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Enhancing Post-Adoption Support Services for Adoptive Families

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ABSTRACT

This research paper focuses on the support services that are provided to adoptive families once adoptions have been finalized. To make the transition and assimilation as easy as possible, there are post-adoption support services that are provided to families. The goal of post-adoption support services is to ensure that children and the adoptive families adjust to the new life and environment for the adoption to be successful. Research literature, surveys, key informant interviews and first person observations were used to inform this study in that I learned, the impacts of improving post-adoptive support services to adoptive families. The research was conducted through a mixed method of both qualitative and quantitative data that was gathered through surveys and key informant interviews with SMEs, community-based organizations, and other key adoption support agencies as well as conversations with adoptees. The goal of this study is to analyze post-adoption services and the impacts they have on adoptive families and adoptees.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background

One hundred thirty-five thousand children are adopted every year. Not all of them end in happiness. There are some that fail due to a variety of reasons. The children from these failed adoptions, for the most part, end up in the foster care system. If there are extended family members who want to raise them that is the most preferred course of action. Adoption is a long and expensive process, and the average person doesn't have the money to adopt a child. So, the children are placed into the foster care system. As more children are put up for adoption or placed directly into the foster care system, there have been calls for action to ensure that the most vulnerable population, children, are provided the best opportunity at living in a happy home. Between 2008-

2020, there were over 66,000 children that ended up in the foster care system. That's an average of 5,500 children per year. This study was conducted to see if it is possible to improve the support services that adoptive families receive once adoptions are finalized. By working to keep families together, the hope is it will decrease the number of failed adoptions who end up going into foster care system, thus decreasing the number of children who are on welfare and ensuring they stay with the adoptive families.

Statement of the Problem

The goal of the proposed research paper is to explore if post adoption support services are effective and sufficient in assisting adoptive families with on-going support. Given the lifelong impacts that failed adoptions can have on adoptees and adoptive parents, what post-adoption services can be provided to improve adoption success rates?

This study will attempt to address the below problem:

- P1: Post-adoption social support is not adequate

- P2: Community-based organizations have not been incorporated into supportive services

- P3: Post-adoption supportive services lack the funding they need

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the issue of providing post-adoption support services to adoptive families. When adoptions fail, the children are usually placed into the foster care system. Post-adoption support services are an important tool considering the vital role they play in ensuring that adoptive families and adoptees get the support they need.

Significance of the study

On average, 135,000 children are adopted annually, of those, around roughly 5,500 end up in the foster care system, that's roughly 4% of all adoptions that fail. Once the adoption is

finalized, it's a difficult to adapt to the new life and new environment. The parents are learning to raise children who may be older, the children are learning to live with new parents, there may be cultural differences, especially for international adoptions. The correlation between post-adoption support services and failed adoptions needs to be explored to determine if improving post-adoption support services can help reduce failed adoptions. This study will benefit the adoptive families, adoptees, and the community. It will help gain further insight into ways that post-adoption support services can be improved to be as effective as possible in serving a vulnerable population in the community.

Main research question and sub-questions

The main question is:

1. What types of post-adoption support services can be provided to adoptive families after the adoption process is completed?

The sub-questions are:

1. How can post-adoption support services help families adjust to a new life?
2. How can community-based organizations be incorporated into post-adoption support services for families?
3. What is the availability of funds for post-adoption support services?

Theory of change and Assumptions

The Theory of Change for this research are:

Assumption 1 (A1): IF post-adoption support services were improved.

Assumption 2 (A2): IF community-based organizations were incorporated into the supportive services.

Assumption 3 (A3): IF funding was available for post-adoption support services.

THEN there would be a reduction of adoptions that end up on the foster care system.

Limitations

There are several limitations with the research methods in this study. First, time constraints. There is not enough time to conduct a proper testing of the assumptions. This will probably be the biggest limitation. Time limitation played a factor in this research project. Second, the willingness of individuals to complete the surveys. This limitation also played a role in not being able to gather enough data for this research. Third, the surveys may not get completed in a timely manner. Surveys were not completed in a timely manner. Fourth, key informant interviews may not occur due to competing priorities the interviewees may have. Finally, public health emergencies (COVID-19, monkeypox) that may prohibit individuals meeting for an in-person interview. Public health emergencies were not a factor but the availability of key informants/SMEs for interviews was a challenging limitation.

Definitions of terms

These definitions are applied as follows for the purpose of this study.

Post-Adoption – this refers to the time when the adoption process has been finalized.

Adoptive Families – Adoptive families refers to both the adoptee (child) and the adoptive parents/biological children.

Post-adoption Support Services – This refers to formal support services that are provided to adoptive families, post-adoption, on an on-going basis. These include preventative, support and therapeutic.

Improving – doing more than what is currently being done

Community-Based Organizations – this includes faith-based, non-profit, and adoption support agencies

Funding available– this refers to any funding that could be made available or used to pay for any post-adoption support services related expenses.

Reduction of adoptions that end up on the foster care system: Reduction will be compared to the 12-year average of 5,500 children going to foster care after failed adoptions, then tracking the number of children who end up in the foster care system over the same period and comparing the data, ≥ 5% will support the assumptions.

Expected Impact of the Research

This study has the potential to identify areas of improvement for providing post-adoption support services to adoptive families and helping children grow up in stable environment. This study is very limited in that it's a regional study, it could potentially be used in other regions in the state as well across the country. Just as with any social service program, this will impact the community as well. If a new post-adoption support services program were to be created within a certain community, the funding will most likely come from tax payers and this will impact that group of individuals.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Within this chapter of the study, the focus will be using literature to address the primary questions of the topic as well as the sub-questions presented in the previous chapter. While the main questions surround the types of post-adoption support services that could be provided, the sub-questions revolve around improvement, community-based organizations, and funding for post-adoption support services.

Improving Post-Adoption Support Services

Some areas where adoptive families may need support in are assimilating, learning to parent, coping with stress as well as clinical interventions in certain cases. There are many factors that may call for post-adoption support services. The study *Joining New Families: A study of Adoption and Fostering in Middle Childhood* focuses on some of the factors that determine the amount of support post-adoption and post-placement. It concludes that most children who were mistreated tend to be the ones who need the most support. Families who adopt children who have been mistreated are the ones who need the most support.

Another area that could be useful to adoptive parents is *Strengthening Caregivers' Adoption Experience through Support Services.* Most families encounter many challenges once the adoption has been finalized. Studies show that families would benefit from post-adoption support services (Lalayants, 2022). From speaking with adoptees and adoptive parents, the time immediately after the adoption process is complete is especially difficult for families, this is particularly true for international adoptions where there are cultural and sometimes, language barriers.

Incorporating Community-Based Organizations

The journal *Post Adoption Services for High-Risk Families and their Children: Preliminary Results of a State-Wide Intervention,* discusses the need for more supportive services. "The number of adoptions in the United States has increased 20-fold during the past 57-years from an estimated 105,000 in 1960 (Stolley, 1993) to recent estimates of nearly 2 million children (Vandivere, Malm & Radel, 2009)." This shows that need for not only county, state, and federal support services but more importantly community-based-support as well because these children are being absorbed into these communities.

Funding for Post-Adoption Support Services

After speaking with SMEs in this field, funding is not all that readily available for post-adoption support services. One SME, Case Worker A, stated that she doesn't "there aren't any funding sources that (she) is aware of" (Case worker A, 2023)

Conclusion

In conclusion, the literatures reviewed during this portion covered the need for post-adoption support services as well as identifying areas where adoptive families and children may need the most support.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

The study compiled both qualitative and quantitative data using a mixed-method approach as well as first person observer data. Qualitative data will focus on conducting key informant interviews, examining documents and research studies that are relevant to my topic. The quantitative data will focus on using surveys to analyze raw data. First person observer data will help in providing additional data points to analyze. The primary focus will be on adoptive families receiving post-adoption support services and the impact that has on reducing failed adoptions.

Research Question and Sub-questions

The main question is:

1. What types of post-adoption support services can be provided to adoptive families after the adoption is completed?

The sub-questions are:

2. How can post-adoption support services help families adjust to a new life?

3. How can community-based organizations be incorporated into post-adoption support services for families?

4. What is the availability of funds for post-adoption support services?

Theory of Change and Assumptions

The Theory of Change for this research are:

Assumption 1 (A1): IF post-adoption support services were improved.

Assumption 2 (A2): IF community-based organizations were incorporated into the supportive services.

Assumption 3 (A3): IF funding was available for post-adoption support services.

THEN there would be a reduction of adoptions that end up on the foster care system.

Operational Definitions

These definitions are applied as follows for the purpose of this study.

Post-Adoption – Although there are several steps to the adoption process, post-adoption refers to the time when the adoption process has been finalized, in its entirety.

Adoptive Families – Adoptive families refers to both the adoptee (child) and the adoptive parents.

Post-adoption Support Services – This refers to support services that are provided to adoptive families, post-adoption on an on-going basis.

Improving – providing more services than what is currently being done – this will include reaching out to adoptive families and gathering feedback on the support they need. The adoptive families will know what they need.

Community-Based Organizations – this includes faith-based, non-profit, and adoption support agencies

Funding available– this refers to any funding that could be made available or used to pay for any post-adoption support services related expenses.

Reduction of adoptions that end up on the foster care system: Reduction will be compared to the 12-year average of 5,500 children going to foster care after failed adoptions, then tracking the number of children who end up in the foster care system over the same period of time and comparing the data, ≥ 5% will support the assumptions.

Population Sampling Strategy

The population sampling strategy consisted of the online surveys and key informant interviews first person observer data. The population sample came primarily from surveys sent to adoptees and adoptive families. Other population samples included subject matter experts (SMEs), those who work in the social services office, adoption agencies and non-profits and faith-based groups who provide support to adoptive families. Some of the SME areas I reached out to are case managers, community outreach workers, community support specialist, and director of social services.

Procedure

A mixed method approach was used to gather all data for this study. The primary approach are surveys and key informant interviews. The plan was to distribute the surveys to target populations, who are adoptees and adoptive families. The goal was to collect at least 50

surveys and conduct 8-10 interviews. The surveys were sent weekly over a 2-week period to adoptees and adoptive families. The surveys returned 20 responses and only 2 SMEs responded to my inquiry.

Data Processing and Analysis

The data processing and analysis was conducted by collecting the surveys, key informant interviews and first-person observer data and analyzed for both qualitative and quantitative data. Once data was collected, it was compiled into multiple data points with visual for inclusion in the final report. Interview questions and responses were also compiled and analyzed and consolidated into a single document to be included with the final report. Finally, data compiled was used to determine whether the original set of assumptions were validated.

Internal and External Validity

Internal Validity: The internal validity was impacted by outside forces which could validate and invalidate the improvement of support services. Factors that impacted internal validity are support service utilization rates, the number of available community-based support services and the non-availability/unwillingness to provide funds for those who need the support.

External Validity: Although this study could have a significant external validity, the impacts may not be visible in the amount of time allotted. If there were more time and able to implement on a large scale, this would have huge potential to be tested outside of Alameda County and may be even in other states. If enough resources were dedicated to this, it could have impacts on national level.

Limitations

There are several limitations with the research methods in this study. First, time constraints. There is not enough time to conduct a proper testing of the assumptions. This will

> **Commented [RA1]:** There will likely be multiple data points

probably be the biggest limitation. Time limitation played a factor in this research project. Second, the willingness of individuals to complete the surveys. I sent the survey out to about 50 people and only got back about 20. This limitation also played a role in not being able to gather enough data for this research. Third, the surveys may not get completed in a timely manner. This is a significant limitation as most people I sent the survey to are not completing the survey in a timely manner. Fourth, key informant interviews may not occur due to competing priorities the interviewees may have. I did not have as much success with key informant interviews. I have not gotten back as many interviews as I would have liked. Finally, public health emergencies (COVID-19, monkeypox) that may prohibit individuals meeting in person. Public health emergencies were not a factor but the availability of key informants/SMEs for interviews was a challenging limitation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the data gathering methods used was both qualitative and quantitative, incorporating mixed methods of distributing surveys and conducting key informant interviews as well as first-person observer data. Surveys were distributed to adoptees and their families. Key informant interviews were sent out to SMEs, and adoption agencies, non-profit and faith-based organizations who provide support services to adoptive families.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the surveys and interviews that were conducted for the assumptions. As of today, a total of 20 people completed the survey. In this section, I will examine each assumption for a better analysis.

A. *Assumption 1 (A1): IF post-adoption support services were improved.*

1. **Quantitative Results**

- This assumption was validated. The survey responses to this assumption show

  that there is a need to improve post-adoption support services. The questions

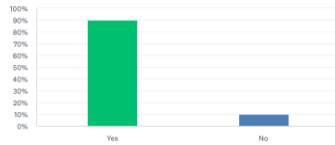 that are associated with this assumption are:

Q 1: Based on your experience, do you believe that post-adoption support services could be improved from what was provided to you and your family.		
Yes	18	90%
No	2	10%
Total	20	100%
Q 2: Based on your experience, what post-adoption support services are needed?		
Preventative (education, information, parenting etc.)	5	26.32%
Supportive (Information, referrals, support group, advocacy etc.)	5	26.32%
Therapeutic (crisis intervention, therapeutic intervention, residential treatment, specialized assessment etc.)	9	47.37%
Total	19	100%

Table 1: A1 survey analysis

The primary purpose of these questions was to understand whether those

who were adopted and adoptive parents saw the need for improving post-

adoption support services as well as the type support services that were

needed more than others. Although this is a small sample size, the fact

90% of all respondents saw the need for improving the services that are

provided to families, post-adoption, validates the assumption. More

research on the topic will identify a more concrete result.

Q2: Based on your experience, do you believe that post-adoption support services could be improved from what was provided to you and your family?
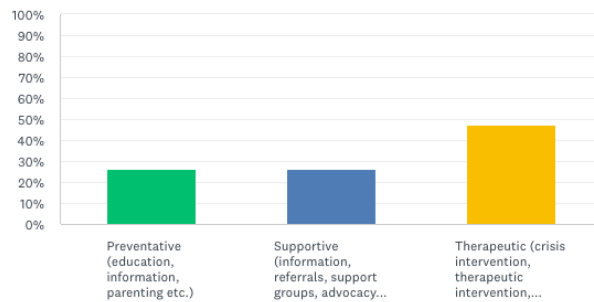
Answered: 20   Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▾ Yes	90.00%	18
▾ No	10.00%	2
Total Respondents: 20		

Fig. 1 (Q 1, question 2 on survey

Q3: Based on your experience, what post-adoption support services are needed?

Answered: 19   Skipped: 1

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES ▾	
▾ Preventative (education, information, parenting etc.)	26.32%	5
▾ Supportive (information, referrals, support groups, advocacy etc.)	26.32%	5
▾ Therapeutic (crisis intervention, therapeutic intervention, residential treatment, specialized assessment services etc.)	47.37%	9
TOTAL		19

Fig. 2 (Q2, question 3 on survey)

- Quantitative findings for assumption one, question one and two surveys align

  with the arguments in Chapter 2: Literature Review. The argument is that

  overall, support services that are provided to adoptive families need

improvement. The responses received thus far align with this argument.

Although the survey responses are leaning heavily towards validation, more

research needs to be conducted due to the number of respondents being

smaller than anticipated to fully validate this assumption.

2. **Qualitative Results**

- The qualitative results partially validated this assumption. There were two

  additional comments in the survey for the two questions that addressed

  assumption one. That is not enough data to state the assumption was validated

  or not validated.

Q 2: Based on your experience, what post-adoption support services are needed?		
Preventative (education, information, parenting etc.)	5	26.32%
Supportive (Information, referrals, support group, advocacy etc.)	5	26.32%
Therapeutic (crisis intervention, therapeutic intervention, residential treatment, specialized assessment etc.)	9	47.37%
Total	19	100%
Additional Comments		
Respondent 1	"Both preventative and support"	
Respondent 2	"All the above support services are needed."	

Table 2: A1 survey analysis

- Not enough qualitative data was gathered to validate the assumption. Of the

  eight interviewees I reached out to, I only have gotten two responses back. I

  had been promised three additional by the end of week six, but none

  materialized. The twos responses I have received do agree that post-adoption

  support services could always be improved. The one thing Case Worker A

  states is more helpful are informal support services such as "events and

  activities (that) provide opportunities to make friendships with other adoptive

  families" are extremely helpful. Additionally, support services that are needed

but not available are "…adoption competent therapists, more casual (informal) support groups, (and) more in person tween and teen groups." As encouraging as this interview response is to validate my assumption, this is not enough data to conclusively state that it has been validated. Further research is required to gather enough qualitative data to validate assumption.

B. *Assumption 2 (A2): IF community-based organizations were incorporated into the supportive services.*

1. **Quantitative Results**

   - Assumption two was partially validated as proposed. It validated that more participation is needed from community-based organizations. The current quantitative data suggests that community-based organizations are an important part of the support services that are provided to adoptive families, it does not show how effective this would be. The responses to the survey question for this assumption showed the clear lack of community-based organizations' participation on the post-adoptive support services but does not clearly answer the why. Why is there a lack of community-based organization participation in providing post-adoptive support services to adoptive families. Questions associated with this assumption are:

Q 4: Did you/your family use community-based support services?		
Yes	2	10%
No	18	90%
Total	20	100%
Q 5: If community-based support services were used, what type of support did you receive?		
None	8	40%
Other	3	15%
Skipped	9	45%
Total	20	100%

Table 3: A2 survey analysis

The primary purpose of these questions was to understand whether

community-based organizations were an important part of the post-adoption

support services and are they involved in provided those services to adoptive

families. As the survey results show, eighteen out of twenty stated they did

not use community-based organizations. On question 5, less than half

answered, which is in line with the responses in

question 6. The other several may have skipped it for the same reason the 5

answered. The survey responses point to the lack of participation from

 community-based organizations. Further study is needed to get a more

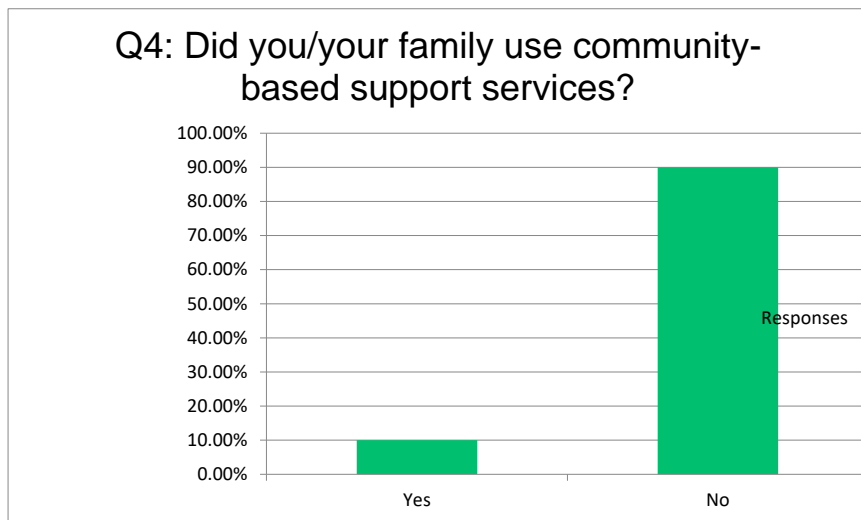definitive answer for this assumption.

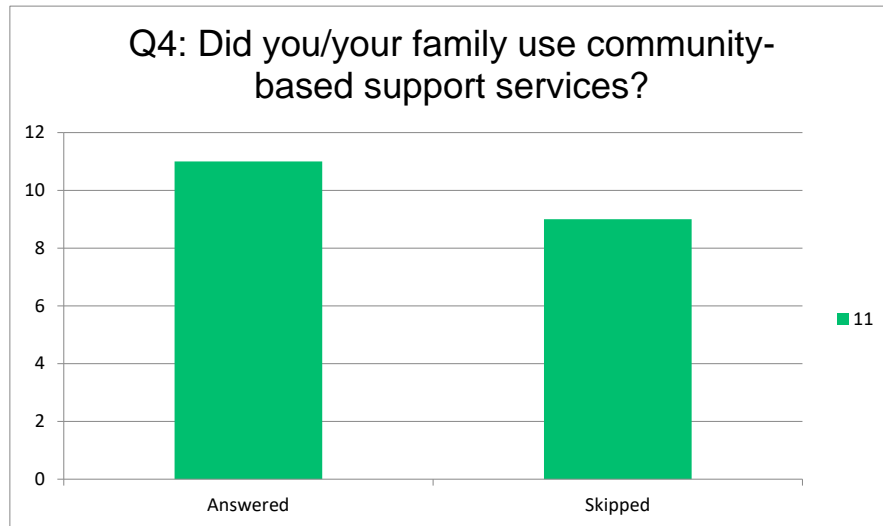Fig. 3 - Q3 responses (question 4 in survey)

Fig 4: Q4 analysis (question 5 in survey)

- Quantitative findings align with arguments or findings with theme 2 in Chapter 2: Literature Review. The additional comments from survey participants suggests that community-based organizations do not participate in providing post-adoption support services to adoptive families. It looks as though there is a lack of participation but can also be that the survey respondents did not know how to go about getting the support, therefore did not use community-based organizations as a source of support. Due to time limitations, the research did not dig deeper to determine whether it was a lack of participation or the lack of knowledge on the part of the adoptive family on the available post-adoption support services in their community that are provided by community-based organizations. Further research is required to determine the full validity of this assumption.

2. **Qualitative Results**

- The qualitative data for assumption two validated the assumption. The interviewees that responded to my questions over email unequivocally stated that the participation of community-based organizations is important to the support system. Case Worker A stated that it "helps normalize adoption for (the) adopted (and) helps adoptive parents know what their child is expressing is normal…" This validates that having the participation of community-organizations is important to the post-adoption support that is made available to adoptive families. Case Worker A also stated that it is difficult getting community-based organizations to participate in this type of program. There are many reasons but top of the list are "…difficult to bill for, …difficult to formalize. Many agencies don't see the importance…Not enough people geographically close to get a real group going." This is just one SME responding therefore further study is required to understand how important community-based organizations are. The statement of one individual does not show the full picture. If anything, these statements show the need for additional study and research to gain a better understanding of the significance of community-based organizations and the valuable services they provide to adoptive families.

C. *Assumption 3 (A3): IF funding was available for post-adoption support services.*
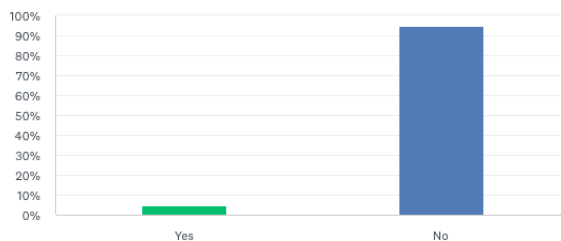
1. **Quantitative Results**

- Assumption 3 was partially validated. The reason for partial validation the responses show the lack of funds but does not answer the why of the lack of funds. Did families not receive funds due to an actual lack of funding or the lack of know of where to go to get said funds? This is one of many questions that needs to be answered in future studies. More funding is needed for post-adoption support services. The quantitative data supports that funding is a large part of the lack of support services. Survey questions associated with this assumption are:

Q 6: Did you receive any funding from the county/stated any post-adoption support services-related expenses?		
Yes	1	5%
No	19	95%
Total	20	100%
Q 2: Did you find the finds sufficient?		
Yes	1	5%
No	19	95%
Total	20	100%

Table 3: A2 survey analysis

Q6: Did you receive any funding from the county/state for any post-adoption support services-related expenses?
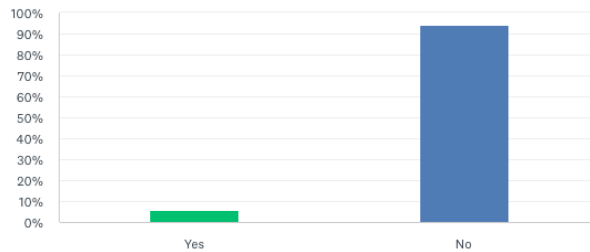
Answered: 20   Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	5.00%	1
No	95.00%	19
TOTAL		20

Fig 5: Q5 analysis (question 6 in survey)

Q7: Did you find the funds sufficient for your needs?

Answered: 18   Skipped: 2

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	5.56%	1
No	94.44%	17
TOTAL		18

Fig 6: Q6 analysis (question 7 in survey)

The primary purpose of these questions is to understand how much of a role the funding plays in the availability of post-adoption support system. Based on survey respondents, 94.44% stated they did not receive funding for post-adoption support services. Only one respondent stated that they received funding and that the funds they received were sufficient to cover their needs. This tells me that funding is available but not everyone knows that it exists and therefore do not utilize it. Although the response my suggest that funding may not be offered to adoptive families, it does not show that it is not available. This suggests that further research is required to understand where the gaps are. Questions such as are funds available to families? How much money is available? If there are funds available, are adoptive families told of the availability of these funds? The responses create more questions than

answers. At face value, the assumption is validated but additional research is
required for further validation or invalidation.

2. **Qualitative Results**

- The qualitative data does not validate assumption 3. There are no additional
comments from survey takers for qualitative data that can be used for
validation.

- The interview did validate the difficulty of acquiring funding for post-
adoption support services. Case Worker A stated that it is "very difficult (and)
there aren't any funding sources that (she) know(s) of." Case Worker A also
stated that since funding is hard to acquire or non-existent in some cases,
some changes that might help are "more insurance coverage for therapy.
Families being willing to pay for (support) services. (and) Families not being
nervous/ashamed/embarrassed to call us when they are struggling." This
assumption does need further research. Although the case worker stated the
need for fund availability for families, it requires additional research to 1)
understand the gaps, 2) how much money is required to assist the families
who struggle post-adoption, 3) looking at subsidizing post-adoption support
services they way other services are subsidized.

Conclusion

In summary, one of the three assumptions was fully validated, albeit with a small sample
population. The other two assumptions were partially validated. The survey responses for
assumption two showed that it is difficult to get the participation pf community-based
organizations in post-adoption support services. Perhaps further study will show that is not the

case. Assumption one was fully validated. All agreed that post-adoption support services are important and should be improved. Assumption three was validated in that funding plays a large role on ensuring families continue to receive those services. The data analysis for assumption three showed that it is difficult to obtain funding for post-adoption support services. Further study is required for all assumptions as the sample population was quite small for this research. The findings in this research might not be as they appear.

<div align="center">**CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**</div>

Conclusions

   The research looked at how improving post-adoption support services would be able to help reduce adoption failure rates. The research showed that most adoptees and adoptive parents feel there is a need for improving the post-adoption support services that are provided to adoptive families. Although the response rate was low, the responses leaned heavily in favor of validating all assumptions and improving post-adoption support services. However, this research did raise more questions than answers. The responses leaned heavily towards that need for improving the post-adoption support services, the inclusion of community-based organizations in that support structure and making funds available to adoptive families for post-adoption support services related expense but did not adequately answer the why.

  The survey respondents stated that they did not receive support services from community-based organizations. Why is that? Was it because there were no community-based organizations or was it because of the lack of knowledge/information on how many, the types and the location of community-based organizations in their community? If it is because of the former reason, then this research supports the need for improving post adoption support services

by bringing community-based organizations into the process. If it is the latter, further research will be required to clearly validate or invalidate the assumption.

The same is true when it comes to funding for post-adoption support services. Most of the respondents stated they did not receive funds for post-adoption support services related expenses. This could be because of the lack of actual funds or the respondents not having the information of how to go about receiving those funds. Both questions require further research to clarify and gain a better understanding of the reason for the lack of funding.

Recommendations:

o   Conduct a more thorough research of post-adoption support services – with adequate time dedicated to the topic (6-12 months).

o   Close the knowledge gap, adoptive families may not be aware of the support services that are available to them.

o   Conduct a test run of community-based organizations being involved in the adoption process. This would look something like a local non-profit that works with adoptive families being included from the beginning of an adoption process through conclusion. This would allow the organization to better assist the adoptive family because they would have a better sense of the type of support services they require.

o   Close the funding gap, determine what funding, if any, is available to adoptive families and develop a plan to socialize the availability of said funds. 95% of the survey respondents stated they did not receive any funds for post adoptive support services. This may be due to the lack of knowledge of the availability of funds. If there is an actual lack of funds, then looking at how to make funds available is one way to close the funding gap.

Areas for Further Study:

- o Research the types of informal support services that are being provided to adoptive families.

- o Research the feasibility of providing annual funding for post-adoptive support services at the county/state/federal levels.

- o Explore how community-based organizations can be involved more in the post-adoption support services role for adoptive families.

- o Separate research on the types of support services that are provided in the three types of adoption systems, child welfare, domestic infant, and international.

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