Cost Barriers to Adoption: A Call for Change

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Introduction

Over a hundred thousand children sit in the adoption and foster care systems waiting to be given a home, but the staggering cost of private adoption to families deters many. There are thousands of families with a desire to adopt and thousands of children wishing for a permanent home, yet the low rates of placement suggest that there are factors preventing families from adopting. The cost of children waiting in the adoption and foster care system is a significant expense for the government to maintain; furthermore, it is significantly cheaper to reduce the upfront costs of adoption in order to keep children out of the system than to maintain their needs through government resources. There are many financial ramifications to the high cost of adoption, but the greatest cost of keeping a child in the system is the cost of their well-being. A study by Brodzinsky shows that children in the adoption and foster care systems have higher levels of mental health and adjustment issues than others (2022). Many children stay in the system for years, finding themselves without a family in the most foundational years of their lives. While there are studies researching adoption and its effects, there is a paucity of research examining the relationship between cost and adoption rates. Thus, we decided to undertake a study inspecting the role that cost plays in the private adoption process. Our research investigates the following: Does the high cost of private adoption deter families from adopting children? (IRB Approval #: 26021701)

Methodology

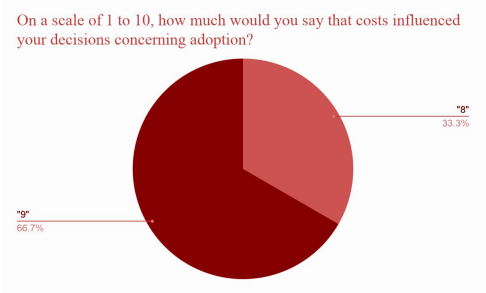
This project is both a qualitative and quantitative project analyzing the lived experiences of those who have considered adoption. Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling methods. All study participants were presented with the same set of questions and data will be supported with quantitative data from governmental databases.

Financial Implications

Not only does private adoption pose a serious cost to adoptive families, but it also demands a significant expense from government systems. Barth et al., found that “on average, adoption provides the state with cost savings of approximately $3,133 per year per child” (2006).

A 0.001% increase in household adoption rates in Texas alone would yield $16,285,902 in savings (in one year).

If Texas were to implement a $5,000 stipend to aid families in adopting a child, the state would still save over $50,000 over the adopted child’s lifespan (for a child adopted at birth).



Results and Discussion

Our study results indicate that cost is a major factor in adoptive families’ decision to adopt. All participants noted that medical complications influenced their adoption decision. Only one participant noted they had financial assistance through a work loan program, but all others did not receive any financial assistance. One factor all families shared was having exposure to adoption through a friend who had adopted a child. All families had a household income of at least $120,000 a year, which implies the inability for lower-income families to access adoption. This study found that cost is a significant barrier to families considering private adoption. All families considered the expenses related to adoption to be a major factor influencing their decision. These results indicate the need for a systemic change in adoption and additional financial assistance programs to alleviate this fiscal burden.

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