

**THE CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY ADOPTIVE PARENTS IN THE ADOPTION
OF ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN ZIMBABWE: A SOCIAL WORK
PERSPECTIVE**

by

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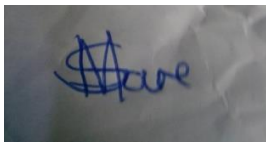
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DECLARATION

I, Shelter Marengu (Student No: **54517966**), declare that **the challenges experienced by adoptive parents in the adoption of orphans and vulnerable children in Zimbabwe: a social work perspective** is my own work, and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been acknowledged dully through the intext references and by means of complete list of references at the end of the report. I also declare that this dissertation has never been submitted for any qualification at any other institution before.



29 January 2020

Shelter Marengu

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the Almighty God who always makes a way for me and to my family for giving me support and love.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere gratitude goes to the following people:

- My supervisor, Dr Maditobane Lekganyane for not giving up on me. I am grateful for his patience, understanding and overwhelming support and I believe it was a privileged for me to be supervised by him;
- My brother Cryton, for his unwavering financial and moral support and my child Candace, who proved to be resilient when I was unable to give her the full attention due to this project;
- All the adoptive parents, particularly those who were part of this study, for remaining patient as they go through the winding process of adoption in pursuit of providing love and care to orphans and vulnerable children;
- My fellow social workers who despite limited resources, put in long hours of work to assist parents who undergo the process of adoption.

ABSTRACT

Given the general challenges associated with finding alternative care for an increasing number of orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) in Zimbabwe, adoption appears to be an appropriate option. In practice adoption appears to be one of the alternative forms of child care and yet it has not received the necessary research attention. This study was aimed at developing an in-depth understanding of the challenges experienced by adoptive parents in the adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe and the support system available for them in managing such challenges using the ecological systems theory.

A qualitative research approach which was designed from exploratory, descriptive and contextual research designs to understand the challenges experienced by adoptive parents in the adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe was adopted, with purposive and snowball sampling techniques used to identify and recruit a sample of eight parents who have undergone the process of adoption. Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews guided by an interview guide and analysed according to Braun and Clarke's six steps of qualitative data analysis. Trustworthiness of this study was evaluated according to its credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as proposed by Guba and Lincoln while relevant ethical principles were upheld throughout the entire duration of the study. The findings revealed a variety of socio-demographic features of adoptive parents as well as several challenges and experiences which are presented in a form of 10 themes and 13 subthemes in this report. Conclusions are drawn based on the research process and the research findings from which the recommendations are proposed for research, practice and training and education.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
EST	Ecological Systems Theory
GoZ	Government of Zimbabwe
HIV/AIDS	Human Immune Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
MPSLSW	Ministry of Public Service Labour and Social Welfare
NAC	National AIDS Council of Zimbabwe
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM FORMULATION

The plight of orphans and vulnerable children is a matter of concern particularly in African countries such as Zimbabwe. The United Nations Children's funds (UNICEF) reported in 2011 that Zimbabwe is one of the countries with the highest prevalence of HIV and AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa, where out of 14 million children, 1.6 million were estimated to be orphaned due to HIV and AIDS (UNICEF 2011:5). Despite this high number of orphans in Zimbabwe, Kriel (2014:8) points out to a low culture of adoption, with institutionalisation of children being the most preferred childcare method.

Although it is the most preferred alternative form of childcare, institutionalisation is not without its challenges. Childcare institutions, as noted by Chinyeye (2017:2) has several drawbacks. They separate children from their biological relatives, deprives them of family support and therefore impact on their sense of self and their personality later in life (Chinyeye, 2017:2). Overcrowding has also been reported to be one of the challenges resulting in a strained budget (Chinyenze 2017:10; Marcus 2014:33. This situation prevails despite availability of other childcare options like adoption. Despite having proven to be a best solution to childcare globally, adoption seem to be less favoured in Zimbabwe. This underutilisation of adoption, as noted by Bega (2011:13) may be because adoption is not a culturally appropriate childcare option. Pieces of testimony to point is contained in the National AIDS Council of Zimbabwe (NACZ) (Zimbabwe, 2012:34) which reported that by December 2012, the number of OVCs in Zimbabwe alone was around 941 024. In another report, during the same period there were 48223 child-headed households with about 102233 children (UNICEF 2006). This situation places a heavy burden on the state, which find itself grappling with ways of finding solutions to address the plight of OVC while adoption as an option is underutilised.

Having been a Social Worker under the employ of the Zimbabwean Ministry of Social Service Labour and Social Welfare (MPSLSW) for several years, the researcher observed that there are several factors that negatively hamper the utilisation of adoption as an alternative form of childcare. The bureaucratic process linked to adoption is tiring, leaving adoptive parents discouraged from completing their application process. In Zimbabwe the process of adoption, take two forms: firstly, the prospective adoptive parents who have not yet identified an adoptive child file an application to adopt a child through the ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare (MoPSSW). Once an application is approved, by the MoPSSW will help the parents in identifying a child matching their preference or the ministry may recommend a child for adoption. Alternatively, the prospective adoptive parents may identify a child whom they wish to adopt and approach the District Children's Court directly or through the District social welfare office to file an application to adopt such a child.

Once the parent receives an authorisation for adoption from the MoPSSW, the prospective adoptive parent can conclude that the child is eligible for adoption. Although anyone may submit documents on behalf of the prospective adoptive parents, they may not act on behalf of the prospective adoptive parents. This means that the prospective adoptive parents must be present during all the key steps of the process, including identification of the child, obtaining documentation, and all administrative and court proceedings. This process can take a duration of between three months to seven years and therefore discourage prospective adoptive parents from considering adoption. The mandatory medical examination for prospective adoptive children may also serve as a deterrent for adoption especially if the child is found to have chronic medical conditions like HIV and AIDS.

These factors may deter parents from considering adoption as an alternative form of childcare. In a local district of Shurugwi, for example adoption applications dropped drastically. In 2007, the district used to process at least two adoption cases per year. From 2012 to date, the district has not processed any adoption cases. The reasons for this decline relate to among others, the challenges faced by the adoptive parents in the

adoption of OVCs, which is what this study sought to establish. Literature review on adoption has established some causes including restrictive legal requirements, time consuming and prolonged adoption process, sociocultural differences and general lack of public awareness.

As frustrations built on part of the adoptive parents, temptations to induce officers who are involved in processing adoption applications becomes inevitable to some parents. According to Mbigi (2012:27), for instance corruption has been reported in some cases with potential adoptive parents accused of bribing social workers to fast track the process. Resulting from the abovementioned reports, prospective adoptive parents are usually perceived to be suspicious and some become subjected to further prolonged verification process, which is further frustrating (Mbigi 2012:7)

Oher than the above-mentioned challenges, it is generally acknowledged that any effort by the government to establish alternative forms of childcare should also consider the cultural practices and beliefs of the society (Tshitswana 2013:12). As noted by Mararike (2008:29), totems and clans are very important forms of identification in the Zimbabwean culture. They are considered in every aspect of the people's lives and adoption is not exceptional from these cultural practices. A child is usually called by his or her father's totem or clan name, and not call a child by a clan name to which he or she does not belong is discouraged as is said to invoke anger from the gods and ancestors (Mararike 2008:29). The general belief is that adopting children with unknown totems to the family will therefore anger the gods and ancestors. For the adopted children and adoptive families, the whole issue of totems may even place them in a vulnerable position of being stigmatised and excluded from the mainstream society. It is mainly due to these reasons that most of the Zimbabwean parents prefer to avoid adopting a child with whom they are unrelated by blood (Mararike 2008:3).

Adopted children also find themselves caught up in this debacle. In Zimbabwe, a child without a known family tree or whose biological father cannot be traced lacks integrity

and honour because of stigma (Chigwedere 2002:62). Derogatory concepts like “mubvandiripo” (a denigrating name used to differentiate that child from other children of that family) and are used label for children who are brought from second marriages (Mararike 2008:35). In some instances, there is a common myths held by some Zimbabwean about adopted children that they are constantly sick because the spirits of their ancestors will be calling them home and their dead relatives’ spirits will not rest until such children are taken back to their relatives (Chavhunduka 2006:92). This suggests that there is little or no chance for an adopted OVC particularly those that are unrelated to the parents) to have a permanent place in the Zimbabwean family setup.

Childlessness (even voluntary childlessness) is considered a deviation from the norms in that it is unusual and violates the prevailing norms of society (Veevers 2009:10). Although Miall (2007:37) found in the study of stigma of adoptive parents that people generally believed that “being linked with blood is superior for bonding and love and therefore bonding and love in adoption are second best”, participants who took part in her study fully described occasions where they thought they were being informally sanctioned because of having adopted children. Similar findings are revealed by Beach’s (2012:37) Zimbabwean study of the challenges faced by orphaned children, wherein participants believed that it was impossible for parents to bond with a non-biological child and that the two will never become a family because blood ties are crucial for bonding to happen.

The plight of OVCs in Zimbabwe persist even within the extended family whose safety nets have been stretched to their limits because of their inability to cope with OVCs. The 2009 report by Thomas Reuters Foundation (2009:18) reveal that Zimbabwe’s inflation rate had reached 500 billion percent by December 2008 and resulted in the unaffordability of basic commodities by many families. As reported by the United Nations (UN) (2011), Zimbabwe’s unemployment rate during the 2005 to 2016 was one of the highest internationally. Without a source of income, people fail to look after themselves, let alone provide for other people or their children. In a study focusing on alternative forms of childcare by Brody (1996), it was confirmed that the Zimbabwean situation and the economic conditions make adoption a less favourable option of childcare. With the

soaring number of OVC, this means that alternative care methods will have to be established. The Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) tried to come up with solutions such as the provision of institutional care and empowering communities to take care of OVCs in their respective communities (Ngwenya 2015:5). In Zimbabwe, institutionalisation is the last resort when it comes to childcare, followed by adoption, which is the second last priority for childcare (UNICEF 2011:18). What this means is that there is absolutely no commitment from the GoZ to adoption as an alternative form of childcare in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwean government's lack of commitment to adoption along with the scarcity of literature around challenges faced by those parents who may consider adoption are among the main reasons prompting the researcher to look into the subject of the challenges experienced by those adoptive parents during the course of the adoption process.

The need for alternative form of childcare like adoption is critical, particularly given the higher number of OVCs resulting from the scourge of HIV and AIDS. The relegation of adoption at the lowest tier of childcare options as reflected in the GoZ policies should be a matter of concern if childcare and protection is to really be taken seriously (UNICEF 2008:18). The stigma associated with adoption amongst members of the communities is rife and tend to deter prospective adoptive parents to consider adopting an OVC. The weak Zimbabwean economy seem to cause reluctance of Zimbabweans to adopt OVCs. The GoZ's policies do not favour adoption, nor do many culturally entrenched beliefs and myths. This seem to nourish an increasing number of OVCs, which proves that the current forms of childcare are either ineffective or inadequate. In some instances, people believe that an adoptive parent cannot love a child the same way a biological parent would (Livne 2008:9). Live's point is particularly understandable as one would find people who, despite having unplanned babies, would insist on keeping them notwithstanding their unfavourable living circumstances for raising children (Chikanda, Rubert & Rasmussen 2011:90).

In other instances, people cannot give up their children for adoption because they believe that once a child is adopted, they cannot have any form of contact with that child. Linked

to the above is that some biological mothers never recover from the pain of putting up a child for adoption. Although some participants in a study conducted by Jones (2008:9) reported that the greatest gift they ever bestowed was to give their child up for adoption, some reported that the pain of being separated from the child becomes an unbearable one. Despite this reluctance and underutilisation of adoption, research has proven that adoption is an effective form of childcare. The reality is that adoption needs to be given the necessary attention from both the literature and the program and policy perspective. Misconceptions around adoption should be thoroughly understood so that they can be allayed, and adoption be promoted as one of the alternative childcare method. This could be achieved through among others, a full understanding and appreciation of the adoption together with its related dimensions.

In perusing some of the literature, the researcher found a gap in the subject. What has been mainly researched under adoption is the importance of kinship ties in informal adoption and fostering of children in Africa, and less around the challenges experienced around formal and legal adoption (Berrick, 2008; Stack, 2009; Dubowitz, 2006; Hegar & Scannapieco, 2005). It is against this background that the researcher decided to investigate the challenges experienced by adoptive parents in the adoption of OVCs hence considering adoption to be a viable solution to the problems of OVCs. The researcher sought not to only unveil the factors hindering adoption of OVC in Zimbabwe, but also to sensitise policy makers within the GoZ, stakeholders involved in childcare, protection, and the general population around the issue of adoption as an alternative form of childcare.

Understanding adoption include among other things, paying attention to its dimensions and factors. It is on this point that the researcher decided to compose a study on the challenges faced by adoptive parents in the adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe. Through this study, the researcher hoped to develop an insight around the challenges faced by these parents and unveil the difficulties that they particularly experience during the process of adoption. Through this understanding, the researcher hoped to assist parties who are involved in one way or another with adoption matters in planning and developing

adoption-related programmes and policies based on a full understanding of the plight of the parents who undergo through the process of adoption.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The Zimbabwean MPSLSW (2006:28) reported that between 2004 and 2005 there were 5000 children living in orphanages in Zimbabwe. By 2013, this number was reported to be more than doubled (Kriel 2014:3). This plummeting population of OVCs coupled with underutilisation of some of the services available like adoption, tend to exacerbate the plight of OVCs. Research literature (Shumba 2013; Mararike 2008), reveal that the underutilisation of adoption is due to among others, the cultural and socioeconomic factors and the Zimbabwean government's reluctance to consider adoption in its policies. In a study looking into the alternative forms of childcare for example, Brody (1996:141) found that adoption gave children a chance of permanency, an opportunity to be raised by people who love them, and who are willing to share resources and time with them. McKenzie (2009:39) made similar findings in a survey of the most frequently asked questions around adoption, which revealed that the most important positive elements of adoption is permanency. Children who are in adoptive families will have their future planned as opposed to those in childcare institutions who are usually discharged when they reached the age of eighteen. Although his view could be subject to controversy, Kramer (2012) holds the view that parents who adopt children are psychologically, emotionally, and financially prepared to raise a child than biological parents.

Despite adoption being available as the best option for childcare, children continue to be raised in family environments where parents are unable to provide care and protection. Shumba (2015:3) who reported that baby dumping has reached crisis proportions in Zimbabwe and Namibia, though actual national statistics are difficult to collate, attests this point. People need to consider adoption as an alternative form of childcare to address the problem of OVCs. The need for researchers to create awareness around adoption as an alternative form of childcare cannot be overemphasised. It is the researcher's conviction that this awareness can be created among other things by conducting research

and making the findings of such a study. This is of particular significance for social workers given Lietz and Zayas (2010:188)'s emphasis on the importance of social workers to be informed about literature base and research advances in the field of social work practice since they address issues that affect individuals, families and communities.

What Lietz and Zayas (2010) call for above is that in studies such as the current one, an escalating number of OVCs should be a matter of concern for social workers and social work researchers. The need for a thorough investigation of the factors contributing to an escalating number of OVCs is therefore an inevitable exercise for social work researchers. It was therefore anticipated that this study would enlighten among others the GoZ, Zimbabwean civil society, social workers and related professionals and practitioners, and the general research community in the planning, formulating, implementing, and monitoring and evaluating child welfare programmes and policies. It was further anticipated that the public will be also sensitised to appreciate and consider adoption as an alternative form of childcare. Orphans and Vulnerable Children were also expected to benefit from this study, which was expected to escalate their challenges among the stakeholders involved in childcare and encourage the care and protection of these OVCs through adoption as an alternative form of childcare.

1.3 PROBLEM FORMULATION

An increasing number of OVCs in Zimbabwe is a cause for concern. As reported by the NACZ (in Ngwenya, 2015:4), the 2013 figures on OVC data shows that the country has an estimated 1.6 million OVCs. These figures escalated from the 1 million reported by the same NAC in 2011 (Masuka, Banda, Mabvurira & Frank 2012:59). Due to HIV and the dire economic situation in Zimbabwe, many families are unable to provide for their children (Mushunje cited in Masuka et al. 2012:60). This result in many children growing in dire family conditions. All these challenges happen amid the Zimbabwean government's commitment to child welfare and protection. Zimbabwe has a legal framework such as the bill of Rights enshrined in the Constitution, the children's Act, the Guardianship of Minor's that support children and one would expect a maximum utilisation

of systems like adoption which are put in place to address child welfare issues. As indicated in the general introduction, there are various alternative forms of care including adoption yet, adoption remain one of the underutilised alternatives. In Zimbabwe there is a high rate of child-headed families with less care and protection and OVCs are unable to access critical and basic social services like health and education for their development (Masuka et al. 2012:60; Yenoah 2018:68266). Yenoah (2018:68267) warns that if these challenges are not addressed, there will be a vicious cycle of more and more children becoming vulnerable and struggling to survive. In an attempt to address some of these challenges, it is therefore crucial to comprehensively understand what might have went wrong with some of the existing child care programmes like adoption.

The dimensions of these programmes and the challenges faced by people who make use of their services should be fully understood in order to inform and guide interventions that are aimed at improving them. The aim of this study was to look into one of such programmes: adoption from the perspective of the parents who are making use of its services. The conviction of the research was that the views and experiences of parents who are making use of adoption services in Zimbabwe will be crucial in informing efforts that are aimed at improving this programme. From the above discussion, the problem statement of the study was demarcated in the following way: *Adoption is one of the most crucial forms of childcare but yet remain underutilised, particularly in African countries like Zimbabwe. The underutilisation of adoption should be fully understood from those who make use of it in order to effect measures that will improve this programme.*

1.4 THE ADOPTED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research process should be supported and guided by a specific theoretical framework which is linked with the topic under investigation (Babbie 2005:12). Theory refers to a set of ideas aiming to assist in explaining the reasons for a phenomenon to happen in a particular way (Cottrell 2006:79). It is a social perspective and a lens through which the researcher perceives the world (Besen-Cassino & Cassino 2017:418). In other words, researchers use theory to understand and interpret the social world under

investigation. One the aims of the theory in research is to summarise existing knowledge and give meaning to isolated empirical findings (Fain 2017:103). In the current study, the theory that was used to guide the process was the ecological systems theory (EST). For one to fully comprehend human development, it is crucial to consider the EST in which such development occurs (Bronfenbrenner 1979). The EST considers an individual as embedded within a larger social system and focuses on the interaction of the individual and their environment (Golden & Eap 2012:364). According to the EST, the types of environmental systems (Ettetal & Mahoney 2017:2) influence human development here. These systems are categorised into four: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and the macrosystem (Ceci 2006; Ettetal & Mahoney 2017:3; Kiraly, Turk, Kalarchian & Shaffer 2017:131).

The individual is at the center around the four main systems. The first system is the *micro-system*, which is the layer situated closer to human and include their immediate settings such as parents, families and homes (Kilary et al. 2017:131). It is characterised by the environment wherein individuals directly interact. In the context of this study, it included places like the households wherein adoptive parents interacted with the children and other members of their families and households (Ettetal & Mahoney 2017:3; Ceci 2006:71). It within the microsystem wherein adoptive parents may be subjected to negative attitudes and stigma perpetuated by members of the family who may hold views that are against adoption. Equally some members of the family may be supportive and encourage the parents to continue with the process and even go as far as to support them when they face some challenges associated with the process of adoption.

The *mesosystem* refers to the relationship between microsystems or connections between contexts such as the interaction of family experiences, and school and religious experiences on human beings (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Ettetal & Mohoney 2017:4). The interaction of families and churches for instance may influence the opinions and decisions made by the parents when coming to adoption. In other words, the opinions and beliefs held in the mesosystem will influence or be influenced by the adoptive parents and children in the same way microsystem did. If the church and the family consider adoption

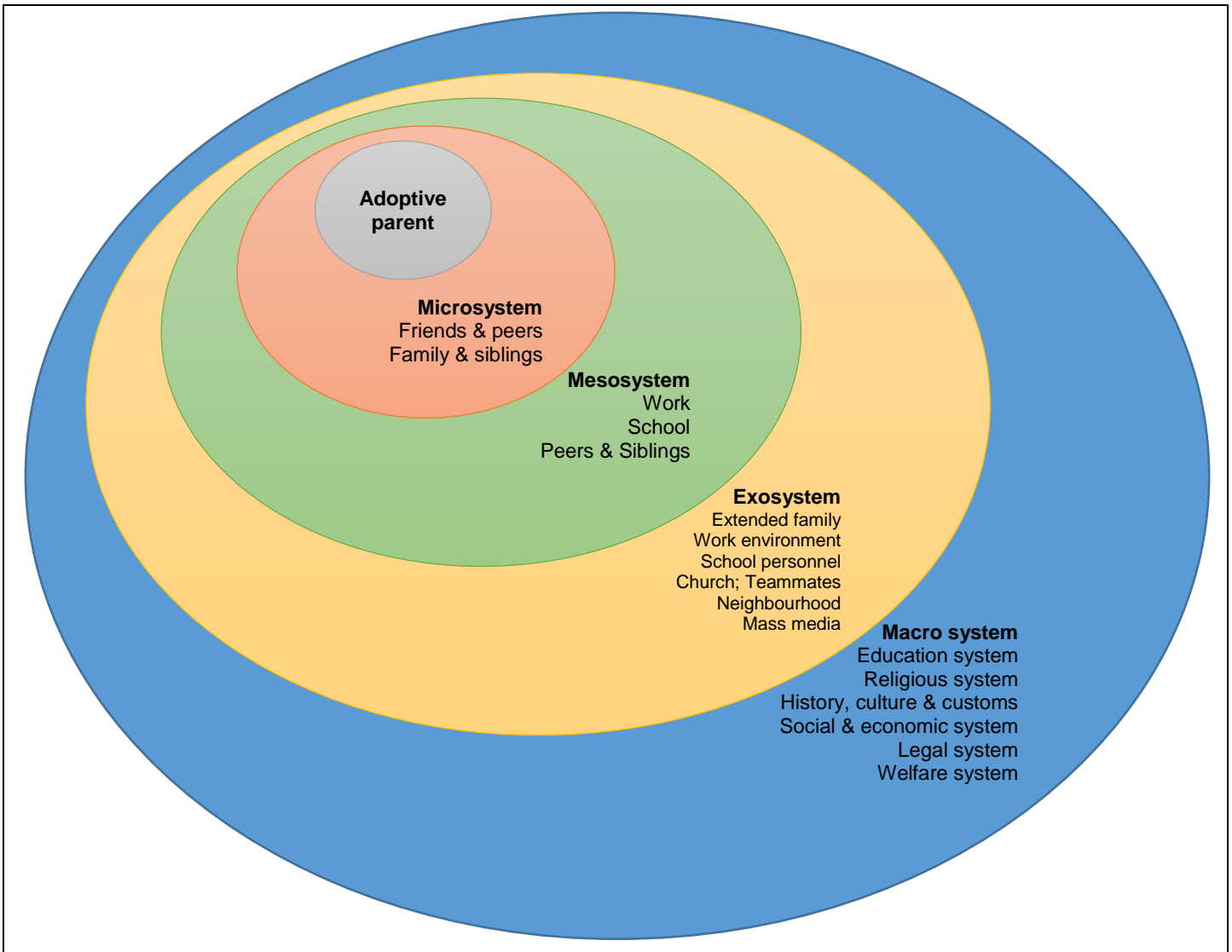
of an OVC to be a sin for example, the adoptive parents are likely to be discouraged from considering adoption as their option and those who have adopted may be stigmatised and subjected to some form of rejection.

The third system refers to the *exosystem*, which involves the interactions between two or more systems causing a direct influence on the individual (Julien-Chinn, 2017:53; Liao, 2016:132). In other words the family and a system like a church interacts and in this process of interaction, influence how an individual member of a family perceive or interpret adoption. In the process of adoption, adoptive parents become part of the larger system of social services like the Ministry of Public Service Labour and Social Welfare, the courts, hospitals and so on. In their interactions with these systems, parents may find themselves dissatisfied with the services received and these negative experiences might negatively affect their relationships with children (Schweiger & O'Brien, 2005:517). As noted by Schweiger and O'Brien (2005:517), frustrations resulting from parents' interactions with social workers can drain the parents' emotional resources, lower their overall satisfaction with the process and split over into negative attitudes towards the child. These negative attitudes may also be towards other members within the family such as the partners.

Finally, as noted by Bronfenbrenner (1979), the systems extend to a *macrosystem*, which includes patterns of culture, economy, customs, bodies of knowledge and symbols. This level involves the wider impact of society on an individual level factors like the values that families might have, the belief systems, customs, lifestyles, opportunities and hazards embedded in them (Hong, Algood, Chiu & Lee, 2011:867; Lio, 2016:138). Some examples of a macro systems are race or ethnicity and policies which have an impact on a particular condition like the relationship that adoptive parents might have with the child (Hong et al.2011:867). The impact of the macrosystem on adoption becomes clear when people develop negative attitudes towards adoption because they have been socialised to view it as unconventional or because of the general societal belief that adoption is morally or socially unacceptable. The role of policies and legislature in the macrosystem is also crucial I shaping perceptions, attitudes and ultimately relationships. Placing

adoption as the second last option of childcare to discourage people from practicing adoption is one of the macrosystem practices in the Zimbabwean society and may lead to people developing negative attitudes towards those who practice adoption. Figure 1.1 below presents the various levels of the EST.

Figure 1.1 An adapted Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory



Source: Smith-Acuna, (2011:21)

1.5. RESEARCH QUESTION, GOAL, AND OBJECTIVES

The research question, aim and objectives are broadly interchangeable (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston 2014:49). In the following section, the researcher presents the research questions, the goal and objectives that guided this study.

1.5.1 The research question

The research question is a fundamental requirement to any good research (Durand & Chanter, 2014:20; Sandberg & Alvesson 2011:23). For qualitative researchers, the research inquiry involves solving the research problem by answering the research question formulated during the inquiry (Creswell 2016:3). By a research question, Cronon (2006:3) refers to a concise, complex and arguable phrase which clearly focused and around which the research is centered. As described by Agee (cited in Yegidis, Weinbach & Myers 2018:67), qualitative research is a tool, which assist the researcher by navigating through the research process, and therefore encourages exploration into unexpected directions the research might take. For Maxwell (2013:73), research question is what the researcher wishes to understand by conducting a study. They reflect both what the researcher hopes to study, which is attractively positioned in relation to existing literature. Through the research project, the researcher hopes both obtain some answers to the questions they have in mind in relation to the phenomenon when composing the study. In the current study, the research questions were posed as follows:

According to Sandberg and Alvesson (2011:23), it is fundamental to all research to carefully establish research questions. Durand and Chanter (2014:20) state that fundamental to any research is a good research question. Cronon (2006:3) points out that “a research question is a clear, focused, concise, complex, and arguable phrase which one centres the research on.” What Cronon (2006) highlights above, is that the whole research process is based on the research question. The following research questions guided this study:

- What experiences do adoptive parents have in relation to adoption of OVC in Zimbabwe?
- What challenges do adoptive parents have about adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe?
- What type of support services are available for adoptive parents in managing the challenges associated with adoption in Zimbabwe?

In Yin's (2011:67) view, the researcher's first set of questions are not conclusive since they can always be reviewed as the research evolves. The research questions, as noted by Morse and Cheek (2014:3), are separate but complementary to the overall aim or goal. Whereas the goal of the study indicates the central thrust of the study, the objectives identify the specific issues that the researcher proposed to examine (Fouché & Delport 2014:108). This means that research questions are generally inseparable from the research aim. In the next section, the researcher presents the overall goal or aim and the objectives that guided this study.

1.5.2 The overall aim of the study

The peculiarity of qualitative research goals as noted by Crescentini and Mainardi (2009:433), resides in the way the question is framed and mainly involves a need to describe, verify or understand. The goal or aim of the study should be specific, clear, focused on the research problem and succinct since it constitutes the boundaries of the research and prescribe the purpose of the study (Schneider & Fuller 2018:94). The research goal is also called the research aim or the research purpose. The statement of purpose captures, in a sentence or paragraph, the essence of the study. It should describe the intent of the study, ground it in a specific qualitative genre, discuss the central concepts or idea, provide a general definition of that concept, and stipulate the unit of analysis (Creswell in Rossman & Rallis 2012:129). In this study, the overall aim was, *to make use of an ecological systems theory to develop an in-depth understanding of the challenges experienced by adoptive parents in the adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe and the support system available for them in managing such challenges.*

1.5.3 Objectives of the research

The research objectives define the things that have to be done during the research (Moore 2006:7). They reflect a summary of what the researcher intends to attain through the research study (Matenga 2011:17). Research objectives should be clear and specific (Kumar cited in Fouché & Delport 2014:108). According to Ritchie et al. (2014:49), for objectives to be good enough for a study, they should be characterised by: the following features:

- they must be clear, intelligible and unambiguously focused, but not too narrow;
- they must be capable of being researched through data collection, not questions, which require the application of philosophy rather than data. This means that objectives should be formulated in such a way that they can be answered through the data collection process
- they must be feasible, given the resources available. In other words, the research objectives should be formulated in such a way that they are attainable through the resources that are available at that time. The researcher should not formulate objectives that exceed available resources.

The main objectives that were formulated for the current study were as follows:

- *To explore and describe the challenges of adoption as experienced by adoptive parents in the adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe.*
- *To explore and describe the experiences of adoption by adoptive parents in the adoption of OVCs*
- *To explore and describe available support services for adoptive parents in managing the challenges associated with the adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe.*

The task objectives for the study were formulated as follows:

- To select a sample of adoptive parents from Zimbabwe in order to explore and describe their challenges of adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe;
- To collect the data by conducting the semi-structured interviews guided by an interview guide with the participants in order to explore their challenges of adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe;
- To analysed the data in order to provide a clear and detailed description of the participants' challenges around the adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe;
- To interpret the data and conduct literature control to verify the findings for an accurate and detailed description of the participants' challenges in the adoption of an OVC in Zimbabwe;
- To make some conclusions regarding the challenges of adoption of an OVC in Zimbabwe.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In defining the term research methodology, Silverman (2010:436) refers to the choices made by researchers, which includes the appropriate models for the study, the type of cases to study, the methods to be used in gathering the data and the forms of data analysis, in planning and executing a research study. It involves decisions undertaken by the researcher in relation to the way the entire research study is approached in order to yield answers to the research questions. Research methodology, as described by Brynard, Hanekom, and Brynard (2014:39), focuses on the process of research and the decisions that the researcher must take to execute the research project. It enables the researcher to reach conclusions by searching for answers for the research questions in a systematic way (Goddard & Melville 2004:127).

Researchers (Brynard et al. 2014:39; Schneider & Fuller 2018:49-55; Carr, Boyle, Cornwell, Correll, Crosnoe, Freese & Waters 2018:5) distinguishes between qualitative research methodology, quantitative research methodology and mixed methods. Whereas quantitative researchers are mainly interested in counting and measuring things to produce the data, qualitative researchers are more interested in gathering the data

through the participants' own spoken or written words (Brynard et al. 2014:39). With the mixed method research, the researchers yield the data by combining both the qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. In the current study, the researcher made use of the qualitative research.

1.6.1 Qualitative research approach

Qualitative research is a type of research, which is used by researchers to provide rich description of a phenomenon by collecting and analysing the data, which is in a form of words and images (Carr et al. 2018:16). The aim of qualitative research as noted by Shelton, Smith and Mort (2014:69) is to provide an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and the process involved in such an understanding by considering the reasons and way such phenomenon occurs. It aims to explore and describe complex concepts rather than to test hypotheses as in quantitative research (Connelly 2002:185). As defined by Malagon-Maldonado (2014:120), qualitative research is a type of research through which the researcher aims understand the way people interpret the environment in which they live, work, or receive care. It follows a process that begins with the research problem to be solved and the question to be answered, the collection and analysis of data and the presentation of findings in a form of a doctoral dissertation, master's thesis, journal articles, proposal for funding or local organisational studies (Creswell 2016:3). The following are some of the characteristics of qualitative research as noted by Marshall and Rossman (2016:3).

- **Qualitative research takes place in a natural setting**

Human experiences tend to be influenced by the natural setting in which they occur, making it crucial to study behaviour as it happens within such natural settings (Marshall & Rossman 2016:101). Qualitative researchers develop an understanding of the socially constructed meanings by entering the everyday social worlds of the research participants and reconstruct these meanings in the scientific language (Bell 2017:61). In other words, qualitative researchers strive to interpret the meanings

that people create out of their social environments. The scope of this interpretation as described by Yegidis et al. (2018:126) include the natural context in which the phenomenon occurs. This means that it is not only the meanings that are interpreted, rather the natural context in which these meanings are developed as well.

- **Multiple interactive, humanistic and flexible are common for qualitative research studies**

According to Leedy and Ormrod (in Fouché & Delport 2014:64), qualitative research is more holistic and emergent, characterised by flexible focus, design, data collection methods, interpretations which may change as the process unfolds. The researcher may as the process unfolds, chop and change some of the initial plans in response to some of the emerging events. This means that as much as the process is complex, what makes it more complex is the possibility of changing plans as the process evolves.

- **Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive**

Human experiences as understood from the research point of view is a process of interpretation (Bell 2017:60). The interpretive nature of qualitative research emanates from the assumption that social reality is a human creation since human beings create social reality through their beliefs and practices (Baškarada 2014:1). This feature required the researcher to approach this study with the belief that participants' experiences and challenges reflects their interpretation of their worlds. The researcher's responsibility in this instance was to further interpret and contextualise the participants' interpretations.

- **Qualitative researchers adopt a holistic view of the world**

Qualitative researchers develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation by trying to maintain a broad perspective (Yegidis

et al. 2018:127). In other words, the researcher is not only interested in the participants' responses or narratives as they emerge during the interviews, they also pay attention to the manner in which such narratives are made, the circumstances in which they are made and any other factors that could accompany such narratives. In addition to these aspects, the researcher also pays attention to himself by considering the impact of his personality, traits or other features on the research process.

- **Qualitative researchers systematically reflect on her identity in the inquiry, they are generally sensitive to their biography and its impact on the study**

In qualitative research, the researcher's role is subject to critical analysis and scrutiny much as the research itself (Carolan, in Patnaik 2013:100). He is an instrument and his presence in the participants' lives is fundamental to the methodology (Marshall & Rossman 2016:118). This means that the researcher is part of the process and he or she is inseparable from the process. Just like an analysis of all other research instruments, the researcher's identity and role should be scrutinised to determine how it shaped the research process by either facilitating or inhibiting the process. This scrutiny will include paying attention to the researcher's gender, level of education, class or position in society and the power balance during the interaction with the research participants.

- **Qualitative research is complex, multifaceted and iterative;**

The complexity of qualitative research is based on several activities involved. The researcher must for instance observe the manner in which the process unfolds, pay attention to the manner in which he interacts with the participants, the substance of what the participants share with him through the interviews and the settings in which such interviews or observations are made.

- **Qualitative inquiries are systematic in nature.**

Qualitative research is not a haphazard process; it is a systematic process of inquiry following a roadmap to explore the phenomenon under investigation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016:103). This process is not considered uniform for all researchers. According to Crescentini and Mainardi (2009:432), qualitative research evolves through a systematic process of six phases which are: (1) the formulation of general research questions, (2), the collection of information, (3), transformation of the data, (4), interpretation of the data, (5) conceptual and theoretical work, and (6), the writing up or conclusions. For Fouché and Delport (2014:70), qualitative research process evolves through five phases: (1) selecting a researchable topic, (2) the formal formulations, (3) planning, (4) implementation and (5) analysis, interpretation and presentation. Like Fouché and Delport above, Fain (2017:22) consider qualitative research to be an approach evolving through five phases. In Fain's (2017:22) opinion, the five phases of qualitative research process are (1) selecting and defining the problem, (2) selecting the research design, (3) collecting the data, (4) analysing the data and (5) utilising research.

In addition to the above features, Brynard et al. (2014:39) highlight the fundamental theme of qualitative research as the phenomenological one wherein the actors' perspectives in the empirical point of departure. It focuses on the real-life experiences of people. In other words, the focus of qualitative research is rather on those aspects, which one can only find in the real-life situations of the participants.

For Riese (2018), qualitative research aims to understand the realities in which people find themselves. Qualitative research is normally conducted under various circumstances, the following of which were particularly suitable for the current study as noted by Holosko (in Yegidis et al. 2018:127).

- Qualitative research is suitable for studies wherein the researcher wishes to explore a topic or phenomenon of which little is actually known (Yegidis et al. 2018:127). As indicated in the introduction, the scanty literature around the challenges of adoption as experienced by adoptive parents makes qualitative research a particularly suitable approach to study this phenomenon.
- Qualitative research is appropriate for situations where one wishes to study something that is sensitive and has emotional depth (Yegidis et al. 2018:127). In the process of exploring the challenges experienced by the adoptive parents, it was anticipated that one could provoke some of the sensitive experiences that confronted the participants. In order to guard against such eventualities, qualitative research was considered the most relevant approach for the current study.
- When one may wish to capture an experience from the perspectives of those who live it and create meaning from it, qualitative research is the relevant approach (Yegidis et al. 2018:127). The best way to understand the lived experiences is from the person who have lived such experiences themselves. This principle made qualitative research to be considered a suitable approach for the current study since its focus was to understand the lived experiences of the participants (the challenges that they have experienced in the process of adoption).

1.7 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

For any research study to become a success, sufficient time should be devoted to preparing and developing coherent research design (Hammett, Twyman & Graham, 2015:15). According to Devers and Frankel (2000:264), qualitative research design can be equated to a sketch, which is filled by the researcher as the study proceeds. Marshall and Rossman (2016:100) highlights the significance of building flexibility into the research design as a demonstration that the researcher reserves a right to modify the original plan

as the study unfolds. The term research design, as defined by McNabb (2010:40), refers to the logic structure applied to the research project by the researcher. In another definition, Biber-Hesse and Levy (2006:57) refers to the research design as a plan showing the way the researcher carries out the research project. For Creswell (2016:278), research design refers to a guide for researchers on how the study is planned and conducted. The main purpose of the research design in the research process is to ensure that a data gathered is adequate to completely answer the research question (McNabb 2010:40). This is particularly evident when one considers the nature of the current study through which the researcher sought to make use of an ecological systems theory to develop an in-depth understanding of the challenges experienced by adoptive parents in the adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe and the support system available for them in managing such challenges. The design in this context should enable the researcher to collect adequate data, which provide adequate answers to the questions around the challenges faced by adoptive parents. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016:101), the strengths of qualitative research lies in its exploratory, descriptive nature and its focus on the context or setting. This suggests that any qualitative research which does not consider exploratory, descriptive and context research design is likely to be categorised among those without strengths. The type of designs that were adopted for the current study were in line with Marshall and Rossman's (2016) above views. They were exploratory, descriptive and contextual. These designs are introduced further in the next section.

1.7.1 Exploratory research design

In studies wherein, little is known about the problem and there are many questions to be answered, exploratory research is considered a suitable research design (Fouché & De Vos, 2014:95; Yegidis et al. 2018:105). The main aim of exploratory study is to explore the phenomenon under investigation. Exploratory research designs are particularly suitable for qualitative research (Carr et al. 2018:28; Creswell 2016:7; Mahtani 2004:67). As defined by McNabb (2010:44), exploratory research design refers to a small-sample designs used primarily to gain insight into and ideas about the research problems and (in

the case of a quantitative research approach the variables) and (where qualitative research is involved) issues associated with those problems.

Exploratory studies enable researchers to explore people's interactions in a setting and their interpretations and adaptations to such settings (Carr et al. 2018:29). In exploring the challenges faced by adoptive parents and available support services for them, the researcher's plan was to conduct the semi-structured interviews, which are designed in such a way that they allow participants to express themselves freely in their own way, with minimal guidance towards the goal of the study. The researcher planned to remain more of a listener who was to enable participants to express themselves. Once knowledge in the problem area accumulates through exploratory design, it becomes more crucial to describe the situations and events (Yegidis et al. 2018:105), hence the descriptive research design as introduced and explained further in the next section was one of the adopted designs for the current study.

1.7.2 Descriptive research design

Just as its name suggests, descriptive research design is more concerned with the description of the phenomenon under investigation. Qualitative researchers are more interested in describing an understanding rather than explaining and predicting human behaviour (Fouché & Delport 2014:65). According to Yegidis et al. (2018:107), the findings that are accumulated from exploratory research, makes it possible to now describe such acquired knowledge. Descriptive research is concerned with information obtained through observation (Brynard et al., 2014). As described by Rossman and Rallis (2012:133), descriptive research design aims to answer questions such as, "what do participants believe? What are their values? What is tacit in the setting? How do these beliefs and values shape their understandings and actions?" For McNabb (2010:43), descriptive research aims to provide a description of an event, or help define a set of attitudes, opinions, or behaviours that are observed or – in the case of quantitative approach – measured at a given time and in a given environment. Polit and Hugler

(2004:715) share the same view with McNabb when they say, “the main objective of descriptive studies is to accurately portray the characteristics of persons, situations or groups.” The researcher’s adoption of descriptive research design was mainly driven by the goal of the study, which was the need to understand the challenges of adoption as experienced by adoptive parents in the adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe and the available support services for them. An understanding in this regard was expected to be among others, an ability to describe the participants’ challenges in an accurate fashion. The plan was to allow the participants to express their experiences and challenges (hence the exploratory design) and then describe such experiences and challenges based on the researcher’s understanding.

1.7.3 Contextual research design

Context is one of the important areas of qualitative research (Creswell 2016:6). The main reason for conducting qualitative research is to explore the context in which the research issues manifest (Hennik, Hutter & Bailey 2011:288). As defined by Holtzblatt and Beyer (2011:1), contextual research design refers to a well-defined, structured participant-centred research design aiming to collect the data in the field to create product and service concepts. These concepts are refined and tested reiteratively with the participants. Crabtree and Miller (2002:40) describe contextual research as a type of design, which involves observing the research participants within their environments in order to gain a first-hand understanding of how the phenomenon is influenced by the broader context of their lives. In Babbie and Mouton’s (2009:272) view, events that are of interest to the researcher should be described and understood within a concrete, natural context of their occurrence. For Ritchie et al. (2014), contextual research design is concerned with identifying what exists in the social world and the way it manifests itself. According to Hennik et al. (2011:288), the researcher should reflect on the various contexts in which the participants live such as the personal or community context, the sociocultural context, the political, economic or historical contexts that shape the research issue or the phenomenon under investigation. In the current study, the researcher’s plan was to understand the challenges experienced by adoptive parents as they happen in

their daily contexts in Zimbabwe. This means that as the participants express their experiences and challenges, attention was to be given to the cultural context, their socioeconomic contexts, their psychological contexts and their physical contexts from which such experiences were shared.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODS

The term research method means the way the researcher goes about in collecting the data (McNabb 2010:40). For Silverman (2010:436), research methods refer to specific research techniques. A detailed explanation of the methods adopted for the current study is provided in the next section.

1.8.1 Population, sampling and sampling techniques

The term population refers to a total of all individuals of relevant interest to the study (Eller, Gerber & Robinson 2018:140). For Rubin and Babbie (2010:13), a research population is usually a huge collection of individuals or objects that is the chief focus of scientific enquiry. In qualitative research, a population refers to a group of individuals within a area who are in possession of features that are of interest to the researcher. As held by Asiamah and Oteng-Abayie (2017:1609), it is necessary for qualitative researchers to succinctly and clearly define the population when they document their research. What this means is that qualitative researchers must specify the population from which the sample is to be drawn. In this study, the population was all parents who have undergone the process of adoption as adoptive parents in Zimbabwe.

Due to the practical difficulties associated with studying every single adoptive parent in Zimbabwe due to among others, the funding limitations, the researcher opted to draw a sample from this population. Researchers are urged to make provision for sampling, regardless of the research design they adopt (Bell 2017:203). The term sample refers to the selection of a population of individuals for the study (Franklin 2012:293). In another

definition, Carr et al (2018:644) define a sample as a subset of the population selected by the researcher for the study. Two types of sampling techniques include probability and non-probability sampling (Hammet et al. 2015:221; Bell 2017:2013; Koerber, 2008:459). In the case of probability sampling, the researcher selects participants randomly and affords each one of them an equal chance of being selected to ensure that, as sample is representative as possible to enable generalisation (Franklin 2012:293). When using non-probability sampling, the researcher does not estimate the probability of an individual to be included and does not guarantee the inclusion of every potential individual (Bell 2017:204). Since non-probability samples are convenient for cheaper methods and studies that of interest for naturalistic studies (Bell 2017:205), they were considered for the current study. The non-probability sampling methods include convenience or accidental sampling, quota sampling, purposive sampling, snowball sampling (Bell 2017:205). In this study, the researcher's plan was to adopt purposive sampling and snowball sampling as the techniques.

The goal and logic of qualitative research as described by Devers and Franklin (2000:264) necessitates the employment of purposive sampling. Through purposive sampling, the researcher deliberately chooses participants who fit the purpose of the study based on their distinguished characteristics (Bell 2017:205; Carr 2018:642). As noted by Koerber (2008:464), one of the pitfalls in purposive sampling is when researchers describe their sampling methods as purposive but do not provide adequate detail about their purpose in selecting the sample. To minimise the risk of the above-mentioned pitfall, the potential participants were expected to meet the following inclusion criteria:

- Participants had to be any parent who participated in the adoption process as an adoptive parent;
- Participant were expected to be residing in Zimbabwe at the time of the study
- Participants had to be voluntarily willing to give a written consent and be recorded when they participate in this study.

Alongside purposive sampling was the snowball sampling, which was mainly expected to be used in cases where purposive sampling does not yield an adequate pool of participants. Snowball sampling is particularly suitable when researchers work through a gatekeeper (Hammett et al. 2015:142). Through snowball sampling, researchers rely on previously identified potential participants to facilitate the introductions of others who would be willing to participate in the study (Bell 2017:204; Carr et al. 2018:645; Hammett et al. 2015:142). In applying the snowball sampling, the researcher planned to ask participants who already indicated their willingness, to assist her in finding other potential participants who may be willing to take part. The same procedure was expected to be followed with those participants who would be identified in this fashion until the research objectives, goal and questions are fully addressed.

It is crucial to note that in qualitative research there is no predetermined sample size. Researchers are expected to continue with data collection until they reach a point of saturation – a point during which the researcher stops learning any new things from every additional participant (Carr et al. 2018:354; Morse 2000:3). In other words, the researcher stops once the participants are repeating what other participants have been sharing repeatedly and therefore provide no new lessons. This was the approach, which the researcher anticipated to adopt as the research unfolds.

1.8.2 Preparation for data collection

The researcher was fully mindful of the observations made by Uhrenfeldt, Paterson and Hall (2007:37) when they state that novice researchers are generally unprepared to deal with unexpected challenges and complexities brought about by different participants, the research questions and the research settings. In view of this potential predicament, the researcher planned to ensure that she is thoroughly prepared for any eventuality. Once a decision is made in terms of the population and the sampling techniques, the researcher intended to clearly plan on how to eventually enter the study sites and be prepared for the process as that will eventually enable her to access the research participants.

According to Devers and Franklin (2000:266), using one's existing social networks and gatekeepers can be useful in facilitating the researcher's entrance into the sites. It is crucial for the researcher to understand that the views held by gatekeepers are critical for negotiating and maintaining access and ensures the integrity and credibility of the study (Devers & Franklin 2000:266).

The researcher intended to consider the importance of securing permission from the gatekeepers as one of the critical aspects to consider during this stage. By a gatekeeper, Eller et al. (2018:204) refers to a person with authority to permit the researcher to enter the site. In the case of the current study, gatekeepers were expected to be social workers, directors and managers in the MPSSLSW. The researcher's intention was that once permission is granted, she would then meet with managers and supervisors, as the operational level of the organisations that render adoption services whom she hoped would eventually facilitate access to the participants. The researcher also planned to equip herself with some interviewing skills by reading through literature on interviewing techniques. She also planned to rehearse the interview questions until she internalise them.

The researcher was also mindful of the importance of preparing the research participants for the interviews. In preparing the participants, she intended to explain the aim, objectives and questions of the study to the participants together with the entire process to be followed as well as the ethical principles involved in the process. The plan was that once she is satisfied with the level of preparation, she would then begin to collect the data. The next section explains how the plan for data collection was formulated.

1.8.3 The methods of data collection

In this section, the researcher gives attention to the way the plans around the data collection and the methods that were to be used for data collection were formulated. Rossman and Rallis (2012:168) describe data collection as a discovery process. During this process of discovery, the researcher discovers various ways of doing things, cultural practices, values, and various experiences from the participants.

In collecting the data, researchers use various techniques such as participant observations, interviewing, documenting and analysing material (Court, 2018:41; Eller et al. 2018:641; Rossman & Rallis 2012:168; Strydom 2014:329). In the current study, the plan was to use interviews as the primary method of data collection. Interviews refers to conversations, which are guided to gather evidence for a study (Baškarada 2014:11). In another definition, Shelton et al. (2014:273) refers to interview as a guided conversation between the researcher and the participant, which may be structured, semi-structured or in-depth. The purpose of interviews is to create a conversation through which the participants narrate accounts that informs the research question (Josselson, 2013:4). This is done by asking the participants open-ended questions (Creswell 2016:279). The types of interviews include structured interviews, unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews or focus group interviews (Baškarada 2014:11). Structured interviews are those types of interviews that are characterised by pre-defined questions and limited response categories (Baškarada 2014:11). In other words, the participant who is interviewed through the structured interviews has little or no flexibility; she is restricted to provide answers for specific set of questions. With the unstructured interviews, the researcher uses open-ended questions and therefore allows for even more flexibility (Baškarada 2014:11). Unstructured interviews may a risk of deviating from the focus of the study since participants can go as broad as they wish in responding to the questions posed.

In this study the plan was to use the semi-structured interviews since they are flexible and provides for the researcher to use a prepared list of questions called the interview guide, which is characterised by follow-up probes, flexibility in terms of the order of questions and a provision for the conversation to unfold naturally (Carr et al. 2018:344). Given the research questions and the aim of the current study (see sections 1.4.1 and 1.4.3 above), semi-structured interviews were expected to be a more suitable type of interviews to enable the researcher to understand the challenges associated with adoption as experienced by the participants (Baškarada 2014:11). The researcher hoped that through the semi-structured interviews, she would allow the participants to be flexible while on the

other hand using the interview guide to maintain the focus on the research goal, objectives and the questions. In most interviews, researchers want to gain some background biographic details of the participants (Hammett et al. 2015:144). Given the significance of context in qualitative research, the current study was also crafted in such a way that it should consider the participants' biographic details. The questions that were formulated for data collection in this study included the biographic questions to enable the collection of information on the participants' profile. The plan was to ask the following biographic questions:

- What is your gender?¹
- How old are you?
- Are you married?
- How many biological children do you have?
- Which religion do you practice?
- What is your occupation?

In addition to the biographical questions, the interview questions were also developed to gather some responses to the research questions and attain the research goal, questions and objectives. The questions that were developed and to be posed to the research participants in addressing the goal, questions and objectives are as follows:

- Can you please tell me what motivated you to consider adoption of an orphan and a vulnerable child?
- Please tell me about your general experiences as an adoptive parent in Zimbabwe
- What challenges do you face during the adoption process?
- How do you find the adoption application process itself?
- What is your experiences in relation to the attitudes that people have in relation to adoption?

¹ A question of the participants' gender was included given the possibility of the participants' gender preferences.

- Please share with me about the resources in place to support the adoption initiative
- As an adoptive parent, how do you manage the challenges that you face?

Good interviews as described by Ezzy (2010:164) are not dominated by the voice of the interviewer, they are rather characterised by probing, directing, questioning and active listening. This means that the researcher needs to possess certain skills in order for the interviews to be good. In the current study, the researcher intended to use listening, probing and empathy as some of the interviewing skills. For participants to remember their experiences as fully as possible, the skill of listening is very important (Gill, Steward & Treasure 2008:292). Probing involves asking questions to get some clarity on the responses provided by the participants. As described by Hannabuss (1996:26), probing may bring the discussion back on track and ensure that the whole interview is completed on time. Probing and listening do hand in hand. The interviewer should listen carefully to the participants and engage actively with what they are saying. Whereas probing enables the participants to respond in their own words (Mack, Woodsong, McQueen, Guest & Namey 2012:142), empathy enables the researcher to try to understand the participants by entering into their worlds to understand how it feels and looks like from the participants' point of view (Josselson 2013:80).

Researchers are urged by Clough and Nutbrown (2012:142) to avoid using the only handwritten notes as a method of recording the interviews. They should rather couple the handwriting with the audio or video recording (Clough & Nutbrown 2012:142). In this study, the researcher intended to use the audio recording device in conjunction with the handwritten notes to collect the data.

1.8.4 The pilot study

A pilot study is a feasibility study, which are small-scale in version or the trial runs conducted with a purpose of preparing for the main study (Carr et al. 2018:593; Fraser, Fahlman, Aracott & Guillot, 2018:261). A pilot study can also be a specific pretesting of

research instruments, including the interview schedules (Fraser et al. 2018:263). It aims to test the feasibility of the adopted research design. In this study, the researcher's plan was to use one interview as a pilot to test the feasibility of the main study. The study was to be tested on a small scale to minimise any risk of failure by determining and addressing possible problems that might occur and fail the research procedure (Strydom 2014:239). The researcher's plan was to test things like the quality of audio recording device, the participants' ability to understand the research questions, the wording of the interview guides the questioning order and range of answers. The feedback from the participant who took part in a pilot study and the researcher's own observation was to be used to adjust the interview guide where necessary (Monette, Sullivan & De Jong 2008:9).

1.8.5 Methods of data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is defined by Babbie (2016:532) as, the examination and interpretation of observations in a nonnumerical manner with the aim of discovering the underlying meanings and patterns of relationships. For Maguire and Delahunt (2017:3351), data analysis is "central to credible research". In other words, without a detailed data analysis plan, credibility of the study may be compromised. In another definition, Kawulich, (2004:96) states that data analysis involves immersing oneself in the data with the purpose of understanding it and then looking for patterns and themes and various relationships that helps the researcher in this understanding. It enables the researcher to link the data and find or create the meanings by critically reflecting on the links and patterns of data linkages (Hammett et al. 2015). In the current study, the collected data was to be analysed thematically using the six phases of analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006:87). By thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006:79) refers to the identification of patterns or themes from the qualitative data. The researcher's plan for the process of data analysis was in the following manner:

- Firstly, the researcher intended to familiarise herself with the collected data by transcribing it, reading it and reading it repeatedly while noting down some initial ideas;

- Once she has fully familiarised herself with the data, she then intended to generate the initial codes. This was to include among others, the systematic coding of interesting features of the entire data sets and collation of data with relevant codes;
- Once the codes are generated in terms of the above phase, the plan was to collate them into potential themes and gather the data into the relevant themes;
- The themes generated above were to be verified against the coded extracts and the entire data sets to generate a thematic map of data analysis;
- The verification process and generation of thematic map was to be followed by an ongoing analysis to refine, define and name each of the generated themes;
- Once the themes are refined, defined and named, the researcher planned to select vivid, compelling extract examples and analyse them and relate them back to the research questions and literature and produce an analysis report.

1.8.6 Methods of data verification

Data verification constitutes honesty and trustworthiness of the study. By trustworthiness, Bowen (2009) refers to the conceptual soundness used to judge the value of qualitative research. Without trustworthiness or rigor, qualitative research has a number of limitations such as the lack of academic integrity (Fliep, Turner, Edise, Thompson-Fawcett & Fitzsimons 2018:2). The four main criteria for ensuring trustworthiness as identified by Guba and Lincoln are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Koch, 2006; White, Oelke & Friesen 2012). The plan for the current study was to adopt these criteria as measures for ensuring trustworthiness.

Credibility refers to a state in qualitative research wherein the research findings reflects the meanings and multiple realities of the participants (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). As defined by Lietz and Zayas (2010), transferability refers to the degree to which the research findings could become useful or applicable theoretically, practically and in future research. Transferability is ensured through thick description, which enables the researcher to comprehend the ways in which the research findings may be applicable to other settings

(Shenton 2004). In other words, for transferability to be fully realised in a study, the researcher have to ensure that the entire process and decisions that informed the process are fully explained to enable a point of reference for other researchers. In ensuring thick description, the researcher's plan was to ensure that she explain in detail how the study was planned and how the study unfolded. She also planned to ensure that the methods leading to the findings are clearly explained in a separate chapter dedicated to the application of qualitative research process (see Chapter Two).

Dependability and **transferability** achieve a common purpose, which is to ensure that all the research designs and operational activities are clearly explained and noticeable to readers in order to allow replication of methodology (White et al. 2012). Dependability is a state during the qualitative research wherein the research findings remain stable overtime, regardless of the conditions (Anney 2015:278; Elo Kaariairen, Kanste, Polkki, Unitrainen & Klygas 2014). To achieve dependability, researchers should clearly explain how the data was collected, recorded, coded and analysed (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole 2013; Anney, 2015:278; Ware 2008; Shenton 2004). In the current study, the researcher's plan was to satisfy the criterion of dependability through the technique of thick description wherein she would explain in a very detailed fashion, how the process unfolded. To record the details relating to the process, the researcher intended to use a research journal to document all the developments during the process and draw some notes to enhance the descriptions.

Confirmability involves the study's ability to allow others to confirm the findings (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). Confirmability demands a demonstration from the researcher on how the study enabled then to arrive at the findings and interpretations (Koch, 2006). To ensure confirmability, researchers should maintain an audit trail, conduct negative case analysis, member checking and peer debriefing (Lietz & Zayas 2010; White et al. 2012).

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

One of the crucial issues that researchers should bear in mind is the fact that they are dealing with human beings who can easily be harmed either physically or psychologically. According to Lincoln and Guba (in Shaw 2003:12), ethics should be part of the paradigm position held by the researcher. It is therefore on this note that ethical issues are given the necessary attention in this study. Without any doubt, ethics are at the heart of research (Ritchie et al. 2014:78). In defining ethics, McNabb (2010:69), refers to the application of moral standards to decisions made in planning, conducting, and reporting the results of research studies. In another definition, Aluwihare-Samaranayake (2012:65) defines ethics as doing good and avoiding harm. The ethical principles that guided this study are presented in the next section.

1.9.1 Informed consent

Informed consent is one of the crucial principles of an ethically sound research (Rossman & Rallis 2012:73); Ritchie et al. 2014:87). By informed consent, Johnson, Reynolds and Mycoff (2016) refers to procedures used by researchers to provide information to potential research participants about the proposed research to which they are recruited to enable them to give free consent before they could participate. Obtaining informed consent means that the research participants should be informed about all information pertaining to the study including the goal, duration, the procedures to be followed, the advantages and disadvantages or even dangers to which the participants may be exposed and the credibility of the researcher (Strydom 2011; Ritchie et al. 2014). For the current study, the researcher planned to explain to the participants all the aspects of the research process as recommended above See addenda A and B). The plan was to ensure that participants understand fully what they are getting themselves into before they could sign consent forms should they wish to participate in the study. Informed consent as described by Haverkamp (2005:154), is not a once off event, it is rather an ongoing mutually negotiated process. This suggests that as the process unfolds, some events might emerge which

requires the researcher to inform the participants and renegotiate their involvement in the process.

As the research process unfolds, the researcher will also realised the significance of adhering to the principles of anonymity and confidentiality to protect the identities and information shared by the participants. The next section presents the principles of anonymity and confidentiality and how the researcher planned to implement them.

1.9.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

Anonymity refers to the concealment of participants' identities in all documents resulting from the research (Milligan, 2009:4). In another definition, Carr et al. (2018) defines anonymity as an instance wherein researchers cannot link the identifying of the participants to the data. Anonymity is particularly important when the researcher publishes the research results (Vainio 2012). In adhering to anonymity, the researcher does not retain any identifying information such as names and addresses of the participants (Carr et al. 2018:84). According to Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi and Cheraghi (2014:3), confidentiality means no research information should be revealed except in certain circumstances. For Carr et al. (2018), confidentiality means that the researcher ensures that no one have access to the participants' information except members of the research team. In observing confidentiality and anonymity, the interview recordings should either be erased or stored in a safe place and pseudonyms which are preferred by the participants are used (Court 2018:84). In the current study, the researcher planned to use pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants and therefore uphold anonymity. In upholding confidentiality, all the data sets were saved on a personal computer and an extended hard drive and password protected. Information was only shared with the supervisor who had some vested interest in the manner in which the study was conducted.

1.9.3 Avoiding harm and ensuring beneficence

Research ethics should not only ensure that participants are not harmed, they should also consider ensuring that the research is conducted in a socially responsible manner to the benefit of participants (Court, 2018:82; Aluwihare-Samaranayake 2012:70). Beneficence involves the practice of doing good to the participants through the research (Akaranga & Makau, 2016:6). Through beneficence, the researcher is obliged to ensure maximum possible benefits and minimise possible harm (Strydom 2014:116). In emphasising the significance of beneficence, Haverkamp (2005:150) states that, “attention to the benefits that accrue to participants as a result of their involvement in our research is long overdue”. According to Court (2018:86), as much as harm should be minimised, sometimes it may be justified based on the benefit of knowledge that be acquired. A little embarrassment or emotional discomfort on the part of the participants may be sacrificed to ensure that information as much as possible is collected about their challenges or sad experiences, which can ultimately be beneficial to them and the entire society.

1.9.4 Debriefing

Should the researcher realise any uncomfortable thoughts or feelings among the participants during the study, she must debrief them to clear the air (Onwuegbuzie, Leech and Collins 2008:4). Debriefing can also be used during the study to reassure the participants’ confidence in confidentiality and to negotiate some elements of the stories that can be published in the final report (Onwuegbuzie et al. 2008:4). According to McBurney (in Strydom 2014:122), researchers should allow participants an opportunity at the end of the study, to work through their experience of the study and its aftermath where they can ask questions and clarify any misconceptions. Strydom (2014:122) suggests that debriefing be conducted in a therapeutic context, with the process characterised by the following:

- Participants are afforded an opportunity to work through their experiences of the study and its aftermath to minimise harm which may have occurred during the process;
- Misconceptions which may have emerged in the participants' minds are clarified;
- Termination and withdrawal are handled with utmost sensitivity in cases where participants benefited therapeutically from the study.

In the current study, measures to ensure participants were planned and put in place in case the need arise. The researcher made the necessary arrangements with a social worker who agreed to provide debriefing to the participants (See attached Addendum C).

1.9.5 Data management

Linked to confidentiality is the need to keep research data safe – a concern that should be for all researchers (Hammett et al. 2015). Ritchie et al., (2014:102) use the concept data protection to refer to data management. According to Ritchie et al., (2014:102), there are numerous legal and regulatory standards that have implications for the collection, storage, and transfer of research data and it is crucial that researchers familiarise themselves and comply with these standards. In the current study, the plan to manage the data in such a way that it does not compromise any of the ethical principles. The intention was to manage solid data by storing it in the researcher's personal case, which remained, locked and only accessible to her, while the electronic data was expected to be saved in the personal laptop, and external hard-drive, which were both password, protected.

1.10 DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

There are many ways through which the research findings can be disseminated (Yegidis et al. 2018:323). Dissemination as noted by Karner and Hall (2009:520) is a process through which the researcher communicate information gleaned from science to

audiences who are most likely to benefit from it. This suggests that different people may have different interests in the study and the researcher should therefore when disseminating the findings, consider those interests. Post-graduate students might for instance consider disseminating by presenting the proposed methods verbally in a class, present the initial findings by means of a PowerPoint presentation at the seminar; hand in a written dissertation for examination or publish the findings in a peer reviewed journal article. For the purpose of the current study, the researcher's plan was to disseminate the results by means of PowerPoint presentations to various departments that may be affected, discussions with the parents who are directly affected, the compilation of a dissertation report to be published through Unisa's library repository and writing an article which will be peer-reviewed and published in an academic journal.

1.11 CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

According to Yegidis et al. (2018:317), the operational definitions of key terms may be included in the report. In this section, the key terms that are central to the study are defined.

1.11.1 Challenge

The Cambridge dictionary (2013) defines challenge as the situation of being faced with something that requires great mental or physical effort to be accomplished.

1.11.2 Experience

Collins Dictionary (2010:581) defines the term experience as the totality of a person's perceptions, feelings, and memories. In this study, the term experience will refer to perceptions, values, feelings, attitudes, and behaviours which adoptive parents had to go through during or after the process of adoption.

1.11.3 Adoption

As defined by Carrol (in Zhang 2006), adoption refers to any customary and optional procedure for taking a child as one's own a child. Ishizawa and Kubo (2014:633) distinguish between two types of adoption, which are open adoption and closed adoption. Open adoption not only allows contact between birth parents and adoptive parents, but also allows "individuals to make their own decisions, construct their own families, and work out their own understandings of kin-ship" (Modell, in Ishizawa & Kubo 2014:633). Closed adoption, on the other end of the spectrum, does not allow any information to be shared amongst the parties involved (Ishizawa & Kubo 2014:633). To this study, adoption will be defined as the process that results in a permanent termination of a bond between the child and his/her parents to allow other parent(s) to take that child as their own.

1.11.4 Orphans and vulnerable children

The concept orphans and vulnerable children is defined differently by countries, institutions or related documents. An OVC is a child below the age of 18 who has either lost one or both parents due to death, has a chronically ill parent, lives in a household where an adult died in the previous 12 months due to sickness of three of the 12 months before his/her death, lives in a household where at least one adult was seriously ill for at least three months in the previous 12 months or lives outside family care environment such as an institution or the streets (UNICEF 2008:7).

1.12. OUTLINE OF THE REPORT

This research report has five chapters and it is organised in the following manner:

In Chapter One the report focuses on the general introduction and orientation of the study. The main aim of this chapter is to outline the research plan which was adopted to guide the study. The chapter introduced the reader to the study, outlined the research problem and the rationale of the study. As part of the research plan that guided the study, the

chapter also contained the research aim, questions and objectives. The chapter also outlined the plan that was adopted in relation to the research methodology, the research design and the methods. In conclusion, the chapter provides a presentation of plan in relation to the ethical principles that were to be adopted for this study and concludes by a definition of the key terms which are central to this study.

In chapter Two, the focus will be on the description of the way the research plan as introduced in Chapter One, was implemented. The chapter has a section dedicated to providing a justification of the researcher's decision to apply qualitative research process in the manner that she did. The justification of the decision to apply qualitative research process will then be followed by an explanation of how qualitative research as an approach which was adopted for this study, was applied. The chapter also provides a description of the research methods and the research design as applied in the study. The description of the way the ethical principles were implemented concludes the chapter.

In Chapter Three a presentation is provided on the first part of the research findings which is the findings in relation to the socio-demographic features of the research participants and the findings on the challenges experienced by adoptive parents. The findings pertaining to the challenges experienced by the research participants in relation to adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe are presented in a form of four themes, which are accompanied by storylines and discussed in the context of existing literature and the adopted theoretical framework. A chapter summary which summarises the main issues covered by the chapter serves as a conclusion for this chapter.

Chapter Four serves as the second part of the research findings and it focuses on the findings pertaining to the experiences and support services available for adoptive parents in dealing with the challenges of adopting OVCs in Zimbabwe. These findings are presented in a form of the last three themes (theme six, seven and eight) and eleven subthemes which are compared with existing literature and discussed in the context of the adopted theoretical framework.

Chapter Five serves as the final chapter for this report. Its main purpose is to present the summary, conclusions, recommendations and limitations of the study. The focus will be on a summary and conclusions based on the introduction and orientation to the study, the summary and conclusions based on the way the qualitative research process was implemented, and the summary and conclusions based on the research findings. Some recommendations are proposed for research, practice, training and policy purposes. The chapter also highlight some of the limitations of the study and like all other chapters, it concludes with a chapter summary.

CHAPTER TWO

APPLICATION OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROCESS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, an introduction and problem formulation were presented, with the focus being on the background to the study and the adopted qualitative research methodology as planned. Unlike the previous chapter wherein the problem was introduced and an outline of the plan for the implementation of qualitative research process was provided, the current chapter aims to report on the manner in which the plan as introduced in Chapter One, was implemented. Before she presents a detailed description of the qualitative research process, the researcher will first justify the method or approach that she adopted in applying the qualitative research process in the manner that she did.

2.2 JUSTIFICATION OF THE METHOD FOLLOWED IN APPLICATION OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

One of the yardsticks through which qualitative research is evaluated is its ability to be dependable and transferrable (White et al. 2012:246). Dependability and transferability of qualitative research aims to ensure clearly identifiable designs and operations in order to allow for replication of methodology by future researchers (White et al. 2012:246). This suggests that the application of qualitative research should be detailed to enable the reader to fully understand the decisions made and clearly follow the process in case they wish to verify the process leading to findings. The reader should be well informed about every part of the process, from the planning phase to the conclusion phase. This point is clearly underscored by Koch et al. (2014:135) who states that, “the goal of transparency requires authors to provide enough detail [so] that readers have a clear understanding of all the methods used to generate and analyse data as readers cannot assess the quality,

rigor and trustworthiness of the study if they do not have access to the details of the research process.”

In fulfilling the task of detailing the process to enable readers to pass a verdict on this study, the researcher resorted to dedicate Chapter One to focus on the initial plan of the study and then make use of Chapter Two to explain how the plan unfolded, in view of the events of the research field. This approach, the researcher believes the reader will be afforded an opportunity to go through the plan and see how the plan unfolded throughout the process. The significance of a detailed explanation of the way the application of the research methods was done find support among several authors. Braun and Clarke (2006:80) for example register the need for clarity in relation to the process and practice of methods.

2.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH AS APPLIED IN THE CURRENT STUDY

The application of qualitative research was in this study, guided by the nature of this research approach. It would therefore suffice to detail the nature of qualitative research for the enhancement of the reader’s full understanding of the way the process was followed.

In conducting qualitative research, the researcher studies the phenomenon under investigation as it happens within its natural setting (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Flick 2018:x). Enactment of qualitative research through this feature involved visiting the fields wherein the participants were experiencing the phenomenon under investigation. This included among other things a visit by the researcher to Ministry of Public Service Labour and Social Welfare to negotiate for access participants who are receiving adoption services from its regional offices. Once approval was granted, the researcher moved into another natural setting wherein participants were receiving the services which was the respective service centers of the department wherein adoption services were rendered.

Central to qualitative research is its unique contribution to professional knowledge of the phenomenological understanding of the participants' lived experiences and perceptions, which can be crucial in effectively addressing the social issues (Koch et al., 2014:133). In the current study, the main interest of the researcher was an understanding of how participants experience the challenges associated with the process of adoption in Zimbabwe. The way the interview questions were framed was in such a way that they allow participants to share their own lived experiences of the participants. The observations that were made by the researcher were also driven by the need to understand these lived experiences. Attention was for instance paid in relation to the way the participants expressed their challenges in order to have a full understanding of the likelihood or the seriousness of these challenges.

In highlighting the nature of qualitative research, Kaczynski, Salmona and Smith (2013:128) states that researchers who conduct qualitative research seek to discover or enhance a deeper understanding of the social relationships by remaining inductively open to the unknown. In other words, notwithstanding their own pre-existing knowledge, qualitative researchers are open to learn new things from the participants and the context in which the study is being conducted. This openness for learning was highly considered in the current study wherein the researcher used semi-structured questions, which allowed the participants an opportunity to be free in expressing their experiences, while enabling the researcher to ensure that the responses provided by the participants remain within the parameters of the study. Openness for learning new things was also considered in cases where observations were made regarding the context of the study and the manner in which the participants expressed themselves. In fact, the researcher tried to see things with a new eye even in instances where it was not the first time she came across such issues.

In qualitative research, it is common to use of multiple sources of data in order to support a deeper understanding (Kaczynski et al. 2013:130). The research does not necessarily rely on one source of data, she considers other sources to enhance her understanding. In realising this feature, the researcher used the semi-structured interviews as the main

data collection tool or source and the diary in which she noted her observation of the context in which the participants' challenges were experienced and the manner in which they shared them.

It is also crucial to note that one of the central features of qualitative research is that it is a flexible process in response to the unfolding events (Fain 2017:21; Kaczynski et al. 2013:130; Malagon-Maldonado 2014:124; Yegidis et al. 2018:126). The flexibility of this process suggests that some of the planned conceptual decisions may not necessarily unfold in line with the plan. The researcher's approach to qualitative research is therefore determined by various contextual factors Malagon-Maldonado (2014:121). Just like any typical qualitative research approach, flexibility guided the application of the current study. The researcher did not follow the plan in a religious fashion. She was rather open for any new events that might need to be incorporated as the process unfolds. Linked to the flexible nature of qualitative research was the fact that it is a natural process, which must be allowed to unfold naturally. Strict adherence to the research plans and designs was therefore expected to compromise this natural process, hence the researcher's adoption of a flexible approach which allows her a room to remain open for any possible change of the plan.

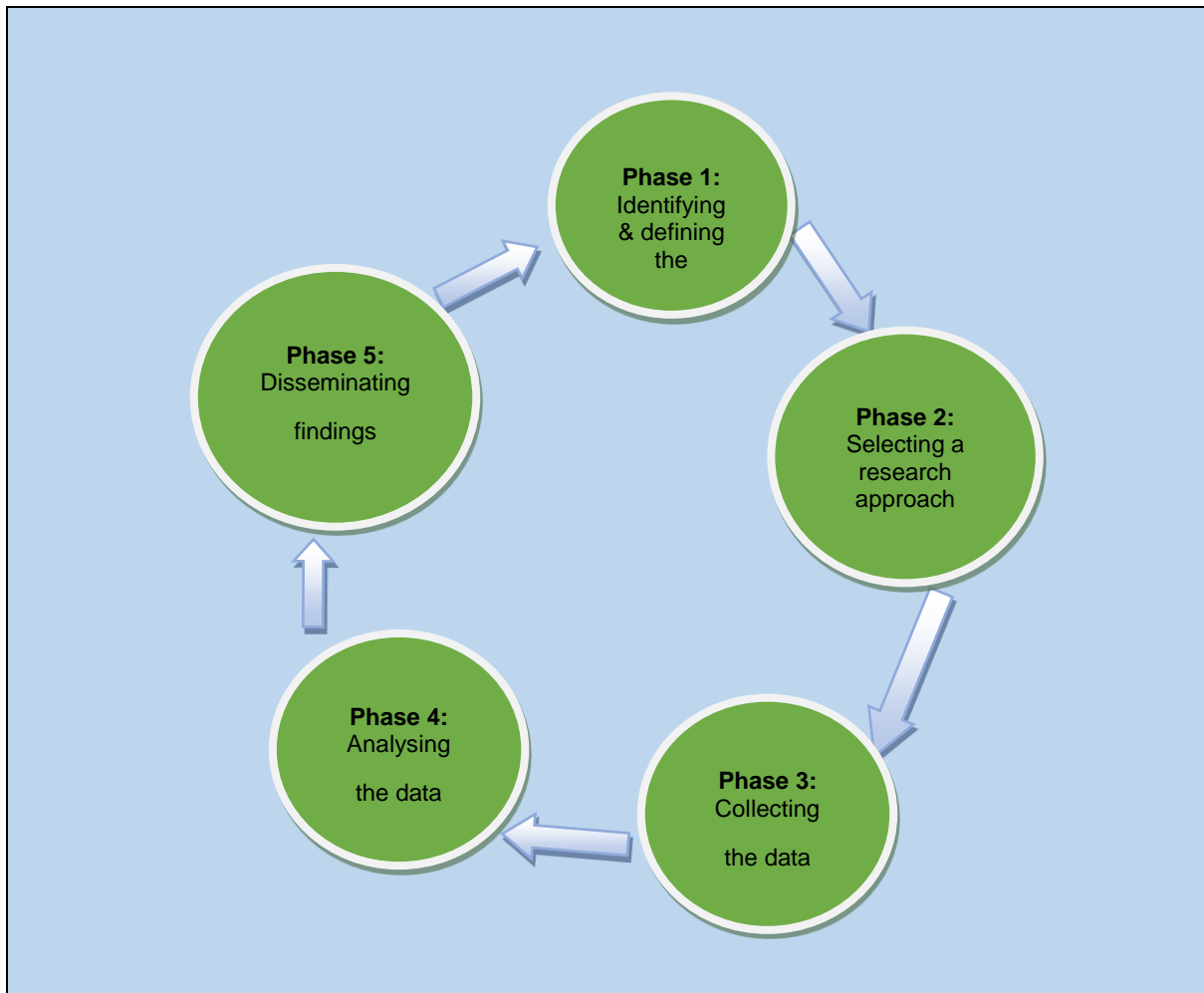
As much as qualitative research is flexible, there is also some form of coherence, or structure. In other words, although a provision is made for qualitative researchers to amend the plan as the process unfolds, this is done in an orderly and structured fashion. In the current study, the process was guided by Fain's (2017:22) model of the research process. In terms of the structure or the way the process unfolds, there appears not to be consensus among authors and researchers. In the following table, the researcher presents various stages of the research process as proposed by four authors, namely Moule (2018:26), Fain 2017:22), Grinnell and Unrau (2011:55) and Holloway and Wheeler (in Quick & Hall 2015:130).

Table 2.1 Stages of the research process as proposed by various authors

Moule (2018:26)	Fain (2017:22)	Grinnell and Unrau (2011:55)	Holloway and Wheeler (in Quick & Hall, 2015:130)
Identifying problems	Selecting & defining the problem	Problem identification & formulation of questions	Identify the problem in practice
Searching for literature	Selecting a design	Design the study	Performs data collection and analysis and assess the problem
Critically reading research	Collecting data	Collect and analyse the data	Plan, implement change identified from the research findings
Research aims, questions & hypothesis	Analysing data	Present and interpret the findings	Conduct evaluation
Research design	Utilising research	Disseminate the findings	
Ethical issues			
Sampling techniques			
Data collection			
Data analysis			
Interpretation of results			

Although the stages presented in table 2.1 differ in one way or another, they also appear to have some commonalities. A consensus among all authors for instance is that the researcher begins in one way or another by identifying the problem and that collecting analysing the data are some sort of a compulsory part of the process. Despite these commonalities and differences in approaching the process, the ultimate decision lies with the researcher based on the way her own study progresses. In the current study, the research process followed Fain’s model. These phases are presented schematically in Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1: Schematic presentation of the research process (adapted from Fain 2017:22)



The above table show the different views in relation to the structure or the process of qualitative research and held by various authors. As it can be seen from the first column of the table, Moule (2018:26) categorised the stages of research according to ten stages. In the second column, the process as held by Fain (2017:22) evolves through five main phases. In the third column, the model developed by Grinnell and Unrau (2011:55) who like Fain above, hold the view that the research process evolves through five the five stages of phases is presented. For Holloway and Wheeler (in Quick & Hall 2015:130), the research process unfolds through the four phases.

As indicated in figure 2.1 above, the current study evolved through the five main phases. The first two phases are mainly concerned with the planning stage of qualitative research and they were addressed in detail in Chapter One. In the first phase, the researcher selected and defined the problem. This process involved spending time reading the literature around the subject of the challenges of adoption and the gaps in both literature and knowledge. She also drew the practice gaps from her own experienced as a social worker who was once involved in adoption. This process enabled the researcher to clearly identify and formulate the problem as presented in Chapter One of this report.

In the second phase, the researcher selected qualitative research as an approach for the study. The appropriateness of qualitative research in this study was as provided in Chapter One (see section 1.5.1), based on among others, the sensitivity of the subject of challenges faced by adoptive parents in the process of adoption, the need to understand the challenges as they happen in the participants' natural settings from their own perspectives.

Phases 3 and 4 form the larger part of this chapter. This is mainly due to the chapter's focus on the application of qualitative research approach. During the third phase, the researcher began to identify the relevant authorities within the Ministry of Public Services Labour and Social Welfare and negotiate access to contact these authorities through request for appointments with them to discuss the research aim and the process. She also requested permission to access the participants, and eventually conducted the

interviews with the participants during this phase. In the fourth phase, analysis of the data was conducted. Like with all other aspects of the research approach, the application of data analysis is described in such a way that practically demonstrates whether and how the actual data analysis was conducted as per the plan introduced in Chapter One (See section 1.6.5).

In the final phase, which is phase 5, the researcher began the process of disseminating the findings. This report is part of dissemination of the findings, which is an exercise of sharing the findings with the parties who may have interest in the findings. Holloway and Wheeler state that writing a research report is one of the crucial parts of the research process (Quick & 2015:133). A question of the format of the report will as noted by Quick and (2015:133), be determined by the institutional requirements. This suggests that the structure or format of the research report is not cast in stone, it is determined by the institution from the which the study was conducted.

2.4 APPLICATION OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Although the description of the term research design was provided in Chapter One, it would be beneficial to keep referring the reader to those sections of the Chapter in order to set a base for the description of the manner in which the designs were applied by firstly revisiting the meaning of term research design. The researcher's plan as indicated in Chapter One (section 1.5.2) was to adopt the exploratory, descriptive and contextual research design. A discussion of how these designs were implemented as part of the qualitative research process is provided below.

2.4.1 Application of the exploratory research design

Through the exploratory research, the researcher approaches the research with an open mind to allow new knowledge to infiltrate. He begins the inquiry without much insight into the phenomenon under investigation (Yegidis et al. 2018:106). Application of the

exploratory research design was conducted in such a way that it allows the researcher to approach the process with an open mind, ready to learn from the participants and the process. This included conducting the semi-structured interviews, which allows the researcher to ask participants questions and allow them to answer the questions in their own pace without being interrupted. In this way, the researcher was able to garner some insight into the world of the participants.

2.4.2 Application of the descriptive research design

The purpose of the descriptive research design is to describe the meaning of the phenomenon under investigation (Fain 2017:168). The aim of descriptive research design as noted by Yegidis et al. (2018:107) is to describe variety of ways in which the participants experience or perceive the phenomenon. In this study, the participants (adoptive parents) were invited to the interviews, which were aimed at affording them an opportunity to describe the challenges that they are going through in the process of adoption as well as the support which they receive in managing such challenges. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in such a way that the researcher avoided interjecting or interrupting them as they described their challenges. Participants' narratives were then further subjected to literature control wherein they were compared with some of the existing literature in order to enrich the descriptions (See Chapter Three and Four for descriptions in a form of literature control).

2.4.3 Application of contextual research design

Contextual research is concerned with identifying what exists in the social world and the way it manifests itself (Ritchie et al. 2014). According to Hennik et al. (2011:288), a context can be conveyed in a study through various ways, such as paying attention to the personal context, a community context, the socio-cultural context of the population, the political, economic and historical context that shape the phenomenon under investigation. In implanting the context of the phenomenon, the researcher did pay attention to the

participants' individual and sociocultural context by considering their biographical factors like ages, gender, income and others as reflected in Chapter Three (See section 3.2). The community context mainly included paying attention to the local areas where participants were coming and consideration of any misconceptions regarding adoption as held by members of such areas. An effort was also made to discuss the phenomenon within the political context of Zimbabwe and its evolution in the country by highlighting some statistical figures and government's intervention.

2.5 THE RESEARCH METHODS AS APPLIED

In this section, the researcher details the procedure, which she followed in applying the research methods that were adopted for the current study.

2.5.1 Identifying the population, and using sampling techniques

As indicated in chapter one, practical and financial constraints limited the researcher to focus on the entire population of adoptive parents who have undergone through the process of adoption in Zimbabwe. She instead resorted to draw a sample from the population. In order to draw a sample, the researcher had to first identify the population in question.

Identifying the population for this study was a process. It began when the researcher identifying welfare organisations that rendered adoption services around Harare in Zimbabwe through the internet and through referral by some of her friends and colleagues. Once the organisations were identified, she then began to contact some authorities to arrange a meeting where she asked for a permission to conduct this study. Permission was then granted by the head office of the department and the researcher began to schedule meetings with district offices where she also met with authorities and explained the purpose of her visit. She was warmly welcome and granted permission to conduct the study at that level. During these meetings, she made sure that she gets some

clarity on the figures of parents who contact the offices for adoption and the areas where these parents could be found.

Once she was provided with information about the areas where she could possibly find the potential participants, she then made use of the information to contact them. Practical limitations and inadequate funding² made it impossible for the researcher to contact all the participants. Not all participants who were identified did respond positively though. Some did not respond at all, prompting the researcher to follow up still without any success. The researcher was then prompted to consider snowball sampling by requesting two of those who responded positively to further assist her in identifying others who meet the criteria. Ultimately, a total of eight parents responded to the researcher's request and indicated their willingness to participate. Once the researcher identified the participants, some preparations for data collection were underway. Sampling is considered complementary to data collection due to its direct relations with sampling (Lopez, & Whitehead 2013:127). The data as noted by Lopez and Whitehead (2013:127) is collected directly from the selected sample of the population. In the next section, the researcher explains how she first prepared herself and the participants before she could start with the process of data collection.

2.5.2 Preparing for data collection

Several authors highlight the significance of preparing for data collection. Creswell (in Winsome & Travis 2014:319) for example urge researchers to consider the following steps in preparing for data collection:

- **Firstly, identify the participants through purposive sampling;**

The process of identifying participants, negotiating time with them and having informed consent session with them was part of the preparatory measures observed by the

² The researcher was funding the study herself and funds were insufficient to address all her needs.

researcher before the data collection could commence. More details around this process is provided further below in section 2.5.1 of this chapter.

- **Determine the type of practical interview which is useful to answering the research questions;**

A question of determining a suitable type of interview for the research question was clearly considered during the plenary phase of this study as part of the plan for data collection and methods of data collection (see Chapter One section 1.6.3). What was of particular importance for the researcher when coming to preparation for data collection under this section is underscored by Gill et al. (2008:292) who urge researchers to spend time familiarising themselves with the interview guide in order to avoid portraying the process as an unnatural, and rehearsed one. The researcher spent time going through the questions repeatedly just to internalise them in order to allow the interview to unfold as a spontaneous process and to avoid boring the participants by searching through the questions during the interviews.

- **Determine the place of the interview and after arriving, obtain consent.**

The significance of place of the interview finds support from Gill et al. (2008:292) who states that the interviews “should be conducted in areas free from distractions and at times and locations that are more suitable for participants”. This suggests that one of the tasks which the researcher should perform in preparing for the interview is to ensure that there is a venue which is convenient and comfortable for the interviews and for the participants to feel free in sharing their participants. In this study, the researcher consulted the participants prior the interviews and asked them about any venue which they preferred for the interviews.

Some of the participants preferred to be interviewed in their homes while others preferred to be interviewed in town. For those who opted to be interviewed in their homes, the researcher highlighted the importance of having interviews conducted in a quiet venue and requested them to ensure that the venue is free from noise. Alternatively, she offered

to interview them in her office, but they still preferred their own homes. In the case of those who preferred to be interviewed in town, they reasoned that it was convenient for them to be interviewed in town since they work there and have offices and venues, which are convenient for the interviewing purposes. Furthermore, they found it to be cost-effective both in terms of time since they can spare an hour of their work time for the interviews. After considering the conducive nature of the environments, the researcher decided to conduct the interviews in the venues chosen by the participants.

- **Have the questions ready and allow time to elaborate**

Once she became satisfied, that the participants were informed about the research process and ready for the interviews, the researcher began the process of interviewing. The researcher recorded all the interviews using a tablet. The researcher ensured that prior to the interviews the gadget was adequately charged and was in good working order. The researcher notified the interviews that their contributions will be recorded. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, the researcher thought it to be necessary to consider building rapport with the participants. The process relating to how rapport was built is explained further below:

2.5.3 Collecting the data

The data that was collected included the background and socio-demographic data. Winsome and Travis (2014:321) suggested that researchers keep the demographic questions brief because they are boring, and people hate them. In trying to avoid boring the participants, the researcher prepared a list of questions and ask the participants to complete them before she could begin with the interviews aimed at answering the research questions. As indicated in Chapter One (see section 1.6.3), the researcher's intention with regard to data collection was that she would make use of the semi-structured interviews which were contained in the interview guide.

The interviews were collected by the researcher herself in Shona which was the language spoken by the participants and later translated to English. As noted by Basse (in Winsome & Travis 2014:321), some researchers prefer to record the interviews using a tape recorder while others prefer to take notes. For Gill et al. (2008:293), researchers can benefit from making fieldnotes during and immediately after the interviews in relation to some observations, thoughts and ideas that they might have about the interviews. In the current study, the researcher preferred to use a digital recording device as the main device for recording the interviews and a diary as a secondary recording technique wherein she recorded her observations of the unfolding events as well as her and the participants' reactions and other experiences in relation to the process.

The questions contained in semi-structured interview guide are posed in such a way that the stem questions or primary questions are asked in the same order in each of the interviews and the responses to these questions are probed to allow the participant a freedom to answer the questions as he wishes (Morse 2012:88). For Patton (in Winsome & Travis 2014:320), questions may be asked in order, with opinions and feeling related questions asked first followed by the researcher's probing of interpretation of such experiences. The view held by Manzano (2016:351) is that when conducting the semi-structured interviews, the researcher should pretend to be incompetent in order to avoid contaminating data and to deliberately act as "naiveté". Qualitative interviewing as held by Winsome and Travis (2014:319) should start with the researcher if the views held by the participants are meaningful.

In conducting the interviews, the researcher should start with a small talk to enable participants to feel comfortable and to break the ice (Josselson 2013:59). This approach particularly crucial given Winsome and Travis' (2014:321) observation that some participants may in the process be frightened or irritated. The researcher is therefore expected to make the participants feel comfortable (Winsome & Travis 2014:321). In the current study, the research began by introducing herself to the participants and reminded the participants of the purpose of the study, the process and her ethical obligations as a researcher. She then had to check with the participants if they are ready and once they

indicated their readiness, she started with the interviews. Before she goes straight into the interview questions, the researcher started with a small talk as suggested by Josselson (2013:59) above.

Once she was assured that, the participants were at ease, she then started with the stem question, which was open-ended in nature. Probes were used to seek clarity and enable the participants to share more of their challenges. As described by Roulston (2018:326), active listening is repeatedly stressed in methodological literature as one of the crucial skills for data collection. Active listening and observations were also used as some of the skills used to assist the researcher in following through the narratives of the participants while observing how they narrate such stories. Through active listening, the researcher hoped to demonstrate to the participants that she is interested in their stories while ensuring a full understanding of their stories.

According to Silverman (in Winsome & Travis 2014:319), observing body language enable the researcher to see the effect on the questions on the participants so that she can adjust them in order to avoid boring or annoying the participants or any kind of physical discomfort. In the current study, the researcher used observation not only because she wanted to avoid boring, annoying and causing discomfort, she also wanted to make sure that she has a full understanding on the contexts in which the stories were shared. Gill et al. (2008:292), additional skills like the strategic use of silence that can efficiently to get responses, to talk more elaborate or clarify an issue. The process and techniques used during the interviews were used with all the participants through the interviews.

In line with Gill et al.'s (2008:293) for the researcher to thank participants for their contribution in the interviews and allow them time to make some input in the process. Once the researcher concludes the interview with each of the participants, she thanked them for their contribution and indicated clearly that she may come back to them again to clarify few issues should there be a need (preparing them for member checking, see

Chapter One, section 1.6.6 and section 2.5.5 below)³. As observed by Greeff (2014:353), the duration of a semi-structured interview is normally a considerable amount of time. It generally depends on the researcher's familiarity with the schedule (interview guide), her ability to concentrate during the interviews and her ability to constantly monitor the topic scheduled in the guide (Greeff 2014:353). Despite the strenuous process of the interviews, the researcher managed to remain focused and ensured that all the topics are adequately covered. On average, the interviews took about 45 minutes. At the end of each interview, the researcher began the process of data analysis. An explanation pertaining to the way the data was analysed is provided in the next section.

2.5.4 Analysing the data

In terms of data analysis, it was indicated that the plan was to use Braun and Clarke's (2014) 6-phase guide of thematic analysis. Qualitative researchers are urged to be clear about the way analysis was conducted in their reports (Braun & Clarke 2006:79). In the current study, the process of data analysis was conducted in the following manner:

- **Phase 1: The researcher began by familiarising herself with the data**

One of the ways through which researchers can familiarise themselves with the data is by repeatedly reading through the transcripts while noting down some ideas as they come to her mind (Maguire & Delahunt 2017:3355; Braun & Clarke 2006:87). The researcher should thus immerse herself to an extent that she is familiar with the depth and breadth of the content (Braun & Clarke 2006:87). In the current study, the process of getting familiar with the data began when the researcher transcribed the data, which often demanded her to go back and forth in capturing the participants' narratives. Once the data was fully transcribed, the researcher spent a week reading the data repeatedly until

³ Member checking as a technique for trustworthiness requires the researcher to go back to the participants to verify that the stories documented in the transcripts are indeed a true reflection of what they shared with the researcher.

she became fully familiar with it. As she was reading at the same time she was noting some of the interesting ideas that as they come to mind in the margins. Through this process, she eventually created a list of ideas.

- **Phase 2: Once she became familiar with the data, she then began to generate initial codes**

Coding entails a meaningful and systematic process of organising data (Maguire & Delahunt 2017:3355). As noted by Braun and Clarke (2006:89), coding can be conducted electronically through a software programme or manually. In the current study, the researcher opted for manual coding. Either when coding manually, the researcher writes notes on the analysed texts or use coloured pens or highlighters to indicate the potential patterns and to identify the data segments (Braun & Clarke 2006:89). This is the approach adopted by the researcher. She used the highlight pens to highlight the common data sets while at the same time writing notes on the margins. This process was not done with all the data sets; she rather only focused on those that were relevant to the research questions.

- **Phase 3: After the generating the codes, she started to search for themes**

In searching for themes, the researcher began to sort different codes into potential themes and collating all the extracts of the coded data within the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006:89). The term theme as defined by DeSantis and Ugarizza (in Nowell Norris, White & Mules 2017:8), refers to “an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole”. A theme captures the essence of something crucial in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke 2006:82). When identifying the generated themes, the researcher should begin with few predefined codes and those that are relevant to build an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (King in Nowell et al. 2017:8). Those codes that do not belong to any of the themes were temporarily housed in the so-called “miscellaneous

themes” for the researcher to decide on their fate. Ultimately, a file was created for them to be saved in a computer.

- **Phase 4: Reviewing themes**

During this phase, the researcher began the process of reviewing the themes against the supporting data. This process was conducted in line with Braun and Clarke (2006:91)’s suggestion for researchers to consider firstly reviewing the coded data extracts by reading all the extracts collated for each theme to determine its coherence. As she was going through this process, she found some extracts did not really fit the themes under which they were classified and decided either to collapse the theme in question or to relocate the extracts with the correct themes.

In the second level of reviewing themes, the researcher performed the same exercise that she did above, but this time by reading through the entire themes to ascertain if the themes work in relation to the data set and to code any data which may have been missed during the second phase (Braun & Clarke 2006:91). This process was then completed, and the data extracts were found to clearly reflect the themes.

- **Phase 5: The themes that were identified were then named and defined**

The aim of naming and defining the themes as described by Braun and Clarke (2006:33511) is to identify the essence of each theme and make determine the aspects of what is captured by each theme. At this stage, the researcher determined whether a theme is not too large or does not have any subthemes⁴ and if so be categorised accordingly (Braun & Clarke 2006:93). The themes that are identified were given concise and punchy names (Braun & Clarke 2006:93). In other words, the names given to the themes concisely reflected the essence of the extracts. Through this process, the researcher generated a total of eight themes and 16 subthemes.

⁴ A subtheme is a theme within a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006:93).

- **Phase 5: Once all the themes are clearly named and defined, she then started to compile an analysis report.**

In the last phase, the researcher had to compile an analysis report. The analysis report as noted by Braun and Clarke (2006:93) must provide enough evidence within the data. In other words, there must be enough extracts to substantiate the themes. In compiling the report, the researcher ensured that she present it narratively like a story, with each theme is sufficiently supported by the data extracts.

Data analysis is closely connected to trustworthiness of the study. It must be precise, consistent, exhaustive and systematically recorded and detailed with disclosure of the methods adopted to allow the reader to determine its credibility and accept its trustworthiness (Nowell et al. 2017:1). Further description of the way in which trustworthiness was ensured through the study is provided in the next section.

2.5.5 Ensuring trustworthiness of the data

Trustworthiness as described by Lincoln and Guba (in Nowell et al. 2017:3) is one of the ways through which the researcher can persuaded themselves and their readers that their study is worth attention. The criteria adopted to ensure the trustworthiness of the study are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Connelly, 2015:435; Flick 2018:35; Nowell et al. 2017:3).

- **Credibility**

Credibility entails the establishment of the truth-value of the research findings based on the participants' environmental context (Mohajan 2018:42). The techniques, which were used for ensuring credibility, are prolonged engagement with the participants, peer-debriefing, member checking, triangulation and reflective journaling (Connelly 2015:435; Korstjens & Moser 2018:12; Morse 2015:1212). Through prolonged engagement, the

researcher spent time with the participants firstly to build rapport, secondly to prepare them for the interviews and thirdly to verify if indeed they were ready to start with the interviews. These interactions enabled the researcher to fully become immersed with the process and to create a conducive environment in which participants were also open and free to participate.

Peer-debriefing was done during the supervision sessions wherein the researcher presented her interpretation of the process and the data to the supervision for review. Through peer-debriefing, the researcher sourced a second opinion on her interpretation of the events of the process.

Member checking involved taking the interview transcripts back to the participants for them to verify if indeed they reflect their experiences. This process was done with eight of the participants and they all seemed happy with the transcripts.

In ensuring triangulation, the researcher made use of different data sources (i.e. participants with different ages, educational, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, with different). She also consulted literature widely from different disciplines and research literature consulted from different contexts.

Through reflective journal, the researcher noted all events as they unfold and her experiences of those events. This process began as early as in the negotiation phase where she was still negotiating access from the gatekeepers. She would for instance record things like the content of the discussions and her feelings about the way such discussions were conducted. The journal was also used during the actual interviews where the researcher recorded the pace with which the interviews unfolded, her observations of the clients (i.e. the clients' feelings, openness or reluctance to talk). The researcher's hope was that the data, which was recorded in this fashion, would assist her in enriching the data.

- **Transferability**

Transferability makes it possible for the research findings to be transferable to similar situations, circumstances and contexts (Morris & Burkett in Mohajan 2018:42). To ensure transferability, the researcher needs to support the study with rich, detailed description of the context, location, experiences and the participants and by remaining transparent with regard to the analysis and trustworthiness (Connelly 2015:436; Korstjens & Moser 2018:121). The attainment of thick, rich data as noted by Hamilton and Finley (2019:5) considers the quality of time that the researcher spent with the participants, the research burden and the appropriateness of the recruited sample for the study's purpose. Larger sample sizes as noted by Hammarberg, Kirkman and Lacey (2016:500) does not provide a greater transferability. Thick description involves not only the behaviour and experiences of the participants, but also the contexts that make such behaviours and experiences meaningful (Korstjens & Moser 2018:121).

In applying the thick description for the current study, the researcher presented a detailed plan of the study as Chapter One and the manner in which such a plan was executed. She also described the background information of the participants, presented the research findings in a detailed fashion, and supported them by excerpts of the interviews conducted with the participants.

- **Dependability**

Dependability is maintained through an audit trail of the process logs and peer debriefing with colleagues and reflexivity (Connelly 2015:435; Korstjens & Moser 2018:121). Dependability as noted by Nowell et al. (2017:3) can be achieved if the research process can be audited. The researcher should therefore strive to maintain an audit trail by providing evidence of the decisions and choices that she made in relation or about the theoretical or methodological issues throughout the study which must clearly be justified (Nowell et al. 2017:3). This suggests that researchers should present their reports in a detailed fashion with enough evidence and justification of the choices made to avoid

leaving the reader with unanswered questions about the study. According to Nowell et al. (2017:3), audit trail can be maintained by keeping a record of raw data, fieldnotes, transcripts and a journal, which will assist the researcher in reporting the findings. In the current study, the researcher made use of an ordinary diary wherein she recorded all events as they unfolded during the study. She also recorded her feelings and reactions to some of the events (i.e. when she became astonished by a participant who explained how her mother was angry at her when she considers adoption). The participants who became uncomfortable noticed the researcher's reaction in this instance. The researcher thought events like these would support her study and ensure the fulfilment of dependability through audit trail.

On reflexivity, it worth noting Jeanfreau and Jack's (2010) assertion that researcher should consider the possibility that her own values and belief may influence the study. This point was considered seriously for the current study. As a female from a Shona cultural background and influenced by the values and practices of Shona, the researcher had her own personal beliefs about adoption. It was crucial for her to ensure that her beliefs and values do not necessarily divert the focus and the essence of what the participants are saying. In doing so, she accepted these beliefs and told herself that they are hers as a person and may not necessarily be similar or subscribed to by the participants. In this way, she was able to allow the participants to share their challenges in their own way without clouding them with her own beliefs. At the end of each interview, she would critically assess the impact of her beliefs on the process, note them down for further analysis, and build on her knowledge of such impact as the process unfolds.

- **Confirmability**

Through confirmability, the researcher establishes verifiable direct evidence from the experiences that he has with the participants (Mohajan 2018:42). In ensuring confirmability, the researcher keeps notes of the details of decisions and their analysis as the research process unfolds. In the current study, the researcher resorted to make use

of a diary to record all the events that unfolded during the study daily. For instances she would record the dates of meetings, the names of people with whom she interacted such as the gatekeepers. A summary of minutes of the meetings with gatekeepers and participants during the duration of the study were also recorded. She also noted what transpired during the interviews themselves (i.e when some of the participants broke into tears as they narrate their difficulties in relation to the process of adoption. Connelly (2015:435) suggests that the notes, which are documented in this fashion, be given to colleagues to verify them or be taken to the peer-debriefing sessions wherein they should be discussed. In following Connelly's above suggestion, the researcher preferred a discussion with the supervisor to have the notes verified.

According to Connelly (2015:435), member checking may also be used as a technique to ensure conformability of the study. Through member checking, the researcher affords the participants an opportunity to check the interviews for accuracy (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell & Walter 2016:1803). In fulfilling confirmability through member checking, the researcher collected the data and immediately transcribed them as she collects. Once she has transcribed all of the data sets, she then made appointments with the participants to allow them an opportunity to individually verify it.

2.6 UPHOLDING ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

In this section, the researcher provides an applied description of the way the ethical principles were upheld. The ethical principles were upheld through the entire duration of the study.

2.6.1 Upholding informed consent

The research participants have a right to know the duration of the study, the prospects of being exposed to any form of discomfort or any risk of emotional or psychological in nature

because of self-disclosure. They should also know the prospects of any loss of privacy, time or money because of their taking part in the study (Moule 2018:39). The researcher took time to ensure that the participants are fully informed about the study. She firstly made some appointment with the participants individually to present the aim of the study, its objectives and the questions, provided them with copies of informed consent forms so that they can go through it at their own time alone, and asked them to note some questions that they may have about it (Moule 2018:39).

Another meeting was scheduled with each one of them individually where she discussed the form and invited any questions that they might have. She also made time to explain how the study will unfold, the participants' right to ask questions, and to withdraw at any time of the study, should they so wish. The purpose of informed consent form and the importance of signing it were highlighted to the participants. Another opportunity for the participants as a group wherein the researcher explained the above information again to ensure that everybody fully understand the purpose, objectives and questions regarding the study. In the latter participants had an opportunity to get clarity on some of the misunderstandings.

2.6.2 Upholding anonymity and confidentiality

A common practice among qualitative researchers to ensure participants' anonymity is by allocating participants a number (I.e participant 1, participant 2 and so on) or by using the pseudonyms (Quick & Hall 2015:130; Ross 2012:152). According to Quick and Hall (2015:130), pseudonyms are considered the best method of ensuring anonymity because of their ability to reduce a risk of breaching anonymity. In the current study, the researcher adhered to the principle of anonymity by using pseudonyms to identify the participants. She also avoided using the real names of the locations where the participants were staying in order to ensure that they are not easily identifiable or linked with such areas. In reporting of information about the study, she was also cautious by ensuring that the information is not too detailed to expose the identities of the participants.

Confidentiality as noted by Ross (2012:152) is linked to anonymity. In her description of the concept confidentiality, Fain (2017:37) holds that confidentiality prevents the researcher from divulging the participants' information without their permission. It involves respecting the privacy of the participants and their need and expectation not to be identified throughout the study (Ross 2012:152). In implementing this principle, the researcher kept all the participants' information to herself and never shared any of the details with anyone without the participants' knowledge and permission. In cases where she discussed some of the information with the supervisor, she received permission from the participants and discussed only things that relates to the principles and process of qualitative research.

2.6.3 Avoiding harm and ensuring beneficence

The researcher ensured that her obligations of ensuring the participants are free from harm and benefit from the study is upheld in various ways. Firstly, she avoided discussing sensitive topics, which could upset the participants' in any way by simply sticking to the topics that are led by the participants. The study was conducted in such a way that it allowed the researcher to "lend an ear" to the participants and therefore provided them with an opportunity to have someone listening to their plight. The challenges that were shared by the participants as part of this study were analysed and prepared to be shared with various parties who are affected. Through this process, the study offered a platform through which the participants can make their voices heard or their plight known.

2.6.4 Debriefing participants

As indicated in Chapter One (Section 1.7.4) that providing the participants with debriefing was one of the principles envisaged to be upheld by the researcher as the process unfolds, this principle was also observed as per plan. In ensuring debriefing, the researcher made the necessary arrangements with a social worker who was specialising

in trauma counseling to be on standby to provide the participants with debriefing. The agreement between her and the social worker was that the former will identify the participants who need the latter's services and refer them telephonically to the latter for debriefing. She also made sure that she continuously observes the participants throughout the study to identify any signs of being overwhelming or any form of distress, which might necessitate debriefing so that she can refer them to the above social worker for debriefing.

2.6.5 Managing/securing the data

Decisions around data management in research is determined by the relevant legislation and codes, national and institutional policy and the procedures and guidelines that the research project adheres to (Kennan & Markauskaite 2015:74). The researcher managed the data in the following way:

- She created a file in her personal computer where she saved all of the soft copy files.
- In the case of hard copies of the files, she scanned, created a file for them in her compare and saved them in a pdf format.
- She created a password for each of the files to ensure that she is the only person who can have access to the files.
- The computer in which the files were saved was the researcher's personal computer which belonged to her and which was accessible only to the researcher. She nevertheless created a password for the computer to mitigate the risk of other parties accessing the files in the computer.

2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to explain how the research plan as presented in Chapter One, was operationalised. Firstly, the researcher justified the reasons why she decided to implement qualitative research in the manner that she did and then proceeded in

explaining how qualitative research as an approach adopted for the study was enacted. Her justification was then followed by an explanation of the way in which the research design, the research methods were enacted. In concluding the chapter, an explanation of the way the ethical principles introduced in the plan were upheld. In the next chapter, the focus will be on the first set of the research findings which is the findings pertaining to the challenges experienced by adoptive parents in the adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe.

CHAPTER THREE

FINDINGS ON THE CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY ADOPTIVE PARENTS IN THE ADOPTION OF OVCS IN ZIMBABWE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this Chapter is to present the first part of the research findings, which are the findings pertaining to the challenges associated with the adoption of OVCS in Zimbabwe. Specific attention is placed on the socio-demographic profile of the participants and the four themes addressing the challenges relating to the requirements of adoption, the challenges relating to the family and relatives as impediments of adoption, the challenges associated with the community and the challenges relating to the adoptive children. All of the themes are presented in the context of some existing literature and the adopted theoretical framework.

3.2 THE SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS ON THE PARTICIPANTS

As part of the data collection process, the researcher interviewed eight participants around their experiences in relation to the challenges involved in the adoption process of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Zimbabwe. Participants were further asked to provide their information pertaining to the socio-demographic profiles. In the next table (Table 3.1), the researcher presents the findings relating to the socio-demographic profiles of the participants.

Table 3.1 The socio-demographic profiles of participants

Code	Age	Gender	Marital Status	No. of own Children	Religion Practiced	Ethnicity	Occupation
<i>MV</i>	49	Female	Married	Two	Christian	Black	Businesswoman
<i>BG</i>	43	Male	Married	None	Christian	Black	Philanthropist
<i>MB</i>	53	Male	Married	Three	Christian	Black	Businessman
<i>CC</i>	51	Male	Married	None	Christian	Black	Volunteer
<i>JS</i>	46	Female	Married	None	Christian	Black	Church Leader
<i>TK</i>	56	Male	Married	None	Christian	Black	Educator
<i>CB</i>	51	Male	Married	Two	Christian	Black	Administrative Clerk
<i>CF</i>	33	Male	Married	None	Agnostic	White	Businessman

3.2.1 Findings on the age demographics of the participants

In terms of the age demographic of the participants, they were between the ages of 33 and 56. There seem to be some concurrence with some existing literature about the age of adoptive parents. In a Kenyan study of child adoption systems and their impact on extended families for example, Chimene (2017:100) contends that in most cases, the ages of adoptive parents ranged from 20 to 40 years. In another study of the acceptability of child adoption as management option for infertility, conducted in Nigeria by Oladokun, Arulogun, Oladokun, Morhason-Bello, Bamgboye, Adewole, and Ojengbede (2009:87), participants' ages were between 20 to 45 years. The age demographic of the adoption as revealed by this study, also appear to reflect western data, with authors like Oien (2015:12) revealing that adoptive parents' ages between 35 to 50 years. In another instance, the Centre for Diseases Control and Prevention (2018:5) shows that 81% of adoptive mothers are between 35 to 44 years, with only 3% being less than 29 years of age. A similar picture was painted by the Norwegian data, which reveal that most adoptive parents are between 40 to 45 years (Leung 2014:34).

3.2.2 Findings on the gender demographics of the participants

In terms of the gender demographics of the participants, two were females whilst six were males. These findings appear to be in line with Aremu and Badawa's (2016:250) Nigerian study of the influences of macro-factors on adoption wherein the majority of African males were found to be common in undertaking or leading the adoption processes in the family. This is mainly influenced by the cultural roles of being heads of households as played by black males in Africa. However and contrary to the above, it appears that in some cases, it is females who first make suggestions for adoption (Aremu & Badawa 2016:250). The leading role played by males in initiating the adoption process appears to also be a western practice, with researchers like Jones (2009:2) revealing that among Americans, more adopters are men as compared to their women counterparts. Similarly, Kahler (2018:2) states that men were twice more likely than women to adopt. In contrast to the above findings, Leung (2014:35) argued in her Norwegian study that amongst the vast majority of adoptive parents, women spearheaded adoptions.

3.2.3 Findings on the marital Status demographics of the participants

At the time of this study, all the eight participants reported that they were married. Of all eight participants, seven had undertaken both African and Western marriages with the initial marriage conducted in a form of 'lobola' negotiation and thereafter a Western 'white' wedding celebration. In the case of a white participant, the marriage was conducted from the western tradition. In terms of marital demographics of adoption, Mafuse and Zvidzai (2017:120) contend in their Malawian study of the perspectives of the African tradition on marriage in the new modern era that traditionally adoption is undertaken by those who are married. Their findings should be interpreted with caution, since the focus of their participants were individuals who adopted children from their extended families whilst the current study focuses on adoption in general. A picture painted by the current study on the marital status of adoptive parents also find support from the work of Jones (2009:3) whose study also revealed that most of the adoptive parents are married. Despite the above-quoted consensus pertaining to the marital status of the participants, a South

African study of the trends and patterns of adoption in the country by Mokomane and Rochat (2011) points to the contrary. In this study, the researchers analysed the South African National Adoption Register and found that most of the adoptive parents were either single or unmarried and divorced or widowed.

3.2.4 The findings on the racial demographics of the participants

The racial profile of the participants revealed that all of the seven participants were black while only one was white. Although the context in which the study was conducted should be considered with caution, the findings on racial demography of the participants seem to find support in the work of Jones (2009:4) who established that in the USA the majority of adoptive parents were black Americans. This was contrary to the findings by Mokomane and Rochat's (2011:7) South African study wherein they established that blacks were markedly under-represented in the adoption statistics compared to their white counterparts. It is crucial to interpret the demographic pertaining to race with caution given Chokho and Mlaunsiwe (2015:23)'s argument that in most African cases, adoptions by blacks were usually family based and not registered in the formal system. In Zimbabwe, there are usually relatives appointed by the family elders to take care of the children of their deceased relative as a 'Sara pavana' (an English term for a family designated child guardian).

3.2.5 Findings on the religious demographics of the participants

Of the eight participants, seven reported that they were practicing Christianity whilst only one reported that he was Agnostic. Furthermore, the one who was agnostic was the only white male Zimbabwean who participated in this study. In considering this factor in the context of literature, it is crucial to refer to Nwaoga (2013:707) who argues that it is crucial to consider the religious context in which adoption is practiced particularly in most African countries. In support of the religious demographic findings of the current study, Nwoaga's (2013:707) study of the Socio-Religious implications of child adoption in Igboland south eastern Nigeria also revealed that that the predominant religion was Christianity. She also

noted that Christianity was mainly practiced by black Africans in the community. The above revelations also find support from the Zimbabwean statistics (Zimbabwe, 2017:xi), which shows that most of the religions practiced in Zimbabwe were Christianity followed closely by African traditions, which in some instances were practiced in tandem. It worth noting one of the interesting views pertaining to Christianity and adoption as noted by Agbo (2014:88) in his study of the socio-cultural challenges of child adoption in Eastern Nigeria in west Africa. Through this study, Agbo (2014:88) established that the main religion practiced by most black Africans in his society was African tradition which he argues, has never been acceptable culturally since pre-colonial era until currently.

3.2.6 Findings on the number of children as a demographic factor for the participants

Of all eight participants, three had children of their own whilst the rest did not have any children. The revelations made by this study on the number of participants with children of their own appears to corroborate with some existing literature, which generally shows that the majority of the adoptive parents did not have children of their own. In their South African study, focusing on analysis of the National Adoption Register to establish the trends and patterns of adoption for example, Mokomane and Rochat (2011:6) found that in most cases adoptive parents wait to find out whether they cannot conceive on their own before they consider adoption. Their main reason for adoption is mostly infertility (Leung, 2014:34; Nwaoga, 2013:707). This view find support in Anderson (2012) who holds an African perspective on fertility is that the increase in the rate of adoptions in can be best explained by the increasing cases of infertility among married couples and the pressure by the society. This suggests that infertility tends to attract some negative perceptions from the society, which then result in some pressure exerted on the parent to have a child. Consequently, adoption becomes an option. For adoptive parents, the idea of adoption saves both the child and the adoptive parents from physical or emotional trauma (Nwaoga, 2013:707). Unlike the revelations made by this study on the number of children as supported by some parts of literature, some studies reveal the contrary. Jones (2009:5) for instance found in his study of the characteristics of women and men who

have adopted children that the majority of adoptive parents in the have children of their own. In order to fully understand this demographic aspect, it is however crucial to consider the context in which the studies were conducted (i.e. the fact that Jones study was conducted in the USA and the current study as well as some of the supportive revelations were from an African context). In another study, Mokomane and Rochat (2011:6) reveal that some of the adoptive parents (particularly white parents) usually adopted even though they had children of their own. Amongst some of the reasons cited is that they wanted to fulfil the social responsibility. Contrary to Mokomane and Rochat's findings above, a white parent who took part in the current study did not have his own children.

Having provided a context of the study through the socio-demographic findings, the researcher will now switch to the findings pertaining to the research questions, goal and objectives.

3.3 FINDINGS ON THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS, GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

As indicated in Chapter Three, the collected data was analysed through the six phases of thematic data analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). These phases involved the researcher familiarising herself with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes and writing up. This analysis process gave rise to eight themes and sixteen subthemes. These themes and subthemes will be introduced in table 3.2 below and further discussed under section 3.4. In order to clarify the context and further enhance the credibility, each theme and subtheme is substantiated by direct quotes from interview.

Table 3.2: Themes and subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Theme 1: Participants' challenges in relation to the requirements for adoption.	<p>1.1 Participants' challenges in relation to financial state as a determinant for the prospects of a successful application.</p> <p>1.2 Participants' challenges in relation to unrealistic expectations required by authorities to qualify for adoption.</p> <p>1.3 Participants' challenges in relation to suspicion by officials around the motive for adoption.</p> <p>1.4 Participants' challenges in relation to marital requirement for adoption.</p>
Theme 2: Participants' challenges in relation to negative attitudes by family and relatives as impediments for adoption	
Theme 3: Participants' challenges in relation to cultural beliefs and practices as impediments for adoption.	
Theme 4: Participants' challenges in relation to the stigma associated with the child's HIV positive status.	
Theme 5: Participants' challenges in relation to lack of resources of adoption.	<p>5.1 Participants' challenges in relation to few social workers available to assist with adoption.</p> <p>5.2 Participants' challenges relating to lack of or inadequate transport to visit the clients.</p>
Theme 6: Participants' challenges in relation to the	

prolonged nature of the adoption process.	
Theme 7: Participants' challenges in relation to the derogatory remarks.	
Theme 8: Participants' narratives of their motivations to consider adoption.	8.1 Participants' need for children whom they consider their own as a motivation for adoption. 8.2 Altruism as participants' motivation for adoption.
Theme 9: Participants' emotional reaction to adoption.	9.1 Participants' mixed feelings in reaction to adoption. 9.2 Participants' fears of uncertainties in reaction to adoption. 9.3 Participants' frustrations in relation to inadequate information provided on the requirements for adoption.
Theme 10: Support systems for adoptive parents in managing the challenges experienced.	10.1 Participants' partners and friends as support systems in managing their challenges. 10.2 The role of the church as a support system for adoptive parents in managing their challenges.

Having outlined the themes and subthemes in table 3.2 above, the themes and subthemes in question will now be introduced and discussed in detail in the next section.

3.3.1 Theme 1: Participants' challenges in relation to the requirements for adoption

Among the main issues that were reported by the participants as one of the challenges associated with undergoing the process of adoption in Zimbabwe related to the requirements that one should fulfil before they could qualify for adoption. On a scrutiny, the challenge relating to the requirements for adoption was further categorised into subthemes, with income, unrealistic expectations by authorities and marriage emerging as subthemes under this theme as some of the requirements which participants were expected to fulfil.

3.3.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Participants' challenges in relation to financial state as a determinant for the prospects of a successful application

The financial state of the applicants is one of the factors considered as one of the hindrances of a smooth adoption process. As held by the participants, in the assessment of prospective adoptive parents, officials tend to evaluate the same parameters to determine the capacity and hence eligibility of the applicant to parent an adopted child. Among those who expressed dissatisfaction with income as a determinant for adoption were **CF**, **CC** and **TK**.

CF shared her dissatisfaction by saying, *"Many prospective adoptive parents grow cold feet when they think of the prospect of having the health of their finances scrutinised. His fear was that, "...adoption ends up being viewed as something for the elite..."*

On a similar vein, **CC** questioned the reasons for scrutinising the economic resources in order to make a determinant for the prospects of a successful adoption application by asking, *"... adoptive parents are supposed to be immune to the economic hardships prevailing in the country? And if applicants are scrutinised that way, how many will pass the assessment?"*

In another interview, **TK** explained how income is particularly considered a determinant crucial for the process to be concluded, *"An applicant needs to have more than an average income to be able to complete the adoption process."* **TK** further explained, *"The processes one is required to do cost money but they must be done...The economic environment is not favourable so even things that do not cost much money might be hard to acquire."*

In some instances, participants seem to understand the significance of having better economic means in order to qualify for adoption. In support of this view, **MV** had this to say, *"One needs resources, not only time but monetary resources for the process to go smoothly. If you do not have a car you will be in trouble because you have to process*

papers and go to the offices a lot of times. You have to pay for various services, like having your fingerprints cleared by the Police.”

On the other hand, **JS** argues that one *“cannot just adopt an OVC when you struggling to fend for yourself or for the children you already have; that is if one has any.”*

Similar views were shared by TK who told the researcher that, *“...there are a number of things that need to be done and money is definitely needed for example some of the adopting parents will need to travel more frequently to and from the offices until the process is finished.”*

The challenges pertaining to the economic status of the potential adoptive parents as highlighted by the participants of this study is found to be in line with a number of prior studies. A Nigerian study by Oladokun, Arulogun, Oladokun, Adenike, Morhason-Bello, Bamgboye, Ojengbede, (2010:48) for instance found that financial implications were a barrier to adoption. Similar findings were noted in Kenya by Stuckenbruck (2013:79) wherein it was established that there could be a challenge of low-income families becoming a barrier to successful adoption. In Kenya, the representatives from the Law Society of Kenya (2016:3) were of the view that adoption in their country was an expensive affair and a complicated process. It was also found that Kenyan adoption societies charge a large amount of money, which was equal to the monthly salary earned by most professionals in the country.

In another study by Monroe (2016:51), some adoptive parents expressed concern regarding the costs of the adoption process. Few other researchers note the danger of considering the economic status of the prospective adoptive parents. Fletcher (2015:100) for example argue that one of the biggest misconceptions was that the formal adoptive process is very expensive, and that it is for the rich. The view held by Fletcher (2015:100) above find support in Ambrose (2016:110) who observed that some adoptive parents in most African countries have gone through alternate channels of adoption and paid heaps of money believing that adoption is more expensive.

The concerns raised by the participants above, as supported by literature on the challenges of economic state of the applicant on adoption appears to have some advantages. A consensus amongst scholars is that positive attitude towards adoption and acceptability of an adoptive child are heightened by among others, the annual income of the household (Adewunmi *et al*, 2012:367; Oladokun *et al.*, 2009:86; Omosun & Kofworola, 2011:3). This places the economic status of the adoptive parent and his or her family in a crucial position when coming to making decisions around adoption. The link between eligibility for adoption and economic means appears to have led to the development of a perception of adoption as an option only for the rich people, which in turn result in many Kenyans not completing the adoption procedure (Stuckenbruck, 2013:95).

The economic resources factor as a requirement for adoption is not a distinctly African phenomenon. In their analysis of the US adoption facilitator for example, Baccara, Collard-Wexler, Felli, and Yariv (2010:8) found that an increase in adoption finalisation costs has decreased the aggregate probability of receiving an application for adoption from a prospective adoptive parent. Similar findings were revealed by Woodluck and Grant (2016:55) in Asia wherein it was established that some adoptive parents expressed concerns with the high legal fees and unethical behaviour from some advocates in the sector.

3.3.1.2 Subtheme 1.2. Participants' challenges in relation to unrealistic expectations required by authorities to qualify for adoption

In some interviews, participants highlighted some unrealistic expectations by some authorities as one of the challenges that they face in their quest for adoption. Amongst the participants who raised a concern about these unrealistic expectations were MV, CF and BG.

In the case of **MV**, the issue for her was when authorities wanted to complete the adoption process in two months. This for her was unrealistic as she explained, "*Looking back, I*

think they may have been a bit unrealistic. I mean wanting to complete the adoption process in a month or two.”

CF appears to have been frustrated by the unrealistic expectations. He expressed himself by saying, *“Some of the policies and procedures guiding the process of adoption are not really necessary or practical in the Zimbabwean context... Trying to calculate how stable a person’s marriage is, is a noble thing but not practical. The Social Worker will assess if the applicant is a happy person (laughs). How does one measure if a person is a happy person or not unless they have been in contact with that person for quite some time... It is a bit unrealistic in the environment we are in. Just imagine, one home visit and a person says they are in a position to write a report on whether you can be a good parent or not!”*

On a more similar vein with CF above, BG was clearly frustrated by being required to prove that her motives for adoption were good. She expressed herself as follows, *“I felt really frustrated about having, somehow, to prove that I have good motives for adopting the child.”* (**BG**)

The findings in relation to unrealistic expectations by the authorities seem not to be a new phenomenon as raised by the participants of the current study. Research literature appears to have some similar highlights, with some researchers (Adewunmi *et al.* 2012:368; Oladokun *et al.* 2009:88; Aniebue & Aniebue, 2008:7) reporting that these unrealistic requirements and processes from the child welfare and judicial system have discouraged some couples from adopting and partly encouraged unofficial or illegal adoption practices which are often less rigorous and sometimes less expensive. In developing countries such as Nigeria, for instance, adoption procedures and guidelines were found to be cumbersome (Oladokun *et al.* 2010:88). The cumbersome nature of the Nigerian adoption system was also observed by Ojelabi *et al.*, (2015:78) who established that some of the main reasons for the child adoption processes being cumbersome and challenging where that there were too many red-tapes in the child welfare and judicial system. It was also noted that adoptive parents are required to complete an exhaustive process riddled by unrealistic expectation and requirements. The unrealistic nature of

adoption process is also highlighted by According to Adewunmi *et al.* (2012:368), who states that some are unrealistic. According to Aniebue and Aniebue (2008:7), these cumbersome standards and processes have discouraged some couples from adopting and partly encouraged unofficial or illegal adoption practices, which are often less rigorous and sometimes less expensive.

3.3.1.3. *Subtheme 1.3: Participants' challenges in relation to suspicion by officials around the motive for adoption*

In some interviews, participants reported that they think some officials were suspicious about their motive for adoption. Clearly, in instances where there are some suspicions, one would expect a rigorous process aiming at eliminating any possible foul plays. It was therefore not surprising that some participants became subjected to a rigorous process. Participants who raised a concern about the suspicions by officials with regard to their motive for adoption were MV, CF, BG and CC.

According to **MV**, some social workers who realised that the applicant or prospective adoptive parent has her own child tend to become suspicious of her motive. This is what **MV** had to say, *"...even some Social Workers are baffled, especially when they discover that you have no problems conceiving your own biological children. They start treating you with suspicion."*

The sentiments similar to MV above were shared by CC, *"In this country, people who usually adopt OVCs are couples who would have failed to have their own biological children. The Social Workers also seem to be more eager to process adoption applications from clients who do not have their own biological children. When applicants have their own biological children, they are usually viewed with suspicion by the Social Workers because they will question the motive behind the adoption"*.

In the case of CF, perceived challenge was that Social worker thought biological parents would receive more love and attention at the expense of the adoptive child. This is how

CF expressed her the challenge, “...*the Social Worker thought I would change my mind later and want my own biological child then my feelings towards all the children I was living with then would change. She thought it would have been more sensible if I was infertile then it would be known that I was going to love these children for life.*”

As highlighted by BG, another reason for social workers to be suspicious of the applicants they believed that some adoptive parents had sinister ulterior motives for adopting OVCs. BG had this to say, “... *the Social Workers did not try to hide their curiosity on why we would want to adopt the child. The Social Workers at the hospital knew that I was friends with the German diplomats, our relationship made people more suspicious of our motive to adopt the child.*”

The views expressed by the participants in terms of the suspicions by officials is also shared by Roby and Shaw (2006:201) who noted that most social workers interviewed in their USA study were against trans-racial adoption as they were suspicious of the adoptive parents' motives, especially if they were Caucasian who were adopting child black. Stuckenbruck (2012:76) argues that adoptive parents are concerned about social workers' suspicions on their motives to adopt even if they are meant to determine their fitness to adopt. Unfortunately, the adoptive parents view it as a bureaucratic and inherently suspicion-laden intrusion into their personal lives (Chitsika, 2017:92; Nwaoga, 2013:706; Miall, 1987:35).

3.3.1.4. Subtheme 1.4: Participants' challenges in relation to marital status as a requirement for adoption

The applicant's marital status also took the center stage as one of the challenges making the adoption process difficult for the participants. As indicated further below, it emerged during the interviews with BG, MB, MV and CF that one of the documents required was a marriage certificate.

BG explained her predicaments by saying, *“The office of social welfare requires one to produce among other things a marriage certificate of which in most cases some people are customarily married but are in a position to adopt the child.”*

In the case of MB, the issue was not just a marital requirement. Her effort of proving her African traditional marriage was dismissed because she was not married from the western tradition. Therefore, it was believed that the adoptive parents had to have had a western wedding, which was solemnised by a marriage officer, and a marriage certificate signed and provided. In other words, adoptive parents were made to believe that customary marriage was not enough for a successful adoption process. This is what MB had to say, *“There is an issue of marriage certificates which are required documents to be attached on the application for adoption. Some people do not have them because they were married under the customary law. This deters some people from continuing with the adoption process. This other couple was customarily married, they were asked for a marriage certificate, which they did not have. They had to rush to get married in court so that they could continue with the application”.*

Besides the marriage certificate serving as a proof of marriage, it emerged that in some instances participants had to be accompanied by their partners or show some form of approval by their partners in writing. In alluding to this challenge, MV shared her experiences by saying, *“My husband would not deny me anything I wanted. He had always been supportive of my ideas but he would not accompany me to the offices. It was required that he writes a letter showing that he approves of the adoption, that he is in agreement with it and knows about it. The fact that I was doing the application alone made the Social Worker question the kind of relationship that exists between my husband and I.”*

Participants were not only frustrated by the requirements of marriage itself, but also the way the quality of their marriages were scrutinised by the officials in an effort to determine their suitability for adoption. MB explained her frustrations pertaining to the way her marriage was scrutinised by saying, *“The Social Workers want to know everything, details*

about very personal and intimate issues.... They want to know if your marriage is solid or not. That is if you are happy in the marriage or not.”

The sentiments shared by MB above were supported by CF who told the researcher that, *“[The] quality of the marital relationship is assessed, I do not know how the Social Worker can know how happy a marriage is.”*

The frustrations raised by the participants in relation to the marriage requirements and the manner in which their marriages were scrutinised is noted by Chitsika (2017:90) who observed that majority of potential adoptive parents do not have the complete and up-to-date information on the adoption process in Zimbabwe. This suggests that although some of the above concerns may be legit, some may not necessarily be true. In Nigeria for instance, both single individuals and married couples may adopt however, a single person will not be allowed to adopt a child of the opposite sex except in extra ordinary circumstances (Aluyor & Salami 2017:1).

The requirements for adoption as indicated by the participants and categorised in the above-presented subthemes should further be interpreted in the broader context of the EST. According to the EST, the individual’s live evolves around various systems namely, the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem (Hong et al. 2011; Liao, 2016; Smith-Acuna, 2011:21). The requirements of adoption as informed by the policy reflects the impact of the macrosystem on the participants’ pursuit of adoption. These policy requirements as narrated by the participants cause some difficulties in the process and leave them frustrated by the system.

3.3.2. Theme 2: Participants’ challenges in relation to negative attitudes by family and relatives as impediments for adoption

The negative attitudes held by families and relatives in the process of adoption was reported to be an interference with what the participants considered private affairs. The

interviews conducted with CF, JS, BG, MB, MV and CC were extracted in support of this theme.

In the case of CF, the involvement of family became a challenge when he had to inform members of the family about his decision to adopt. CF explained his predicament by saying, *“Even if they were to consider applying for an adoption order, the decision has to be made known to significant members of the extended family. These relatives usually do not support one’s initiative to adopt an OVC. It is against the norms of most families to take an unknown child and make them part of the family.”*

The sentiments alluded to by CF above were also supported by JS, who told the researcher how members of her relatives could not support their decision to adopt. JS is quoted in the following extract, *“Generally a person faces a lot of resistance from relatives when they decide to adopt an OVC...while our relatives had applauded my aunt for adopting her deceased brother’s son, our decision to adopt was not met with a good reaction. Most of our close relatives did not support it. Most even offered to give us their own children so that we could have children to live within our home. JS explained further. “We had a major challenge trying to get the child to be accepted by the extended family; especially my husband relatives were extremely difficult.”*

For BG, relatives did not have an issue with her assisting children wherever they are. The issue was when she decided to bring a child permanently into her home. His utterances were captured as follows, *“It is generally unacceptable by one’s relatives for one to bring an OVC in to the family permanently. My relatives would tell me that they understand that I want to help children, but they advised me to help the children wherever they will be and not bring them permanently to my home.”*

MV explained how the entire family wanted to be part of the process since it has some repercussions for them. This is what MV told the researcher, *“This is Zimbabwe, we have our beliefs and experiences that make people reluctant to accept an OVC in the family.”*

All family members even extended family wants to be involved for they say that adoption has repercussions that affect the whole family.”

It was also established during some of the interviews that some of the relatives and family members were not in support of adoption of OVCs who were not from their family. The main reason for this were linked to the superstitious beliefs of avenging spirits causing havoc in the family due to raising children who are not of their bloodline. The interviews conducted with **CC**, **MB**, and **MV** as extracted below supported this revelation.

During the interview with CC, it emerged that the family wanted to be part of the process because it somehow affect them. They believed that bringing a stranger in the family has some negative consequences, which might affect them. This is what CC said, *“The impact of having an outsider is not just felt by the immediate family living with her or him. All the people related to that family which will be taking care of the stranger are also affected. The effects of bringing a stranger into the family are usually negative; this is what is usually believed. This usually has to do with the way one’s ancestors get along with the spirits from the adopted child’s clan.”*

CC further explained, the challenges he personally encountered with his family, *“...my mother said I wanted to destroy the family for if the child dies while in the family, a lot of things might be demanded from the family to appease her spirit. These ideas about adoption did not disturb me. Some I found illogical to the extent that I would have a hard time trying not to laugh, but I also knew that these people had a serious conviction that was making the worst decision of my life. I was more concerned about ruining relationships and how my adopted child would be accepted by the bigger family.”*

In the case of MB, the adoption process resulted in some form of conflict between him, his parents and siblings who are of the view that adoption will lead to some problems particularly if the child were to die. MB’s own words were extracted from the interview as follows, *“My point is, the adoption kind of drove a wedge between my parents, siblings and I. My siblings accuse me and my wife of creating problems not only for ourselves but*

for them as well. They say avenging spirits of our adopted child's ancestors are likely to attack our whole clan. They point out that all might be rosy for us now because the child is still alive, if she dies it will be a different story. This distressed my wife and I for some time, the continuous questions and accusations but now we are no longer concerned about what people say or think. The child is ours and we will treat it just as we would have our own biological daughter."

In addition to the above challenges associated with the negative attitudes held by the family and relatives, the study further revealed that, some of the relatives and family members have been known to disown or shun their own for adopting OVCs who were not related to them. MV elaborates on this point, *"Some of the few people whom I know to have adopted a child have had relatives not visiting them for some time. Even their own parents, they shunned them. Many extended family members view a relative who adopts an orphan he or she is not related to as a misfit and a person who is not up to no good. We were socialised to revere blood ties and not temper with them by bringing in "unknown" children into the fold."*

The findings pertaining to the negative attitudes held by members of the relatives and families in relation to adoption of an OVC shows that participants' families and relatives tend to find it difficult to accept adopted children who are not from their 'bloodline' or related to them. As can be noted above the families of adoptive parents fear that the adopted children could have a negative effect on their family structure as well as relationship with ancestors. The view held by the participants corroborates with Agbo's (2014:87) findings on the Nigerian study of the socio-cultural challenges of child adoption, which revealed that adopting an unknown child is generally not acceptable and adoptive parents usually face negative reaction from the family and community. As observed by Agbo (2014:88), adoption in Eastern Nigeria is not common and it occurs mainly among educated people whose adopted children suffer discrimination and denied inheritance. Agbo (2014:87) also noted that many traditional communities in Nigeria do not allow an adopted child to participate in sharing communal land. Furthermore, they are also not permitted to inherit the staff of office of the family (a position and honour given to the

eldest man in a village or community). This type of attitude towards the adoption will discourage parents who may wish to adopt children. In further highlighting the negative attitudes towards the adoptive child, Onwuka (2013:1) argues that an adopted child is viewed by the family and community as not their real son or daughter because they would want a child that is recognised as biological son or daughter by the society. He states that adoption is still stigmatised. According to Agbo (2014:87), this type of attitude towards discourages child adoption.

The negative attitudes towards adoption appears not to be an issue among family members and relatives. In her Ethiopian study of the challenges associated with facilitating child adoption for example, Engida (2018:80) found in that participants faced a problem of low community perception on adoption. The study found that it is considered as unacceptable by the society to care and rear adopted children. This attitude was also found in Kenya wherein Stuckenbruck (2012:83) established in his study of the rights of children deprived of parental care that in most cases family members only take care of children who are not biologically theirs because there is a blood tie, however this act would not be extended to a child unknown to them. As an addition Onwuka (2013:1) also argued that an adopted child is viewed by the family and community as not their real son or daughter as they are not biologically their son or daughter.

In underscoring the challenge associated with the attitudes held by members of the family and relatives, Nickman (1985:380) asserts that the social concept of adoption contains elements of rejection and relinquishment. Furthermore, his studies found adopted children expressed a loss of status because of stigmatisation from within the family or society. Because of these beliefs, feelings of self-worth or self-identity may be elicited on part of the adoptive parents (Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Esau 2000:382).

In further looking at these findings from the EST point of view, the impact of the microsystem on the participants is apparent. In terms of the microsystem the interaction between the participants and close family members will influence the participants' experiences (Ceci, 2006:1; Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017:3; Kiraly et al. 2017:31; Smith-

Acuna, 2011:21). In this context, participants' narratives attest to the influence of these interactions on their experiences/perceptions of adoption.

3.3.3. Theme 3: Participants' challenges in relation to cultural beliefs and practices as impediments for adoption

Following the challenges relating to the families and relatives, participants highlighted a number of challenges, which they believed emanated from the cultural beliefs and practices held by members of the community. Amongst those who shared the challenges that build up to this theme were MV, JS, CF and CC. MV explained how adoption may lead to a danger of avenging spirits in case of a death of the adopted child, *"There are issues to do with "ngozi", avenging spirits, if a stranger is to be buried by people he or she is not related to by blood."* MV further explained how the adopted child could bring misfortune, bad luck, *"There are also fears that the child might have unclean spirits (spirits of witchcraft or of stealing) following her, these are said to bring bad luck to the whole clan."*

In the case of JS, the issue was the manner in which people regard totems as important and therefore unable to compromise their totems for adoption. This is how she told her story, *"The Shona people, mainly the Zezurus or Karangas [the Shona Tribes] might call someone they share the same totem with, a relative; but they would not usually go to the extent of living with that person on a permanent basis. This shows that it is difficult for someone to take a child whose ancestry or totem they do not know and live with that child for good."*

Just like JS above, CF also alluded to the importance of totems and its impact on adoption. This is what she told the researcher, *"Zimbabweans also happen to value blood relations and knowing the totem of the person they are staying with. However, in this country, it is difficult to know the relatives or biological parent of the child one wants to adopt. Totems are that important to many people here. They would not want to live with someone whom they have no clue to his or her past, relations or origins. So, an OVC*

usually does not know any relative so she or he will not know anything about totems and surnames.”

Moreover, *MB* added that another challenge in relation to the community's cultural beliefs and practices was that there was a danger of bringing a person with a strange spirit into their house since it has the danger to anger the ancestral spirits. This is how *MB* narrated her predicament, *“In our culture, adopting an OVC has implications that are spiritual. Elders are concerned that you will be bringing a person with a “strange” spirit into the family. Your own ancestral spirits might fight with the spirits of that child’s ancestors. In our traditional religion, it is these ancestral spirits that protects the tribe, if they are somehow offended, they withdraw their support. They are said to protect against misfortunes of various kinds...The ancestors will not only withdraw their support, as it is believed. They will begin fighting the family by causing bad luck. This is to force the individuals in the family to rectify things, correct their misdeeds. If they withdraw their support, they must be appeased in order to protect the family or tribe again. So, it is normal that many fear the wrath of the ancestors because nobody wants misfortunes in their life.*

MB explained further, *“The trouble one is accused of starting is breaking the protective hedge the ancestors offer as protection to the family by bringing in a child with an unknown totem to the family. Many extended family members view a relative who adopts an orphan he or she is not related to as a misfit and a person who is not up to no good. We were not raised up that way. We were socialised to revere blood ties and not temper with them by bringing in “unknown” children into the fold.”*

The views expressed by the participants in terms of the above is shared by various scholars. Whereas Omeire Iheriohanma, Osita-Njoku, and Omeire (2015:65) holds that adopting is an aberration and culturally abominable, Oladokun et al. (2010:48) argues that adoption is still stigmatised. It is therefore not surprising that participants raised the above challenges given the views held by scholars such as Omeire et al. (2015:65) who state that adoption is considered alien to most traditional African cultures.

Besides the challenges of cultural beliefs and practices, CC explained how adoptive children also face challenges of being called names and shunned upon. CC alluded to his plight by saying, *“So adoptive parents usually face challenges from their relatives and from the community. The child may be referred to by unpleasant and at times derogatory names like “gora” meaning wild cat and a whole lot of other unkind names.”*

Since African traditional systems has always encouraged informal adoption of relatives' children, there may be need to consider giving totems to OVC so that they can be adopted by people with same totem or revisit the Children's Act to open up adoption processes to the public including disclosure of biological parents so that people do not feel threatened by a “strange child”. Further stigmatising labels like illegitimate child or invalid woman should be removed from the act as they discourage protection of children and women. These days, in Zimbabwe totems are simply social labels that do not mean have the same value as in the past, it is often assumed that all people with the same totem are related by blood, but this may not hold true always.

Prior studies show that there are African perspectives which also concur with the above-mentioned challenges in relation to cultural beliefs and practices as impediments for adoption. According to Omeire et al. (2015:69) the subject of child adoption evokes mixed reactions from different persons and cultures. He adds that to some, it is a wholesome practice and socially accepted whilst to others, it is an aberration and culturally abominable.

For instance, in Eastern Nigeria, child adoption has never been acceptable culturally before pre-colonial era. According to Oladokun et al. (2010:48), in Igbo communities, adoption is still a stigma. Omeire et al. (2015:69) states that this assertion is true because in Eastern Nigeria people do not easily accept a child whose biological make up is foreign as a legitimate child in the family. This is also the case in most Black Zimbabwean societies, especially with strong rural background. The Herald dated 28 February 2018 reported that although child adoption is done, it was still culturally shunned upon in the Shona and Ndebele culture. Omeire et al. (2015:69) also notes that this was the case in

the Igbo culture where it was considered alien and no matter how rich an adopted child might be, he could not be a traditional ruler in the community. It was also argued by Ameh, Kene, Onuh, Okohue, Umeora and Anozie (2007:376) that adoption of babies is bringing a lot of problems that are against people's way of life and should discontinue. Hence, Omeire et al. (2015:70) believes that it is due to cultural beliefs and norms that babies are aborted by their unmarried and inexperienced mothers for fear of the children being rejected by the society simply because their biological fathers are unknown.

According to Adewunmi *et al* (2012:367) another social implication is that the treatment meted for adopted children was a cause for concern. It was noted that the children due to rejection experience emotional trauma, low self-esteem and identity crisis. Many other issues so intrinsic to the adoption experience arise when the adoptee reached adolescence. At this time, there is acute awareness of the fact that the society in which they belong had a negative attitude towards them. Hence, the children developed negative behaviour as a sign of retaliation and rebellion for example running away, committing suicide or developing behavioural disorders like fighting, robbery etc. Such behaviour adds fuel to the traditional African culture perceptions that the ancestors have not embraced the adopted child as he or she are not of their bloodline or the adopted child's ancestors are calling him back thus he or she is rebelling from the adoptive parents (Adewunmi *et al*, 2012:367; Oladokun *et al*, 2009:85; Aniebue & Aniebue, 2008:125). According to Avidime, Ameh, Adesiyun, Ozed-Williams, Nathaniel, Aliyu, Ojabo, and (2013:263) this is not surprising since every aspect of child-bearing and rearing in Traditional African culture is largely influenced by culture. Furthermore, this culture holds procreation in high esteem and children are seen as priceless benefits of marriage (Aniebue & Aniebue, 2008:7).

Nwaoga (2013) states that there are varieties of cultural issues surrounding child adoption practices and discussions. He adds that just as cultural practices have implication on childbearing, so also culture influences couple's decision towards adoption. As a matter of fact, most of the circumstances in which adoption occur in most African countries like Zimbabwe, that is, infertility, gender completion, desire for an heir to sustain lineage and

inherit possessions are culture based (Ezugwu, Obi & Onah 2002:214; Nwobodo & Isah 2011:273; Wusu & Isiugo-Abanihe 2006:142). For example, most traditional African cultures literary perceive infertility as unacceptable, such that upon marriage in-laws, parents, family and friends are not only waiting expectantly for news of pregnancy and subsequent child-birth but making babies. These are acts still practiced at most traditional Shona and Ndebele households in Zimbabwe Thus, childless couples would often suffer from a combination of personal, interpersonal, social and religious expectations which brings a sense of failure to them.

The social stigma, psycho social pressures and other consequences often put intense pressure on marriages. Oladokun *et al.* (2009:85) believe that in extreme, they are excluded from leadership and important social events; women are forced out of their marriages or ostracised by their immediate families. Several studies on child adoption in Africa suggest positive attitude, nevertheless, knowledge, acceptability and practice of child adoption are relatively low among infertile couple (Omosun & Kofworola 2011:3). However, Avidime *et al.* (2013:263) argue that despite, the increasing acceptability of child adoption several socio-cultural practices and concerns still constrain people's attitude in the actual practice and process of adoption.

The process of child adoption especially in African countries where there are strong cultural ties amongst family units face a number of ethnic issues and challenges. For instance, the complex ethno-religious behaviours, beliefs and practices makes the formal practice of child adoption seemingly difficult. The prevailing cultural norms do not literally accept adopted children as born children of their adopter. They are rather treated as outcast and bastard, sometimes hated, disrespected and constantly reminded that they do not belong to the family. Nwaoga (2013:707), noted that the ingrained Eastern indigenous ideology of "onyebiarabibia" meaning 'the stranger' which generates a caste system might have contributed to the poor acceptance of an adopted child. Thus, to accord such adopted child all the benefits and privileges of a full-fledged member of the community will be seemly rare.

Interestingly, in the South-western part of Nigeria (Yoruba land) they seem to have a more positive disposition towards child adoption. The Yoruba cultural belief that 'oriomo lo npeomowa'ye' (meaning a child usually attracts yet to be born children to come to the physical realm) strongly suggests support for child adoption (Oladokun *et al*, 2009:86). This belief makes it relatively easier to accept adopted children as a part of the family and community in order to attract the blessings of biological children to the adopters. Nevertheless, Adewunmi *et al.* (2012:367) argue that some Yoruba cultural belief also perceives adopted children as bastards with likelihood of anti-social behaviours. As a result, men in infertile marriages are rather encouraged to marry another woman (Oladokun *et al.*, 2009:86) and couples willing to adopt are constrained by the fear of tarnishing their family's good name, should in case the adopted child is indeed anti-social.

The research by Stuckenbruck (2013:93) is also in agreement with the various scholars discussed above as he also confirmed the findings of existing literature regarding cultural taboos and stigma associated with the adoption of children in Africa. A booklet produced by a Kenyan child rights NGO lists several reasons stopping people from adopting, including: "*Some people consider it un-African to adopt*", "*Some people find adoptions stigmatizing as it shows that one is unable to have a child of their own*", or "*Adoptions have been seen as child-buying and hence has a negative connotation*" (Odhiambo-Mabona & Muyonga, 2007:5). Stuckenbruck (2013:101) study reaffirmed such perceptions, but further revealed that what often lies behind such beliefs is the social prohibition of passing on inheritance, especially land, to a child who is not a blood relation, which is intimately connected to the issue of fertility. Unearthing these beliefs is critical to understanding the place formal adoption can have in an African society.

As already seen, caring for children within the extended family is a widely accepted practice in Africa. However, the presumption that such care would entail passing down one's ancestral land or property to these children does not seem to be a natural part of this social agreement in Zimbabwe. Childless couples may decide to 'take' children from other families to secure the continuation of their lineage, but this is either done within traditional, and often rigorous, rituals still cultivated by a few clans and tribes

(Archambault, 2010:233) or it is done in secrecy to avoid public disclosure of their inability to conceive. Adopting an unrelated child into a family by granting this child all the rights secured to birth children and publicly acknowledging the adoption seems to be a relatively new phenomenon, which is slowly being absorbed by African societies, even in Zimbabwe, primarily by the urban middle class, who have often been educated in a western way of life

All the interviewees were of the Christian religion except one; they had either western contacts or experience of urbanization and modernity. Religion plays a very important role in people's lives; it provides the framework upon which decisions are made (Bourdillon, 1990:16). In his book, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim defined religion as "a unified system of beliefs and practices relatives to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them" (Durkheim, cited in Bourdillon 1991:16). Depending on the values of the various social actors with which adoptive parents interacted, conflicts arose.

The cultural beliefs as reported by the participants in this context represent the broader system of the EST which is the macro system. As the level of macrosystem, participants are influenced by among others, the cultural patterns, customs, economic and social factors, bodies of knowledge and symbol (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:1; Hong et al. 2011:867; Liao, 2016:138). The role played by cultural beliefs and practices at this level is so eminent such that this level is even called the "cultural blue print" (Hong et al. 2011:867). Biased stigmatising attitudes as noted by Liao (2016:138) might leave participants as socially prejudiced and as failures.

3.3.4. Theme 4: Participants' challenges in relation to the stigma associated with the child's HIV positive status.

Amid the central concerns that were reported by the participants as the challenges associated with undergoing the process of adoption in Zimbabwe were adoptive parents'

challenges relating to adoptive children. On a scrutiny, the challenge was expressed in parents' challenges in relation to the stigma associated with the child's HIV positive status.

It was established that the social workers were allowed their own opinions to influence adoption decision making for example, after parent **BG** decided to continue with adoption of a baby who was positive HIV, the Social Worker who was responsible for the case discouraged **BG** and speculated on the motive for adoption.

"When we expressed interest in adopting her (child with HIV and AIDS), almost everyone was surprised." (BG)

The adoptive parent expressed disappointment with the conduct of the probation Officer, as well as other hospital staff who went their decision to adopt the child of their choice.

"...The experts and health practitioners should have known best but they showed the worst discriminatory behaviour and attitude." (BG)

These findings should be of great concern as numerous of scholars have stressed the point that discrimination can exacerbate the challenges and psychological problems adopted children already face in HIV/AIDS pandemic (Chase & Aggleton, 2001; Clay, Bond & Nyblade 2003; Geballe, Gruendel, & Andiman, 1995; Gernholtz & Richter, 2004).

After being asked which experts he was referring to he clearly indicated that he meant the Social Workers involved,

"...the Social Workers, they know how vulnerable children living with HIV are. Especially those without parents." He also added that "...the doctors and nurses should be there to dispel people's fears about HIV/AIDS and not help spread stigma and discrimination. Yet they discouraged me, I cannot think of any other reason why they would discourage me, besides stigma and discrimination." (BG)

Stigmatization of OVC with HIV and AIDS was wide spread and it was even visible in some of adoptive parents with some not willing to even consider adopting HIV positive children

“Other people (most of the population), though they have had or have relative(s) with HIV, they cannot shake off stigma against those infected by HIV/AIDS though it has also affected their lives. They continue to discriminate; they cannot imagine adopting an HIV positive child. So children with HIV are not chosen for adoption by prospective adoptive parents.”(BG)

Moreover, stigmatization was also visible from friends and colleagues of the adoptive parents.

“So the problem is not with the lay person in the street only, but some of your colleagues also do not get the concept. Back then, when we adopted our child; my friends who knew about her status asked us if we were not afraid to get HIV/AIDS from the child. I answered with a joke loaded with some truth that we would not be having sex with the child, so the possibility of getting HIV from her was almost zero.” (BG)

There is variation in the extent, effects and nature of stigma and discrimination across regional cultural, socio-economic and gender contexts. Deacon and Stephneyy (2007:7) posit that stigma and discrimination can be affected by various epidemiological factors including stage of epidemic, prevalence, distribution of HIV cases, political factors just to name a few. While this variation does not always imply the need for different interventions to reduce stigma (Ogden & Nyblade, 2005:2), it does suggest that research on adopted children in other contexts may not be directly applicable in sub-Saharan Africa, and even within the region there may be significant difference in children's experiences.

According to Deacon and Stepheney (2007:11) the various kinds of stigma and existing forms of marginalisation or disadvantage have complex and sometimes cumulative relationships, but they can seriously reduce quality of life in infected or affected people. They also add that adopted children may also be more vulnerable to discrimination

because they are often not in as much control of their circumstances as are adults, they often do not know their rights, and may be less able to assert their rights.

Deacon and Stepheney (2007:8) developed a definition of stigma that distinguishes between stigma as ideology and discrimination as practice, and notes the lack of a one-to-one relationship between the two. They add that in order to understand stigma there is a need to understand the effects of stigma better, which may include status loss, related discrimination, internalisation and social withdrawal. Furthermore, the various kinds of stigma and existing forms of marginalisation or disadvantage have complex and sometimes cumulative relationships, but they can seriously reduce quality of life in infected or affected people.

Much of the research on stigma has conflated stigmatising beliefs themselves (unjustified negative things people believe about others that involve a moral judgement), responses to stigma (internalisation of negative beliefs or expected stigma and discrimination), and effects of stigma like discrimination (what people do to disadvantage others). Since unfair discrimination is one of the main reasons why stigma is a problem, many studies define stigma as something that results in discrimination, suggesting that discrimination is the enactment or end point of stigma (Link & Phelan, 2001:379). This position has come out of the tradition of understanding stigma research as a way of identifying and tackling human rights issues in HIV and AIDS work. Thus, work like Parker and Aggleton (2003:17), for instance emphasises the way in which stigma and discrimination follow the fault-lines of existing social marginalisation. This links to a broader effort to link HIV prevention to poverty relief and improvement in women and children's rights.

Various scholars suggest that stigma and discrimination can exacerbate the challenges and psychological problems adopted children already face in HIV/AIDS pandemic context (Chase & Aggleton, 2001:4; Clay *et al*, 2003:8; Geballe *et al*, 1995:18; Gernholtz & Richter, 2004:911). According to Strode and Barrett-Grant (2001:2) stigma could prevent proper access to education, wellbeing, treatment and care both directly (through abuse, denial of care, forced child labour and loss of inheritance), and indirectly (if children avoid

potentially stigmatising situations such as social interaction, healthcare and educational opportunities because they expect or internalise stigma). Stigma, discrimination and courtesy stigma directed towards the adoptive parents can affect their ability to provide proper psychosocial and material support for children infected or affected by HIV/AIDS (Robertson & Ensink, 1992:47).

Research on adults cannot be extrapolated directly to adopted children because adopted children are likely to be affected by stigma and discrimination in different ways from adoptive parents. Children are developing cognitively, physically and socially and they may interpret, express and react to stigma in different ways from adults. Cree, Kay, Tlisdall and Wallace (2004:15) adds that since the adopted children are particularly vulnerable to courtesy stigma, for instance, that associated with parental HIV status, they might experience stigma more intensely than adults do. Deacon and Stepheney (2007:17) also add that children may also be more vulnerable to discrimination because they are often not in as much control of their circumstances as are adults, they often do not know their rights, and may be less able to assert their rights.

The stigma associated with the child's HIV positive status as one of the challenges faced by the participants is part of the macrosystem of the EST. Stigma in this instance reflects the general beliefs and attitudes held by members of society as influenced by their customs and cultural practices. Some of these practices might also be shaped by religious systems, the education system, the political system or even the legal system which might have laws that discourage adoption.

3.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The main purpose of the chapter was to present and discuss the first set of the research findings which are the findings pertaining to the challenges experienced by adoptive parents in the adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe. The presentation of findings included the socio-demographic profiles of the participants and the themes and subthemes relating to the challenges experienced by adoptive parents in the adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe.

Each of the socio-demographic features was discussed in the context of some existing literature to develop a meaning in the context of literature. Similarly, the themes and subthemes supporting the challenges experienced by the adoptive parents in adoption, were discussed in the context of some existing literature and the adopted theoretical framework. The next chapter focuses on the second set of findings which is the findings on the experiences and support services available for adoptive parents in the adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY ADOPTIVE PARENTS IN THE ADOPTION OF OVCS IN ZIMBABWE AND USED TO MANAGE SUCH CHALLENGES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the researcher presented the first part of the research findings wherein the focus was on the challenges associated with adoption of OVC in Zimbabwe. The current Chapter is a continuation of the previous chapter and its focus is on the experiences and support services for adoptive parents in the adoption of OVCS. Like in the previous Chapter, the themes and subthemes presented here will be discussed in the context of the prevailing literature and the theoretical framework adopted for the study with the aim of comparing and contrasting them with literature and the principles enshrined in the adopted theoretical principles.

4.2. FINDINGS ON THE PARTICIPANTS' CHALLENGES IN THE ADOPTION OF OVCS IN ZIMBABWE

This section is a continuation of the findings based on the challenges experienced by the participants in the adoption of OVCS as presented in Chapter Three. The rationale for the chapters to be divided into two was due to the volume of data under these themes. The aim of this section is to present the last three themes relating to the challenges experienced by the participants.

4.2.1 Theme 5: Participants' challenges in relation to lack of resources for adoption

What emerged from the findings in relation to the challenges associated with the adoption process was the lack of resources within the department. This as alluded to by the participants led to some unnecessary delays of the process. Participants' narratives in relation to these challenges were further categorised, giving rise to the challenges in

relation to inadequate social workers and the challenges in relation to inadequate transport for house visits.

4.2.1.1. Subtheme 5.1: Participants' challenges in relation to few Social Workers available to assist with adoption

Participants highlighted some challenges in relation to inadequate Social Workers tasked with the responsibility of assisting them with adoption. The main issue for **BG** and **CF** was that social workers were not always available to assist with the adoption process. This is what MB shared her challenges, which involved making several trips to try to see the Social Worker who was not always available, *"We had to make endless trips to the Social Welfare offices. Sometimes the Officer dealing with our case would not be in the office but we would have made an appointment. At the hospital, they were two Social Workers, but the senior Medico-Social Worker was almost always absent from work."*

CF WAS told the researcher how she would struggle to get hold of the Social Worker who was working on her case even through both physical visits and telephonically. She explained her plight by saying, *"She [the Social Worker] would call last minute to cancel the appointment when we would have cancelled most planned activities for the day already. This was very disappointing. Sometimes I would just turn up at her office during working hours to drop off letters from references and I would not find her there and nobody seemed to know where she was...When I later call asking if she had seen the letters, she would say she is yet to get them. If I ask her what is the next thing I am required to do, she would then say she will have to check for what is still missing in my file. That would be it, I would not hear from her until I call again."*

Some of the participants indicated that once the adoption process was completed, they would again be confronted with the challenges of access to the Social Workers who were never available to render any support to them. This situation was explained by CB who said, *"She did not check on how the child was coping at my house since it was a new*

environment for the child or if he was giving me any problems. I am used to this kind of scenario.”

In another interview with **CF**, she explained how the Social Worker ceases to be available. She explained, *“I know once parents have an adoption order, the Social Worker ceases to be the OVC’s guardian ad litem but I believe the family should receive support in one way or the other if they need it. The only way the Social Worker can know if help is needed is if she or he keeps communicating with the client.”*

Like **CB** and **CF** above, **MV** also found himself confronted by challenges after the adoption was finalised, without any support from the Social Worker. **MV** said, *“Other adoptive parents after the adoption they do not know where to receive support even when they happen to need it. Unlike foster parents who are constantly receiving support or monitoring visits from Social Workers, once an applicant adopts a child they seem to be on their own”.*

In instances where participants manage to access the Social Worker, they somehow felt the pressure of encouraging them to work on their case. This retention took various forms like as indicated by JS, buying lunch for them. JS shared this with the researcher, *“The Social Worker is required by law to pay home visits to the home of the couple that applies for adoption. It will make you look like a better couple if you have very good food ready for lunch when the Officer pays a visit for assessment purposes. You inform him or her in advance that when they come they should expect to have lunch with your family. You can also do them personal favours, if you get the opportunity. That way, they are motivated to help you through the process more quickly. I do not see it as bribing someone as such. It is just motivating a person. Your case will always be on their mind that way. ... and you also need to buy lunch at times so that the Social Worker will view you in a favourable light (laughs).”*

As they go through these challenges, participants such as MB felt that perhaps it would be crucial to keep some officials closer to them in one way or another through various

forms of incentives. MB explained how he was tempted to bribe some Social Workers in order to get things done. He explained this challenge by saying, “*As I noted before, in Zimbabwe, to get things done at an acceptable pace, one has to be prepared to part with a significant amount of money. It is against my beliefs to bribe people. I decided to view it as motivating the Probation Officers and even the police when I needed my fingerprints to be cleared quickly.*”

The role of Social worker in child adoption is highly instrumental. The process cannot really unfold without the Social Worker. It is therefore not surprising that the above participants raised some concerns about Social Workers who were inaccessible, resulting in a delayed process. According to Baccara et al. (2010:8), the central role played by Social Workers in adoption made them prone to blames in the administrative and court procedural delays. Authors like Matthias and Zaal (2009:295) noted some concerns over inadequate human resources within the government departments of social services at most developing countries. In supporting Matthias and Zaal’s (2009:295) view, Dawes (2011:5) reports that the delays in processing, screening and placement of children are mainly caused by shortages in human resources given the few registered social workers in most African countries.

Participants of the current study also felt that the Social Worker could have done more in supporting them to enable the child to adjust in the new home. Reports made by participants in this study were not unique. According to Masuka et al. (2012:63), the Zimbabwean DSS is heavily pressed by the challenges of shortages of social workers who can act as *guardian ad litem* during the adoption process. A study conducted by Wyatt, Maupedziwa and Rayment (in Masuka et al. 2012:63) demonstrated that in 2010, the department had a total of 39% vacant positions. The shortage of social workers clearly affect the quality of service rendered to adoption. Handwerker (1991:8) for example, several parents reported a need for intensive in-home therapy, to assist them in stabilizing a child in their home. Braun and Clarke (2006) whose adoptive parents who participated his study also reported the need for additional financial and policy supports address the needs of children they would have adopted reported similar views.

4.2.1.2. *Subtheme 5.2: Participants' challenges relating to lack for social workers to visit them*

What transpired from the current study is that participants felt that Social Workers do not have enough transport to reach out their families and this led to some delays in the adoption process.

MB explained how he found himself caught up in a difficult situation as he found his Social Worker did not have a vehicle to conduct some visits but at the same time when he tries to offer her a transport she refused. This is how MB narrated his plight, *"They tell you that they do not have a vehicle in order for them to make a home visit. You offer to assist them with transport and they tell you that their work regulations do not allow them to use clients' vehicles."*

CF was also confronted with a challenge of a Social Worker who did not have transport to conduct home visits, *"The Social Workers also lack adequate resources which are necessary for them to conduct their duties effectively. Just imagine one home visit and a person says they are in a position to write a report on whether you can be a good parent or not! I do not think one home visit is adequate but the Social Worker will site transport challenges if you ask them about this issue."*

According to **CB**, there seem to be a general problem of resources within the department and social workers do not have vehicles to conduct home visits as part of their investigations, *"It seems as if Social Welfare does not have adequate resources to make follow-ups. When you go to the offices, the Social Worker is swamped with people waiting to be attended to. They do not have a vehicle for home visits and other duties."*

The lack of resources like vehicles is not a new phenomenon for social workers. A South African study of enablers and barriers faced by social workers in undertaking advocacy in Johannesburg by Chibone and Chikazi (2017:11) for example reveal that social workers reported a severe shortage of resources which hampers the nature and quality

of services rendered to the clients. Observations in relation to the challenge of vehicles for social workers in Zimbabwe was also made by Mushongera (2015:61) who note that the critical shortage of vehicles for social workers made it impossible for them to make regular home visits to their clients.

4.2.2 Theme 6: Challenges in relation to the prolonged nature of the adoption process

Amongst the administrative challenges of adoption were those that relate to the prolonged adoption process, which participants believed, was unnecessary. The extracts presented in support of this subtheme are those from the interviews conducted with **TK**, **MV** and **BG**.

TK explained his experiences of the process by saying, *“The process of adopting a child is very long, time and energy consuming and tedious as well.”*

MV explained how he thought the process would be quick and got surprised when it became a long process, which he says requires some patient from the applicant, *“... adoption is for patient applicants because it takes time in most cases. This is what most applicants do not like. The police might tell you that if you pay ten dollars you will get your clearance after three days but believe me, if you are fortunate, you will get it after seven working days. It is only that I thought that the process of adoption would take a few months. I was wrong. I was also used to getting what I want the moment I wanted it. It has taken other people, at times two years to get an adoption order. This is partly because they do not fully co-operate with Social Workers and partly because a lot is involved in the process.”*

MV further explains how he came to understand the significance of this long process, *“One cannot hurry the adoption process. A lot of papers require processing. Much detail about the adopting parents is required especially on levels of income and some other information, which the applicants might consider too personal. This information will help*

the Social Worker to see if the applicant is able to take of the child or will be suitable to be the child's parent.”

In the case of **BG**, this long process together with the documents and amount of information required was discouraging and cumbersome, *“The first being that the process itself is not an easy one, it takes time. The department of Social welfare requires one to do a lot of paper work, which sometimes is discouraging and a bit cumbersome. The office also wants to know every detail about the adopting parents especially on levels of income and some other information even if it is personal.”*

It could not take the researcher as a surprise for participants to raise concerns about the long adoption process, which is characterised by delays and inquiries into their private affairs. The views shared by the above-quoted participants is shared by some scholars who believe that simplifications of the administrative process of which facilitate placements and reduce waiting periods, while still providing adequate protection for children, are warranted (Ainsworth & Hansen, 2011:12). Authors like Engida (2018:80) reports that child adoption in countries like Ethiopia face numerous challenges as well with the main one being its bureaucratic system. One of the adoptive parents who participated in his study reported that officials were bored when facilitating the child adoption process because the bureaucratic system, took so much time that some parents ended up discontinuing with the process.

4.2.3 Theme 7: Participants' challenges relating to derogatory remarks

One of the concerns raised by the participants in relation to the challenges associated with adoption was the negative remarks often directed at them because of adoption, which is often perceived as due to infertility. Participants like **SD**, **JS**, **CC** and **MV** were particularly concerned about these remarks.

SD explained how one of her relatives used a hurtful remark because of their decision to adopt. **SD** said, *“There was also this other time when a relative from my wife's side made a hurtful remark. We were casually discussing about adoption and she said that as a*

couple, we had no choice but to bring a bastard in our lives since we were barren. That hurt a lot and we thought that was so insensitive.”

CC explained how derogatory remarks are often used to refer to children who have been adopted, *“The child may be referred to by unpleasant and at times derogatory names like gora⁵ meaning wild cat and a whole lot of other unkind names.”*

Like **SD** above, **JS** experienced some hurtful remarks from people who would call him names. This is what he said, *“Some of the things that are said are very painful. In our instance, people would ask us if barrenness have made us to lose our minds. We were seen as people who had been driven insane by our failure to conceive.”*

This is how **TK** explained his challenge which first started with some difficulties of accepting that he and his wife had an infertility problem and later on became confronted with negative remarks from people, *“As a couple who had fertility problems, we had a hard time accepting that we cannot conceive. Accepting our condition as a couple was the first challenge. People use hurtful words to describe barrenness in people.”*

As evident from the above extracts, participants were not only confronted by the challenges associate with adoption itself, they also had to deal with some negative and often derogatory remarks made by people some of whom were members of their own relatives. These challenges could be attributed to the findings made by other researchers that adoption can and does involve some form of stigma (Baltimore, 2008:4) who hold that infertility is a common health problem with devastating psychosocial consequences on the affected couples especially in the African context. It is quiet unfortunate that some people tend to assume that people resort to adoption due to infertility, Oladokun, Arulogun, Oladokun, Morhason-Bello, Bamgboye, Adewole & Ojengbebe, (2009:80) also established that even when a couple would have adopted they still suffered from the conflux of personal, interpersonal, social, and religious expectations, usually from the

⁵ A Shona word for wildcat.

society, which brings a sense of failure on their part. In Kenyan study of the rights of children deprived of parental care for instance, Stuckenbruck (2013:92) reports that the taboo of infertility was constantly raised amongst his participants as the reason for adoption, while at the same time being a deterrent for more people from adopting because of the stigma associated with the inability to conceive and with the idea that sterile couples resort to buying babies. This plight is also noted by Collins (2010:134) who assert that some of the adoptive parents still suffer from the agony of infertility, which is manifested in a form of emotional disturbances, depressive illness and marital disharmony.

Contrary to what the participants are saying as supported by some literature above, some studies have shown that the couples who consider adoption grieve less about their childless challenge and have better emotional support compared with their peers (van den Akker, 2001:150; Akin, 2011:1001). In some instances, families often shared children with relatives who were unable to bear them as a sign of solidarity and protection of the glan from the inherent shame of infertility (Oladokun et al., 2010:367; Agbo, 2014:208). This is contrary to the remarks made by participants of the current study, particularly people like SD above whose relatives were among those who mocked her for her infertility.

4.3 Participants' experiences in relation to adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe

One of the main questions that the study sought to answer related to the experiences that adoptive parents had in relation to adoption of OVCs as practiced in Zimbabwe. In responding to questions around their experiences, participants alluded to a number of issues, which were analysed and clustered into two main themes: the reasons for participants to adopt and the participants' emotional reaction to adoption. As introduced and discussed further see below, these themes were further categorised into two subthemes.

4.3.1 Theme 8: Participants' narratives on their motivations to consider adoption

There were a number of factors that motivated participants put forward as the basis for their consideration of adoption. On a scrutiny, these reasons were categorised and gave rise to two subthemes: the need to have children whom they can consider their own and the pure altruistic reasons, which related to the need to care for children in need. These subthemes are presented further below.

4.3.1.1. *Subtheme 8.1: Participants' need for children whom they can consider their own as a motivation for adoption*

Some of the participants alluded to the reasons for considering adoption as motivated by the need to have children whom they consider their own. Amongst these participants were **BG, JS, TK, MB** and **CC**.

This is what transpired during the researcher's interview with **BG** who explained that he had to consider adoption following their inability to give birth to a biological child, *"My wife had a lot of miscarriages. The doctor told us that it would not do my wife any good if she continued to fall pregnant. We gave up trying to have a baby and devoted our time to helping children who were in hospital, especially because of cancer. I can say by adopting this child, we also fulfilled the need we had; the need to have our own child."*

During the researcher's interview with **JS**, it emerged that he considered adoption an option for parents like him who are for whatever reason, unable to have children. This is how **JS** narrated his story, *"It seems as if adoption is an option to be considered only when you are unable to have your own biological children and if you do not have children who are orphaned you are related to. As for us, we wanted to adopt because we wanted a child in our lives. We had failed to have our own biological child."*

TK expressed similar sentiments with **BG** and **JS** above, wherein he explained how infertility became the reason for them to consider adoption. **TK** said, *"As a couple who*

had fertility problems, we had a hard time accepting that we cannot conceive. Accepting our condition as a couple was the first challenge. People use hurtful words to describe barrenness among couples.”

The need to have a child whom he could call his own was also a motive for MB to consider adoption. **MB** alluded to this experience by saying, *“The issue is that by adopting a child, a couple wants to fulfil a need in most cases. It may be a need to have a child one calls their own.*

In the case of **CC**, his inability to bore children at a particular age was one of the motive for him to consider adoption. This is what **CC** told the researcher, *“Most adoptive parents adopt OVCs because they want to fulfil the need to be a parent, to have a child or children in the family who they can call their own. To be honest, most people, me included have this urge that seems innate to have a child at a certain age. When a couple is childless, society kind of looks down on that couple. This might seem to be changing but in reality, it is still the same. Infertile couples face stigma even if they are people who would have succeeded in life.”*

CC continued to share his experiences in relation to the need for him and his couple to have their own child, *“Our visits to the offices were very frequent but they would not last more than 5 minutes. As a couple, we had problems getting a child whom we thought would be perfect for us. We thought that it would be ideal to adopt a very young child, newly born would have been ideal for us. We finally had to settle for an older child for we realised that if we wait for an infant we were likely to wait for a very long time. We thought the younger the child, the greater the possibility that the bond between us and her would become stronger.”*

The revelations made by this study under the theme: participants’ reasons for adoption is not surprising given some of the African views and attitudes around fertility. In some African communities and cultures, a married woman without a child has no honour in her husband’s family and the inability to have children is always considered her fault. It is

therefore not surprising for authors like Ezugwu *et al* (2002:214) to highlight paramount importance for a family to have biological children for acceptance. In most instances, an alternative step is to adopt a child for the family will have continuity. What the participants alluded to in terms of the need to have children of their own as the reasons for adoption tend to support some of the findings of the previous studies and the views held by some authors. According to Agbo (2014:90) for instance in Eastern Nigeria childlessness is the top most reason for child adoption, which may be due to infertility in the family or death where all the woman's children or child might have died when she cannot give birth any more. This is a view shared by most African adoptive parents (Adewunmi *et al.*, 2012:368; Omosun & Kafworola, 2011:3; Agbo, 2014:90; Stuckenbruck, 2013:90; Aniebue & Aniebue, 2008:125) observed that infertility is amongst the biggest drivers of adoption. In spite of the need for children in order to be accepted, Agbo (2014:90) believes that there is a male child syndrome that drives many African traditional families to adopt. In other words, some of the parents tend to resort to adoption in order for the family to have a male child. This is particularly understandable given Ezugwu *et al.*'s (2002:214) postulation that the perception in African tradition is that women are considered responsible for a couple's inability to bear male children. A married woman without a son is therefore usually desperate or pressurised to adopt a male child in order to save her marriage (Nachinab, Donkor & Naab, 2019:1). However, there was no evidence to support this view from the current study.

Besides the literature evidence in support of the reasons raised by the participants, some literature evidence pointed to the contrary, with researchers like Downey (2010:2) asserting that parents adopt to expand their existing families and provide safe, stable homes for homeless children. Another reason for adoption as noted by Adewunmi *et al.* (2012:369) is gender selection where the children in the family are of the same gender and the couple is in need of the one they lack, the tendency is that such family may resort to adopting the gender they lack.

4.3.1.2. Subtheme 8.2: Altruism as the participants' motivation for adoption

In addition to the need to have children they can consider their own, participants also highlighted reasons relating to altruism, wherein they alluded to the need to care for a child in need as one of the reasons do adopt.

In support of this subtheme, **BG** explained how his involvement in a child welfare program culminated into their decision to adopt. He explained his experiences by saying, *"We were much involved in KidzCan's⁶ programs at Parirenyatwa Group of Hospitals. You know that KidzCan specialises in helping children, especially those diagnosed with Cancer. It was during one of my many visits to the paediatric ward, that I met the child that I later adopted. She had been found dumped in a refuse can. The Police had received an anonymous tip off from the public; they are the ones that brought her to the hospital."*

Altruistic drive appears to have prompted **CF** to consider stepping into the shoes of her deceased friend's child and assume the role of a parent. To her adoption became an option to assist in fulfilling his desire. This is how **CF** narrated her experience, *"I had explained that this child was my deceased friend's daughter, her mother was critically ill and the child was already living with us. I just wanted to formalise things because I felt I had the obligation to care for a friend's child."*

The sentiments echoed by **BG** and **CF** in relation to making a difference in a child's life as indicated above, were also supported by **MV** who told the researcher how him and her partner wanted to make a difference in children who live in difficult circumstances. She explained her desire by saying, *"We wanted to change a life, make a huge contribution in someone's life, rather than just have more children. I wanted to adopt children living in difficult circumstances so as to give them more opportunities."*

⁶ By KidzCan, BG refers to an organisation which is caring for children with cancer and other related conditions.

MB drew from her wife's personal experience of being an orphan, as the main reason why they resorted to adoption of an OVC. According to him, his wife learnt the painful lessons of being an orphan and therefore both thought it necessary to care for OVCs so that they cannot find themselves in a situation in which his wife found herself.

MB narrated this experience by saying, *“As for me, I already had my biological children; the need I had was to make a difference in one way or the other. To invest in a child's life. My wife and her sisters were orphaned at a young age, they had to move from one relative's house to another during their early years of life. Their school fees were paid by well-wishers and sometimes the money was not available for them to pay school fees in time. She was awarded a scholarship after she had passed her Advanced level, which is why she managed to study abroad. That is where I met her. This is the reason why she was excited about us adopting an OVC. She knows how difficult it is for someone to grow up without a permanent home, though circumstances differ from one person to another.”*

In the case of **MV**, she had her own children but simply wanted to add more to her family and this she believed would at the same time assist children who live in difficult circumstances. The extract from the interview conducted with **MV** is as follows, *“I had always wanted to add more children to my family and I began to consider adopting as a way of doing so. I wanted to adopt children living in difficult circumstances so as to give them more opportunities”*.

The findings made in relation to altruism as the reason for African parents to consider adoption is noted by numerous scholars (Adewunmiet *al.*, 2012; Omosun & Kafworola, 2011:3; Agbo, 2014:94; Stuckenbruck, 2013:100; Aniebue & Aniebue, 2008:7). However, according to Agbo (2014:89) in African societies, many families adopt children in need of help especially when such children are relatives. This indicates that, unlike in most developed countries, in terms of altruism kinship adoption was the most preferred acceptable form of kindness towards adopted children. A child may lose his or her parents to death or they may be too poor or too sick to raise the child up. In this case, it is mostly the grandparents, uncles, aunts or even any close relation that adopts the child and raises

him or her up. It is however noteworthy that the views held by Agbo (2014:90) does not enjoy support from the findings of the current study.

It seems to only find support in the utterances made by **CF** above who explained how she felt obliged to care for the child of the deceased child. Amongst the rest of the participants, the reason for adoption was only raised as altruism without any indication of the relationship between the adoptive parent and the adoptive child.

4.3.2. Theme 9: Participants' emotional reaction to adoption

The emotional reactions to adoption was one of the experiences reported by the participants. The data relating to this theme was further categorised into three subthemes: participants' mixed reactions in view of adoption, participants' fears of uncertainties in view of adoption and participants' frustrations in relation to inadequate information provided on the requirements for adoption. These subthemes are further introduced and discussed below,

4.3.2.1. Subtheme 9.1: Participants mixed feelings in reaction to adoption

What emerged during the interviews was that some participants reacted with mixed emotions to the adoption process. This was as participants became confronted with some unexpected events associated with the adoption process. The interviews that supported this subtheme were those that were conducted with **TK, MV and JS**.

TK explained how he found himself confronted by mixed emotions associated with his uncertainty about the decision to adopt and his fear of how the future will bring for him in relation to this decision. He expressed his mixed emotions by saying, *"To tell the truth I was both scared and excited to adopt our child. I was not sure if it was a wise thing to do. I was not sure if I would still feel and express the same kind of love I had for the child at that time if my wife and I happened to conceive in future."*

TK continued to explain his predicament of mixed feelings associated with adoption, *"Adopting an OVC is an uphill task. The decision to adopt itself is not an easy one to make*

for most people. One usually goes through a dilemma of whether it is a good move or not. There is some thought at the back of almost every parent's mind asking what if things go wrong."

MV expressed the fear of being rejected by the child and feeling of uncertainty about the future of his relationship with the child. He expressed his experiences by saying, *"They fear that the child might reject them later in life as she or he searches for his or her biological parents. Questions are sometime always at the back of one's mind as to what will happens if the child's biological parents turn up. Or if the child finds them, will there be any changes to the bond that will have been formed during the years the adoptive parents raised the child. Will the child choose her biological parents over her adoptive parents? For most people, the reason to adopt a child comes from a need to have a child in the family..."*

JS explained how parents who decide to adopt became frustrated and at the same time discouraged by the process. He narrated this view through the following extract, *"Most of the parents usually feel frustrated and discouraged about the whole process since it is taxing both emotionally and physically."*

In supporting this theme, some existing literature shows that parents display various emotions in reacting to adoption, with some feeling detached from their adopted children while some felt rejected by the children. In some studies there were reports of parents having a difficulty of integrating the child within their families and emotionally unprepared to meet the needs of the child (McDonald *et al.* 2009:71) Purvis *et al.* 2015:208). This could indicate that such fears of uncertainty do arise during the process and there may be a need for support from government, family and society to curtail and address these uncertainties before they cause a permanent drift between adoptive parents and the OVCs. According to McDonald *et al* (2009:71) parents who did not feel close to their adopted children cited such reasons as the child's learning difficulties, emotional insincerity, and behavioural problems, and their own feelings of being rejected by the child. These difficulties more frequently arise when the adoption takes place later in

childhood, as later-adopted children tend to have difficulty adjusting to their new homes (Clark, Thigpen & Yates 2006). A study by Thibodeau (2013:51) showed that some adoptive parents feared feeling unable to meet the needs of the adopted children in their care due to the severity of the children's physical ailments.

4.3.2.2. *Subtheme 9.2: Participants' fears of uncertainties in relation to adoption*

In some interviews there was a clear indication that during the process of making their decisions to adopt, participants were confronted by some feelings of an uncertainty, particularly about their relationship with either the child or their significant others. The revelations pertaining to uncertainty were made by **CC**, **MV**, **JS** and **TK**.

CC expressed his uncertainties in relation to adoption by narrating that, *"On a personal level, most adoptive parents struggle with whether the child they intend to adopt will bring more joy than pain in their lives."*

For **MV**, uncertainties were expressed by saying, *"Most adoptive parents have their own fears of whether they have made a good move by deciding to adopt OVC(s)."*

There is also uncertainty in relation to how the child will turn out to be in the future. This uncertainty was expressed by **MV**, *"There is a possibility that the child you adopted may not turn out as you as a parent hoped. But nothing is certain in life."*

In the case of **TK**, excitement about adoption was characterised by the fear of the unknown, which included possibility of a child turning out to be the opposite of what the parents anticipated. This is what **TK** had to say in his own words, *"Even though one will be excited about adopting a child, wondering what the child will turn out to be when they grow up and so on. There is a possibility that something might not go as per plan. Especially in terms of what you expect from the child and the child might actually turn out to be."*

TK explained his predicament further by saying, *“People are usually scared of venturing into the unknown. If people know, things are de-mystified.”*

Just like the above-quoted participants, **JS** was also concerned about the uncertain future especially when coming to the child’s behaviour. **JS** alluded to his concern about an uncertain future by saying, *“You also think about other things that may go wrong when the child is growing up. I was terrified of the possibility that the child might have behavioural problems especially if we disclose to her about the adoption. You wonder what you would do if the child has a medical condition that will be difficult to manage later in life.”* Participants’ experiences in relation to adoption as manifested through their emotional reactions to adoption, particularly through their feeling of uncertainty is noted by researchers like Collins (2010:133) postulating that some adoptive parents reported feeling unprepared to meet the intensive needs of the child or sibling they were pursuing to adopt. They also established that a few parents noted that the children’s sexually acting out behaviours led to significant concerns. A study by Thibodeau (2013:51) showed that some adoptive parents feared being unable to meet the needs of the adopted children in their care due to the severity of the children’s physical ailments. Similar sentiments were reported by Boyd (2013:5), who states that parents feared having difficulty meeting the child’s needs.

4.3.2.3. Subtheme 9.3: Participants’ frustrations in relation to inadequate information provided on the requirements for adoption.

As the process of their application unfolds, participants experienced some frustrations in relation to the manner in which information was provided. They felt that the information was not adequate and in cases where there was information, it was provided in trickles and this they believed was not necessary. These frustrations as reported under this subtheme were particularly raised by **CC, MV, CF, BG, and TK**.

CC explained how scanty information around adoption is leaving people illequipped with regard to adoption, *“Most parents usually have difficulties in accessing information*

pertaining to adoption. In this country, people do not usually discuss adopting OVCs legally. There is barely information on adoption in Zimbabwe on the internet or even printed material. The Children's Act offers some insight on some legal aspects of the adoption process but I believe it does little to equip potential adoptive parents for the process." CC explained his challenges further, "Like other adoptive parents, I had challenges accessing adequate information on the process and procedure of applying for adoption. I had to go to the Social Welfare offices where I asked about the adoption process. I was given very little information; I had to go back again and again to seek clarification and more information."

Similar experiences like **CC** above left **MV** wondering as he needed some light on how to go about adoption in Zimbabwe. This is what **MV** had to say, *"I asked for written material on adoption, they did not have any at the offices. On the internet, there was lots of information about adoption from other countries but did not get anything significant about adoption in Zimbabwe."*

In **CF**'s view, availability of information in a form of brochures could help applicants with regard to adoption. **CF** said, *"They do not have any printed brochures on adoption which they can give to prospective adoptive parents. These can be very helpful to applicants."* **CF** further explained how he would make some follow-ups and his efforts of trying to assist in resolving the delay were dismissed, something he says he was never told when he made an application. **CF** explained his frustrations by saying, *"I would call after about two weeks and then she would tell me that the child to be adopted has to undergo medical examination. I bring a medical report from my doctor and she tells me that it is the state that appoints the doctor who will conduct the medical examination and write a medical report. I would wonder why she had not given me this information earlier. This made me furious."*

BG felt that some of the challenges that he has encountered could have been avoided by simply providing adequate information as early as in the beginning of the process. This is what **BG** told the researcher, *"Most of us experience a lot of challenges when we are*

applying for adoption orders because we do not have adequate information when we start the application process. Most of the challenges I faced could have been avoided. If the process is properly explained to an applicant and requirements outlined, things will become a bit easier... Most of the parents usually feel frustrated and discouraged about the whole process since it is cumbersome”.

Like his fellow adoptive parents, **TK** explained how frustrating it was, to be provided with information in trickles. *“The issue I found frustrating was the step by step process of information dissemination. The information pertaining to the documents and other things needed to complete the adoption process was given in a trickle. We paid numerous visits to the offices in order to know processes that needed to be done and forms that had to be completed. The Social Workers insisted that that is the way it should be done.”*

The challenges of inadequate information relating to the requirements and process of adoption was also an issue for **MB** and his wife and like **BG** above, **MB** felt that the sluggish process of adoption was partly due to this trickled information. He narrated his plight by saying, *“My wife and I were not pleased with the way information on the adoption process was given to us, it was given in bits and pieces. Some of the requirements for the application were given at a later stage. This caused delays which were unnecessary.”*

The experiences reported by the participants in relation to inadequate information around the requirements and process of adoption, which consequently delayed the process seem to support some existing literature in the subject of adoption. Various scholars report that awareness and knowledge around adoption was low in most African countries (Oladokun et al., 2010:48; Stuckenbruck, 2013:95; Adewunmi et al., 2012:366; Agbo, 2014:87; Costa & Tasker, nd:8; Engida, 2018:80). This is despite evidence showing that increasing public's knowledge of adoption has been shown to improve attitudes towards adoption in other settings in Africa (Ezugwu et al, 2002:212; Omosun & Kofoworola, 2011:3). In countries such as Nigeria for instance, researchers like Oladokun et al. (2010:40) reports that there is uniform national guideline or protocol for the child adoption process including a law. A South-Eastern Nigerian study by Ezugwu et al (2001) revealed that majority of

infertile women have heard about adoption but only few (27.3%) knew the correct meaning, its legality and the process it entails. The provision of inadequate information to adoptive parents was scrutinised by Geen, Malm and Katz (2004:18) who suggest that individual workers may vary in how much information they share about a child.

4.3.3 Theme 10: Support systems available to adoptive parents in managing the challenges experienced

Availability of strategies for adoptive families to manage the challenges can buffer the stress associated with the challenges of adoption (Liao 2016:133). Amongst the research questions posed by the study was one relating to availability of support system for participants in managing the challenges associated with adoption.

4.3.3.1. Subtheme 10.1: Participants' partners and friends as support systems in managing their challenges

What appeared to be common for some participants was that the support, which they received from their partners, enabled them to overcome some of the challenges with which they were confronted. Amongst those who indicated a partner as a source of support were MV, MB and JS.

MV's response was very brief as he explained that there is mutual support for him and his wife, *"As a couple we were a source of support to each other."*

In the case of **MB**, determination for him and his wife always helped them to cope with the challenges, *"We are also a very determined couple. When we set out to do something, we always follow it through. That helped us a lot that is how we coped."*

JS explained how his husband's commitment enabled them to overcome the challenges, *"My husband is also the kind of person who does not rest until he accomplishes his goals. We were in this adoption issue together so he helped a lot."*

Few of the participants indicated that the support means, which is available for them to manage their challenges, was from their friends. This emerged during the interviews with participants like MV, BG, MB and CF.

MV explained the instrumental role played by friends in offering them support by saying, *“Even when we doubted and despaired, friends would also encourage us. We also sought information from others.”*

For **BG**, the courage and strength that she received from friends kept her going. This is what she told the researcher, *“My friends also provided strength and support. They continuously offered encouragement and were also a source of sound advice. That is how I coped, asking friends for advice on how to proceed and also relying on personal intuition.”*

Like BG and MV above, CF explained how he finds support from his friends, *“A few of my friends actually had a higher regard for me as a person when they got to know that I had adopted a child.”*

As for **MB**, both friends and church congregants saw her decision to adopt as a positive move and this gave her strength to cope. She alluded to this by saying, *“Some of our friends commended us and most of our fellow church members see us in a whole new light, positive-that is, because they know the adversity we faced.”*

4.3.3.2. *Subtheme 10.2: The role of the church as a support systems for participants in managing their challenges*

Besides friends and partners being a source of support for some participants, two indicated that they resort to church to seek support from either the church leaders or fellow congregants. This was recorded from the interviews conducted with CC and TK.

CC explained how congregants would offer prayers to support her, *“Most church colleagues were very supportive, offering prayer that I be led by God to choose the right child for my family.”*

In TK’s case, church leaders and congregants were instrumental in offering support. This is what TK said to the researcher, *“My church leader and other members who were praying for us kept us strong and we valued their support.”*

Participants’ decision to seek refuge from the church is not surprising given the instrumental role played by the church in supporting the vulnerable population groups of society in managing various difficulties. Research evidence in relation to church support for adoption can be traced from as far back as the Middle ages wherein the church played an instrumental role in preserving the institutions of adoption, with the law of the church through the Code of Canon Law⁷ (Canon 877) providing for the registration of both adoptive parent and the adoptive child in the baptism register (UN, 2009:26).

The view of the church is that adoption is a natural remedy for infertility and a more preferable reproductive method than biotechnologies (UN, 2009:24). In a study which looked into the pastors’ attitudes and the church’s practices in relation to adoption, Gonnerman (2012:v) found that the vast majority of church leaders reported that they would strongly support adoptions from foster care system, non-foster adoptions, international adoptions, adoptions of infants adoptions of children under 12 years and adoption of children with special needs. Participants reported a stronger support for couples to adopt in order to start their families especially those who were for whatever reason, unable to have their own children (Gonnerman, 2012:18). In further attesting to the supportive role of the church in adoption is the work of Baltimore (2008:61) whose participants reported that they turn to God and fellow Christians to cope with the challenges of adoption.

⁷ The law of the church.

The role played by the partners, friends and the church as support systems for adoptive parents in managing their challenges reflects the role of both the microsystem and the exosystem in the lives of adoptive parents. Whereas family members and close play their supportive role within the microsystem level, the church's role is a reflection of the exosystem (Smith-Acuna, 2011:21).

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter was a continuation of the presentation of the research findings. The focus was on the research findings based on the experiences and support services available for adoptive parents in managing the challenges associated with adoption. The four themes that supported the findings were presented and eleven subthemes that supported the findings pertaining to the experiences and support services for adoptive parents were introduced and discussed using the existing literature and the adopted theoretical framework. Like all other chapters, the current chapter is concluded through a chapter summary wrapping up the main points which were covered. The focus of the next chapter will be on the summaries, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Five is the last chapter of this report and it presents summaries, conclusions and recommendations based on the research process and the findings. The research process and the findings will be revisited, summarised and concluded upon and recommendations be proposed from such conclusions. As part of the recommendations, attention will be placed on the recommendations for the research process, recommendations for the research findings, recommendations for social work practice and training. Like all other chapters, a summary of key aspects covered in this chapter will conclude the chapter.

5.2 SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

The summaries and conclusions which are presented in the current section are based on the research process and the research findings as presented below.

5.2.1 Summary and conclusion based on the research process

In setting a base for the study, the general introduction and orientation to the study was presented in Chapter One, aimed at providing background and orientating the reader to the study. The research questions, goal and objectives were also presented in Chapter One (Sections 1.4.1, 1.4.2 and 1.4.3) to guide the process. The reader will also recall that it was indicated in Chapter One that part of the research plan was to conduct this study from the qualitative research approach designed from exploratory, descriptive and contextual designs. It was further mentioned in Chapter One that data collection will be conducted through the semi-structured interviews aided by an interview guide, analysed through Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of data analysis and verified through Guba

and Lincoln's four strategies of trustworthiness. This section therefore aims to draw some conclusions based on each of the above-mentioned aspects of the process.

5.2.1.1. The general introduction and orientation to the study

The general introduction and orientation to the study as presented in Chapter One, laid the foundation for the study by highlighting the plight of OVCs from a broader perspective and within the Zimbabwean context. The challenges faced by both parents and children were highlighted, giving rise to the rationale of the study and the research problem. In order to enhance the description of the phenomenon under investigation, the EST was also introduced as a theoretical lens through which the phenomenon could be analysed. In giving the study a focus, the research questions, goal and objectives were also introduced in Chapter One, as evaluated below.

5.2.1.2. The research questions, goal and objectives

The study centered around three main questions. In order to answer these questions, participants were identified and recruited to participate in the semi-structured interviews which were aided by an interview guide. The questions which are mentioned in Chapter One (Section 1.4.1) will now be evaluated below.

- ✓ *What challenges do adoptive parents have about adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe?*

This question was aimed at getting to understand the challenges that adoptive parents face during the adoption process in Zimbabwe. The findings based on the challenges faced by these parents as presented in Chapter Three and Four, revealed that caregivers face several challenges from those that relates to the requirements for adoption happening before the adoption is concluded, to those that happen once adoption is concluded.

- ✓ What experiences do adoptive parents have in relation to adoption of OVC in Zimbabwe?

The experiences highlighted by the participants in relation to adoption of an OVC in Zimbabwe were reported in two themes addressing their motivation for adoption and their emotional reactions to adoption. Through this theme, participants reported that they were inspired by the need to have children of their own and altruism.

- ✓ *What type of support services are available for adoptive parents in managing the challenges associated with adoption of OVC in Zimbabwe?*

A question of support services for parents was answered in two ways. For some participants, the partners and friends played an instrumental support while some seek refuge from the church. The role played by friends, family and the church was explained using literature to support this theme.

5.2.1.3. Application of the qualitative research process

As part of the plan, the researcher explained that the study will be conducted from the qualitative research approach. Chapter Two was dedicated to a detailed description of the manner in which qualitative research as introduced in the plan (Chapter One), was implemented. In this chapter, the researcher justified the method followed in applying the qualitative research and then proceeded in explaining how it was applied with specific attention placed on describing the research design, the research methods and ethical principles.

5.2.2 Summary and conclusion based on the research findings

On the basis of the research findings, attention was given to the socio-demographic profiles of the research participants and the findings pertaining to the research questions,

goals and objectives. The next section presents summaries and conclusions based on the socio-demographic participants and the research questions, goals and objective.

5.2.2.1. Summary and conclusions of the socio-demographic profiles

Before the data could be collected to answer the research questions, goal and objectives, eight participants who were recruited were requested to answer questions that requires their socio-demographic information. The findings collected for this profiles revealed various features such as mixed gender, different ages ranging between 33 and 56. Of the eight participants, six were males and two were females. In terms of religion, seven of them were Christians while one was an agnostic. The means of economic survival for these participants ranged from being business men/women to being church leaders and various professions like educator and administrative clerk. The socio-demographic profiles were analysed using some existing literature to ensure a detailed description.

5.2.2.2. Summary and conclusions on the findings pertaining to the research questions, goal and objectives

In trying to get answers for the research questions, participants were requested to participate in a semi-structured interviews to respond to various questions around their experiences, challenges and the strategies adopted in managing their challenges. As indicated in Chapters Three and Four, their responses were analysed and gave rise to nine theme. Among the issues raised by the participants was their challenges in relation to the requirements for adoption wherein their financial state, unrealistic expectations, suspicions of their motives for adoption by officials and the marital status which they believed were unnecessary and hampered the process (Theme One). They were also confronted by some negative attitudes by family and relatives displayed negative attitudes towards them and discouraged them from adopting by means of stigma (Theme Two).

In some instances the cultural beliefs and practices were highlighted as impediments for adoption (Theme Three), wherein participants stated that some cultural beliefs and

practices held by their communities were in their nature, discouraging adoption and therefore making it difficult for them during the adoption process. Any deviation from these generally held beliefs and practices would somehow result in some form of social sanctions in a form of the stigma imposed on the parent who decided to proceed with her adoption process, to somehow discourage them from considering this option. Adoptive children themselves posed few challenges to some parents (Theme 4), with some reporting the stigma associated with the HIV-positive status of the child as an issue which leaves most of the parents worried about the child's future and the reaction by some community members.

Besides the challenges experienced, participants also shared their motivations to consider adoption of an OVC (Theme Five) and how they reacted emotionally to adoption and its process (Theme Six). Their motivation to consider adoption was in twofold which is the need to have children of their own and altruism. Whereas the need to have children of their own was clearly expressed, altruism emerged out of being inspired by their involvement in charity works and the general need to give love and care to a child in need. In terms of their emotional reaction to adoption (Theme Six), Mixed feelings, uncertainties and frustrations were common due to manner in which the process unfolded and information provided during their consultations.

Resources were also found to be inadequate for adoption (Theme Seven). In this instance there were reports on inadequate social workers to handle adoption cases and a lack of transport to timeously reach out all adoptive parents. In general adoption was perceived to be unnecessarily long requiring a lot of patience (Theme Eight). There was also a clearly articulated message from the participants about some derogatory remarks which were directed at them by virtue of their decisions to consider child adoption (Theme Nine). Participants in some instances, extreme words like "bastard" were used to refer to adoptive children while parents were considered being "barren". These for participants were some of the harsh practices confronting them and making their comprehension of the process too cumbersome. Finally, besides the challenges highlighted by the participants, they also shared the support systems which are available for them to

manage these challenges (Theme Ten). Among the systems used to manage the challenges experienced, support from the partners, friends and the church were described as instrumental.

In conclusion, adoptive parents consider the adoption of an OVC either because of their need to have a child of their own and the need to fulfil altruistic motivations. They seem to go through various challenges which are system, community, societal and family related. Besides these challenges, adoptive parents have the families, friends and the church as systems in place to support them in managing these challenges.

5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study should be interpreted with caution due to the following limitations inherent in the study:

- A small sample of eight participants was drawn for the purpose of this study. A larger number might yield more comprehensive data which and ultimately affect the findings.
- This study was conducted using the semi-structured interviews as a primary method of data collection, with some form of observation. The use of other diverse methods of data collection might have led to more comprehensive data.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions made in this study the researcher proposes some recommendations pertaining to the research process, the research findings, for social work practice and for training and education and for further and future research. These recommendations are presented in the subsequent subsections.

5.4.1 Recommendations based on the research process

As indicated in the discussion of conclusion based on the research process, qualitative was found to be suitable approach for this study. It is based on this conclusion that the following recommendations are proposed in relation to the research process:

- Future studies might benefit from including a larger sample to allow diverse and comprehensive experiences of the participants.
- Future researchers might find it more informative to target social workers and adoptive children in future studies in order to analyse and document their views and experiences on the process of adoption.

5.4.2 Recommendations for social work practice

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that

- ✓ some educational programmes should be designed and implemented by social workers aimed at combating adoption-related stigma and educating the communities about the nature and significance of adoption of an OVC
- ✓ Some social work support programmes should be designed and implemented by social workers in order to support adoptive parents in managing the challenges associated with adoption of OVCs;
- ✓ Some advocacy programmes should be designed and developed to lobby for resources for social workers working with adoption cases;

5.4.3 Recommendations for training and education

In terms of training and education, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Training of social workers should incorporate learning material that will prepare and equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to support adoptive parents who are facing some challenges associated with adoption.

5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter Five has presented the summaries, conclusions, limitations and recommendations. The general introduction, orientation to the study and the research questions, goal as well as objectives of the study were revisited and summarised to determine if the aim and objectives of the study were attained and if the research questions were all answered. Based on this evaluation, some conclusions were reached and recommendations drawn. The reader was also cautioned about the limitations of this study which were mainly methodological in nature.

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LIST OF ADDENDA

ADDENDUM A: A PREAMBLE TO AN INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Dear MsK

My name is Shelter Marengu, a part-time Masters student in the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa. In fulfillment of the requirements for the Master's degree, I have to undertake a research project and have consequently decided to focus on the following research topic: ***The challenges experienced by adoptive parents in the adoption of orphans and vulnerable children in Zimbabwe: a social work perspective.***

In view of the fact that you are well-informed about the topic, I hereby approach you with the request to participate in the study. To help you decide whether or not to participate in this research project, I am going to give you information that will help you to understand the study (i.e. what the aims of the study are and why there is a need for this particular study). Furthermore, you will be informed what your involvement in this study will entail (i.e. what you will be asked or what you will be requested to do during the study, the risks and benefits involved in participating in this research project, and your rights as a participant in this study).

This research project originated as a result of an identified gap in the knowledge and practice in the area of adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe, and the aim was to *make use of an ecological systems theory to develop an in-depth understanding of the challenges experienced by adoptive parents in the adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe and the support system available for them in managing such challenges.*

The information gathered from this study will provide insight into the obstacles experienced by adoptive parents in the adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe, and to further intensify efforts geared towards child welfare.

Should you agree to take part in this study, you would be required to participate in semi-structured interviews that will be conducted in any area which is convenient to you, at any time which we can agree upon, from Monday to Friday.

It is estimated that one interview will last approximately one hour. The questions which will be directed to you during the interviews are attached (see Addendum D).

As the research progresses, you may be required to do the following:

- 1) Complete the schedule focusing on biographical information.
- 2) Share your expectations regarding the whole research project.
- 3) Evaluate the value of every interview to check if expectations are being addressed and by sharing the experiences gained.
- 3) Read through the verbatim transcriptions of interviews to verify if they are indeed a true reflection of the conversation.

With your permission, the interviews will be audiotaped. The recorded interviews will be transcribed verbatim. Your responses to the interview (both the taped and transcribed versions) will be kept strictly confidential. The audiotapes will be coded to disguise any identifying information. The tapes will be stored in a locked safe at my private house and only I will have access to them. The transcripts (without any identifying information) will be made available to my research promoter, translator, and an independent coder with the sole purpose of assisting and guiding me with this research undertaking. My supervisor, the language editor, and the independent coder will each sign an undertaking to treat the information shared by you in a confidential manner. The independent coder is someone who is well versed and experienced in analysing information collected by means of interviews, and is appointed to analyse the transcripts of the interviews independently of the researcher to ensure that the researcher will accurately report the participants' accounts of what has been researched. The audiotapes and the transcripts of the interviews will be destroyed upon completion of the study. Identifying information will be

deleted or disguised in any subsequent publication and/or presentation of the research findings.

Please note that participation in the research is completely voluntary. You are not obliged to take part in the research. Your decision to participate, or not to participate, will not affect you in any way now or in the future and you will incur no penalty and/or loss to which you may otherwise be entitled.

Should you agree to participate and sign the information and informed consent document herewith, as proof of your willingness to participate, please note that you are not signing your rights away. If you agree to take part, you have the right to change your mind at any time during the study. You are free to withdraw this consent and discontinue participating without any loss of benefits. However, if you do withdraw from the study, you would be requested to grant me an opportunity to engage in informal discussion with you so that the research partnership that was established can be terminated in an orderly manner. As researcher, I also have the right to dismiss you from the study without regard to your consent if you fail to follow the instructions or if the information you have to divulge is emotionally sensitive and upset you to such an extent that it hinders you from functioning physically and emotionally in a proper manner. Furthermore, if participating in the study at any time jeopardises your safety in any way, you will be excused from the process.

Should I conclude that the information you have shared left you feeling emotionally upset or perturbed, I am obliged to refer you to a counsellor for debriefing or counselling (should you agree). You have the right to ask questions concerning the study at any time. Should you have any questions or concerns about the study, please dial these numbers: [Tel:+263 77 2 818 854](tel:+263772818854); +263 77 3467 201.

Please note that this study has been approved by the Research and Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Work at Unisa. Without the approval of this committee, the study cannot be conducted. Should you have any questions and queries not sufficiently addressed by me as researcher, you are more than welcome to contact my supervisor in the Department of Social Work at Unisa. His details are as follows: Mr MR Lekganyane,

telephone number: +2712 429 2926, or email: lekgamr@unisa.ac.za. If, after you have consulted the supervisor and his answers have not satisfied you, you may direct your questions/concerns/queries to the Departmental Chairperson of the Departmental Research and Ethics Committee within the Department of Social Work, Prof Alpaslan, whose telephone number is +2712 429 6739, or email, alpash@unisa.ac.za. Should you still be dissatisfied with the answers, you can direct your concerns to the Chairperson, Human Ethics Committee, College of Human Science, PO Box 392, Unisa, 0003. Based upon all the information provided to you above, and being aware of your rights, you are kindly requested to give your written consent should you decide to participate in this research study by signing and dating the information and consent form provided herewith and initialing each section to indicate that you understand and agree to the conditions. Thank you for your participation.

Kind regards,

Shelter Marengu

Principal Researcher

[Tel:+263 77 2 818 854](tel:+263772818854); +263 77 3467 201

ADDENDUM B: INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of research project: The challenges experienced by adoptive parents in the adoption of orphans and vulnerable children in Zimbabwe: a social work perspective.

Reference Number:

Principal investigator: Shelter Marengu

Address: 104 Enterprise Road, Highlands
Harare
Zimbabwe

Contact telephone Number: [Tel:+263 77 2 818 854](tel:+263772818854); +263 77 3467 201

<p>DECLARATION BY THE PARTICIPANT:</p> <p>I, the undersigned, _____ (name), [ID No: _____] the participant of _____ _____ _____(address)</p> <p>A. HEREBY CONFIRM AS FOLLOWS:</p> <p>1. I was invited to participate in the above research project which is being undertaken by Shelter Marengu from the University of South Africa’s social work department.</p>	<p>Initial</p>
<p>2. The following aspects have been explained to me:</p> <p>2.1 The title and aim: The information collected around the challenges experienced by adoptive parents in the adoption of orphans and vulnerable children in Zimbabwe will be used <i>to make use of an ecological systems theory to develop an in-depth understanding of the challenges experienced by adoptive parents in the adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe and the support system available for them in managing such challenges.</i></p>	<p>Initial</p>
<p>2.2 I understand that I am participating in this research project without any</p>	<p>Initial</p>

expectation of payment of whatsoever nature and that I will be interviewed on my experiences around the challenges that I face in the adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe.	
2.3. Risks: As the research progresses, I may be emotionally too overwhelmed to share some of my experiences, and the researcher will in this regard refer me for debriefing.	Initial
2.4 A possible benefit: As a result of my participation in this study, I will be afforded an opportunity to share my experiences of the challenges that I face in the adoption of OVC's in Zimbabwe, and therefore play a huge role in making the plight of OVCs and adoptive parents to be taken seriously.	Initial
2.5 Confidentiality: My identity will not be revealed in any discussion, description or scientific publications by the researcher.	Initial
2.6 Digital recordings of interviews: I also understand that the interviews will be digitally recorded through a digital voice recorder in order for the researcher not to miss important data during analysis and this process will not result in my identity being revealed.	Initial
2.7 Possible follow-up interviews: I am also aware that the researcher may do some follow-ups on the interviews in order to get clarity on issues which may not be clear.	
2.8 Access to findings: Any new information or benefit that develops during the course of the study will be shared with me.	Initial
2.9 Voluntary participation/refusal/discontinuation: My participation is purely voluntary. My decision on whether or not to participate will in no way affect me now or in the future.	Initial
3. The information above was explained to me by Shelter Marengu in Shona/Ndebele/English and I am in command of this language. I was given an opportunity to ask questions and all these questions were answered satisfactorily.	Initial
4. No pressure was exerted on me to consent to participate and I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any stage without any penalty.	Initial

5 Participation in this study will not result in any additional cost to me.	Initial
<p>B. I HEREBY CONSENT VOLUNTARILY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ABOVE PROJECT.</p> <p>Signed at _____ on _____ 2016</p> <p>_____</p>	
<p>Signature or right thumbprint of participant</p>	<p>Signature of witness</p>

ADDENDUM C: COMMITMENT TO DEBRIEF THE PARTICIPANTS

Muchachi Government Complex

P.O Box 942

Midlands

17 August 2015

To whom it may concern

I, T. B Hove will de-brief all the participants in the research that will be carried out by Sheiter Marongu for her UNISA Master's dissertation. I am a qualified Social Worker, trained in Counselling. I am prepared to avail myself to help any participants who may be affected psychologically by the interviews or the research process.

Yours Faithfully

Tafara Byron Hove +263 77 3 502 766



ADDENDUM D: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

The Chief Director
Department of Social Services
Harare
Zimbabwe

Dear Sir/Madam,

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

My name is Shelter Marengu, a social worker in the Department of Social Services. I am also a part-time Masters student in the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa. In fulfilment of the requirements for the Master's degree, I have to undertake a research project and I have consequently decided to focus on the following research topic: ***The challenges experienced by adoptive parents in the adoption of orphans and vulnerable children in Zimbabwe.*** This research project originated as a result of an identified gap in the knowledge and practice in the area of adoption and challenges faced by adoptive parents, and the aim is *to make use of an ecological systems theory to develop an in-depth understanding of the challenges experienced by adoptive parents in the adoption of OVCs in Zimbabwe and the support system available for them in managing such challenges.*

In view of the fact that adoptive parents are well-informed about the topic and that your organisation specialises in the area of adoption, I would like to request your permission to access adoptive parents from your organisation. The information gathered from this study will provide insight into the obstacles experienced by adoptive parents, and further intensify the efforts of child welfare by sensitising stakeholders involved in child welfare. The study will be conducted through interviews which will last for about one hour. As part of my ethical responsibility, I am obliged to treat the participants with respect, not harm any of them, not force them to participate in the study, to inform them about the practical

details of the study, and to treat any information provided to me by them as confidential. Participants will sign a consent form through which they will be informed about the study in detail and through which I as researcher will be committing myself to the ethical principles. Granting permission to conduct this study will therefore contribute towards bridging the gap of knowledge and research around the challenges experienced by adoptive parents, while on the other hand promoting child welfare by sensitising societies on the importance of adoption.

Your response will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

Marengu Shelter

Principal Researcher

ADDENDUM E: GRANTED PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A STUDY

Phone: 071 6 060669

Telegrams: "SECLAB"

P. Bag 7707, Causeway



Reference:

Ministry of Public Service Labour and Social Welfare

Compensation House

Cnr Fourth Street & Central Avenue: Harare

14 February 2016

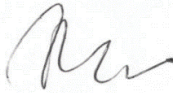
Attention: Shelter Marengu

In response to your letter in which you were requesting for permission to carry out research on adoption, I am pleased to inform you that your request has been approved. You have been granted authority to carry out the research as per your proposal.

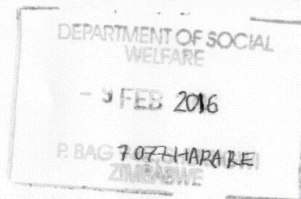
The Department of Social Services hopes that the research will add value to your work.

A/ Director

Department of Social Services



A. T Chinake



ADDENDUM F

THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

- Can you please tell me what motivated you to consider adoption of an orphan and a vulnerable child?
- Please tell me about your general experiences as an adoptive parent in Zimbabwe
- What challenges do you face during the adoption process?
- How do you find the adoption application process itself?
- What is your experiences in relation to the attitudes that people have in relation to adoption?
- Please share with me about the resources in place to support the adoption initiative
- As an adoptive parent, how do you manage the challenges that you face?

ADDENDUM G

THE ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER



**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH AND ETHICS REVIEW
COMMITTEE**

18 January 2016

Ref#: DR&EC_2015_013¹
Name of Applicant: Marengu, S
Student#: 54517966

Dear Ms Marengu

DECISION: ETHICAL APPROVAL

Open Route

Name: **Ms S Marengu**

Address & contact details: **104 Enterprise Road, Highlands, Harare,
Zimbabwe**

Tel: **+263 77 2 818 854; +263 77 3467 201**

Supervisor: **Mr MR Lekganyane**

Title of Proposal: **CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY ADOPTIVE PARENTS
IN THE ADOPTION OF ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN
ZIMBABWE: A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE**

Qualification: **Masters in Social Work**

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Department
Of Social Work Research And Ethics Review Committee.

The application was reviewed in compliance with the UNISA Policy on
Research Ethics by the abovementioned Committee at a meeting conducted
on 9 December 2016.

Final approval is granted for the duration of the project.

¹ Note: The reference number [top right corner of this communiqué] should be clearly indicated on all
forms of communication (i.e. Webmail, E-mail messages and letters) with the intended participants as
well as with the Department of Social Work' Research and Ethics Review Committee.



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The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:

- 1) The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
- 2) Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study, as well as changes in the methodology, should be communicated in writing to the Department of Social Work's Research and Ethics Review Committee. An amended application could be requested of there are substantial changes from the existing proposal, especially if those changes affect any of the study-related risks for the participants.
- 3) The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study.

Kind regards,



Signed by: _____

Professor AH Alpaslan

18/01/16

Chair: Department of Social Work Research and Ethics Review Committee
alpasah@unisa.ac.za

Signed by: _____

Prof MPJ Madise

Manager Postgraduate Studies: College of Human Sciences

