

PERMANENCY



Agency Related Barriers Experienced by Families Seeking to Adopt from Foster Care

Chanmugam, A., Madden, E. E., Hanna, M. D., Cody, P. A., Ayers-Lopez, S. J., McRoy, R. G., & Ledesma, K. J. (2016). Agency-related barriers experienced by families seeking to adopt from foster care. *Adoption Quarterly*, 1-19.

Issue

A nationwide longitudinal study was conducted to identify agency-related barriers faced by prospective adoptive parents. There were 300 families recruited for this study and they were all seeking to adopt children from the foster care system.

Findings

Agencies are systems that are responsible for seeking and obtaining permanency for the children who are under their care. Agency barriers are complex organizational and systemic obstacles that include a wide assortment of issues that can delay timely adoptions for children in care. Prospective parents reported an average of 10.5 barriers during their attempts to adopt. Most often, the barriers were agency related rather than child or family factors. Three primary agency barriers were identified.

- 1) **Adoption process logistics** are the level of bureaucratic “red tape” families experienced while attempting to adopt from foster care (i.e., how easy and timely the process was, and their experiences with errors and inconveniences like paperwork that was delayed, lost, or redundant). The overwhelming majority (92.5%) of families in this study reported that adoption process logistics were the primary barrier to successful adoption. Almost all (98%) of the families who had finalized adoptions, reported that the logistics posed significant difficulties for them while trying to adopt.
- 2) **Agency communication and responsiveness** relates to the organizations’ communication practices, including family impressions regarding whether responses to them were timely and provided accurate and comprehensive information. Poor communication included incomplete or inaccurate information and communication that was delivered unprofessionally (e.g., impatiently or with judgmental statements).
- 3) **Agency emotional support** refers to families’ perspectives on how much agency personnel partnered with them throughout the adoption process, including perceptions related to encouragement and acknowledgement that aspects of the process were challenging for families, and general helpfulness of the agency.

Agency-Related Barriers to Adoption

BARRIER	PERCENTAGE REPORTED
Application process logistics	92.5%
Agency communication and responsiveness	79.5%
Emotional support from child welfare agency	65%

For the prospective adoptive parents who participated in this study, the lack of agency communication and a collaborative approach when working with them presented a major challenge. They expect communication that is timely, honest, thorough, and considerate of what the process is like from their perspectives.

Implications

The findings of this study have implications for policy and practice. At the policy level, the analysis suggests a need for:

- ongoing changes to the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) process
- increased funding for post-adoption services and supports
- increased supervision and reducing caseloads
- streamlining the adoption process to reduce quantity and redundancy of paperwork and “red tape”
- using adoptive families’ experiences and knowledge in recruitment and retention efforts as a collaborative partnership