can adopt, instead of it being a supportive process like where we're not making the decision, we are helping you make the decision, we are helping you prepare for your decision and so on. (Maeve, Support Group Representative)

Intercountry adoption applicants commented on the impact of the assessor to which they were assigned. Prospective adoptive parents commented that their experience of

assessment was influenced by how their Contracted Adoption Assessor understood the process. If the assessor viewed it as an educative process then applicants felt they benefited from the process. If, however, the assessor had a pass or fail mentality, then applicants reported difficulties in viewing the process as a personal learning experience.

Now I agree that the assessment process hinges on your social worker and how well they run that assessment process and I have to say it's a very mixed bag. (Emily, Support Group Representative)

And it depends on the social worker as to her experience and knowledge, her interest in other families. (Mave, Support Group Representative)

For those applicants with high anxiety levels (notably the first time prospective adoptive parents who either had no children or biological children), the anxiety seemed to influence their attitudes towards assessment. In my sample, there were eleven first-time adopters and five participants who had already adopted children. High levels of anxiety were not conducive to an open mind towards learning. Anxiety tended to result in applicants feeling frustrated about both the assessment process and the intercountry adoption process in general. As Andrea noted:

I understand that they have to screen people and that they want absolutely the best people to bring up these little ones, but I guess there is always this little part of you that thinks other people are getting to make the decisions about your life, it's the lack of control, you totally lose control. (Andrea, Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Another influence on the opinions expressed by adoptive parent participants in my study was the amount of time that had elapsed between when the adoptive parents underwent their assessment and the time they were interviewed for my study. For those who had undergone the process more recently, it was still fresh in their memory, while those who had finished the process some time ago, did not always remember the exact details of their experience. The latter group had a chance to see that issues discussed during assessment were important to how they were bringing up their child. For those participants whose parenting experience was quite new, not enough time had elapsed for them to see if the assessment had been, or was helpful in their day-to-day life as parents.

Conclusion

This chapter found that the policy environment in which intercountry adoption operates in Australia is complex involving as it does, many actors, resulting in an unclear policy orientation. While the states and territories are working with the Commonwealth to achieve

harmonisation, there is still much to be achieved in terms of harmonising the day-to-day practices involved in the education and assessment of applicants for intercountry adoption. In NSW, participants were critical of the process in terms of the time it took to be allocated a child and the high costs involved. While some participants saw advantages in the education seminars, others felt they were 'a trial to be gotten through'. Similarly, the assessment process was a positive learning experience for some, while others saw it as an obligatory step in the process of adopting their child.

The way in which government payments are made to families formed through intercountry adoption leads to questions about the legitimacy of intercountry adoptive families in the Australian community. The messages from the state and Federal Governments are mixed regarding whether intercountry adoptive families are understood in the same way as biological families, based on how family services are funded. This question of legitimacy is further questioned in NSW, because of the introduction of a user-pay system for services and the potential outsourcing of intercountry adoption services to the non-government sector. Both these examples suggest the state government has limited commitment towards intercountry adoption as part of its core business and, therefore, its commitment to families formed in this way.

These findings suggest that adoptive parents are extremely focused on being allocated a child whereas the government's orientation is less clear. This is reflected by the government's uncertainty about who its client is in intercountry adoption – is it the overseas country, the adoptive parents or is it the unknown child in the overseas country? This uncertainty is reflected in how the layers of the state bureaucracy handle intercountry adoption, a situation that is further complicated by the global context discussed in Chapter Seven.

7

Globalisation and intercountry adoption

At the heart of intercountry adoption is the movement of children across international borders. While this phenomenon has been occurring throughout history, the current wave of migration in the 'post-Cold War globalisation era' is characterised by the movement of people from developing nations to developed nations (Guhathakurta, Jacobson & DelSordi, 2007, pp. 202-203). Intercountry adoption, therefore, contributes to the current wave of migration and is influenced by the effects of globalisation.

Globalisation has been described as a concept that refers 'both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole' (Robertson, 1992, p. 8). It is especially relevant to the practice of intercountry adoption because advances in international travel, coupled with the ability of people to communicate more quickly and easily, means that intercountry adoptions can be more easily effected. Advances in international media bringing news and information in real time to most parts of the world, also results in greater awareness of the plight of children in difficult circumstances (Guhathakurta, Jacobson & DelSordi, 2007, p. 205). Globalisation has both increased the interconnectedness between countries and improved methods of communication, which have facilitated greater access to knowledge about intercountry adoption and how other countries manage and organise their process and programmes.

In this chapter, I will outline the findings from my study in relation to how global factors have an impact on the policy environment in which Australian intercountry adoption operates. The discussion begins by analysing how globalisation has influenced the ability of children to move throughout the world for intercountry adoption, and questions concerning the number of children available. This is followed by an examination of how participants viewed the Hague Convention in relation to intercountry adoption, and a discussion of how international media and the internet have transformed the landscape of the practice. Perceptions of how overseas countries view intercountry adoption are

examined and the chapter concludes with a summary of participant views about the future of intercountry adoption in Australia.

Globalisation increases access to children

Improved technology has resulted in greater access to information and a more mobile population (Giddens, 1998; Held & McGrew, 2003; Hirst & Thompson, 1996; Robertson, 1992). These factors have an impact on the process of intercountry adoption by improving people's ability to access orphaned or abandoned children from a range of countries around the world. In this study, questions concerning the number of children available for intercountry adoption caused disagreement among adoption professionals, support group representatives and prospective and current adoptive parents. That there was no consensus about the number of children available for intercountry adoption creates difficulties for discussions about intercountry adoption policy. If perceptions differ on the scope of the problem, then it becomes hard to develop comprehensive policies and procedures to manage the issue.

How many children are available for intercountry adoption?

There has been ongoing confusion about the actual number of children born overseas who are available for adoption. Marshall noted in 1984 that 'the myth that there are countless needy children available for adoption from third world countries is somehow perpetuated in the community and leads to some unrealistic expectations among prospective adopters' (Marshall, 1984-85, p. 12). Based on the findings of my study, a similar observation can still be made today. A widely held belief among adoptive parents and prospective adoptive parents was that huge numbers of children are in need of families and that intercountry adoption can provide a solution to the problem. Adoption professionals, however, stressed that the number of children requiring care through intercountry adoption was lower than adoptive parents and prospective adoptive parents suggested.

The following quotations highlight these different views. The crucial point seems to be that while there may be many children in need of care; this does not necessarily make these children available for intercountry adoption. In fact, in some countries, placing children in care may be a temporary measure by birth parents unable to care for children temporarily, but hoping to do so in the future. The opposing views about the number of children available for intercountry adoption are expressed by Stacey and Hugh.

Lexie: It seems that there are lots of adoptive parents but perhaps not so many kids who are legitimately available for adoption.

Stacey: Bull shit. Tomorrow we could sign the Hague Convention with those countries and bring those children in. These are children where there is no choice for them. There are so many. Cambodia would go tomorrow. I wish the world was perfect and it wasn't the case. (Stacey, Adoptive Parent)

I think there's certainly a perception within the mainstream Australian community that there are many, many children out there in the third world in need of families, you know a wonderful urban myth and I'm sure you've come across this time and time again. Numbers from 11 million to 140 million children that come from a whole range of sources that are in orphanages, the reality of those situations are somewhat different. (Hugh, Adoption Professional)

While on some level, the prospective adoptive parents and adoptive parents may recognise that not all homeless children are available for adoption, they are keen to access those children that can be adopted. This is where the friction develops between adoptive parents and the various levels of government in Australia. The role of the Australian Government in accessing children is questioned because applicants focus on the low number of adoptions and the fact that no new programmes have been developed with overseas countries.

So I'm not saying there's necessarily a bazillion children but I think there's a whole lot of governmental red tape between an individual couple and the availability of a child. So I think in answer to your question, yes, there are lots of children but it's how you access them. (Malcolm, Adoptive Parent)

So the process of abandonment is they have to advertise, they have to investigate, have to go and look for other relatives. It all takes time. So just because they're not available today it doesn't mean they're not going to be available in six months from now. And there are, I mean there's millions of kids in Brazil that need families. There's thousands of kids in Africa that need families. How come Americans can adopt 22,000 kids and we can only adopt 400? (Maeve, Support Group Representative)

Despite the myth that high numbers of children are available for intercountry adoption, a number of reasons including poverty, lack of infrastructure and development of domestic adoption services were given as reasons why these children may not be able to be adopted overseas. Adoption professionals outlined these reasons below:

The other thing is there's not as many orphans as everyone thinks either. Like a lot of children live in poverty all over the world but they have family, you know. They have aunts and uncles and grandparents. Whereas with intercountry adoption you're really looking to find the children that have no one to care for them. So, there's not the massive numbers of children needing adoptive families that people think. (Cassie, Adoption Professional)

I think it's true that there are a lot of children in institutions in overseas countries that will never be adopted, that'll never see the outside of the institution or the inside of a family. They'll never, ever see that and that's because of a lack of infrastructure in that country to provide decent care for children or to explore the child's case to the point where they are satisfied that the child has no family able to care for them and can't be cared for in another family in that country. (Rachel, Adoption Professional)

But I guess what is clear to me is that where there are countries that were traditionally making their children available for intercountry adoption, (beginning with Korea as the best example but also including India, and now apparently even China), those countries are running on a par at some levels with the West in terms of gross national product and infrastructure and all of those things. So, they're much more able to develop an infrastructure that looks after their own children in country. So they're no longer making children available for foreigners to adopt, they're developing their internal welfare structures. (Sophia, Adoption Professional)

Participants raised the difficulties in estimating the number of children available for intercountry adoption. One support group member questioned the definition used when quoting figures for 'orphans'. She explained:

If you look at the UN figures of orphans in the world today, an orphan will be defined as a child who has lost a parent. It doesn't mean that the child doesn't have another parent or an extended family so the problem is, a lot of the statistics on orphans worldwide, according to the UN, actually includes children who have still got a parent or who have still got extended family. In my eyes, those type of children should never be put up for adoption as a first solution because they've got extended family. (Naomi, Support Group Representative)

Recognition of the fact that countries did not have as many children available was seen by the change in eligibility criteria as is outlined below:

That's why there's such a wait and that's why China has changed their criteria, because the number of people wanting to adopt and the number of children available is so disproportionate for young, healthy children. (Lily, Adoption Professional)

The availability of children debate becomes complicated when people begin thinking of children as commodities. It becomes an issue in understanding where the emphasis should rest with an intercountry adoption programme. Whose needs should the programme cater for - the overseas countries, the child, the prospective adoptive parents or all of these?

I remember watching a program when they were talking about intercountry adoption and the bloke was jumping up and down and saying we should have more agencies in there finding all these children and why don't Oxfam and Community Aid Abroad, why don't they do it? They should be in there getting all these children. You know that's just the best thing to do. And I thought there's no way they would do that. Their work is about developing communities to keep those children and I'd rather put my money there than into sourcing like it makes these children out to be a bit of a commodity (chuckle). (Lily, Adoption Professional)

The danger with believing that more children are available and wanting to access these children, is that unethical practices can occur and children will be adopted overseas who are not legally available for adoption. Unless children are legally able to be adopted, there are no guarantees that they have not been kidnapped or abducted for adoption as Emily noted:

Yes, there are children in very difficult circumstances all around the world. We know there are a lot of children, but the biggest issue is whether those children are available for adoption and 'cause I'm a strong believer now in ethical adoptions – that those children have been relinquished by their parents or in the case where they no longer have parents you know there is a process in place where they are available for adoption. 'Cause we are hearing too many stories from across the world of children and we've had some in Australia that were trafficked, that were not made available for adoption where their birth parents were not aware but they were being smuggled. (Emily, Support Group Representative)

By only working with certain countries. Australia is seen as making sure that the children are legally available for intercountry adoption as Kaitlyn observed:

Australia is very much about making sure those children are legitimately available for adoption to avoid any risk of trafficking. So we're only working with certain countries. So that then limits the amount of children, just by virtue of us only working with a relatively small number of countries when you look at the world picture. (Kaitlyn, Adoption Professional)

The idea that a child may have been trafficked and sold in order to become available for intercountry adoption is an unsettling point for the Australian Government and for adoptive parents as Scott explained:

I do find myself reassuring Deidre that it's highly unlikely that she was kidnapped. 'Cause that is unsettling, that there's a parent somewhere who actually wants the child. (Scott, Adoptive Parent)

Comparisons were often made by participants in relation to the number of children that citizens of the USA were able to adopt versus the numbers adopted by Australians. There seemed to be the attitude that if people from the USA can adopt, why can't Australians? Some participants recognised that Australian practices had to conform with the Hague Convention, but the feeling was that if Australia could develop better relationships with overseas countries and agencies, then this would result in more children. As Harriet commented:

I think it's really the number of children who are made available for intercountry adoption to Australia because remember we're competing or – competing is the wrong word, but there are, you know, all the other countries of the world who are also wanting their number

of children and then we've got the US that hasn't signed the Hague Convention¹⁰ who seemed to be able to just go in and, you know, say yes we'll have that child and that child and that child and here's our money. So they build relationships with orphanages and they get priority. (Harriet, Support Group Representative)

Throughout the study, there was negligible discussion about whether intercountry adoption as a practice should exist. It was understood that children in need of care worldwide require parents and that these parents are available in Australia. When talking about intercountry adoption in its broader sense, some participants expressed the opinion that in time, domestic adoption programmes in overseas countries would improve, thus reducing the need for intercountry adoption by other countries. However, it was not seriously considered that as a country Australia should decrease involvement in intercountry adoption or reconsider our position. The vast majority of participants were supportive of the Australian Government accessing more children from the countries with which negotiations currently occur or developing new programmes with other countries.

Discussions of how a child became available for adoption

Pringle notes that 'many people regard adoptions from China as acceptable because its surplus children have been generated through its official population policy rather than from famine, war or poverty in some more generalised sense' (2004, p. 233). This question was also posed to participants in this study as I was curious to understand whether how a child became available for adoption made any difference to adoptive parents. A range of opinions was found to exist. Some participants, for example, actively disagreed with the one child policy in China, which meant they did not consider adopting from China, and instead selected another country. The basis of this disagreement was explained as being due to the ability of the Chinese Government to enforce a policy that limited human rights and individual choice. While people differed in their reaction to the one child policy, there was strong agreement among all participants in the study that children should not be available for intercountry adoption through child trafficking, kidnapping or coercing a family to relinquish a child.

Greater mobility means increased possibilities

Just as globalisation has influenced the movement of children across international boundaries, it has also made it easier for governments to use improved technology and travel to explore possibilities for new programme development. An Australian delegation

¹⁰ Since interviewing, the USA has completed the requirements for the Hague Convention.

has recently returned from Kenya where the possibility of programme development with both Kenya and Burundi was discussed. In a sense, the world has opened up in terms of pursuing new agreements with overseas nations and although no new programmes have yet been established, the potential exists for this development.

To date, they've established no new intercountry adoption programs and there's no guarantees they ever will. They're about government-to-government relationships in a fundamentally uncertain and dynamic area with massive ethical concerns. (Hugh, Adoption Professional)

Response to the Hague Convention

In response to the increased movement of children around the world and growing concerns about the ethics of intercountry adoption, the international community established the Hague Convention which was discussed earlier in Chapter Three (pp. 128-131). Following is a discussion of the comments made by participants in relation to the Hague Convention.

In the best interests of the child

The Hague Convention was viewed by most in the study, as a significant initiative in providing guidelines to ensure intercountry adoption is conducted ethically and in the best interests of the child. As Abigail commented:

Australia can only work with the country that we have an established agreement with so we only work with Hague Convention countries so that the standard is maintained and if it's not a Hague Convention country it's a country where the standards are equivalent. (Abigail, Adoption Professional)

While participants acknowledged that the focus was on the child, some thought there should also be some recognition that the process was also in the best interests of the parents as Jacqueline explained:

If people can actually acknowledge their own selfish need to have a child and to parent, then it's a bit more balanced and the child doesn't have to feel grateful for that...So whilst yes the Hague Convention says it needs to be in the best interests of the child, part of the best interests of the child is that the couple need the child just as much as they need the family. (Jacqueline, Adoption Professional)

Safeguards for children?

The Hague Convention was also construed as a mechanism for providing safeguards for children to ensure that intercountry adoption is not conducted for economic gain or as a method of trafficking children. Patrick described the Convention in this way:

I think it's a good thing because what it stops is baby and child exploitation. While I've not read through the whole thing, my basic understanding is it stops – it aids in stopping the exploitation of children. So I know in South America they shut a programme down. (Patrick, Adoptive Parent)

Although safeguarding children was believed to be at the heart of the Convention, some acknowledged that opportunities still existed for child exploitation. Examples from the media were given in relation to child trafficking reported in India, Chad and China. Others commented that 'under the table' adoptions still occurred despite the Hague Convention as highlighted below:

Well it's necessary because baby trafficking from what I can gather still happens quite a lot, again because of that level of desperation. (Lily, Adoption Professional)

I'm concerned, at the moment, at the level of kidnapping and child sales in India, and there's an awful lot of evidence around that. There's some suggestion it's happening in Africa at the moment as well and I don't think – certainly there are some countries where there's not sufficient monitoring to ensure that these children are genuinely orphans requiring families. (Kirsty, Adoption Professional)

Thus, despite the intention of the Hague Convention that intercountry adoption must be the last resort for a child and in its best interests, the practice was found not always to be conducted in this way. Hugh and Maeve illustrated this point of view:

The very act of taking children who are isolated in third world countries and moving them to the first world is a fundamentally dangerous position if you don't have safeguards and protections...and the very creation of markets of children for the purposes of adoption, that is a reality of the world we live in. I think the Hague Convention has been a remarkable step over the last 15 years or so since it was created in providing that baseline legal and ethical framework to inform practice and provide protections. But no system is perfect. (Hugh, Adoption Professional)

I mean if people want to traffic children, the Hague is not going to stop them. It just isn't. I mean like it might make it harder to get paperwork, but I mean if you want to forge somebody's passport, whether it's a child or an adult, you're still able to do it. (Maeve, Support Group Representative)

Hague criteria difficult to meet for some

The complexity of the Hague Convention and the requirements overseas countries needed for intercountry adoption to occur were noted. One participant commented that the Hague Convention might inhibit countries being involved in intercountry adoption because of their inability to provide the level of infrastructure required. Charlotte explained using Guatemala as an example:

...like Guatemala which is poor and you know has very little by way of bureaucratic structure. And when you impose something like The Hague on them which you know by its nature establishes all these bureaucratic steps and procedures and you're basically saying that yes, we'll allow adoption from this country but by this process we're going to make it impossible for adoptions to occur because as a country, you're not able to provide the measures that are necessary. (Charlotte, Adoptive Parent)

Lack of enforcement capability

Some raised the issue that although the Hague Convention is an international agreement, it has no law enforcement mechanism for penalising those who disobey the guidelines. The wave of news reports relating to child trafficking and kidnapping were seen as evidence that negative practices continue despite the international treaty. Naomi pointed out:

The Hague hasn't got a method for punishing those who don't follow it properly so, it might be a policy, but it's a legless policy because they don't enforce it. So, you can't have a policy that sits there and just blabbers it's got to actually act...and that's what's missing in a lot of these countries. They have a policy but they don't have any way to implement it and make sure it's policed. (Naomi, Support Group Representative)

The media and intercountry adoption

There has been an increase in the media attention given to the issue of intercountry adoption. This has occurred across a variety of mediums including newspapers, magazines, television and radio (DellaCava, Phillips & Engel, 2004, pp. 154-157). The issue has been played out domestically as well as internationally, especially in relation to celebrity adoptions. Engel et al. (2007) in their sociological account of international adoption in the USA, highlighted the positive aspects of media attention in relation to intercountry adoption. My results confirm that there are positive aspects of the media coverage, but that negative reactions also exist. While Engel et al. (2007) did not discuss the negative aspects associated with mass media and intercountry adoption, both positive and negative reactions will be discussed below.

Increased media coverage generates interest in the issue

On a domestic level, the increased media attention was attributed to stories surrounding Deborah-Lee Furness and her increased exposure in relation to adoption issues after the release of the Report into Overseas Adoption in Australia. Internationally, participants believed that the media coverage generated from celebrity adoptions by Madonna and Angelina Jolie, as well as news reports of crises in overseas countries, resulted in raising the profile of the issue. Participants believed that the increased media attention on

intercountry adoption resulted in heightened awareness of, and interest in, the issue. As Maeve explained:

There's been a lot more awareness of it in the last few years. You know, I suppose it's sort of thanks to maybe people like Deborah-Lee Furness or, you know, even like – just mainstream, like TV shows like *Sex in the City* where one of the characters adopted from China. (Maeve, Support Group Representative)

The media items, which focused on world disasters like the tsunami in Asia or recent earthquakes in China, were also seen as generating genuine concern for the welfare of children in difficult situations. While the motivation to help was interpreted by participants as a desire to 'save children', there was also felt to be limited understanding in the community about the long-term consequences of such a decision. Theresa and Rebecca pointed out:

Following the tsunami we had heaps and heaps of phone calls from people who reckoned they had a third bedroom and, you know, they could fit two more in. And that was lovely of them, you know, they really got carried away. But I had to talk to them about the fact it's more than a bedroom. (Theresa, Adoption Professional)

When they're saying it they're quite genuine in saying that they would gladly take one of these children into their homes. I mean, they're not thinking through the implications really, but the sentiment is genuine. (Rebecca, Adoptive Parent)

These findings are similar to those reported by DellaCava et al. (2004) in the USA who found that mass media coverage of world events, especially in relation to poverty, war, disease and natural disasters resulted in heightened awareness of children living in need around the world. My study also found that the increased accessibility of the international media through cable television and the internet meant that participants were more aware of the problems children faced in developing countries. The impact of news stories and images coming directly into the home led some people to consider intercountry adoption as a solution to these problems as noted by Harriet.

I think when the tsunamis happened in Sri Lanka and, you know, other countries, I heard lots of people saying oh you know, those poor little children, we should – we could adopt one... I think they are powerful, emotive images without people really thinking through, you know, the implications of what that might mean. (Harriet, Support Group Representative)

Some felt that the media portrayed children in crisis and children living in poverty in a way that suggested they were orphans and required homes. Participants commented that the visual images gave the impression that many thousands of children existed who could be

helped through intercountry adoption, when in reality it is impossible to know how many needed homes. Margot explained:

There are millions of children living in poverty and you know, they see the faces of the starving African children, the wars, and everything and go oh my God, that's awful, we need to rescue all those children. But you know, a lot of those children do have families. (Margot, Adoption Professional)

Celebrity intercountry adoption

Participants in the study made both supportive and negative comments in relation to the media coverage of overseas adoptions by celebrities. The range of opinions will be discussed next, but the findings suggest that more people perceived the coverage negatively than believed the stories contained positive messages about intercountry adoption.

Positive elements of celebrity stories

A few participants believed that celebrities involved in intercountry adoptions added legitimacy to the practice. They felt that the involvement of the rich and famous told the world, that intercountry adoption was an acceptable way to form a family. Rebecca expressed her opinion in this way:

But I suppose it's good in the sense that, you know, people see that families can be formed in different ways and maybe if they are doing it, it's not such a, you know, unusual or sort of radical thing to do. (Rebecca, Adoptive Parent)

The interest generated by the celebrity adoptions was seen as developing a heightened interest in local intercountry adoption stories as Kaitlyn explained:

Yeah, I feel like they're picking up on the mood of the adoptive families. I mean they're quite interested in their views and what they're going through and the wait— but also the good picture too. (Kaitlyn, Adoption Professional)

People wanted to adopt children from overseas as quickly as possible and when they saw through the media the apparent ease with which celebrities achieved their adoption, some began to question the process in Australia. Jacqueline, an adoption professional suggested that the media surrounding the movie star adoptions might result in some people gaining greater credibility in the system because Australians must go through a slow process. Still others reflected that the Madonna and Angelina Jolie stories showed how intercountry adoption operates in other countries and it was a positive reflection on the process in Australia, that our system did not work in such an unorthodox way.

For most of them, I think it makes them reflect that it's better here – they appreciate the process that they actually see that it's not appropriate to do what movie stars do. (Jacqueline, Adoption Professional)

Another comment made in relation to Madonna's adoption of David Banda from Malawi was that the media portrayal broadened debates about intercountry adoption. Because of the controversy, that the Malawian child was not an orphan, and despite this, Madonna adopted the boy. Kaitlyn believed that the media had successfully widened the debate about what issues should be considered in conversations about intercountry adoption, for example, questions should be asked whether it is appropriate for a particular child or whether it is in the child's best interest.

Who are you to go in and just take that child from that country? I think there has been a critical response about that, particularly Madonna, you know, they were really critical that there was still a father there who actually hadn't signed consent. So there was a bit more public awareness about the bigger issues. (Kaitlyn, Adoption Professional)

Negative aspects of celebrity adoption: Children become a commodity for sale

Participants noted a number of damaging consequences that were attributed to the media attention focused on celebrity intercountry adoption. One of the perceived negative messages communicated was the idea that children were for sale. This message was in reference to the media coverage of adoptions by Madonna and Angelina Jolie. The message understood by many was that celebrities simply chose a country and then adopted a child. The impression given, was that enough money was all you needed to 'buy' a child from a developing country. The following quotes highlight how widespread participants felt the idea of 'children as a commodity for sale' had become due to the media attention given to the issue:

I think it gives a very false representation of intercountry adoption and I think that the Madonna's and the Angelina Jolie and all of these, I think people assume that if you have money, you can just waltz in and get a baby...but I think it also doesn't do applicants any favours because of the view that it gives the rest of the community. (Kirsty, Adoption Professional)

I think a lot of people start to think of it as a fad and as a movie star thing and not as a reality, not as real children. It's just like it's an accessory. You know, here's my brand new car, here's my adopted child (laughs) and I think a lot of people do get that opinion. (Lorraine, Support Group Representative)

Also too the media certainly portrays a glossy outlook of intercountry adoption. It's like the new fashion, you know? Especially with all the celebrities that are doing it. (Naomi, Support Group Representative)

Below is a cartoon (Letch, 2009) that recently appeared in an Australian newspaper and was accompanied by an article titled 'Precious little extra' (Waterstreet, 2009). The article was an opinion piece and focused on celebrity intercountry adoption with reference to Madonna.

Figure 7.1 Letch, S. 2009, 'Precious Little Extra Cartoon', *The Sun-Herald*, May 10, p. 10



This cartoon expresses some of the themes raised by participants in relation to the negative media portrayal of intercountry adoption. It suggests how children are viewed as accessories able to be purchased by celebrities. Once the white woman (who resembles Madonna) has chosen her outfit, she will choose a child to coordinate with her clothes. Pictured are children from various backgrounds who seem to be from Africa, China, Korea and perhaps Europe. The range of children shown suggests that many children are available for intercountry adoption. The children are drawn sitting in baskets hanging in a wardrobe, which suggests they can be brought out when needed and stored away when no longer required.

The cartoon and accompanying article makes no comment about the intercountry adoption process that the woman underwent to obtain the children or provide any references as to what might happen for these children in the future. The cartoon is a good example of the

type of communication of which adoptive parents were often critical during my study. They believed it undermined their experiences of the intercountry adoption process and consequently, of their resulting family.

One participant suggested that celebrity adoptions were motivated by a desire to increase personal publicity by having the adoption stories splashed across magazines and newspapers. Malcolm explained:

They're looking at it as the child being an accessory. And that's a very gross term but I think you understand what I'm saying in terms of their publicity vehicle. I mean that's just revolting to be honest with you because that's not addressing the needs of the child. (Malcolm, Adoptive Parent)

Another criticism levelled at the media coverage of celebrity adoptions was that the stories made the process look very easy for the rich and famous.

That it's easy, that you can just fly across to wherever and buy a baby. (Margot, Adoption Professional)

The celebrity focused media because it just gave people this impression that this was a very easy thing to do and that our government stands in the way of it being easy. (Jessica, Adoption Professional)

This was in sharp contrast, to how participants in the study experienced the process, and they resented the fact that celebrities seemed to adopt their children quickly and with relative ease. As Lily suggested:

You know all these celebrities seem to have the idea one Thursday and then next Monday they've got the baby (chuckle). So you don't know what process they've had to go through. You're not given that information. (Lily, Adoption Professional)

What was felt to be missing from the media coverage was information about what processes the celebrities actually underwent before collecting their child. There is little if any, discussion of the process reported by the media and, therefore, people questioned whether the celebrities had undergone any process at all. Participants compared their own experience of the intercountry adoption process with the perceived lack of process by celebrities, which resulted in heightened discontentment with the perceived shortcomings of the Australian system.

We get constant complaints about how they just one day, front up and say, I've adopted a child and they don't seem to have gone through any due process or the media doesn't identify any due processes that these people have been through. I think people see that as an unfair advantage that these celebrities are able to access intercountry adoption much

more easily than what they are and then these people also adopt from countries that aren't open to Australia and it's like, why is this? (Jane, Adoption Professional)

But it just leads to people with a really bad taste in their mouth when it takes them three years just to even get their file over there and then they know they've probably still got another two year wait when they basically just get up and go oh yeah, I'll have that child and come home with them. (Lorraine, Support Group Representative)

I mean they should really be going through the same process as anybody else. So it does, I mean within the adoption community, people get really annoyed when they hear Madonna has adopted another child in three months when they've been waiting for seven years to go to the same country. (Maeve, Support Group Representative)

Participants commented that media stories, particularly those originating from the USA did not specify that the adoption was completed under the USA system. Prior to becoming a signatory to the Hague Convention, it was seen as common practice for private adoption agencies to arrange intercountry adoptions on behalf of USA citizens. This was seen by participants as ensuring a quick adoption process. Tanya alludes to the ethics of such agencies:

When they publish things like that or talk about things like that, there needs to almost like be a qualifier that says this is the system in America, it's not necessarily how it works here...it's not necessarily because they're celebrities, it's because that's the system in America anyway, so you can't necessarily relate the two, like you know, unfortunately opinions get formed by that. (Tanya, Adoptive Parent)

The media was also accused of not discussing the process of celebrity adoption because it was not considered newsworthy as Naomi explained:

It's almost like they're just getting this image of oh, you know, Angelina, she just says I want a child and it just happens. They don't see any of the process – whether she goes through a nine-month, 20-month or, you know, whatever...they don't actually show any of that. It's almost like I'll just go and buy a handbag and I've got it. (Naomi, Support Group Representative)

Tied up with the consumerism of celebrity adoptions, participants also suggested that the media focused its attention on being allocated the child, rather than providing any discussion about what happens after the child has arrived in the new family. Adoption professionals were particularly concerned that the focus on obtaining the child suggested this aspect is more important than the child's future life in the family.

It's almost again that focus on getting the child becomes bigger than the actual growing up and looking after the child over a long period of time...You don't hear about well you know we've had a real difficulty in coming to terms with the grief and the loss and how do we talk about the birth parents in this family or anything like that. (Jacqueline, Adoption Professional)

Just as there was little information on the process celebrities experienced to obtain their children from overseas, there was also limited discussion about the situation that led to children being abandoned. As discussed, the media attention often focused on being allocated the child, rather than on the plight of the birth family and their inability to keep the child. While the topic was broadened a little through the coverage of Madonna and her Malawian adoptions, this broader media perspective was the exception. Participants acknowledged that the Australian media did try, on occasions, to present a broader picture of intercountry adoption, for example a recent 7.30 Report (a news analysis programme on Australia's national television broadcaster, the ABC), in which intercountry adoptees and relinquishing mothers were interviewed as part of the story (Murray, 2008). Some participants in this study, however, were reluctant to listen to the views of Australian birth parents. They maintained that what happened to Australian birth mothers in the past and to children adopted early on in Australia's history of intercountry adoption, are not relevant to intercountry adoption as it is practised today. The impression given by some participants in the study was that the experiences of Australian birth mothers in the 1950s and 1960s were not similar to the experiences of birth mothers in overseas countries today.

It does I think distort the message, for the 7:30 Report to be putting that on here and sort of saying, we're talking about these countries overseas being similar to Australia in the 1950s and '60s...I mean it's reasonable to try and put a balanced perspective, but it also muddied the waters, and that wasn't really the story, that was kind of sideline to the story and I'm not sure that really helped. (Aaron, Adoptive Parent)

Some adoption professionals and support group representatives also believed that media coverage suggested that intercountry adoption was about saving a child rather than providing a family for a child as Emily noted:

We don't believe that intercountry adoption is about saving a child and that's because adult adoptees have educated us – to say to a child you're saving it is basically producing an environment of gratitude. I've saved you therefore you need to be grateful or the child will feel the need to be grateful. So we don't endorse the saving of children. (Emily, Support Group Representative)

The internet and intercountry adoption

The introduction of the internet has resulted in an increased ability to communicate easily with others in real time around the world. In terms of intercountry adoption, the internet has improved the ability of Australian authorities to communicate with overseas countries about intercountry adoption programmes and for members of the public to access information and to 'speak' with others involved in the process. There are many ways in

which improved technology via the internet has had an impact on intercountry adoption and these are discussed next. Participants expressed both the positive and negative aspects of the internet in terms of its ability to disseminate information world-wide.

The positive aspects: Information and support

One valuable aspect of the internet was found to be its ability to provide a forum for people across the world to exchange information and support in relation to intercountry adoption. This finding supports earlier research by DellaCava which described the impact of the internet as ‘one of the richest sources of information and support for adoption’ (2004, p. 154). My results suggest that the internet was especially important in relation to online support groups, which were often country specific. For example, participants in the study spoke of a Yahoo China group and a Yahoo Taiwan group. As Edwina and Karen illustrated, the online groups provided both information and support:

It’s a forum, but within the forum there is a place to put links and to put files that are of interest to the group... It runs the gamut from sharing photographs and allocation news to individual problems that parents are having with their children. (Edwina, Support Group Representative)

Oh, fantastic for sharing ideas and support and things like that you know – and I guess you know particularly for Australian families who are kind of isolated by distance you know that you are all part of the online community. (Karen, Adoptive Parent)

The internet support groups were found to be especially useful for single applicants who described the support they provided as particularly important as Gina described:

Because I’m a single applicant I find it really, really isolating because you’re sort of doing this by yourself... you don’t have anybody else who’s that passionate and I find it really valuable to have the e-group because although they’re not passionate about your child, they’re passionate about adopting and they’re passionate about the same journey that you’re on. (Gina, Single Prospective Adoptive Parent)

Participants felt there was a level of accountability with the e-groups because they were closed groups and membership meant following certain rules in order to remain in the group. Edwina explained:

As a moderator, you have the power to remove their post if it was offensive or crossed the lines of our rules, which are stated and actually get sent out when people are approved as a member. (Edwina, Support Group Representative)

The internet was also seen as a valuable resource for international studies and general information about what intercountry adoption involves, outcomes, and suggested resource books. It was a useful tool for obtaining information about how to deal with aspects of

raising an adopted child, for example, in relation to hair care for an Ethiopian child or how to deal with night terrors. Karen and Max both spoke positively about the internet in this way:

There is a Rainbow Kids site which is American which has lots of information on hair care which is quite a big thing when you have an African daughter with very curly hair - learn how to look after it. So yeah, just you know information on that and different types of products. (Karen, Adoptive Parent)

...posting questions, has anyone else you know had similar experiences and my daughter used to have night terrors and so I 'googled' that basically and found some stuff, you know an American psychotherapist or somebody who was dealing with these issues and so I wrote an email to her and she wrote stuff back. (Max, Adoptive Parent)

Tanya observed how people seemed to use the internet more as a support mechanism when they were waiting for a child to arrive rather than after the child had joined the family. She felt it was helpful during the long waiting period because people found it useful to talk to others in a similar position and to hear 'on the grapevine' how allocation in various countries was progressing:

But I find with a lot of those, it's a lot of waiting parents on there and a lot of the discussion is about you know, how do you deal with the wait. Then I guess because once you've got the child you're so busy that you don't have as much time to actually get onto those sorts of forums. (Tanya, Adoptive Parent)

One particularly positive aspect of the internet was its use by people separated geographically or with limited contact to other intercountry adoptive families. Margot described how these families used the internet for support:

A breakaway group of China parents that found that the sort of mainstream support groups weren't supporting them because they were having difficulties with their children and so this whole sort of sub-network of special needs developed and flourished and then went all around Australia. (Margot, Adoption Professional)

Also mentioned was a website from the USA that disseminated information about the progress of child allocation from various countries around the world. Leonie saw this site as positive because the information she was given was correct. Leonie explained:

It's just run by one woman and it's not actually called Rumour Queen. It's called something else but if you 'google' Rumour Queen you'll get the site... So if the Italians get allocated you know she'd say you know the word is the Italians have been allocated up to a log-in date of so-and-so I rate this rumour at you know three stars...It was spot on like in terms of my date. (Leonie, Single Adoptive Parent)

The fact that applicants like Leonie sometimes had access to information in relation to allocation before government departments, suggests how global communication networks 'erode the monopoly of information in the hands of governments, democratising access to breaking information...firms, journalists and Non-Government Organisations often have better information than governments (Aronson, 2005, p. 629). Thus because information is more freely available via the internet, the control by government departments of the process, and of information in relation to the process, is not as tight as previously. This means that the onus is on governments to provide applicants with the most up to date information possible.

Another positive aspect of the internet raised during the course of this study was its use as a method of communication between the state child welfare department and applicants. It was seen as the preferred method of communication by adoption professionals, and as having pros and cons by applicants. Sometimes applicants preferred having personal communication with an adoption worker rather than email contact, but there was recognition in the sample that money was tight, budgets were stretched and that email communication was sometimes the most expedient form of communication available between DoCS and themselves.

Applicants also used the internet initially when starting the process of intercountry adoption as each state government department, as well as the Attorney-General's Department has a website with information about intercountry adoption. Victoria was also in the process of trialling a system where applicants can track the progress of their application over the internet in a similar way to checking the progress of a Building Application on a local council website. The internet was also used in Queensland to provide online education for applicants.

The negative aspects of the internet: Misleading information

While participants noted the positive benefits of global communication via the internet, there was also recognition by some of the downside of the technology. This was mainly in relation to the misinformation that could be generated over the internet in relation to intercountry adoption. Margot explained:

Oh what was the latest rumour on the weekend? Oh, Taiwan's going to close its doors. I mean to say, you know, on Monday you get phone calls from anxious people waiting because that's what they've heard and read on the chat rooms on the weekend. Or China's waiting list is going to blow out. (Margot, Adoption Professional)

One participant spoke of her experiences on the internet in relation to hearing the negative outcomes of intercountry adoption. Thus, rather than the internet being a support mechanism, it became a means of heightening her anxiety. She found reading about the negative experiences of others unsettling, especially prior to receiving her child. Justine emphasised her thoughts on the downside of internet communication:

The people who have got issues, the people who have kids with issues are the ones who post all the time... and if you were a parent who hadn't got a child and reading some of the lists then you'd think oh my God, you know, I'll be expecting sleep issues, I'll be expecting this and all of these bad things are going to happen all the time. (Justine, Single Adoptive Parent)

Participants spoke of how the internet was also used to find out how other countries were proceeding with their applications. While the information was perceived as useful, and gave an indication of Australian allocations, the downside was that some applicants became unsettled and dissatisfied with the Australian system. This was especially the case when comparisons were made between the process in the USA and Australia.

Some applicants say they've been sent pictures of children who might need placement and they come to us and say well we're ready for a child, why am I waiting when we're hearing this? And we're like, we've got no control over the other things they're tapping into...there's a sense of this kind of frenzied emotion and people being really worried will we even get allocated a child and sometimes certain websites I think can feed into those vulnerabilities. (Kaitlyn, Adoption Professional)

Some US internet sites (see for example, 'Adoption Associates Incorporated', 'Adoption and Family Network Incorporated' and 'Children's Home Society and Family Services'), show photographs and provide details of children available for local and intercountry adoption in the USA. By using marketing tools, the adoption process becomes like a shopping expedition and on one site (Adoption Associates Incorporated) they were offering two fee waivers for applicants 'signing up for the Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine programs between June 15, 2009 and July 31, 2009'. The fee reductions were promoted as incentives for prospective adopters to use the services provided by the particular organisation. This kind of advertising sees the internet functioning as a market for children, which encourages 'buyers' to look at photographs and then choose and buy a child. Comments were made by study participants about the system in the USA and its market-driven mentality as Sophia noted:

I despair about the adoption industry in America. It's really scary stuff that goes on and the bargaining on the internet and the being there to cut the cord and all this kind of

commodification and romanticising. I don't see it in Australia; it doesn't seem to go on in this country. (Sophia, Adoption Professional)

While the internet-based approach to viewing available children for intercountry adoption does not occur on Australian websites, an Australian internet site was found that provides information about adoption on a 'fee for service' basis. The organisation is called 'Adoption Australia' and part of a company described as 'independent advisors for a wide range of industries' with 'a large customer base throughout the world' (HoganWest, 2009). The aim of Adoption Australia is to 'offer a comprehensive information package which sets out to ensure you [applicants] are fully informed about the adoption process for international and adoption in Australia' and to provide an 'honest assessment and appraisal of exactly what you need to do to maximise your chances of achieving a successful adoption in Australia'.

While this organisation was not mentioned specifically by participants in the study, this initiative shows the beginnings of commercialisation of adoption in Australia and the introduction of a private agency into the government based intercountry adoption services. The fact that Adoption Australia exists also suggests that Australian applicants are seeking information and support, in addition to that which is provided by the government departments.

Using the internet to open up global communications with people in other countries has allowed Australians to see how adoption is arranged and managed in other countries. This permitted Australians to compare their own experiences of intercountry adoption with the processes people undergo in different countries around the world. For some in the study, this comparison raised questions about the Australian system:

The sad reality is there are countless millions of children around the world who need a family and as I said, it's only the bureaucracy whether it's in their country or ours that's stopping that happening. (Charlotte, Adoptive Parent)

I understand that it has to do with money and the fact that a lot of other countries don't follow the Hague Convention and they do pay orphanages for children. And because Australia follows the Hague Convention and refuses to pay for children, Australia's like right down the bottom of the priority list. (Lorraine, Support Group Representative)

Perceptions of how overseas countries view intercountry adoption

The communication revolution has meant there is now global recognition that some children are in need of families and that intercountry adoption can help some children find families. Knowledge of the practice is, therefore, in the public domain and participants were asked to comment on how they felt the overseas countries involved in intercountry adoption perceived the practice. Answers to this question varied depending on who was asked. Many participants believed that the overseas countries accepted the practice of intercountry adoption and participants spoke of their positive experiences when collecting their child from the birth country. Others believed intercountry adoption was seen as shameful as demonstrated by overseas countries restricting adoption criteria and the growing emphasis on establishing domestic adoption programmes.

These findings are different to the views expressed in the Marshall Report written in 1984-85 and show that perceptions about sending countries and intercountry adoption seems to have changed over time. Marshall commented 'No country currently participating in overseas adoption could be said to be willingly involved. Most countries see overseas adoption as a national calamity and disgrace, but tolerate it on a short-term basis as a necessary evil! This means that a limited number of children are naturally available for adoption' (1984-85, p. 13). The findings in this study do not support such a strident view, with participants believing that some sending countries appreciated the positives offered by intercountry adoption while others felt only shame towards the practice.

Intercountry adoption was also described as a 'double edged sword'. Jacqueline commented how she believed overseas citizens could see both the positive and negative aspects of the practice:

Well again I think there's probably that bit of conflict between feeling yes it's good for the children to have family and to have opportunities in the west but also I think they probably do see it as it's a shame to lose some of this generation of children. (Jacqueline, Adoption Professional)

Another adoption professional described the relationship between Australia and the overseas countries as delicate and believed that consideration must be given to the views of the country about intercountry adoption. Kaitlyn expressed it in this way:

We can't go in charging and saying to a family, to a country, well you know, when are you going to give us a child, 'cause that's kind of their [the adoptive parents] thinking. We really have to be very diplomatic and incredibly polite. (Kaitlyn, Adoption Professional)

Also believed to be important to sending countries was how their involvement in intercountry adoption was seen by other countries around the world. There was the feeling expressed by a few, that some countries were beginning to see the negative aspects of intercountry adoption as Kirsty and Tanya explained:

Korea suspended its program and I think last year was the first time in the history that they'd adopted more children locally than they had sent intercountry... I think countries are starting to recognise that sending their younger generation away is not in their best interests either as a country and so I think there's probably a lot of political pressure to start accommodating those children at home. (Kirsty, Adoption Professional)

Adoption? I think they're beginning to see it more as – if they can't care for their own children then the world sees them as being some sort of – not a monster, but you know, why can't you look after your own kids sort of stuff. (Tanya, Adoptive Parent)

Participants commented that overseas countries appeared to be taking more control over the intercountry adoption process. This was attributed to the fact that the countries were imposing stricter criteria on the type of adoptive parents required for their children. Depending on the country, Australian families had to meet specific criteria in terms of, for example, age, education or marital status. Some in my study thought the setting of these criteria gave the sending country the ability to find a family with similar attributes to those the children may have grown up with in their homeland. Karen said:

Well, I think it's well within their rights to kind of shape the way, the kind of family they expect their child to go to... So I guess you know they're just trying to reinforce what's commonplace in their country. (Karen, Adoptive Parent)

While some countries like Korea were seen as welcoming intercountry adoptees back to their country of birth, other countries were not considered as welcoming. This was interpreted as being a reflection of the country's negative opinions about intercountry adoption. Naomi explained:

A lot of adoptees, when they go back to their sending countries, particularly South America – a lot of those countries are very negative about having those adoptees, as adults, come back. They're like why do you want to come back? (Naomi, Support Group Representative)

Another view expressed was that opinions about intercountry adoption in sending countries differ according to whom you speak. For example, Non-Government Organisations (NGO)

at the ‘coal-face’ caring for children in difficult circumstances, were perceived as being happy with intercountry adoption. There was some uncertainty expressed about how overseas governments viewed the practice because of recognition that intercountry adoption only exists because of the foreign government’s inability to meet the needs of children domestically. As Maeve noted:

Well I guess it depends on who it is that you’re talking to and what level of government they’re at and whether it’s the NGO level, the people that are actually caring for the children, they can’t be more welcoming and willing to assist than they are...But when you start looking at the government level, it depends on the different level. (Maeve, Support Group Representative)

Moreover, the fact that some overseas nations are moving towards developing their own domestic adoption programmes suggested that they recognised the benefits of keeping children in their birth culture and the less positive aspects of intercountry adoption. Ann illustrated this point of view:

Korean’s didn’t adopt locally and it was a little bit of a taboo subject...But in the last year or two, things have changed dramatically in Korea with the change of government and they’re really now pushing local adoption. So I think the attitudes are changing in Korea. (Ann, Adoptive Parent)

Perceived negatives of intercountry adoption: Shame and embarrassment

Shame was the main negative reaction participants attributed to overseas countries in relation to intercountry adoption. This shame was perceived as originating from the acknowledgement of their inability to care for vulnerable children as Donna and Charlotte outlined:

I know Korea sees it with some shame. They’ve been a huge exporter of their own children because of their reticence to accept children from a different bloodline into their families. And also the shame of being a single mother. (Donna, Adoptive Parent)

I guess, most countries would want to be able to look after their own children and so it is somewhat shameful I guess if you look at it that way to be in a position where you can’t look after your children and you have to have people from overseas come in and adopt your children. (Charlotte, Adoptive Parent)

In addition to feelings of shame, overseas countries were also seen as being embarrassed by their involvement in the practice of intercountry adoption as Lily explained:

I’m sure that there are some people who feel embarrassed about it that they do send their children overseas but none of that seems to be overt... but I’m sure there must be embarrassment and a sense of letting these children down. (Lily, Adoption Professional)

There was also the opinion expressed that although the Hague Convention says that intercountry adoption is considered a last resort, that countries are not willingly involved in the practice:

I don't know that there's any country that would willingly be doing it. (Lara, Adoption Professional)

Perceived positives of intercountry adoption: A family plus opportunities

The positive aspects of intercountry adoption attributed to sending countries involved the idea that family life is perceived more favourably than life in an institution. Jane and Theresa both expressed this view:

I think people tend to believe that families are the best and I would suppose that that is the thinking behind the overseas countries putting their children up for intercountry adoption. (Jane, Adoption Professional)

I think they view it as an opportunity at the moment for children to get a family. But in the long term I think they don't want to let their children go, which is why Ethiopia wants reports of those kids for 18 years. (Theresa, Adoption Professional)

Some believed the authorities and community in the sending country felt gratitude for taking the children and giving them a home as Lily and Rebecca explained:

Well the feedback that we get from people who've travelled to collect their children, I think there's gratitude that the children are being well cared for and given an opportunity. (Lily, Adoption Professional)

The feeling that we got when we were in China to pick up our daughter, was very positive from the authorities. And also positive from people that would sort of come up to us in the street and people in general, yeah, seemed to be positive towards what was happening. (Rebecca, Adoptive Parent)

Intercountry adoption was also seen as creating opportunities for children who otherwise would have few alternatives available to them as Claudia suggested:

So, I think there is a class of people who are ashamed of having to give their children outside, but then there's also, you know, a group of people who think well, how lucky are these children to be given opportunities to have a normal life. (Claudia, Support Group Representative)

Global or individual orientation?

Globalisation throws up questions about whether intercountry adoption is a practice performed by countries who are interested in being good global citizens and helping care for the children of the world or whether motivations for the practice arise from the private concerns of individuals. As with discussions about the social impact of globalisation, there seems to be some tension between balancing the local interest of families wanting children with the global dimension of caring for the world's needy children.

During the interviews, it was noted how Australia had strict immigration requirements in terms of the type of children permitted to enter the country as intercountry adoptees. If Australia were acting as a good global citizen, is this role being adequately fulfilled when children with a range of different backgrounds are not accepted and instead there is an emphasis on healthy, young infants? Hugh and Richard both articulated this anomaly:

We don't have histories of adopting children with more complicated backgrounds certainly there are areas of criticism globally that you know Australia doesn't have a greater role in that. (Hugh, Adoption Professional)

The children that would benefit most are not being brought to Australia and partly that is because we don't get the demand, like we don't get experienced foster carers saying they would like to adopt a child with a disability from overseas. (Richard, Adoption Professional)

Because intercountry adoption involves payment for the service, there were often connotations of a global marketplace operating in children and while many acknowledged that money did change hands, there was a reluctance to see the process as involving a transaction as Max explained:

You're not supposed to infer that there was any money involved, because it does sort of make it look a bit like a transaction, economic sort of thing. (Max, Adoptive Parent)

During the study, some participants questioned what the best outcomes were for children needing families. Theresa, for example, suggested that bringing children to Australia might be part of the solution while Samantha argued for a broader approach to be taken to intercountry adoption.

No, it's not our number one core business. Our core business is looking after children within the state. But that doesn't mean that we don't have another part of that business which gives us, as a growing country, the responsibility to be good corporate citizens and, as such, we have a responsibility to children of the world. (Theresa, Adoption Professional)

You know as a developed nation, what are our commitments to the rest of the world's children? And you're saying the only and best way to do that is to bring them here to parent them... I just think you've got to look a little broader. Why are we putting all of our eggs into one basket when we should be looking at a whole range of different ways to meet the needs of the world's children? (Samantha, Adoption Professional)

Sophia described how intercountry adoption is never straightforward and that there are often questions about whether the practice is ultimately in the best interests of the child:

So there's this incredible tension that yeah maybe there's a lot of children in need of families, but is it correct, is it right to effect an international adoption where their rights may be abused? That might be a stolen kid and there actually might be a family back there that would take on that child. (Sophia, Adoption Professional)

There was recognition by some in the study that international views towards intercountry adoption have changed and are continuing to change. Through the education seminars, and because of first-hand experiences of programmes closing down, participants were aware of the move towards countries of origin developing domestic adoption services. Adoption professionals also discussed the change in how nations were dealing with natural disasters, for example, after the civil unrest in Rwanda in the 1990s and in the aftermath of the tsunami in Indonesia, the reaction was quite different to earlier reactions post World War II, Korea and Vietnam as Sophia explained:

Rwanda really throws up for me a sort of an example of where caution is absolutely important. In 1994 when Rwanda happened, we had many phone calls from people saying I want to adopt a Rwandan orphan. And fortunately it wasn't down to any decision making that our system could make because the Rwandan Prime Minister said there will be no international adoptions out of Rwanda... A bit like the Indonesians and the Sri Lankans said after the tsunami, he said – 'cause there was international pressure, let's adopt them, let's adopt them. And he said no. (Sophia, Adoption Professional)

Actions motivated by personal interest

Some people thought carefully about how their decision to adopt a child from overseas would have an impact on the sending country and on the birth family involved. It seemed, however, that the desire for a child outweighed all other considerations and became the main motivator for intercountry adoption despite thoughts of how the practice had an effect on the country in question. As Theo articulated:

You kind of feel – is that country being done an injustice because you're stripping away their cultural identity. (Theo, Support Group Representative)

While intercountry adoption may have been a response to a crisis in the past, its existence has become part of the child welfare landscape. One participant described how the practice has become like ‘a machine’:

It says that we’re really here to market and to keep adoptions happening, intercountry adoptions happening because it’s a machine of its own. It’s a business for some countries like America and it’s a business for a lot of the sending countries... It’s driven by the needs of childless couples who want to have a family. (Naomi, Support Group Representative)

Linking the benefits of intercountry adoption to opportunities in developed countries was seen as a way used by adoptive parents to legitimise their decision to remove a child from its culture.

And this is why I always question and challenge the Deborah-Lees of the world because I just think, you know, we are coming from such a subjective viewpoint of having the gall to think that what we’ve got is better...those people might be poorer but a lot of them look so happy. (Naomi, Support Group Representative)

Due to improved communication, citizens have a greater awareness of global problems including conflicts, civil unrest and the impact of poverty on people around the world. In relation to intercountry adoption, the question that must be asked is intercountry adoption the best choice or would other options be more appropriate for children in need of families? As suggested by the comments above, intercountry adoption seems to be an issue that demands a broader investigation of how best to provide families for children. Should intercountry adoption be defined as a global debate with countries needing to help globally, for example, through aid, or is it about helping individuals create families because they are unable to do this on their own?

Is intercountry adoption an aid policy?

While the advocates of globalisation emphasise the benefits of the phenomenon for all countries, there is recognition that globalisation also produces losers (Wiseman, 1998, p. 16). In some countries poverty has declined, while in others it has increased (Hirst & Thompson, 1996, p. xiv). The comment below suggests that the consequences of poverty may directly influence a birth parent’s decision to allow their child to be adopted overseas as Jane explained:

A number of people think that all the children are orphans. But they're not necessarily orphans but they have been given up by family members because of the poor circumstances. Generally a lot of it is related to poverty issues. (Jane, Adoption Professional)

No longer is the sole reason for intercountry adoption an humanitarian reaction to natural disasters and wars, but instead contributing to its existence today are the results of policies put in place by foreign governments and the impact these policies have on local populations - for example, the one child policy in China. In poorer nations where limited safety net provisions or welfare benefits exist for the neediest members of society, local governments have enacted intercountry adoption to care for children. This means that a pool of children exists for whom intercountry adoption is an option.

Did participants in this study consider intercountry adoption a form of aid? This is certainly an important consideration in terms of policy debates because the answer has an impact on how the policy area is defined and how funding is allocated to the issue. If it were predominantly considered as aid, it may be aligned with federal departments such as the Department of Foreign Affairs and the emphasis would be on caring for children in their own countries rather than adoption into Australian families.

Most people in the study, across all groups, did not consider intercountry adoption as a form of aid. Aid was associated with sponsorship of children who were assisted to remain living in their country of origin; yet, there were elements of the practice which some felt had 'aid like' overtones. For example, the practice of paying money to orphanages and the idea that support groups continued to support orphanages from where their children originated, suggested elements of aid policy. Here are some comments from support group representatives:

I mean, part of the fees go to helping others in the country that you are adopting from, but I don't think, it's not a humanitarian act, I don't think. It's a rather selfish act; actually, I wanted to be a mum. (Edwina, Support Group Representative)

We provide a lot of overseas aid so we tend to give money back to the orphanages to help them and to assist not only in supporting the orphanages but to assist those children that cannot be adopted as well. I think it's a balancing act. You know it's really quite difficult. On the one hand we have to respect those countries and understand and try to support them but on the other hand we need to be realistic enough that they may not have the resources. (Emily, Support Group Representative)

Tied to the issue of whether or not intercountry adoption is considered aid is another question about whether it should be a policy for individuals to form families or whether it should be a community-based approach to a problem. Should intercountry adoption be about individuals living in Australia, for example, paying \$30,000-\$40,000 for a child or should it be about putting \$30,000-\$40,000 into an overseas country to help children

remain in their cultural community? Jessica and Ann both spoke about why they felt intercountry adoption did not represent international aid:

I think aid is the Australian government and money actually going into these countries to discover, to help them create the infrastructure that they need to be able to place their children in their own country. That to me is aid. Taking their children away, that doesn't sound like aid to me. (Jessica, Adoption Professional)

I see it as a way of people forming their families. I think sponsorship is aid. I don't see adoption as aid and I think that's a very tricky area to put it into the aid bracket because then it's like the child has to be sort of thankful for you know the parent to coming and getting them whereas we're the ones who have to be thankful - the parents I think. (Ann, Adoptive Parent)

Any link between intercountry adoption and aid provision suggests a relationship between adopting children and paying for the children. The idea of payment for children was unpalatable to study participants. People would like to interpret the payments made to orphanages as payment for the prior care of their newly adopted child rather than categorise these payments as aid or indeed think of them as payment for a child.

But basically the support group now have a big fundraising where they you know are setting up childcare centres and kindergartens over there and I guess it ensures the you know the ongoing commitment Australia has to the country - so it just reinforces you know the strengths of the arrangement between Australia and their government. (Karen, Adoptive Parent)

Lorraine commented on how payments to orphanages can affect local practices and issues in relation to intercountry adoption. She said:

Paying orphanages or paying countries where you take children from, it can actually just do such enormous harm because you know like it can be that lots of mums end up being coerced into giving up their children and it goes back to what Australia was like in the 1950s where children were coerced away from their mothers. (Lorraine, Support Group Representative)

The payment of money to orphanages raises issues of whether by continuing to support the initiatives in the sending countries, Australia is propping up their system and allowing the practice of intercountry adoption to continue. If the country depends on the aid then it will continue to be involved in intercountry adoption, rather than having an incentive to develop other ways of looking after children domestically.

The future of intercountry adoption in the global environment

Change in the type of child available

Adoption professionals were of the opinion that Australian intercountry adoption programmes would move towards accepting a greater number of children with more complex needs. This trend was attributed to the changing needs of overseas countries brought about by the development of domestic adoption programmes and the demand by local programs for healthy, young children. The following comments highlighted how professionals saw the changing nature of intercountry adoption:

It may be that the future of intercountry adoption is a far more specialist focus, looking at the adoption of older and special needs children. And I think in order to meet the need for the countries to adopt their special needs children, I think all of us across the country need to seriously revise the way that we work. (Jessica, Adoption Professional)

The paediatricians still can't actually put their finger on what it is, whether it is a form of cerebral palsy or what it is. So, we're seeing a significant increase in those types of children and it – it seems that it's only going to get more rather than less. (Jane, Adoption Professional)

If you look at bodies like International Social Service and whatever, the comments that they tend to be making are the need where it does exist is in older kids and kids with much more complicated backgrounds. (Hugh, Adoption Professional)

Very dependent on situation in overseas countries

Many adoption professionals showed insight into how changes in sending countries could have an impact on intercountry adoption in Australia. After natural disasters, some overseas countries have recently demonstrated that intercountry adoption was not the most appropriate response to children left homeless, since surviving relatives may be able to care for them. This view also recognised that some countries are choosing not to be involved in intercountry adoption but concentrating on developing local infrastructure for children to remain in their birth countries. This is suggestive of an ideological shift away from intercountry adoption. Hugh and Jessica illustrated these opinions:

Intercountry adoption by definition is affected by a whole range of issues within Australia but probably more importantly a whole range of issues that happen in nation states across the world, subject to global trends, to issues of national dignity, social policy, broader human services type issues are affected as well. (Hugh, Adoption Professional)

By having an intercountry adoption programme, they awaken their collective conscience of their own community and so they start adopting children themselves in their own country,

which is a wonderful positive thing for the children... which leaves the intercountry adoption component of their work with the need to place special needs children. (Jessica, Adoption Professional)

A more difficult and competitive process

Comments were also made in relation to how participants felt that the intercountry adoption process would become more difficult and more competitive as fewer children became available for adoption. For adoptive parents like Leonie, this opinion was based on personal experience as she explained:

And people were only waiting six months, 12 months. Now the wait is – I know people that are in like batch 70, and they've done online calculations and they're saying they think they're looking at seven years, you know? (Leonie, Single Adoptive Parent)

There was recognition that demand for intercountry adoption services by Australians was likely to increase as people left it later to have children and experienced infertility problems as Karen explained:

I think the demand – well, it's horrible to say demand, but the number of people seeking to adopt I think is only going to grow because I guess with the cost of living people, probably are going to work you know in their careers longer so put off having children...and infertility seems to be on the increase. (Karen, Adoptive Parent)

Adoption professionals like Rachel and Lara confirmed that the wait was longer now and there was increased worldwide competition for children:

And now that it's taking so much longer for people to be placed with a child once their file goes overseas, the dilemma's with aid and adoption and the growing demand and competitiveness of countries like the US and the inherent dilemma's of large amounts of aid going in exchange for adoption. (Rachel, Adoption Professional)

I think it's going to slow down unless there's some catastrophe somewhere, a big catastrophe. I can't see that we would be able to maintain the numbers we are maintaining. It'll become slower and harder. (Lara, Adoption Professional)

Charlotte highlighted how changes in the American system were likely to make adoption more difficult for Australians to get children from our current sending countries:

Guatemala's just closed to America and they were adopting 20,000 children a year from Guatemala. Now, that's 20,000 children that Americans are going to be looking elsewhere for every year. I know it sounds a bit (chuckle) you know callous to say it but that's going to put even more pressure on the countries that are functioning now like China and the Philippines. (Charlotte, Adoptive Parent)

Adoption professionals were already seeing the impact of the slowdown in children because of the requirement to perform updates every two years for approved applicants.

Many had begun completing applicant updates when previously there had been no need because allocation times were faster. Jane explained:

We know that the files are going to be remaining overseas for longer so effectively, some people might need at least two updates in the time before they're allocated a child. (Jane, Adoption Professional)

A few participants commented that they believed the future of the process of intercountry adoption would be smoother because of the involvement of the Attorney-General's Department and the changes that had been occurring. Edwina and Charlotte commented:

Well, hopefully with the Attorney-General's office becoming involved and hopefully with more centralisation of intercountry adoption it will be smoother. (Edwina, Support Group Representative)

Look, at the moment I'm feeling a little bit positive because I think this Attorney-General's Department is doing some good work and I hope that there's a will there at the governmental level to continue this and to fund it and to you know give it some real legs. (Charlotte, Adoptive Parent)

Broaden and balance the discussion

A minority view expressed was that the future of intercountry adoption in Australia should involve a more balanced dialogue between all the parties concerned. Although there is no direct contact with relinquishing parents overseas, a few participants felt that relinquishing parents in Australia have experiences that are relevant to discussions about intercountry adoption. It was felt that their opinions while expressed, were not really listened to by the adoptive parent community. Naomi noted:

I don't see any use in trying to stop intercountry adoption...because there is too much of a fundamental human need that's driving it, which is we want families. You can't stop that and it's a very fierce and emotionally laden driver so, I've thought well let's do it from an educated point of view so that we have a more encompassing, embracing perspective of what it really means to those involved and that we allow those voices, all of them, to be heard. (Naomi, Support Group Representative)

Scott and Tanya commented that they saw the future of intercountry adoption in NSW involving the use of private agencies.

I think it will probably – if I had to guess, say it was more likely to be privatised in some way. DoCS is just under such you know pressure to look after other areas like child protection that I think they'll change the process to it being privatised. So, in five years I would expect it to be privatised. (Scott, Adoptive Parent)

I still see it continuing, I think it will go to private agencies, regulated by the federal government. (Tanya, Adoptive Parent)

Future linked to changes in domestic situation

While the future of intercountry adoption was seen as linked to the overseas countries, some also acknowledged that changes in local practices could also have an impact on intercountry adoption. This was connected to changes that might occur in foster care whereby local adoptions were encouraged for children in long term foster care. Engel et al. suggested that ‘the annual number of international adoptions is likely to continue to grow despite the objections of some governments, groups and individuals’ (2007, p. 268). Given that the USA has recently signed the Hague Convention it will be interesting to see what impact this has on how the that government operates and manages international adoption. Participants in this Australian study were less positive about numbers increasing and some felt this depended on the outcome of talks between the Attorney-General’s Department and overseas countries interested in new programme development.

Most did not contemplate that intercountry adoption would end either because they did not want to consider this option or did not believe that developed nations would stop providing this service for children. A few believed that it might stop as the number of children requiring care declined and the development of domestic adoption programmes increased. Claudia and Rebecca observed:

I think it will just come to a natural end...a lot of them are third world countries and now they’re becoming, you know, much more affluent and people are deciding to keep their children and poverty isn’t such a – a problem...I think it’s about supply. I think the supply is drying up. (Claudia, Support Group Representative)

Look, I think that intercountry adoption will stop probably at some point in the future... like once countries become more affluent and develop a welfare system that can take care of their own sort of orphans, or they develop more local adoptions then, yeah, that probably is in the best interests of the children. (Rebecca, Adoptive Parent)

At the other end of the spectrum was the opinion that intercountry adoption would in fact increase in the future as Patrick argued:

So I see it increasing, I see the spotlight increasing and I guess the pressure on policy makers to think more seriously about it, certainly within the next five years and as a result there may be a streamlining of the process. (Patrick, Adoptive Parent)

Engel et al. (2007, p. 268) believed that adoptees would continue to come from a range of birth countries and this view was also shared by participants in my study who felt that political, social and economic factors would affect the source countries for intercountry adoption. While Engel et al. attributed the changes to ‘national and international crises’,

participants in this study ascribed the changes more to the changing philosophies about intercountry adoption in overseas nations, as well as trends toward developing local solutions rather than using international adoption to care for abandoned and orphaned children.

Reconfiguring power relations in intercountry adoption

The current movement of children across international borders for intercountry adoption has been influenced by globalisation in a number of ways. Firstly, accessible and quick methods of transportation have enabled easy access to numbers of children for intercountry adoption. However, debate exists among stakeholders concerning the legitimate number of children available for intercountry adoption, which has implications for future policy development. Secondly, the Hague Convention was established to protect and safeguard children, yet child trafficking still exists and the international treaty appears to have little enforcement capabilities. Thirdly, international and domestic media coverage have increased awareness of intercountry adoption as a method of helping children from developing countries, and celebrity adoptions have raised some of the pros and cons of the process. Fourthly, the internet although providing information and support on intercountry adoption, has also been a vehicle for spreading misleading information about the process.

Overseas countries were seen as divided in their views towards intercountry adoption and ranged from seeing it with shame and embarrassment to a means of providing children with a family and opportunities in a developed country. Intercountry adoption was clearly motivated by personal interest but at the same time, there was a sense that the practice involved ‘good global citizen’ rhetoric. Although adoptive families held a strong desire for the practice to continue in order to legitimise the method they had chosen for their family, current practices suggest that the type of child available is changing as are attitudes towards intercountry adoption in overseas countries. While there has been an increase in demand from developed nations for intercountry adoption, there seems to be a decrease in the number of children available. It appears that the power in intercountry adoption has shifted, with the overseas countries taking more control of the intercountry adoption process and countries like Australia, tentatively approaching other countries to establish new ways of accessing children for intercountry adoption.

8

Conclusion

We have all kinds of families, you know, in Australia these days which is really good I think. I presume there is some broad encompassing definition that somebody has come up with, but it would need to take into account the diversity. I mean, it's obviously not the nuclear Anglo-Saxon family anymore is it. And any definition would need to take that into account. That we have single parent families, we have gay families, we have families that have all originated from overseas. Adoptive families are another kind of family. (Harriet, Support Group Representative)

The Australian community is made up all different kinds of families, as Harriet suggested during the study. While some participants preferred to define the family in terms of its traditional image, there was growing recognition in the research that family structure is changing as individuals make choices about the relationships they form. When people want to form a family but cannot, it has enormous repercussions on their lives as participants explained through their personal attempts at family formation. Building a family through intercountry adoption is one choice made by individuals and one that is shaped by a range of domestic and international social forces.

The first aim of my study was to examine experiences of the intercountry adoption process by families formed in this way. I found that individuals choose to form families through intercountry adoption because children are a crucial means by which individuals add meaning to their lives and intimate relationships, by providing another human being to love and nurture. This child focus was seen as 'natural' and, for some, as an inevitable extension of their relationship. Women who were part of a couple were often the 'prime movers' in the intercountry adoption process, which was attributed to their greater need for a child, not necessarily a biological child, but a child which would allow them to fulfil the parenting role. In such cases, women undertook the research, completed the paperwork and spent more time thinking about becoming a parent. Single applicants were motivated to complete the process quickly because they recognised that adopting a child would take them longer than people who were part of a couple. Many of the male participants, while keen for a child, did not appear as driven and focused on the outcome of the process as

females. Most men in the sample were happy to let their wives take the lead role in the adoption process.

The research also generated findings about the nature of relationships within intercountry adoptive families and factors that influence how these families differ from biological families. As with other studies, I found that the extra layer of adoption and cultural difference added to the complexity of parenting a child born overseas. While some believed that all families are different depending on the individuals involved, there was recognition that parenting an intercountry adoptee and a biological child was different. Factors influencing the difference in parenting included: the age of the child on arrival in Australia, whether the child had first lived in a foster family or orphanage in their birth country and the impact of earlier experiences including trauma, on the child's psychosocial behaviour and development. Many intercountry adoptive families formed firm friendships with others who had adopted from overseas. These friendships were based on a sense of shared experience and were very important to adoptive parents, as support and information sharing were a common feature of these friendships.

My second aim was to increase understanding of how the state influences the formation of families through intercountry adoption. I found that the complex policy environment in Australia creates difficulties for individuals negotiating the system, and that diversity in legislation and practice among states results in an unclear policy orientation. While the majority of participants viewed the increased role of the Attorney-General's Department positively, the analysis shows there are some areas where inconsistencies exist in relation to policy direction. According to both Australian legislation and the Hague Convention, the intercountry adoption process should be conducted in the best interests of the child, but since the child resides in another country, Australian policy seems to be dominated by a desire to meet the needs of Australian adoptive parents for a child. Also of interest is the desire of applicants for greater access to more children and the Commonwealth Government's stated commitment to achieving this through an expansion of programmes. These actions seem to be motivated by recommendations from the Inquiry into Overseas Adoption, but they also suggest the state approaching programme development in a way that meets the needs of the quite vocal adoption community, with little debate in the political sphere about the ethical and moral dimensions of intercountry adoption.

The third aim of the study was to understand the implications of globalisation on the practice of intercountry adoption in Australia. The movement of children across

international boundaries, while not new, has been influenced by a number of global forces including improved transport, enactment of international treaties, media coverage and the introduction of the internet. These advances have resulted in increased knowledge and access to information about intercountry adoption and a more developed understanding of how the process operates in other countries. This has an impact on applicant experiences of the process in Australia. Different countries regulate and manage intercountry adoptions in different ways and Australians are now able to access information quickly about programmes overseas and this can result in dissatisfaction and criticism of the Australian system. The idea of a globalised ‘market place’ also has implications for intercountry adoption as the buying and selling of goods could be likened to the movement of children across foreign borders.

Throughout my fieldwork I felt participants’ sadness at their inability to have biological children and heard them express their anxiety and frustration with the intercountry adoption process and its multiple stages of education, written applications, assessment procedures and lengthy waiting periods. If portrayed solely in terms of the individuals and their experiences of the intercountry adoption process, it is easy to understand how governments are blamed for being obstructionist and unhelpful in facilitating the formation of families. This focus, however, on the individual and the individual’s desire to choose their family ignores the social, political and economic context in which intercountry adoption policy operates as well as ignoring the other players and layers of government involved in the process.

This examination highlights the competing interests and concerns of individuals involved in intercountry adoption. Each of the actors in the process has a different orientation that in part, helps to explain the range of opinions reflected in the interview material in the study. Prospective adoptive parents and adoptive parents are motivated by their individual needs for children, which gives them a personal and emotional orientation towards the process. The views of adoption professionals who work for state and territory governments are influenced by their need to assess and provide suitable applicants for children born overseas and coming to Australia for adoption. The departments seem to have a practical and pragmatic orientation towards this task as they operate according to the rules and regulations set out in the various adoption acts around the country.

The Australian Federal Government is motivated to ensure that the process is conducted ethically and according to international treaties and appears to have a more legalistic,

formal orientation. The overseas country wants to achieve the best outcomes for its children and is practical and pragmatic, sometimes ashamed, of its inability to develop domestic solutions for abandoned and homeless children. The international community through the Hague Convention appears to adopt a more ideological approach than other stakeholders in relation to intercountry adoption. This orientation is outlined in the Scope of the Convention which highlights the necessity of safeguarding children in order to ensure the outcome of intercountry adoption is in their best interests (Hague Conference on Private and International Law, 2006). The analysis suggests that all these positions need to be understood and aligned in order to get the best solution for both children and the adults involved in intercountry adoption. It is suggestive of the balancing act that social policy needs to achieve in order to take into account the wishes and circumstances of the birth parents, the views of the countries of origin, meet the needs of children, but at the same time recognise and be sensitive to, the needs of adoptive and prospective adoptive parents.

The results of this study show that although community members might attribute humanitarian motives to those undertaking intercountry adoption, it is regarded by the majority of participants primarily as a way of creating a family. Intercountry adoption has become part of our child welfare system and the challenge for Australian policy makers is to look more broadly at the practice in its global context and to consider not only individual motivations, but also the many and varied political and economic factors that influence the way in which intercountry adoption is practiced. Families formed through intercountry adoption represent families of choice and Australian social policy needs to begin to focus less on family types and more on incorporating the diversity of families and relationships found within families, into social policy initiatives.

There are several other areas for future examination that can be identified. This research has shown that the main reason that people use intercountry adoption is to fulfil their need to form a family and to parent children. If as the global trends suggest, intercountry adoption becomes less available to Australian applicants because of a decrease in the number of healthy children available, then people will be forced to look at other ways of building a family. It seems timely, therefore, to examine alternatives to intercountry adoption such as local adoption, long-term fostering and child sponsorship schemes in order to further understand how these alternatives can be made acceptable to this group.

Another alternative to building families, recently reported in the Australian media, is the controversial issue of using overseas surrogate mothers to give birth to children. The recent

news coverage of a non-heterosexual Australian couple, soon to be parents via surrogacy arrangements in India, raises ethical concerns about this method of family formation (Benson, 2009). While commercial surrogacy has been legal in India since 2002, its practice raises many ethical concerns about exploitation of women and cultural imperialism. This example also raises questions about Australian laws relating to the adoption and fostering of children by same-sex Australian couples, which may have influenced the decision to use surrogacy arrangements in the first place.

It is also important to look more broadly at Australia's involvement with developing nations and to consider opportunities for community development strategies. In addition to looking at opportunities for intercountry adoption, further studies might involve researching Australia's role in helping countries develop domestic responses to the problem of abandoned and orphaned children.

The sociological account of family formation involving intercountry adoption in Australia which is developed in this thesis, confirms that relationships of choice are being formed in postmodern society, despite messages from a variety of authorities regarding family life that are often mixed, contradictory and dominated by particular family types, rather than by the concept of choice.

While the concept of choice in relationships is incorporated into the works of Beck (1995), Beck-Gernsheim (2002; 1995) and Giddens (1991; 1992), the focus of the choice relates to how families are formed and decisions about whether or not to have children. This study has examined what happens when the choice is made to have children, but the desire is not fulfilled, resulting in consideration of different options and decision-making. Biological children may not always be an option for some, and other forms of kinships of choice, like intercountry adoption, become an alternate way to form intimate family relationships.

This study on intercountry adoption has linked intercountry adoption with the wider literature on family life. It has shown how broader issues in postmodern family formation structure intercountry adoption, and how intercountry adoption constitutes a vital element of contemporary family formation. The meaning of family in today's society has come to encompass a diversity of relationships. As Weeks et al. suggest, families have become 'kin-like networks of relationships based on friendships and commitments' (2001, p. 9) which are 'beyond blood' (Wakeling & Bradstock, 1995, p. 11). Families of choice formed through intercountry adoption are an important example of this changing family pattern.

Appendix 1: Interview schedule for prospective adoptive parents

Consent form

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. I'm planning to do an analysis of the assessment policies and procedures in relation to ICA in NSW. I hope to be able to make recommendations to enhance the process. Did you receive a Participant Information Sheet with my original letter which outlined details about the study? Do you have any questions before we begin? I just need you to read and fill in a consent form.

Introduction

With your permission I will tape record our interview and later transcribe the tape for analysis. I will also take some notes, but tape recording just makes the process easier.

During the interview it is important to remember that there are no right or wrong answers. I'm really interested in your honest reflections and feelings about your experiences in relation to intercountry adoption (ICA).

Whatever you say during the interview will be confidential. Only my supervisor and I know who has participated in this study. Any quotes used in my final thesis will be quoted anonymously.

Do you have any questions about anything before we start?

Turn tape ON

Background information

- To begin with can you please give me some details about yourself, for example your age, if you are single or married or living in a de facto relationship, what kind of job you work in, if you have children already what are their ages, are they adopted or biological children?

Initial decision-making

- What led you to a decision to adopt a child from overseas?
- What sort of issues did you take into consideration when making this decision?
- What sort of feelings and thoughts surrounded the making of this decision?
- How long did it take you to reach this decision?
- Do you remember when you first applied to become an ICA parent?
- When did you put in your expression of interest form?

Preparation for ICA by DoCS

I'm interested in your thoughts and comments about the preparation seminar run by DoCS for prospective ICA parents.

- Overall, what did you think about the seminar?
- What did you think about the issues which were covered?
(Departmental info/Parenting your adopted child/Loss and grief theory/Adoptive parents' loss/Loss from child's perspective/Birth mother presentation/Identity and the adopted child/Parenting someone else's child born in another country/Assessment application kits)
- Which issues did you find most interesting?
- Which issues were of least interest?
- Were any things missed out which you would have liked to see included?
- What questions if any, did attending the seminar raise for you?
- What were your reactions to any written material which was provided?
- Do you have any comments on how the seminar was organised? E.g. – days, times, venue
- What were the most important things you learnt from the seminar?
- Do you have any suggestions for how the seminar could be improved?

After attendance at the seminar

- What was the next step after attending the seminar?
- What were your motivations to continue with the process?

Choosing a country

- Which countries did you consider adopting from?
- What factors influenced your decision?
- Which country did you decide upon in the end?
- What words would you use to describe this decision?

Lodging an application

- What were your thoughts and feelings about filling out the application form to adopt from overseas?
- How would you describe this process?
- What happened next after you submitted the application?

The assessment process

- Can you describe to me how your assessment proceeded? Clarify, how many assessments took place? Where were they done? Who was interviewed?

- On an emotional level, how what were your thoughts and feelings about the assessment process?
- What sorts of things were you asked during the assessment process? What kinds of issues were covered?
- What were the reasons, do you think, for asking these types of questions?
- What was your reaction to the written report?
- What words would you use to describe the assessment process?
- What were the positives of the assessment process?
- What could be improved in the assessment of prospective ICA adoptive parents?
- How do you feel about the way the assessment was conducted?

Post assessment

- When were you approved to become an ICA parent? How did you receive this information – phone/letter/email?
- How long have you been waiting? What is this like?
- What do you think it will be like, parenting a child who is born overseas but comes to live in an Australian family?
- What do you think are some of the issues which may impact on families in the future who have adopted from overseas?

If necessary, clarify at the end, the timeline:

- Expression of interest – when?
- Seminar attended – when?
- Application submitted – when?
- Assessment begins – when?
- Assessment completed – when?
- Approval granted – when?
- Length of time waiting?
- Do you have any overall suggestions for improvements to the way in which ICA assessments are done in NSW?
- Are there any other comments you would like to make in relation to ICA?

Conclusion

Thank you very much for participating in this study. Once I have some results from the study I will let you know. If you have any further questions please contact me.

TURN TAPE OFF

Appendix 2: Interview schedule for adoptive parents

Consent form

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. I sent you a Participant Information Sheet and am just wondering if you have any questions before we begin? Can you please read and sign this consent form.

Introduction

With your permission I will tape record our interview and later transcribe the tape for analysis. I will also take some notes, but tape recording just makes the process easier.

During the interview it is important to remember that there are no right or wrong answers. I'm really interested in your honest reflections and feelings about your experiences in relation to intercountry adoption (ICA).

Whatever you say during the interview will be confidential. Only my supervisor and I know who has participated in this study. Any quotes used in my final thesis will be quoted anonymously.

Do you have any questions about anything before we start? **Turn tape ON**

Background information

- To begin with can you please give me some details about yourself, for example your age, if you are single or married or living in a de facto relationship, what kind of job you work in...?
- Can you tell me about your child/children? Name, sex, age, which country they were adopted from, how long they have been part of your family?
- What motivated you to be involved in this study?

Initial decision making

- What led you to a decision to adopt a child from overseas? Did you ever consider local adoption?
- What sort of issues did you take into consideration when making this decision?
- What sort of feelings and thoughts surrounded the making of this decision?
- How long did it take you to reach this decision?
- What do you think motivates people to become parents?
- Do you remember when you first applied to become an ICA parent? - when did you put in begin the process?

Choosing a country

- Which countries did you consider adopting from?
- What factors influenced your final decision to adopt from the chosen country?

Preparation for ICA by DoCS

I'm interested in your thoughts and comments about the preparation by DoCS for prospective ICA parents.

- Overall, what did you think about the seminar?
- What did you think about the issues which were covered?
(Departmental info/Parenting your adopted child/Loss and grief theory/Adoptive parents' loss/Loss from child's perspective/Birth mother presentation/Identity and the adopted child/Parenting someone else's child born in another country/Assessment application kits)
- Which issues did you find most interesting?
- Which issues were of least interest?
- What questions if any, did attending the seminar raise for you?
- What were your reactions to any written material which was provided?
- Do you have any comments on how the seminar was organised? e.g. – days, times, venue
- Do you have any suggestions for how the seminar could be improved?
- How relevant have you found the information from the seminar in your day to day life with your child?
- What was the most valuable information you got from the seminar?
- Did the preparation seminars prepare you for how it has been having adopted a child from overseas?
- From your experience now, were there other topics that could have been included? Which topics?

Lodging an application

- What were your thoughts and feelings about filling out the application form to adopt from overseas?
- How would you describe this process?

The assessment process

- Can you describe to me how your assessment proceeded? Clarify, how many assessments took place? Where were they done? Who was interviewed?
- On an emotional level, what were your thoughts and feelings about the assessment process?
- What kinds of issues were covered?
- What were the reasons, do you think, for asking these covering these types of issues?

- What was your reaction to the written report?
- Do you have any overall suggestions for improvements to the way in which ICA assessments are done in NSW?
- How do you feel about the way the assessment was conducted?
- What advice would you give to others going through the ICA assessment process?
- How long did you wait for your child to arrive? What was that like?
- What do you see as the major influences on the way the ICA assessment process is run?
- Often in the media (maybe I could give some examples or the headlines of some examples from my media collection), there is dissatisfaction expressed with the ICA assessment process. What do you think this is about? Why are people so critical of the assessment process?
- What role do you think the assessment plays in the intercountry adoption process? Could it be described as providing a link between past and future?

When you got home from the overseas country

- What was it like when you brought your child home?
- What kind of support was available at the time?
- What support is available now? Can you tell me about the post placement visits – who with, duration, perceptions of?
- Would you consider taking your child to their birth country on a visit- what would you hope to achieve from this visit? What concerns would you have about such a trip?
- How have you found the experience of being the parent of a child born overseas?
- What advice do you have for other people going through the intercountry adoption process?
- What advice would you give to DoCS about the way they run intercountry adoption?

Broad questions about ICA

Perceptions of ICA:

- How would you describe ICA as an issue? Prompt: would you see it as an issue of family policy or immigration policy, or health policy or economic policy or as another policy area?
- Do you see ICA as a personal/private issue or as a political issue?
- How would you rate the public acceptance of ICA as a practice? On what basis do you say this?
- How do you think the following groups view ICA:
 - policy makers
 - Adoptive parents
 - Support groups

- Overseas countries involved in ICA. Do you think they see it in positive or negative terms? e.g. Korea?
- From your perspective what benefits does ICA offer the people involved in the adoption – the child, the AP, the birth parents, the country of origin and Australia.
- What are the disadvantages for the groups involved?
- What do you think of the idea that countries of origin should be encouraged to develop their own internal methods of looking after abandoned children rather than using ICA?
- Can you think of any reasons why people might be uncomfortable about a wealthy western nation adopting children from poorer parts of the world?
- What do you think of the argument that DoCS should be focusing resources on local children rather than being involved with international children?
- What do you see as the future of intercountry adoption in Australia?

Family questions:

- How would you describe the ‘Australian family’?
- What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of forming a family through ICA?
- Do you consider an adoptive family to be the same or different to a biological family?
- Are families formed with children adopted locally the same or different to families formed through intercountry adoption?
- What do you think are the most common issues for families who have adopted from overseas?
- In your experience, how do other people in the community react to families formed through ICA?

Media questions:

- What impact have reports and articles on television and in magazines/newspapers about ICA had on your ideas and views about ICA? Has one media influenced you more than others – pictures rather than words or can you remember any particular articles that stick in your mind?
- Do you think your clients are influenced by media reporting of ICA? If so, in what ways and which media – TV, newspapers, magazines, radio, internet? e.g. stories on trafficking of children
- Sometimes there are news reports which express dissatisfaction with ICA including negative comments about the assessment process – e.g. ‘Adoption heartache for hundreds’ ‘anger over adoption shortcuts’. What are your thoughts on this? Why do you think some people are critical of the assessment process?

Legal questions:

- What do you think of the way ICA is regulated internationally?

- (Australia is a signatory to the Hague Convention.) What impact has this had, in your opinion, on ICA policy and practice in NSW?
- ICA is regulated in NSW by the Adoption Act 2000. Any thoughts or comments on this legislation?

Final:

- Are there any other comments you would like to make in relation to ICA?

Conclusion

Thank you very much for participating in this study.

TURN TAPE OFF

Appendix 3: Interview schedule for adoption professionals

Consent form

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. I sent you a Participant Information Sheet and wonder if you have any questions before we begin? I just need you to read and fill in a consent form.

Introduction

With your permission I will tape record our interview and later transcribe the tape for analysis. I will also take some notes, but tape recording just makes the process easier.

During the interview it is important to remember that there are no right or wrong answers. I'm really interested in your honest reflections and feelings about your experiences in relation to working in the field of intercountry adoption (ICA).

Whatever you say during the interview will be confidential. Only my supervisor and I know who has participated in this study. Any quotes used in my final thesis will be quoted anonymously.

Do you have any questions about anything before we start? **Turn tape ON**

Background information

- Could you please begin by giving me a general outline of the Intercountry Adoption Team – what its role is, how many staff members and what the different roles are on the team?
- Can you explain your role on the team?
- In your experience, why do people choose to adopt from overseas?
- Why do some people choose intercountry adoption rather than local adoption?

Can you go through with me the timelines for each part of the ICA process?

- After lodging an EOI when are they normally invited to a seminar?
- Invite to seminar
- Lodging application – are there certain time limits they must submit the application within?
- assessment
- approval
- file sent to chosen country
- confirmation of adoption
- travel to chosen country

- home in Australia
- So when people ask at the beginning of the process how long it will take until they bring their child home to Australia, what would the answer normally be?
- What are the different time frames for different countries? Why are they different?

Explain the role of the Sate Authority in terms of what the department does at each stage:

- Send out the EOI
- What guidelines are in place for determining which applicants go through to the next step of the process? Are they written guidelines – policy documents? Look through when they come back and if ok ask to a seminar – what happens if something isn't right at this stage? What might it be?
- Seminar – give out applications. Once completed applicants send in to DoCS. What do you do at this stage? Do people get culled at this stage? On what grounds?
- How is the CAA assigned to the case? – geography or on a rotor system?
- Once DoCS receives written report length of time before decision about accept or decline?
- Once accepted – what happens next?
- Length of waiting time?
- When do dossiers go to the countries – different time scale depending on the country?
- What happens while people waiting?
- Allocation – do you ring people?
- Travel arrangements – do they organize this themselves or what happens?

Cost recovery model

- Do you run according to a cost recovery model or is the programme fully funded by the State Government?

Confirm costs are as outlined on the website.

ICA process itself

- Are there written guidelines for assessing applicants at the various stages eg, EOI/ application/ assessment report. What are they? What criteria are used to decide if applicants continue with the process eg. if they have submitted an application?
- Written report from the SW – what criteria do you use to assess the reports? Are there Departmental guidelines for assessing the applications?
- How are judgments made about candidates?
- Are the majority of people who undertake the process are approved. What does this say about the process?

- Please explain the procedure when applicants are not approved. What are their options? What is normally the outcome?
- Mixed picture I'm getting about availability of children. Professionals seem to think that there are not lots of kids available for ICA and yet APs give the impression that many more are available and it is the system holding people back from getting the kids. Comments on this? Where does this sort of information come from?
- It has been suggested to me that other orphanages exist in for example, Korea who have children available for adoption but that Australia doesn't deal with these orphanages – any comment on this?
- The Australian Central authority within the Attorney General's Office works with each child welfare department within each state and territory, what is your reaction to the idea of ICA being run federally and using not for profit organisations to run it? Advantages of this and disadvantages?
- People talk about ICA in America and I'm wondering if you can explain how the USA system differs to our own.
- Is it possible to get statistics on the following:
 - Number of calls for EOI
 - Number of people attending seminars
 - Number of people putting in an application
 - Number of people being assessed
 - Number of people who do not complete the assessment
 - Number of people approved
 - Number of people declined at each step – EOI/ application/ assessment
 - Number of people who go to tribunal – not sure if this is the correct word – might be panel
 - Outcome of tribunal cases.

Preparation for ICA by State Department

I'm interested in your thoughts and comments about the preparation provided by your Department for prospective ICA parents.

- Initial training? Further training?
- What are the most important messages that your department needs to get across to prospective adoptive parents at the preparation seminars?
- Do you have any suggestions for how training/education could be improved?
- What do you understand by the term cultural identity and what are your thoughts on whether ICA families should encourage their child to develop a cultural identity?
- Is search and reunion something to be encouraged or discouraged?

The assessment process

- What do you see as the role of assessment in the intercountry adoption process? Some have said it promotes a connection between past and future for the people involved – and that it is a learning experience towards becoming an AP. What do you think?
- What do you see as the major influences on the way ICA assessments are done?
- What are your impressions of the assessment process? Strengths / weaknesses?
- If you were the DG of DoCS how would you improve it?

Broad questions about ICA

Perceptions of ICA:

- How would you describe ICA as an issue? Prompt: would you see it as an issue of family policy or immigration policy, or health policy or economic policy or as another policy area?
- Do you see ICA as a personal/private issue or as a political issue or ..
- How would you rate the public acceptance of ICA as a practice? On what basis do you say this?
- How do you think the following groups view ICA:
 - policy makers
 - Adoptive parents
 - Support groups
 - Overseas countries involve in ICA. Do you think they see it in positive or negative terms? eg. Korea?
- Some claim that Australian authorities have an ‘anti-adoption’ perspective. What do you think they mean by this? Do you think this is the case or not?
- From your perspective what benefits does ICA offer the people involved in the adoption – the child, the AP, the birth parents, the country of origin and Australia.
- What are the disadvantages for the groups involved?
- What do you think of the idea that countries of origin should be encouraged to develop their own internal methods of looking after abandoned children rather than using ICA?
- Can you think of any reasons why people might be uncomfortable about a wealthy western nation adopting children from poorer parts of the world?
- What do you think of the argument that DoCS should be focusing resources on local children rather than being involved with international children?

Family questions:

- How would you describe the ‘Australian family’?
- What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of forming a family through ICA?
- What beliefs about the family do you think are inherent in ICA policy in NSW?
- Do you consider an adoptive family to be the same or different to a biological family?
- What do you think are the most common issues for families who have adopted from overseas?
- In your experience, how do other people in the community react to families formed through ICA?

Media questions:

- What impact do you think, reports about national disasters like floods, earthquakes and poverty have on people’s views about intercountry adoption?
- What impact have reports and articles on television and in magazines/newspapers about ICA had on your ideas and views about ICA? Has one media influenced you more than others – pictures rather than words or can you remember any particular articles that stick in your mind?
- Do you think PAPS and APs are influenced by media reporting of ICA? If so, in what ways and which media – tv, newspapers, magazines, radio, internet? Eg. stories on trafficking of children
- Sometimes there are news reports which express dissatisfaction with ICA including negative comments about the assessment process – eg . ‘Adoption heartache for hundreds’ ‘anger over adoption shortcuts’. What are your thoughts on this? Why do you think some people are critical of the assessment process?
- What was your reaction to the 7.30 report with Deborah-Lee Furness as a spokesperson for ICA?
- Which media do you think is the most influential in discussions about intercountry adoption?

Legal questions:

- What do you think of the way ICA is regulated internationally?
- (Australia is a signatory to the Hague Convention.) What impact has this had, in your opinion, on ICA policy and practice in NSW?
- ICA is regulated in NSW by the Adoption Act 2000. Any thoughts or comments on this legislation?

What do you see as the future of intercountry adoption in Australia? What about the future of intercountry adoption worldwide?

Conclusion

Thank you very much for participating in this study. **TURN TAPE OFF**

Appendix 4: Interview schedule for Contracted Adoption Assessors (CAA)

Consent form

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. I sent you a Participant Information Sheet and wonder if you have any questions before we begin? I just need you to read and fill in a consent form.

Introduction

With your permission I will tape record our interview and later transcribe the tape for analysis. I will also take some notes, but tape recording just makes the process easier.

During the interview it is important to remember that there are no right or wrong answers. I'm really interested in your honest reflections and feelings about your experiences in relation to working in the field of intercountry adoption (ICA).

Whatever you say during the interview will be confidential. Only my supervisor and I know who has participated in this study. Any quotes used in my final thesis will be quoted anonymously.

Do you have any questions about anything before we start?

Turn tape ON

Background information

- To begin with can you please give me some background details about how long you have been employed by DoCS as a CAA and which geographical area you cover?
- What motivated you to be involved in this study?
- About how many ICA assessments would you do per year?
- How many ICA assessments would you be doing at any one time?
- Can you tell me about the training provided by DoCS for being a CAA?
- What kind of ongoing support and training is available? Education? Supervision?
- What terminology do you use to refer to children who are adopted from overseas and come to live in Australia – international adoption or ICA? What is your preference and why? What is your understanding of the trend in terminology? Could explain I read something from the USA which suggested that ICA was the old term and has now been replaced by international adoption.
- In your experience, why do people choose to adopt from overseas?
- Why do some people choose intercountry adoption rather than local adoption?

Preparation for ICA by DoCS

I'm interested in your thoughts and comments about the preparation provided by DoCS for prospective ICA parents.

- In your experience, how do the seminars prepare applicants for adopting children from overseas?
- What do you think about the issues which are covered?
(Departmental info/Parenting your adopted child/Loss and grief theory/Adoptive parents' loss/Loss from child's perspective/Birth mother presentation/Identity and the adopted child/Parenting someone else's child born in another country/Assessment application kits)
- What are the most important messages that DoCS needs to get across to prospective adoptive parents at the preparation seminars?
- Do you have any suggestions for how seminars could be improved?
- Any comments on the 'Older Child Seminar'?
- What do you understand by the term cultural identity and what are your thoughts on whether ICA families should encourage their child to develop a cultural identity?
- Is search and reunion something to be encouraged or discouraged?

The assessment process

- Can you please go through the steps you take to do an ICA assessment?
- What are the timeframes for the assessment process?
- Number of interviews – is this always the same? Length of interview/ Location of interviews
- Do you have set guidelines that you use or are you able to conduct the interview in your own way?
- Do you have to cover certain themes or issues in the assessment? If yes, can you give me an outline of the issues that you cover?
- What do you see as the reasons behind conducting the assessment in this way?
- What type of questions do you ask? Are they behavioural type questions or case studies -can you give me some examples?
- What should prospective parents know about the country from which they are hoping to adopt?
- Are similar questions asked of couples and single people wanting to adopt - if different - how?
- Do different countries require specific questions to be asked? Or do CAA's conduct the assessment the same way regardless of the country the PAP's are adopting from?
- What is the practice in relation to racial matching – for example, what happens if Chinese couples are interested in adopting a child from China? Are they given priority over other couples (really asking what is the role of race in the assessment process?)
- What guidelines are given for writing the report?

- What are your thoughts on the application form required by DoCS to apply for adoption from overseas?
- Do you receive a copy of the applicant's completed application form prior to the interviews?
- Do you have any role in analysis of the completed application form or is that just by DoCS caseworkers?
- What happens if a CAA has concerns about the ability of applicants to parent a child? What do they do?
- Do you hear lots of urban myths about assessments? What are they?
- What do you see as the major influences on the way ICA assessments are done?
- Does the assessment process promote a connection between past and future for the people involved? Please explain which aspects of the process might do this.
- What are your impressions of the assessment process? Strengths / weaknesses?
- How do you think it could be improved?

Broad questions about ICA

Perceptions of ICA:

- How would you describe ICA as an issue? Prompt: would you see it as an issue of family policy or immigration policy, or health policy or economic policy or as another policy area?
- Do you see ICA as a personal/private issue or as a political issue or ..
- How would you rate the public acceptance of ICA as a practice? On what basis do you say this?
- How do you think the following groups view ICA:
 - policy makers
 - Adoptive parents
 - Support groups
 - Overseas countries involve in ICA. Do you think they see it in positive or negative terms? eg. Korea?
- From your perspective what benefits does ICA offer the people involved in the adoption – the child, the AP, the birth parents, the country of origin and Australia.
- What are the disadvantages for the groups involved?
- What do you think of the idea that countries of origin should be encouraged to develop their own internal methods of looking after abandoned children rather than using ICA?
- Can you think of any reasons why people might be uncomfortable about a wealthy western nation adopting children from poorer parts of the world?
- What do you think of the argument that DoCS should be focusing resources on local children rather than being involved with international children?
- What do you see as the future of intercountry adoption in Australia?

Family questions:

- How would you describe the ‘Australian family’?
- What beliefs about the family do you think are inherent in ICA policy in NSW?
- Do you consider an adoptive family to be the same or different to a biological family?
- Are families formed with children adopted locally the same or different to families formed through intercountry adoption?
- What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of forming a family through ICA?
- What do you think are the most common issues for families who have adopted from overseas?
- In your experience, how do other people in the community react to families formed through ICA?
- Are there any other comments you would like to make in relation to ICA?

Media questions:

- What impact have reports and articles on television and in magazines/newspapers about ICA had on your ideas and views about ICA? Has one media influenced you more than others – pictures rather than words or can you remember any particular articles that stick in your mind?
- Do you think your clients are influenced by media reporting of ICA? If so, in what ways and which media – tv, newspapers, magazines, radio, internet? Eg. stories on trafficking of children
- Sometimes there are news reports which express dissatisfaction with ICA including negative comments about the assessment process – eg . ‘Adoption heartache for hundreds’ ‘anger over adoption shortcuts’. What are your thoughts on this? Why do you think some people are critical of the assessment process?

Legal questions:

- What do you think of the way ICA is regulated internationally?
- (Australia is a signatory to the Hague Convention.) What impact has this had, in your opinion, on ICA policy and practice in NSW?
- ICA is regulated in NSW by the Adoption Act 2000. Any thoughts or comments on this legislation?

Conclusion

Thank you very much for participating in this study. **TURN TAPE OFF**

Appendix 5: Interview schedule for support group representatives

Consent form

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. I'm planning to do an analysis of the assessment policies and procedures in relation to ICA in NSW. I hope to be able to make recommendations to enhance the process. Did you receive a Participant Information Sheet with my original letter which outlined details about the study? Do you have any questions before we begin? I just need you to read and fill in a consent form.

Introduction

With your permission I will tape record our interview and later transcribe the tape for analysis. I will also take some notes, but tape recording just makes the process easier.

During the interview it is important to remember that there are no right or wrong answers. I'm really interested in your honest reflections and feelings about your experiences in relation to intercountry adoption (ICA).

Whatever you say during the interview will be confidential. Only my supervisor and I know who has participated in this study. Any quotes used in my final thesis will be quoted anonymously.

Do you have any questions about anything before we start?

Turn tape ON

Background information

To begin with can you please give me some background details about your support group?

- How many members do you have?
- What activities is your support group involved in?
- How do you communicate with your members? Internet, newsletters, mail, telephone...
- What is your major role(s) of your support group in relation to ICA?
- What motivated you to be involved in this study?
- How would you describe your organisation's relationship with the Department of Community Services in NSW and with other support groups?

Preparation for ICA by DoCS

I'm interested in your thoughts and comments about the preparation seminar run by DoCS for prospective ICA parents.

- In your experience, how well or otherwise do the seminars prepare applicants for adopting a child from overseas?
- What do you think about the issues covered?

(Departmental info/Parenting your adopted child/Loss and grief theory/Adoptive parents' loss/Loss from child's perspective/Birth mother presentation/Identity and the adopted child/Parenting someone else's child born in another country/Assessment application kits)

- What do you think are the most important messages that prospective adoptive parents need to understand before adopting a child from overseas?
- Do you have any suggestions for how the seminar could be improved or changed?

Lodging an application

- What were your thoughts on the Application Form and Expression of Interest forms used for applicants adopting from overseas? Any comments on these?

The assessment process

- What are your impressions of the assessment process? Strengths / weaknesses?
- How do you think it could be improved?
- What do you see as the role of assessment in the intercountry adoption process?
- Do you think the assessment process could be described as providing a link between applicants past and future?

Broad questions about ICA: Perceptions of ICA

- How does your support group view ICA as an issue? Prompt: would you see it as an issue of family policy or immigration policy, or health policy or economic policy or as another policy area?
- Do you see ICA as a personal/private issue or as a political issue?
- How would you rate the public acceptance of ICA as a practice? On what basis do you say this?
- How do you think the following groups view ICA:
 - policy makers
 - Adoptive parents
 - Overseas countries involved in ICA. Do you think they see it in positive or negative terms? e.g. Korea?

- From your perspective what benefits does ICA offer the people involved in the adoption – the child, the AP, the birth parents, the country of origin and Australia.
- What are the disadvantages for the groups involved?
- What do you think of the idea that countries of origin should be encouraged to develop their own internal methods of looking after abandoned children rather than using ICA?
- Can you think of any reasons why people might be uncomfortable about a wealthy western nation adopting children from poorer parts of the world?
- What do you think of the argument that DoCS should be focusing resources on local children rather than being involved with international children?
- What do you see as the future of intercountry adoption in Australia?

Family questions:

- How would you describe the ‘Australian family’?
- What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of forming a family through ICA?
- Do you consider an adoptive family to be the same or different to a biological family?
- Are families formed with children adopted locally the same or different to families formed through intercountry adoption?
- What do you think are the most common issues for families who have adopted from overseas?
- In your experience, how do other people in the community react to families formed through ICA?

Media questions:

- What impact have reports and articles on television and in magazines/newspapers about ICA had on your ideas and views about ICA? Has one media influenced you more than others – pictures rather than words or can you remember any particular articles that stick in your mind?
- Do you think your clients are influenced by media reporting of ICA? If so, in what ways and which media – tv, newspapers, magazines, radio, internet? Eg. stories on trafficking of children
- Sometimes there are news reports which express dissatisfaction with ICA including negative comments about the assessment process – eg . ‘Adoption heartache for hundreds’ ‘anger over adoption shortcuts’. What are your thoughts on this? Why do you think some people are critical of the assessment process?

Legal questions:

- What do you think of the way ICA is regulated internationally?
- (Australia is a signatory to the Hague Convention.) What impact has this had, in your opinion, on ICA policy and practice in NSW?
- ICA is regulated in NSW by the Adoption Act 2000. Any thoughts or comments on this legislation?

- *I know you are a member of the new National Peak Body on ICA what do you see as its role?
What do hope this group will achieve?*

Final:

- Are there any other comments you would like to make in relation to ICA?

Conclusion: Thank you very much for participating in this study. **TURN TAPE OFF**

Appendix 6: Participant Information Sheet



The University of Sydney

Faculty of Arts
NSW 2006 Australia

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Experiences with intercountry adoption in NSW

An invitation to participate in a research project called:

“An analysis of the policies and procedures used in intercountry adoption assessments in NSW”

- (1) **What is the study about?**
The objective of this study is to analyse intercountry adoption assessment procedures in NSW with a view to making recommendations to improve the policies and practices in relation to this type of adoption.
- (2) **Who is carrying out the study?**
The study is being conducted by Lexie Young and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Arts) under the supervision of Associate Professor, Robert van Krieken.
- (3) **What does the study involve?**
This study will involve participating in a face to face or telephone interview about your perceptions and experiences with the intercountry adoption assessment process in NSW. I hope to interview 16 prospective adoptive parents and 16 adoptive parents who have adopted a child from overseas within the past 5 years.

Professional adoption workers and members of adoption support organisations will also be interviewed to gain their perceptions of the intercountry assessment procedures. These interviews will be either face to face interviews or interviews completed by telephone.

With the permission of participants, face to face interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. This method allows for an in-depth analysis of the research findings.
- (4) **How much time will the study take?**
The face to face interviews will last no more than 75 minutes. The telephone interviews will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete.
- (5) **Can I withdraw from the study?**
Yes - being in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to consent.
- (6) **Will anyone else know the results?**
All aspects of the study, including results, will be strictly confidential and only the researchers will have access to information on participants. The results of the research will be written up into a thesis for submission at the University of Sydney. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in either the thesis or report.
- (7) **Will the study benefit me?** No
- (8) **Can I tell other people about the study?** Yes
- (9) **What if I require further information?**
When you have read this information, Lexie Young will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Associate Professor, Robert van Krieken on 02 9351 2641.
- (10) **What if I have a complaint or concerns?**

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Manager, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on (02) 9351 4811.

This information sheet is for you to keep

Appendix 7: Consent Form



The University of Sydney

Faculty of Arts
NSW 2006 Australia

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Experiences with intercountry adoption in NSW

I,, give consent to my participation in the research project titled:

"An analysis of the policies and procedures used in intercountry adoption assessments in NSW".

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I have read the Participant Information Sheet and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s.
3. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher(s) now or in the future.
4. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

Signed:

Name:

Address:

Date:

Appendix 8: Advertisement seeking adoptive parent participants

An invitation to participate in a research project about your experiences with intercountry adoption in NSW

Lexie Young (Doctor of Philosophy candidate) is conducting research into the assessment procedures for intercountry adoptions in NSW. The study will examine the current policies, practices and procedures used in intercountry adoptions with a view to making recommendations based on the findings of the study.

One part of the study involves interviewing intercountry adoptive parents living in NSW who adopted their child in the past five years and who undertook the assessment process in NSW.

If you would like to participate in this research study or if you would like further information about this project, please contact Lexie Young on 0403 077133 or email ayou8357@usyd.edu.au

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