

**INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION LOOKED AT
FROM THE CIRCUMSTANCES, PERSPECTIVES
AND EXPERIENCE OF BIRTHMOTHERS IN
WONJI SHOA AND ADDIS ABABA**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES OF ADDIS
ABABA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN GENDER STUDIES**

**MAY 2013
ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
ADDIS ABABA**

MASTER OF ARTS THESIS

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UNIVERSITY
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and for most I would like to thank God for loving and supporting me throughout my life. I would like to thank the Center for Gender Studies, Addis Ababa University, for financially supporting my fieldwork.

My heart-felt and deepest appreciation goes to my father Demissie H/ Meskel and my mother Asnaketch Demissie, who encouraged me throughout my study period and while undertaking this research. Their support for my success in my university life as well as in writing of this thesis indeed holds a remarkable place. Furthermore, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my brothers Eyob and Mike , my sisters Solome , Tsion and Feben for their continues support. I would also like to thank my beloved daughters, Naomi and Eldad, for their understanding as I had to share my time between them and my study.

I am indebted to the key informants that offered their precious time and showed efforts to supply me with important information. My special thanks and appreciation goes to the birthmothers who shared their life stories without reservations and made this paper a success.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the cooperation of my friends especially, Mekoya, Firehiwot, Assegid and Tirsit who, in one way or another, have contributed to my success in general and to the realization of this thesis in particular.

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to understand and document the circumstances, perspective and experience of birthmothers who have relinquished their children for international adoption in Wonji Shoa and Addis Ababa. Qualitative method was employed for this research. The main participants of the study were five birthmothers who were selected purposively based on their involvement in international adoption, their varied experiences and willingness to participate in the study. Moreover, selected key informants were approached to share their views and experience on international adoptions of children from Ethiopia. These included adoption agency staff, a director of an orphanage, a law practitioner, a counselor and a staff from the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (MOWCYA). Addis Ababa and Wonji Shoa were selected as study sites purposively due to the availability of birthmothers willing to take part in the study. The case study method was used in order to gather data. To supplement data from the five study participants key informant interview was conducted with officials and staff of institutions that are involved in the work of international adoptions. The study found out that most of the case informants were raised in a poor family, lived in poverty, had low level education and therefore had limited access to information. Most of the mothers thought the adoption was not permanent and they expected not only regular contacts some even thought of the possibility of reunion with their children. The failed expectation to have regular contacts as well as their improved life later in life has caused the mothers regret their decision to give up their children for adoption. Birthmothers' source of information on international adoption was through families, friends, adoption agency staff and health assistants. The study suggests understanding the birthmothers experience can help design appropriate response to the new waves of adoption of children from Ethiopia. Local mechanism and alternatives should be given propriety and mothers and birthing relatives in general should be made aware of the alternatives. Adoption should follow the principles of informed consent; mal-practices that can be considered as recruitment by agencies should be regulated. Above all economically disadvantaged families should be given attention and support they need to raise a family as the birth family is the best environment for the children's wellbeing.

Keywords: *Birthmothers, Circumstance, Gender, International adoption, Perspectives Relinquishment.*

ACCRONYMS

ACPF	African Child Policy Forum
ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CRC	Convention of the Right of the Child
HIV	Human Immune Virus
MOWCYA	Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs
OVC	Orphan and Vulnerable Children
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

Adoption is a process of legally taking another person's child and bringing him/her up as one's own child (Oxford 2006). The practice of adoption is divided into domestic adoption and Inter-country/ International/ transnational adoption. Domestic adoption is when a child is adopted in a country of birth while international adoption refers to the movement of children from their country of birth to another country through adoption (Brittingham, 2012). Transnational adoption is when the adoption process extends or operates across national boundaries. The intention of adoption has changed overtime; historically, adoption started as a way of preserving and continuing family lines or inheritance in order to gain political power or counterfeit union between families; then adopted families were usually adolescent or adults who could maintain the continuation of the family line. However, during the mid – nineteenth century adoption started being considered, among other things, as a means of promoting child welfare (UN, 2010). A wide-scale international adoption started as a humanitarian response to the plight of orphaned children following the Korean War (Hübinette, 2006). Then after, adoption has been considered both as one form of alternative childcare mechanism as well as one form of family formation (Benyam, 2008).

The rates and patterns of international adoption have shown progression in response to the looming crisis and other situations, such as war and conflicts, HIV/AIDS, poverty etc. In sending countries as well as demand for adopting children by receiving countries attributed to mainly humanitarian acts and infertility. The fact that African countries are surrounded by the above-mentioned factors which destroy families leaving children orphaned without biological

parents has attracted the receiving countries for adoption. Such situations of crisis put all community groups at risk but women and children at most risk (Greene, 2006).

The data on adoption prepared by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat indicates that more girls are adopted than boys in the domestic and international adoption. The reasons for this preference of sex are considered to be that the sex distribution of children available for adoption, the assumption that girls are easier to raise than boys and the fact that female children are considered to provide assistance with the house chores and care giving activities (UN, 2010).

The top seven sending countries in 1980-1989 were Korea, India, Columbia, Brazil, Sri Lanka, Chile and Philippines. However, because of tightening their regulations previously less prominent countries are emerging as top senders in 2010 which are China, Ethiopia, Russia, Haiti, Columbia, Vietnam and Ukraine (Selman, 2012)

Africa as a continent is a new comer to international adoption as a sender and Ethiopia has taken a lead role as a sending country. According to Adoption Advocate International, Ethiopia is reported as one of the top nine countries that sent children for international adoption from 2003-2010. As a leading sender for international adoption, Ethiopia has sent 22,221 children from the year 2003-2010 (Selman, 2012).

Even though, Ethiopia has been frequented by internal conflict, famine and overall rising cost of living, it is only in the past one decade that international adoption has emerged as one aspect of dealing with family crisis that affect children. Many researches and studies have been conducted in the area of institutions, adoptees and adoptive families worldwide (Yngvesson,

2010). However, little is done from a gender perspective. Besides even though there is limited research done on adoption from Africa, the little that exists is not gender sensitive.

International adoption serves as keeping the best interest of the child particularly in the developing countries, although it has been argued on many occasions that it is debatable (Benyam, 2010).

According to a study conducted by Brittingham (2010), on birth families and intercountry adoption in Addis Ababa, it is indicated that international adoption is one way of securing the future of a child that is orphan and vulnerable. According to her findings, the reason behind the birth families to relinquish their children for international adoption is social and economical inequalities. However, she asserts that the root causes of the problem which are social and economic inequalities are not addressed. She further states that lack of social protection is not something that international adoption can address.

Similarly Sara (2011), in her study on HIV positive birthmothers who relinquished their children in Ethiopia, states that the main reason for giving children for international adoption is death of parents because of HIV/AIDS, which created lack of endurance and fear of death. In addition she emphasizes the effect of HIV/AIDS on birth family which in turn leads to a very high level of poverty, putting birthmothers in a severe economical problem. Being in such situation and with an adoption agency available next door, these women are pushed to partake in international adoption as the best option available to them.

According to the above-mentioned researchers, the decline in the social support system is one factor that contributed in the increasing number of international adoption (Brittingham, 2010 and Sara, 2011).

On another note, studies have been conducted on adoptive parents and adopted children one of which is by Benyam in his work entitled “The Sins Of the ‘Saviors’ ” Child Trafficking in the Context of Intercountry Adoption in Africa. He explains that children are unfavorably affected by child trafficking in the cover of international adoption (Benyam, 2010). Although researches were conducted on international adoption, focusing on adopted children and adopting parents, they haven’t given wide coverage on birthmothers.

The rationale for this study, therefore, mainly focuses on birthmothers. Based on own personal observation, the student researcher who has become aware of international adoption through own work experience and an exposure to the issue explains in the study the implications of international adoption to birthmothers. Therefore, the student researcher seeks to explore and examine the circumstance, perception and experience of birthmothers that relinquished their children for international adoption including the once that have started the process of relinquishment.

1.2. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

There is a growing trend of international adoption from Africa. Ethiopia is one of the leading countries that send children for international adoption (Selman 2009; 2010). Sending countries vary in their circumstances, so do the profiles (circumstances, marital status as well as gender) of families who relinquish children. Furthermore, of children who are internationally adopted, some are full orphans, others are half orphans, and still others are found abandoned or from excessively impoverished background (ACPF, 2012). There is considerable research on institutional mechanisms for adoption, on the general trends of adoption as well as the experience and perspectives of adoptive families (Volkman, 2005).

70% of children adopted by US citizens from Ethiopia have a surviving guardian from the birth family who has relinquished the child for the purpose of international adoption (Brittigham 2010). As cited by Bunte (2010), The Department of State's 2009 annual report on visa issuance shows that 2,277 adoption visas were issued to Ethiopian children. However, researches that have been done have not included the birthmothers' views on international adoption. Birthmothers experience personal pain and loss when relinquishing child/children for international adoption on top of which they are blamed for unplanned pregnancies. Furthermore, they are considered deeply shameful, illegal and frowned on for abandoning a child (Volkman, 2005).

The few researches that are conducted show that birthmothers who relinquished their children suffer from poverty, disease, conflict and insufficient resource in their country of origin. Furthermore, these mothers have been taken advantage of leaving them with emotional unsettlement (Sara, 2011). Despite all these facts, birthmothers have not been given due attention in researches conducted on international adoption. Birthmothers in Africa are at a double disadvantage because (1) African adoption in general is little researched, (2) the little available research has not looked at the phenomena from a gender perspective (3) Ethiopia being a new comer in international adoption and a leading sender at that, there is even graver scarcity of research that documents the perspectives of birthmothers of internationally adopted children. Therefore, the need to study birthmothers who have been involved in international adoption is vital as they are essential part of the adoption. The researcher believes that birthmothers of adopted children that are parts and parcels of the society have received comparatively little attention from researchers and are poorly provided with services tailored to their needs.

This justifies the need to raise the question: what are the circumstances of birthmothers that constitute the decision making process and their experience thereof.

1.3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this study is to understand and document the circumstances, perspectives and experiences of birthmothers who relinquish their children for international adoption.

The specific aims of this research are:

- Assess the circumstance (birth family situation, age, living standard, means of earning income, family size, marital status, educational background, health status etc.) of birthmothers who relinquish for international adoption
- Find out the perspective and experience of birthmothers before and after the process of international adoption
- Identify what services are needed and when to be rendered to the birthmothers who relinquish their children for international adoption.

1.4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

International adoption is in a growing trend in Ethiopia in which birthmothers relinquish their children. However, knowledge and documentation in regards to birthmothers are limited. Therefore, this research, unlike those conducted in the past, will document the circumstance, perception and experience of the birthmothers who have given their children for international adoption. Further, it will help to clearly look at the process of alternative childcare services that

are provided in the country, policy and practice in international adoption and the experiences faced in child relinquishment focusing on birthmothers.

This study will add knowledge and understanding of the birthmothers relinquishing their children for international adoption. Furthermore, it will help government and non-government organizations initiate actions related to developing policies and programmes. Moreover, it will be used as a reference and initiate further researches on international adoption focusing on birthmothers in Ethiopia.

1.5. METHODOLOGY

1.5.1. Design of the Study

In this study the researcher employed qualitative research. The researcher selected qualitative research because of the nature of the study which is to document the circumstance, perception and experience of birthmothers who are involved in international adoption. One reason for why a qualitative research is done is in search for how a problem is translated within a group of persons or an individual (Creswell, 1998). The intent of this study is to generate rich data in order to understand the birthmother's in-depth and is not to generalize and have statistical information therefore the five birthmothers and five key informants were selected. To this effect the researcher had the chance to explore how mothers understand international adoption as a person who has been part of the process by giving them the chance express themselves.

The researcher mainly used case study method. The distinct need for case study arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena and to retain holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events like individual life cycles, neighborhood change and international relations (Yin, 2003). Hence, using case study method the researcher conducted

deep exploration of international adoption in order to present the findings from birthmothers' viewpoints. Moreover, through the use of case study the researcher focused on findings about the experience of birthmothers before and after the process giving them opportunity to express themselves.

Accordingly, the researcher met with the birthmothers at their own homes located in Wonji Shoa and Addis Ababa in order to create conducive environment where they felt safe to share their stories.

In order to compliment the case study method the researcher interviewed one key informant that is familiar to the subject under investigation from each expertise. The key informants interviewed were adoption agency representative, orphanage director, law practitioner, counselor and a representative from Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (MOWCYA).

1.5.2. Study Sites

The researcher selected Addis Ababa as a study site initially; however the researcher found out that even though children got adopted in Addis Ababa they come from different regions and nearby cities which makes Wonji Shoa one of the cities with rich data. Hence, a total number of five birthmothers who relinquish their children were contacted three of whom are from Wonji Shoa, and the remaining two are from Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia.

Addis Ababa the capital city of Ethiopia has a total population of 2,739,551, of whom 1,305,387 are men and 1,434,164 women (CSA, 2007). The inhabitants' depend on formal and informal livelihood.

Wonji Shoa Sugar Factory, Sugar Estate and Wonji Shoa Estate Hospital are located in East Shoa Zone of the Oromiya Region. They are located 110 kms south east of Addis Ababa. Most of the inhabitants of this area are employed by the Wonji Shoa Sugar Factory, Sugar Estate and the hospital, established in 1950's and 1960's by Dutch Company named HVA. The population of Wonji Shoa and the surrounding villages is estimated to be over 52,000. Most of the residents of this area are engaged in the three main sectors, namely factory, agriculture and administrative office. While employees of the office reside in company houses, the rest live in 14 farm estates and villages surrounding the factory (Ethiopia J. Health Dev., 2004).

1.5.3. Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary data sources were used in order to generate relevant information to the research. Primary data were gathered through case study method by making in-depth interview of five birthmothers. Moreover, as a complement to the case study, key informant interview was conducted with individuals who work in the area of international adoption and who were considered to be knowledgeable on the issue.

As to the secondary data, both published and unpublished sources were used. Among others, various documents, magazines, internet (on-line) sources were reviewed in order to understand the subject better. Policies strategies and guidelines were examined to see how they approach international adoption, giving special emphasis to the issue of birthmothers.

1.5.4. Sampling Technique

For this study purposive sampling was used. The process of selection was after reviewing documents the researcher contacted a legal practitioner that handled adoption cases that linked the researcher with a birthmother who relinquished a child that then led the researcher to the

other birthmothers. Hence, five birthmothers who are involved in international adoption with diverse background and experience to the issue were purposively selected. Agency staff, orphanage director, law practitioner, counselor and staff at the government line department were also selected purposively. Addis Ababa and Wonji Shoa were selected as a study site purposively.

1.5.5. Data Gathering Instruments and Procedure

1.5.5.1. Data gathering instruments

To gather necessary information in-depth interview guide was prepared and used to conduct interviews with the five birthmothers that were purposively selected in the study area. The researcher selected birthmothers with different backgrounds and varying experiences in international adoption. By doing so the researcher tried to bring out what international adoption is meant for birthmothers in actual case scenario. The researcher believes that the research creates an understanding not only of the legal procedures from the reviewed literatures but also the emotional, social and economic implications of international adoption on birthmothers.

In addition, key informant interview guide was prepared and used to interview representative from adoption agency, orphanage, counselor, law practitioner and staff of Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs.

1.5.5.2. Data analysis

Policy instruments, Alternative Childcare Services, the Revised Family Law and the literatures on adoption provided the context for the analysis of the data collected from the field as well as for the conclusion and recommendation drawn from the data. Using the conceptual framework developed by the researcher, the data gathered through the case study method, and from key

informants was categorized. The data gathered is presented under the developed themes, followed by explanation, interpretation and discussion. Attempts were made to present the data putting the birthmothers' expressions in indirect reported speech.

1.5.6. Ethical Considerations

In conducting a research and later distribution of the work, the researcher faces many ethical issues which include confidentiality towards participants, sponsors and colleagues (Creswell, 1998). Hence, in order to keep the confidentiality of the entire participants the researcher has retained the identity of individual respondents and institutions that were covered in the study. The appropriate time for the respondents was identified. Therefore, except one birthmother who insisted her story to be told keeping her real name, all the other names in the findings are pseudonyms. Moreover, out of interest to protect the privacy of the respondents, they were asked to choose place for meeting with the researcher. As a result the researcher went to their homes located in Addis Ababa and Wonji Shoa.

Prior to conducting the interview, the researcher briefed the respondents about the purpose of the research. Then, that they provided verbal consents to participate in the research and their decision either to participate or otherwise was respected. The interviewer has taken a note and recorded the interview after getting the permission of the study participants.

1.5.7. Reflections from my Fieldwork Experience

Fieldwork took place between March and April of 2013 in which four birthmothers who relinquished their children and one mother who has started the process towards relinquishment for international adoption were interviewed for the case study. Three of the participants were interviewed in Wonji Shoa while two participants were interviewed in Addis Ababa. Interviews

were structured to resemble normal conversations. The researcher smoothly guided the conversation and directed it so it will not lose focus. Throughout the conversation the researcher encouraged interviewees to answer in detail and at length, in which some of the conversations the researcher had with the birthmothers were longer than others. The reason for that is the uniqueness of birthmothers experience from one to the other. As a result it influenced the length of the narration of each birthmother. In addition, the five key informants who participated in the study were interviewed in their preferred time and place, using the interview guide.

1.6. SCOPE AND DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study focused on the circumstance, perception and experience of five birthmothers that have been involved in international adoption. Their lived experience is studied using a qualitative approach, focusing on the few birthmothers. In addition, selected individuals that have knowledge of the issue have been interviewed. The selected informants cannot represent the whole population of birthmothers and generalization cannot be drawn from the findings. However, looking at the few will contribute to understanding of the situation of birthmothers involved in international adoption.

1.7. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Adoption: for the purpose of this study adoption is a social and legal process whereby a child is legally and permanently placed with a parent or parents other than their biological mother or father (Alternative child care guidelines, 2009).

Abandoned Child: for the purpose of this study an abandoned child is the child who is left unattended or deliberately rejected by his/her parents (Alternative child care guidelines, 2009).

Circumstance: for the purpose of this study circumstance is something that is surrounding or affecting a person either incidentally or as an essential condition. It is a surrounding or an accompanying detail which entails fact, event, incident, position or a situation (Webster dictionary, 1979).

Gender role socialization: For the purpose of this study gender role socialization is the process by which individuals learn their respective gender roles in a given family in a given social setup (MOWA, 2006).

Experience: for the purpose of this study experience is something personally, encountered, undergone or lived through, it is a direct observation of or participation in events as a basis of knowledge (Merriam –Webster online dictionary, 2013).

Perspective: for the purpose of this study perspective is picturing an object or sense in such a way as to show them as they appear to the eye with reference to relative distance or position. Relationship or parts of a whole regarded from a particular stand point (Webster dictionary, 1979).

Alternative care: for the purpose of this study alternative care is defined alternative care as, among other things, foster placement, adoption, or placement in suitable institutions for the care of children (Article 20 (3) of the CRC) Article 20 (2) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) accords children who are temporarily or permanently deprived of their family

environment, or whose own best interests prohibit being allowed to remain with their family, the right to alternative care (ACPF, 2012).

Biological Parent/s: for the purpose of this study biological parent/s is defined as a child's natural parent not the people who adopted him/her (Oxford, 2010).

Child: for the purpose of this study a child means every human being who is not yet an adult (Oxford, 2010).

Domestic adoption (DA): for the purpose of this study domestic adoption is an adoption wherein the adoptive parents and the adopted child are of the same nationality and have the same country of residence (Alternative child care guidelines, 2009).

Double/full Orphan: for the purpose of this study double/full orphan is defined as a child who lost both of his/her biological parent/s regardless of the cause of the loss (Alternative child care guidelines, 2009).

Family-based care: for the purpose of this study family-based care is defined as a form of care arranged for a child that involves living with a family other than his/her birth parents. The term encompasses fostering, kinship care, child-headed households, and adoption (ACPF, 2012).

Family preservation: for the purpose of this study family preservation is defined as a range of support strategies meant to prevent the family from breaking up, and to protect children from abandonment (ACPF, 2013).

Foster family: for the purpose of this study foster family is defined as a family selected by an organization or government institution to temporarily provide an unaccompanied child with physical care, emotional support, and protection for a specified period of time (ACPF, 2013).

Guddifachaa: for the purpose of this study Guddifachaa is the term that represents adoption in Ethiopia, it means adopting a child by fulfilling all the economic, psychological and social rights of a family member (Dessalegn, 2006).

Half/single Orphan: for the purpose of this study half/single orphan is defined as a child who lost one of his/her biological parent/s regardless of the cause of the loss (Alternative child care guidelines, 2009).

International Adoption: for the purpose of this study International adoption is referred as a type of adoption where by an individual or a couple from a given country becomes a legal and permanent parent of a child of a different country. It is also termed as inter country adoption/transnational adoption (ACPF, 2012).

Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC): for the purpose of this study Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) are defined as children whose survival and development is jeopardized by certain circumstances and are therefore in need of alternative childcare services (Alternative child care guidelines,2009).

1.8. ORGANIZATION OF THE RESEARCH

This paper is organized in Five Chapters. After this first introductory chapter, the Second Chapter presents the literature review which includes conceptual framework and theoretical frameworks adopted for the study. Chapter Three presents, the cases of five birthmothers,

findings and analysis of the data collected from the field. Chapter Four discusses the findings, basing the reviewed literature as a benchmark. And the last chapter offers conclusions and recommendations based on the study's finding and analysis.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter deals with review of the related literature. It is developed in three parts. In its first part, the chapter primarily presents basic concepts and historical background of international adoption worldwide, in Africa and Ethiopia, followed by the legal framework, revised family law and alternative child care services in order to give an overview of the legal issues surrounding the practice in Ethiopia. The second part presents literature that deals with motherhood in African, causes and consequences for birthmothers who relinquish their children for International adoption and how feminist view international adoption. Thirdly, it looks at theories and conceptual framework of the study.

2.1. CONCEPTS AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1.1. International Adoption

According to the Oxford dictionary to adopt is to take somebody else's child into your family, making them legally your son or daughter hence, once a person adopts a son or a daughter they will belong to his/her guardianship (2006). There are two kinds of adoption open or closed adoption. Open adoption is where identifying information is shared with the adopting family and a closed adoption is where no identifying information is exchanged with the adopting families (Sara, 2011). There are two types of adoption which are domestic adoption and inter country or international adoption; Domestic adoption is when a child is adopted in a country of birth and international adoption is when a child is adopted by people from other country, it is the movement of children from their country of birth to another country (Brittigham, 2010). For Hübinette international adoption is the movement of mainly non-white children from the

postcolonial, third World to white adoptive parents in Western Europe, North America, Australia and Scandinavia (Hübinette, 2006).

International adoption began as a way of humanitarian act, reaching a child that is unable to live with her/his parents, a solution for child without a parent to get a guardianship so she/he will be raised in a stable environment with his/her child rights protected (ACPF, 2012). According to Hübinette, the beginning of international adoption is cited as the aftermath of the catastrophic and genocide-like Korean War (Hübinette, 2006).

International adoption is a legally accepted procedure; however, it is debatable and is framed in three perspectives. These three perspectives are proponents who advocate international adoption, abolitionists who argue for its elimination and pragmatist who look for ways to improve both conditions in sending countries and the procedures for the transfer of children through international adoption (Hoegnacka, 2012).

2.1.2. International Adoption from Africa

Africa has a history of caring for children communally where a child of one is cared by others. Families and communities help each other to protect children. However, the traditional social systems used to provide care to orphans and vulnerable children specially the extended families, are fading because of the increase of HIV/AIDS epidemic, civil war, famine, inadequate social protection. (Greene, 2006)

International adoption from Africa has shown increase during the 21st century. During the 1970th and 1980th adoption was started in other developing countries, whereas there were a few applicants looking for adoption in countries like Ethiopia. In 1990, 78 Ethiopians and 123 Madagascar's where adopted by France. Even though Africa was in poverty at the time

international adoption was not seen as the first resort for solving the issues of the orphans and vulnerable children in the content. Nevertheless, during the 21st century this history changed. According to the ‘Intercountry adoption an African Perspective’ report there are two factors for the change which are, the first is the increasing number of sending countries in other parts of the world like Africa and the second is some countries that began putting restrictions on international adoption and even suspending the international adoption agencies. Furthermore, the few African states that ratified the Hague conventions with more strict procedures, which leaves the other countries with easier international adoption procedures that facilitate the boom of international adoption. Hence, this and other factors have contributed for the decline of IA in sending countries that have ratified the Hague conventions and an increase on international adoption in sending countries that have not ratified the convention (ACPF, 2006).

2.1.3. International Adoption in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia the term guddifachaa is considered as adoption, this term is inherited from the Oromo language. The term was unanimously approved and is incorporated into the civil law at the parliament session that convened to promulgate the civil code as part of the modern legal system of Ethiopian empire in 1960 (Dessaiegn, 2006). There are policies and regulations regarding international adoption from Ethiopia. International adoption is seen as one of the childcare alternatives in Ethiopia (MOWCYA, 2009). It is believed that children be raised by their biological parents and in a country of origin where they are well cared and nurtured. However, because of lower standard of other alternative childcare services (Brittigham, 2010), the country devastated by poverty, civil war, HIV/AIDS, drought, famine, TB and malaria leaving children to be orphans makes it difficult to be practical in providing adequate care for children in their country of origin and highly contribute to the growth of international adoption; This situation

created an opportunity for childless westerners to be custodians of the orphans and vulnerable children in Ethiopia and made western family's care and nurture children of Ethiopia (Greene, 2006).

2.2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK/POLICY INSTRUMENTS

There are international instruments regarding international adoption. The main international instruments that regulate international adoption are three which are the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) The Hague Convention (1993) on the protection of children and cooperation in respect of international adoption (ACPF, 2010).

The three instruments cover the issue of adoptability, suitability of international adoption, adoption fraud, improper financial gains and the like. These instruments also enforce the importance of putting the best interest of the child as the major factor in the process of adoption (Benyam, 2010). Even if the 1993 Hague Convention is the treaty most directly applicable to international adoption it has been given a segment on the CRC and is not ratified by all that are practicing international adoption which includes Ethiopia. On the other hand Ethiopia has ratified the CRC that imposes the fact that improper regulation of international adoption has a risk as stressed by Benyam (2008).

According to the ACPF, receiving countries have been given a duty of sending a follow-up report of the adoptee, to the sending countries. However, the reports with the purpose of showing if the child is protected can only serve during the early stage of the adoption, therefore it is crucial for the receiving countries to take in charge of the protection of the child that is adopted (ACPF, 2010).

2.2.1. Adoptability of a Child in Ethiopia

Adoptability of a child is decided by his/her country of origin according to the Hague Convention. Both the CRC and The Hague Convention have not clearly defined who is adoptable: whether it is an orphan, an orphan and vulnerable or an abandoned child is not identified clearly which creates dissimilar arguments, however, the convention states that the countries of origin are given the mandate to define adoption based on a set law surrounding the issue (US Department of State, 2013). According to Cantwell cited by ACPF , the definition for the word ‘adoptable’ is someone who is officially considered to have a legal status that enables him/her be adopted.

Ethiopia as a sending country has set a definition on who is adoptable in order to continue the practice. Based on the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Women’s Affairs Childcare Guidelines (2009) a child can be eligible for adoption if he/she is:

- An orphan who has no guardian/relatives to take care of him/her;
- Abandoned child whose parents are untraceable;
- A child who is certified by accredited body that his/her parents are not able to take care of him/her owing to medical or economic reasons;
- Under the age of 18 years;
- Willing to be adopted if he/she is ten years and over

- A child whose parent/s or legal guardians give their consent to the court when they are proved to be destitute by accredited body.

A child who fulfils the criteria fully or partially is considered adoptable, and this has to be certified by an official document stating the points rose above.

2.2.2. The revised family law and adoption in Ethiopia

In 2000 the government of Ethiopia revised the family law in order to make it more gender sensitive in nature, using some vital documents as a referral, such as the Kibre Negest which contains a lot of statements which treated men and women in a different and unjust way and the 1960 civil code that was gender neutral. Therefore, the proclamation was revised and made available for public use on July 4, 2000. One of the issues raised in the proclamation is the issue of adoption, which entails detailed procedures that are applicable both for international and domestic adoption. On the proclamation chapter ten the revised family law has stipulated different issues that are correlated with the subject of adoption which are: how the case of adoption should be handled, parental consent, roles and obligation of government and private orphanages, adoption by foreigners, irrevocability of adoption and petition for revoking the adoption (The revised family proclamation no. 213/2000).

In its Article 180 the proclamation puts that adoption can be created with an agreement that is made between a person and a child, furthermore it states that an adopted child shall for all purposes be considered to be the child of the adopter in its Article 182, as a saving clauses the article states that adoption cannot happen if the ascendant or collaterals of the adopter expressly opposed the adoption and in addition has to be registered in a court registry within one year from the approval of the agreement of adoption by court. In regards to the relationship of the adopted

child with the family of origin article 183 states that 1) the adopted child shall retain his bonds with the family of origin. 2) The same shall apply to the spouse and the descendants of the adopted child.3) wherever a choice has to be made between the family of adoption and the family of origin, the family of adoption shall prevail. It is also stated in the proclamation that a child merely conceived may be adopted on the Article 187 of the proclamation (The revised family proclamation no.213/2000).

Article 191 of the proclamation state the condition for parental consent in adoption of a child which is pointed out as follows:

- 1) Both the father and the mother of the adopted child must give their consent to the adoption where they are alive and known.
- 2) Where one of them is dead, absent, unknown or incapable to manifest his will, the other parent shall give his consent.
- 3) Notwithstanding the provisions of Sub-Art. (1) Of this Article, where one of the parents is not willing to give his consent and the child is ten and above years of age, the court may approve the adoption upon hearing the opinion of the other parent and of the child.
- 4) Where the child has no ascendant capable of giving his consent, the court may approve the adoption agreement taking into account the interest of the child.

On Article 192 of the proclamation it is stated about the obligation of government and private orphanages which makes them eligible to give any child under their custody to the adopter. However, before giving the child for the adoption they are obligated to provide adequate

information to the government authorized body describing how the orphanage received the child and about the personal, social and economical condition of the adaptor.

Regarding foreigner adaptor on Article 193 it is stated that the court will approve adoption if an authorized body which is the Women and Youth ministry that collects and analyzes the vital information about the personal social and economic condition of the adaptor and forward its opinion in showing agreement that the adoption is beneficial to the child. However, if the court assumes the agreement is not beneficial to the child the court can dissolve the agreement according to the proclamation. To this effect, if the court finds the information collected by the authorized personal insufficient it may order for further investigations.

The proclamation clearly states on its article 194 that without the approval of the court no adoption can occur. In doing so the court is responsible to verify if the adoption agreement is to the best interest of the child. In addition, the court is required to consider issues such as: the opinion of the child guardian or tutor, capacity of the adopter, when the adopter is a foreigner the absence of access to raise the child in Ethiopia and the availability of information which shows the court that the adopter will handle the child as one of his/her own and the child will not be abused.

On Article 194 and 196 the proclamation states the irrevocability of adoption and how petition for revoking the adoption is handled. As stated on the article 194.1 of this proclamation, adoption can only be revoked if the adopter doesn't consider the adopted child as of his/her own rather treat the child as a slave, or similar ways, or make the child engage in immoral acts for the adopters own interest or handles the child in any other manner that is damaging the future of the

child. The proclamation further states on article 196, that the court is responsible to examine the ground for petition before warranting revocation.

2.3. ALTERNATIVE CHILD CARE SERVICES

Alternative child care services are services that are availed by the government in order to serve the society at large. These services are designed to secure the best interest of the child which is to be highly considered when trying to bring a solution for orphans and vulnerable children. The alternatives that are in place other than relinquishing a child for international adoption are family preservation, family reunification/ reintegration, domestic adoption , foster care and children's home/similar institutions.

According to the African Child Policy Forum international adoption needs to be put as an exceptional solution after exhaustively considering the other childcare alternatives that are available in bringing solution to the orphans and vulnerable children that are deprived of a healthy way of life. To this effect Ethiopia with a long history of informally caring for children in the community developed childcare alternative guidelines in 2001 which was updated by the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 2009 (currently known as the Ethiopian Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs). These childcare alternative mechanisms were developed in order to bring solution to the problem for children that are in a difficult circumstance in the country. The guidelines putting into consideration the severity of the problem, has put each step that needs to take place accordingly; family preservation/community-Based Childcare, Reunification and Reintegration Program, Foster Care, Adoption and Institutional Care Service (MOWA, 2010).

2.3.1. Family Preservation

It is a universal truth that healthy family environment is important for the wellbeing and growth of a child. Family preservation focuses on issues such as; the role of good parenting, the prevention of family separation and reintegration which is vital in creating conducive environment for the child/children, family preservation is something that should not be taken lightly as indicated by the ACPF since it is curtail for the healthy development of the child. Accordingly family preservation is the first option that is put for birth and extended families including practitioners that are dealing with a situation where children are faced with problems. The Child Rights Convention (CRC) has widely covered the importance and the role of parents and the families in the promotion and protection of children's rights. As a result CRC requires government and development agents to also have a responsibility of developing, adopting and implementing comprehensive national policies on families and children that can strengthen the family environment whereby family is persevered. However, when this is found impossible which leads for a child be deprived of a family environment temporarily or permanently measures need to be taken in order to keep the best interest of the child (UNICEF, 2013).

2.3.2. Family reunification/reintegration

Family reunification/ reintegration is a process of reuniting family's that are separated due to various reasons. Families dismantle because of natural disaster, armed conflict, civil war and economical deprivation and the like. Hence, in cases like this reunifying and reintegrating families need to be considered before looking for other alternatives. According to the report by African Child Policy Forum reunification/ reintegration is possible in times of social disruption, as an example a report done by UNICEF cited by ACPF indicated that 7,010 Kenyan children who were separated after the post- election in 2009 were able to be reunited with their families.

Based on the report ACPF the CRC and ACRWC puts family reunification/reintegration as an obligation in order to secure the best interest of the child.

2.3.3. Domestic Adoption (DA)

Domestic adoption is a legal practice of adopting somebody else's child into own family, which is similar to international adoption in nature. However, if adoption is done domestically, it is considered as a favorable care option for vulnerable children in need of stable family environment, according to the child care alternative guidelines. DA is considered the best alternative care than fostering, and institutional care since a child is placed in a family environment in the country of origin. In Africa looking at adopting abandoned children is not common because of lack of a well-established system and the restrictive eligibility requirements for prospective domestic adoptive parents don't encourage parents to be part of domestic adoption. Therefore, Domestic adoption is considered successful for countries that have a well-established system of domestic adoption according to the ACPF (2012).

2.3.4. Forster Care/Kinship Care

Foster care is where children are placed in a foster family which is advantageous than institutional care because, a child stays in a family environment rather than in an institution, where there are family figures where he/she can associate with. Foster parents are usually trained on how to take care of children in this kind of situation and on how to correspond and be models for birth families according to ACPF. With foster care if biological parents exists a contact can be maintained between the foster parents and the biological parents. Foster parenting is considered to be well coordinated system with an ultimate goal of insuring the best interest of the child. Kinship care which is considered as fostering is usually done with a relative that are fully engaged with the life of the child. These relatives can be identified as the members of the tribe or

clan of the child, godparents, stepparents, or any adult with a kinship bond with the child (ACPF, 2012).

2.3.5. Institutional Care

Last but not list is Placing children in children homes and similar institutions. According to ACPF small residential facilities that are located within the community can serve the purpose of insuring the best interest of a child if an institutional setting is the only alternative left to be taken in the situation (ACPF, 2012).

In conclusion, international adoption needs to be considered if and only if the other childcare alternatives have been critically considered and if that is the only exception left as to secure the best interest of the child according to the African Child Policy Forum.

2.4. BIRTHMOTHERS AND INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

2.4.1. Motherhood in African

When it comes to mothering, Africa as a continent has a unique way of taking care of children of the community. In the African history, the sexual division of labor was organized in a way that women were and still are the primary care givers and were responsible for the bulk of food cultivation and processing. Nzegwu claims that women and men are equivalent, namely equal in terms of what they do in the maintenance and survival of the community' (Nzegwu, 2001). According, power is distributed equally between the sexes and that women's reproductive capacity doesn't determine the subordinate statuses.

The concept of motherhood has been one that has been central in the African reality. Oyewumi who is a strong advocate of the notion of motherhood assert that motherhood in the African context goes further than birthing and rearing children, mothers are the essential building blocks

of social relationships, identities and indeed society because a mother symbolizes; familial ties, unconditional love and loyalty. Furthermore, Oyewumi asserts that, mother is the preferred and cherished self identity of many African women. For these different writers, for African women motherhood position is one that is cherished and respected by the community. Therefore, this leads us to ask the question of why birthmothers relinquish their children to international adoption. What led birthmothers leave the task that is cherished and respected by their society?

2.4.2. Causes and Post Experiences of Birthmothers who Relinquish their Child for International Adoption

Birthmother is defined as one's biological mother, a woman who gives birth to a child. (Oxford dictionary, 2006) birthmothers that relinquish a child or children have varied reasons. Scholars put terminal decease, lower educational status, family breakdown and single motherhood as some factors that contribute to the abandonment of child or children for international adoption (Greene 2006, Volkman 2005). However, poverty and the increase of orphans and vulnerable children in the developing countries are noted as the major reasons why mothers give their children for international adoption. In addition, low awareness in the issue of international adoption is cited as a reason for why families give their children for international adoption.

On the other hand, on a study conducted by the united nation Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Population Division, findings show that birthmothers relinquish their children mostly because they are young and unmarried. The study indicated that extramarital birth which used to be a factor for giving a child for adoption is no more a reason. Further, this study finding indicates that birthmothers that are unmarried are deciding to raise children born out of wedlock instead of placing them for adoption (2010).

In a few studies that are available it is indicated that birthmothers that have relinquished their children suffered from different problems. According to a study conducted on single mothers who have relinquished their child for international adoption in Sydney in the mid 1960s the following were observed ‘depression, anxiety, insomnia or excessive sleep, loss of appetite or excessive appetite, personality disturbance, vague fears and doubts, loss of self confidence, strong feelings of rejection, regret at having surrendered their baby for adoption and feeling that they have ‘destroyed’ their child by surrendering him /her for adoption including suicidal attempt’(Deane,1996).

A documentary film produced by Kjaera (2012) titled ‘Mercy, Mercy’, shows the reality of Ethiopian parents that relinquished their two children Masho and Roba. The documentary has uncovered how the older daughter Masho suffers because of missing her birth family on one hand and how her parents get worried, regretted and became agitated, because of not knowing the status of their children on the other, in addition, the documentary prove how the birth parents are worried of not getting the promised report timely, which left them with anxiety and anguish. Moreover, the documentary demonstrates how they were entwined on thinking of their off springs every single day of their live, after their children left them with international adoption.

“....you cannot imagine the suffering or the pain that I feel in separating from my child but I have to do it because I don’t want him to lack for anything...”

The above phrase is cited on Yngveson (2010) where it is part of a letter that Yngvesson puts as a way of bringing an understanding in the relinquishment narrative, one letter of a birthmother to her son’s adopting family. This phrase can serve as a good example of how it is not easy giving up a child for international adoption for a birthmother, even though it is difficult to generalize.

Similarly, Volkman (2005) describes that, mothers who relinquished their children, will be left with a mixed feeling of guilt, fear and gratitude, after her visit of a birthmother who gave her child for international adoption.

2.5. IS INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION A CONCERN FOR FEMINISTS?

When raising the issue of international adoption one can ask if international adoption is the concern for feminists. The answer is yes, international adoption touches the lives of women in one way or the other, as a birthmother or an adopting mother. Moreover, International adoption touches the lives of women in terms of reproductive rights, justice, economical, social, racial, class and ethnical involvement uniquely and universally. On the article titled a feminist thought on the state of Adoption the writer confirms that adoption is a feminist issue because it is a reproductive issue, it involves both biological mother and adopting mother in addition it is about the class difference, explained in the citation as follows:

“Adoption is a feminist issue because it is a reproductive rights issue. It is an issue about the value of women as mothers and who has "earned" the right to be one. It's about how the states support or does not support women who fall outside of the “good mother” rhetoric. It's about privilege. It's about class.”

Adoption Talk, a feminist talk on the state of Adoption, 2009

On another article titled the feminist lens on adoption Katie Leo (2013) a human rights fellow at the University of Minnesota, writes telling her own story as an adoptive parent as well as adoptee. According Leo she joined the adoption world as an adopting parent straggling with infertility. Considering adoption as a part of the field of reproductive rights ,as a right to chose

from conceiving a child to raising one's child Leo expresses how it is interrelated to women which makes it an issue of feminist.

Cited by Leo, Rickie Solinger investigates adoption through the lens of reproductive rights putting birthmothers and adoptive mothers to the extent of how one woman's reproductive choice intensifies another woman's reproductive vulnerability (Leo,2013) the two are unified in a way that one woman being exploited by the other. Supporting Solinger's ideology Jae Ran Kim suggested for a wider look at the issue of reproductive rights. Pointing out that feminist's focus shouldn't only be abortion ignoring the issue of woman's rights for parenting .In addition, Leo adds the view of an African- American adoptee, activist and writer who has focused on reproduction not only as a 'right' but as a 'justice' which can have a wider coverage between individuals that are being privileged and oppressed in the system of the adoption.

A press by Leo discusses the issue of labeling birthmothers who relinquish their child/children as somehow, young, single, divorced, poor, uneducated who have abandoned their child which significantly acknowledges and as the same time denies the birthmothers from issue which in a myths . Leo puts this positioning of birthmothers giving example of her life story:

“As an example, here is the story I was told about myself when I was a young girl: You were abandoned on the doorstep of an orphanage with a note that read "Please take care of my child." Your mother loved you very much, but since she was probably a prostitute, a very young (probably teenaged) girl, or a single woman, she couldn't take care of you. So, she did the most loving thing a mother could do, she gave you up for adoption so that you could have a better life” (Minnesota Women's Press, 2013).

Leo sharing her own experience examines the meaning of a 'better life' which gives a connotation of the adopting parents as rich and capable of raising a child than the birthmother.

This puts the birthmother and the adopting parent in the continuum one far from the other.

Having a critical look at the points stated by Leo one can understand that International adoptions is the concern of feminist. In a way it touches the deepen experience of mothers that are relinquishing as well as that are adopting.

On another research Sergeant (2009) puts Perry's argument stating that in the transnational adoption, Adopting white mothers are identified as a 'competent mothers' while the black mothers are seen as 'competent care givers' this portrayal of women that puts the white women as capable in mothering a child of any race. Further, Perry explains the creation of international adoption as the result of the circumstance of the women economically, racially and by class, she describes it as children transferring from the poor to the reach illustrated as follows:

“...there is a transfer of children from the least privileged to the most privileged. The imbalance in the circumstances of the two women involved in international adoptions presents a troubling dilemma: in a sense the access of affluent white Western women to children of color for adoption is often dependent upon the continued desperate circumstances of women in third world nations.”

Regarding the third world involvement in the international adoption, postcolonial feminism that is also referred as the third world feminism stress that racism, colonialism and the long lasting economic , political and cultural effects of colonization on the post colonial setting or the third world opened the door for the practice of international adoption.

When we look at the evolution of international adoption it has started as a humanitarian act (Hubinette, 2006). It was started as rescuing orphans that were victims of wars between superpowers that are described as unfortunate results of violence and inequality infused with an immature humanitarian intention as indicated by Brittigham (2010). International adoption is considered as children transferring from the unprivileged to the privileged society, it is considered as ‘betterment of life’. Hence, looking at birthmothers with the eyes of the third world feminism it can be said that birth mothers relinquish their children because they are economically improvised.

The experience of women shouldn’t be universalized according to the postcolonial feminists because women have their own uniqueness racially, ethnically, by class and color. As a result the lived experience of women in each part of the continent differs in its nature. On her book titled “Under Western Eyes” Mohanty describes that feminist need not identify all women as the same, women or woman will have their own unique experience because of their culture, ethnicity, race, religion and other variables that puts a woman or women in a diverse positions, saying that Mohanty is not against the common variables in the life of women but universalizing their experience is wrong according to her (Mohanty, 1991). Hence it can be noted that the birthmothers who relinquished their children will have a unique and common experiences that makes them dissimilar and similar. Therefore, it is imperative to look at birthmothers experience as an individual and a group in understanding the issue of international adoption and its effect on birthmothers.

Researches can be quoted that have studied the experience of adopting mothers, and yet experiences on the birthmothers that have relinquished their children are rarely looked at (Marre and Briggs, 2009). Perry cited by Sergeant, argues that the available researches on international

adoption don't properly illustrate the situation of women within the international adoption. She recommends, as long as factors such as race, class and patriarchy powerfully affect so many women's lives and choices; they must be a part of any meaningful analysis of this important long-standing practice. Hence, she suggested a further investigation of the issue. Moreover, it indicates that examining each unique experience on its own, the lived experiences of birthmothers and adopting mothers are equally important in the process of international adoption.

2.6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A number of theories exist that are linked to international adoption. However, for the purpose of this study, the researcher has focused on two major theories in order to discuss international adoption in relation to the relinquishment of children by their birthmothers. These theories are the social rupture theory and attachment theory.

Sevier poverty has challenged the extended family system to take care of the growing number of OVC (Tatek, 2009). The social rupture theory is used to describe the incapacity of community to care for the growing number of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) which resulted from urbanization, HIV/AIDS pandemic and increasing poverty (Brittingham, 2010). It is indicated that social rupture has an impact on the growth of international adoption in the continent of Africa. According to Tatek the growth of OVC in the content of Africa has overstretched the traditional system that cares for the OVC; this cultural system is diminished by the effect of AIDS leaving the elderly to care for grandchildren in which they themselves will soon die (Tatek, 2009).

The second theory that is considered is attachment theory which is defined as the dynamics of long-term relationships between humans; it explains how much the parent's relationship

influences the child's development (Wikipedia, 2013). Bowlby cited by Buchanan describes attachment theory as a bonding experience that takes place between child and parent based on security, proximity and safety. Bowlby further explains that attachment is originated from biological desire for proximity or closeness and need for protection. According to Bowlby, this bonding experience has a lifelong effect on the child which differs from each individual because of the type or quality of the attachment (Buchanan, 2004).

However, when it comes to international adoption attachment has two phases one which is the adoptee's early attachment with the birth family and in between staying in the orphanage and foster homes and again staying with the adopting family which makes it complex (Noy-Sharav,2005). Furthermore, Haiman defines attachment as a relationship formed between the infant and the primary caregiver who is the mother that frequently connects with her new born. Haiman stresses that a mother's quality of bonding in the first year of her babies' life has inevitable long term impact on the child's development (Haiman,2012) a maternal love during childhood has an effect on the future life of her child, which in turn has an effect on the future life of the mother.

The point of focus for this research is the attachment of birth families especially of birthmothers. Jacob gives a highlight of what the birthmothers feel after the relinquishment by saying "The past is never fully gone. It is absorbed into the present and the future. It stays to shape what we are and what we do" (Deane, 1996). It is a natural phenomenon that a mother is the first person that gets attached to her baby. And her bonding experience is may be something that will not be forgotten for the rest of her life. Even though a mother relinquishes her child she still will not forget the past instead it will shape the rest of her life. Different adoption stories can be exemplified on how early attachment affects the life of both the birthmother and the child. One

good example can be the story of Betty Demwoz the first Ethiopian girl who has lifted the parental right of her adoptive family through the Ethiopian court system. Betty who was age six when she was adopted had not forgotten the memories of her childhood, on the other hand her mother who voluntarily relinquished Betty, has never forgotten her from the day she was taken from her home. Betty came back to her home country where she was back with her birthmother, father and siblings. Betty remembers details of her life with her birth family, except the local language which is Amharic, similarly her mother treasures the childhood of Betty which was never forgotten; hence the mother's attachment to her daughter is something that she always cherishes and remembers, that shaped her life (Dorrit, 2013).

2.7. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

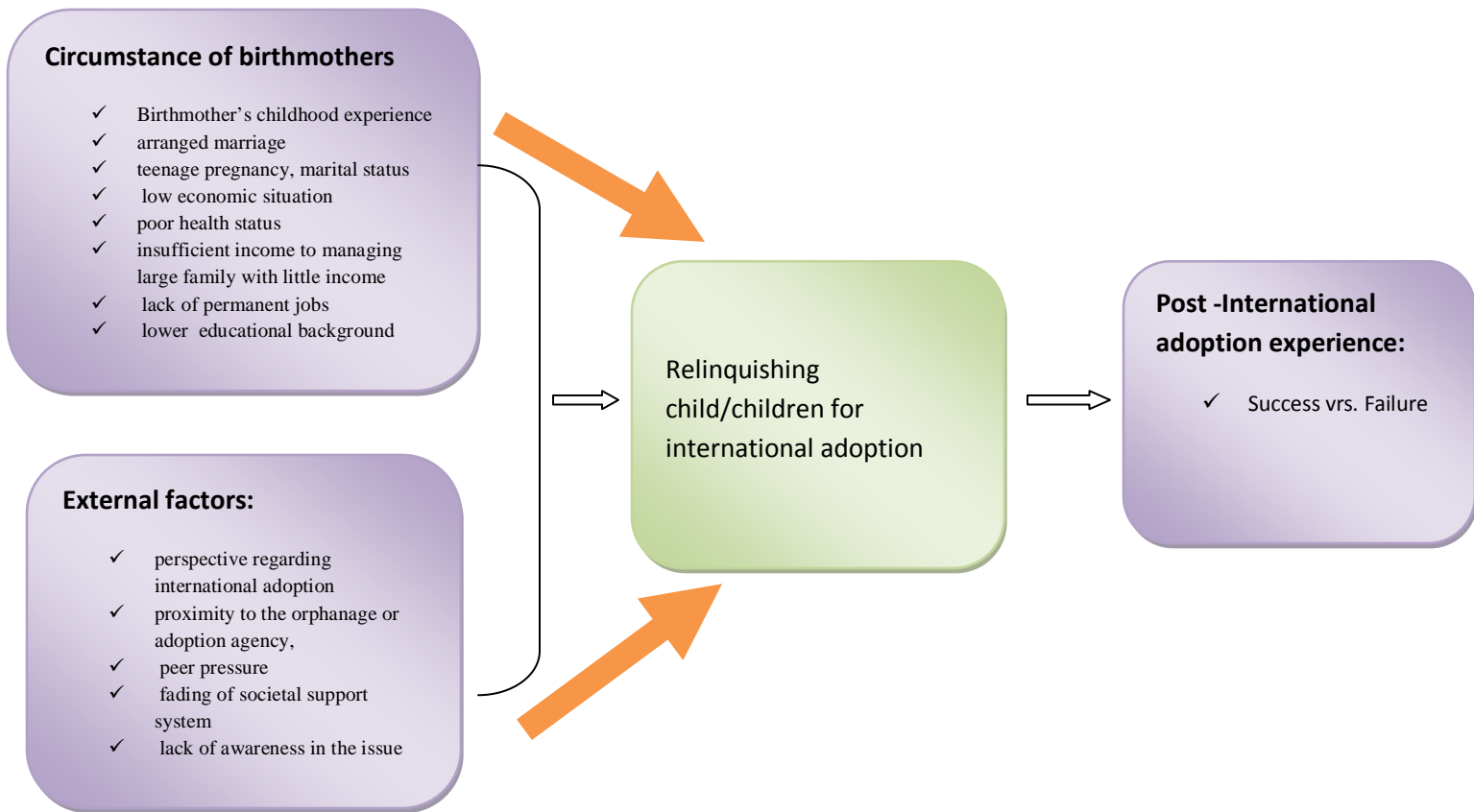


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Own Sketch

CHAPTER THREE

FIVE CASES, FINDING AND ANALYSIS

In presenting the data gathered from the five cases, this chapter will provide insight on the circumstances, perspectives and before and after experience of birthmothers who are involved in international adoption. The findings of the study are narrated accordingly and analysis is made based on the conceptual framework of the study that is sketched by the researcher.

3.1. CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

As Table 1 shows two of the birthmothers are married and two are widowed while one birthmother is single. All of the mothers have attended formal education. Three mothers have between 4 - 6 years of schooling while one has 7, and only one has completed high school. One of the birthmothers earned her living by working as a petty trader; one worked as commercial sex worker; one was a farmer and a domestic worker, one was engaged in domestic work while one was a house wife at the time of relinquishing their children for international adoption.

Table 1: Characteristics of study participants

Name	Tshaye ¹	Tingert	Lemlem	Messert	Kassech
Age	44	36	27	35	32
Place of birth	Adama	Wonji Shoa	Areka, Wolita Sodo	Wonji Shoa	Adadi Mariam
Place of Residence	Wonji Shoa	Wonji Shoa	Addis Ababa	Wonji Shoa	Addis Ababa
Educational background	Gr.7	Gr.12	Gr.5	Gr.4	Gr.6
Marital status	Married	Married	Widowed	Widowed	Single
Means of income ²	Petty trader	House wife	Farmer	Domestic worker	Commercial sex worker
Number of children	5	3	3	4	1

Source: Field Data, 2013

3.2. AGE AND SEX OF CHILDREN RELINQUISHED FOR INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

As indicated on Table 2, Tshaye, Tingert and Lemlem relinquished two children each for international adoption and Messert relinquished one child while Kassech has started the process to give her child although the case has not yet been finalized. While Tingert and Lemlem relinquished both female and male children, Tshaye relinquished two of her female children which leave, Messert who relinquished male child.

¹ Tsehay wants to maintain the real name of herself and her family

² Means of income before and during the time of relinquishing children for international adoption

Table 2: Age and Sex of Relinquished Children

No.	Name of the mother	Number of relinquished children	Age of the child when given for international adoption	Sex of the child
1	Tshaye	2	6 and 2 years	Both female
2	Tingert	2	4 and 2 years	Female and Male
3	Lemlem	2	8 years and 5 years	Male and female
4	Meseret	1	1 year	Male
5	Kassech	1	Process started at the age of 2 (in 2010)	Male

Source: Field Data, 2013

3.3. CASE ONE - TSEHAY

Tshaye 44, Protestant by religion was born in Nazareth located 110 km from Addis Ababa. She used to live with her mother, her six sisters and brothers. Her father died when she was very young. Her mother was a casual hair dresser (*Shuruba*) who earned a minimal amount of money. Consequently, raising her children, including Tsehaye, was not easy for Tsehaye's mother. At the age 20, Tshaye was given away for arranged marriage by her mother, during which time she gave birth to two boys. Since she was not happy with her life, she ran away and joined the army during the Dergue³ regime leaving her children with her mother. Accordingly, two children from her first husband grew up with their grandmother. She then met with her present husband

³ The Dergue is the short name of the coordinating committee of the armed forces police and territorial army that ruled Ethiopia from 1974-1987(Wikipedia, 2013).

Demwoz in the military. After the fall of Dergue, Tsehaye and her husband left the army. They then moved to a nearby town named Wonji Shoa located around 15 km from Nazareth. The purpose of their movement with her husband was to look for employment as they didn't have any income. Her husband Demwoz started to work as a laborer in the grinding mill owned by an individual. Meantime, Tsehaye and Demwoz gave birth to three children: Abenezer, Betty and Mekdelawit.

According to Tsehaye, her husband Demwoz was a loving father to his children but not faithful to her. He became alcoholic and started going out with another woman whom she knew. With tears in her eyes, Tsehaye remembered how she felt when she first discovered that her husband had an affair with another woman. She was very sad and discouraged. However, she stayed in that marriage believing that Demwoz was a God-given partner, and convinced herself she wouldn't leave him whatever the situation.

According to Tsehaye, the year was 2005(G.C), when her husband's health started deteriorating. Life was not going well as planned. Demwoz started getting very sick. When he went to the clinic for a checkup, he was told that he had TB. Later on she found out that her husband was HIV positive while she was negative. Her husband, lying in bed, told her to go with the children back to Nazareth where her extended family lives, but Tsehaye told him that she would stick with him till death since he is a God given husband. She got hired by an individual to prepare injera (Ethiopian local bread) for house consumption and was paid 20 birr (about 2 USD) per month. With this money, she bought plain corn, cook it and gave to her children. To supplement their income, she used to sell tea on the main street of the town, which didn't earn much as the demand was very low. Her elder son Abenezer's education was supported by Compassion International. They heard about Tsehaye and her family and assisted them with the treatment of

her husband. Nevertheless, her husband became seriously sick as the result of which he was admitted to the Wonji Shoa Hospital. In 2005, HIV was a new thing to the community, as a result of which people started discriminating them. She was even terminated from the Eder (funeral related social support group) due to high stigma. She was very much worried and her daily duty became looking after her husband in the clinic. Besides she was morally down. She didn't have anything to feed her children. She remembers with tears bringing empty lunch box to the clinic and taking away the food that was brought for her husband to feed her children as her husband was not in a position to eat his share. She didn't know what to do with her children. Life became hell to her.

In the clinic people living with HIV/AIDS were supported. The clinic provided free medication and sanitary materials for the family.

Tsehaye came to know about international adoption when one Friday morning while waiting in the shelter to receive sanitary material, the health assistant informed the gathering that those parents who were not in a position to raise their children have an option to hand the children over for an international adoption. The conditions were that a child should be from a poor family, affected with HIV and a child who is 0-2 years of age. At that moment it didn't take her long to raise her hand and say to the man standing in front of the gathering that she would give her children instead of them dying on her hand starving. She thought it would be good for her six year old daughter also to go with the two year old so that she would take care of her younger sister. Unfortunately, he said no and told Tsehaye that they could only take the younger one, Mekdelawit. She then went home thinking about that morning. That same afternoon he sent the guard of the clinic who informed Tsehaye to bring her daughter on the following Tuesday morning as the people agreed to take the two year old.

She took her daughter on Tuesday as per the appointment. The then director of an association for people who live with HIV/AIDS and the nurse from the orphanage in Addis Ababa were present. About 25 children, brought by their birthmothers and families were also there. The nurse measured the weight of all the children; put a mark on the hand of each child, which Tsehaye assumed was a code to identify them later. Tsehaye for the second time asked the nurse to consider Mekdelawit's older sister so that she would take care of her sister. The nurse told Tsehaye that she would consider the request and let her know the outcome and left with the children using the minivan that was designated for this purpose. Tsehaye's daughter Mekdelawit was taken that day - an unforgettable moment which put Tsehaye in great emotional pain when narrating the story her eyes filled with tears. After a few days the older daughter, Betty was also taken by the nurse. When giving the children Tsehaye signed a paper which she said is stated as quoted below:

"I Tshaye who live in Wonji Shoa Aleme Tena kebele have nothing to feed my children, and their father being very sick and bedridden with HIV, have given my children for adoption to be raised by foreigners. I approve this with my signature". Her husband Demwoz who was in a critical condition also signed the paper that read as follows:"I Demwoz who is affected with HIV/AIDS have willingly given my children for adoption to be raised by foreigners, because I am going to die soon and am unable to educate and raise my children".

Tsehaye stated that the orphanage that took her children was taking children from the surrounding towns and villages with the help of the nurse who periodically came from Addis Ababa herself assisted by the health assistant who lives in Wonji Shoa. The health assistant was engaged with the ground work of identifying children. This way, after fifteen days, 30 other children, aged from 0-12 years, were also taken.

Tsehaye said that the reasons she gave her children for adoption was because of losing hope as she didn't have any income to survive and bring up the children. On top of this, she didn't want to bring up her children in an environment where they were stigmatized by the community due to the fact that their father was affected with HIV.

Tsehaye's children were taken to the orphanage located around Lanchia area in Addis Ababa. After six months, a message was delivered to Tsehaye by the health assistant that the children were going to be taken by the new parents. Tsehaye and Demwoz were given an option to say good bye if they wished to do so. Accordingly, Tsehaye, Demwoz and their eldest son Abenezer left for Addis to bid farewell to the children. At the orphanage in Addis Ababa they were welcomed by the foreigners who were to be future parents to their children. They were a white Dutch tall man accompanied by a black American lady.

When Betty saw her family, she started crying with a very sad look on her face. Tsehaye, Demwoz and Abenezer couldn't control their emotions they all burst into tears. The nurse told them that it was not right to cry at this stage as they had already given their children willingly without anyone forcing them. Mekdelawit didn't want to come near her mom Tsehaye, although the reason was not clear. Tsehaye was wondering if her beloved daughter has already forgotten her with so short a time or if she was sad and angry because her mom gave her for adoption. Tsehaye even asked her daughter to tell her who she was. To her surprise, her daughter called her by a different name. This was heart breaking for the mother. Tsehaye realized that her daughters were not happy with what has happened. Losing a mother's love is not an easy condition to deal with. Tsehaye said to the new mother of her children "I will give my children to you, not because I hate them but because I am very poor. Their father is dying soon. Please treat and raise them as your own children". Tsehaye was not sure if what she said at the time of

adoption was correctly translated to the new parents of her children. At the end of their conversation, the adopting parents asked if they could visit the village back in Wonji. Thus, Tsehaye and family arranged for them to come and visit them at home in Wonji. During the visit, they observed their living conditions in their shabby, one-room rented house, with no basic furniture. When they left, the new parents promised Tsehaye that they would raise Betty and Mekdelawit like one of their own. In addition, they promised to bring them to Ethiopia every four years to visit their biological parents. Their promise was translated to Tsehaye by the nurse who added, “When the children reach the age of eighteen, they can decide for themselves on their citizenship - either to be Ethiopian or Dutch”. She even told Tsehaye that foreigners raise their children only until children reach the age of eighteen after which the children are left to decide on their lives independently.

Finally, Tsehaye’s children went together with their new parents. After they left, Tsehaye’s mind was filled with endless thoughts about the children’s new life: their day to-day-movements in their new environment, interactions with their new parents, friends, their new school etc. She was also sad that hereinafter, she wouldn’t be in a position to see her children grow. She was unable to sleep for several days as she felt so cold, discouraged and hopeless in everything.

During the first two years, Tshaye received letters from the children’s new parents quarterly. In addition, some pictures were sent by the new parents. Then the letters started arriving once in a year and ultimately this also stopped. Tshaye haven’t heard from the parents after that for a long time. After a while, a letter came stating that Betty is being assisted by her teacher. This was a relief for Tshaye to hear from her daughter and the family though the communication didn’t consistently continue for long.

After about five years, a researcher came from the Netherlands. This man wanted to do a study on the area of international adoption. He and his research assistant (a lady) were interested in studying international adoption with the objective of knowing the reason for the increasing number of children who are being internationally adopted. The lady said “if all the children who are sent for international adoption are orphaned, then birthmothers in the country have all been finished with the epidemics”.

After five years, Tsehaye was told by the researcher who came from the Netherlands that her daughter, Betty is found in a childcare institute in the Netherlands.

Tsehaye felt that Betty’s adopting parents had broken their promises and abandoned her. That was shocking news to Tsehaye and her husband Demwoz, who then survived with the help of ART and the rest of the family. Tsehaye was so disturbed to hear that and wished she was never involved in international adoption. When she asked about the younger sister Mekdelawit, she was told that she is still living with the same parents. As could be noted from Tsehaye’s story, she gave her two children for adoption with the understanding that they would be together to spend good childhood in a better loving and safe environment. She also believed that their being together would create a situation to share mutual family love they were used to back in Ethiopia. It was however very disgusting for Tsehaye to know that her children were separated and live apart in a foreign land.

Tsehaye overcame these dark moments with the help of God. At the time, she didn’t know if any other childcare alternatives existed in the country. She knew about adoption because it was introduced to her knocking her door. There was no way of knowing the other childcare alternatives even if it existed

The researcher from the Netherlands advised Tsehaye to calm down informing her that her daughter is with a caring teacher. He further promised that he would make sure that he will let her get connected to her daughter, but said “please Tshaye go and tell your neighbors and others you meet that it is better for parents to raise their children themselves instead of giving their children for adoption”.

Six month after meeting with the researcher from the Netherland, Tsehaye was connected to her daughter who later came to Ethiopia to visit her family. When Tsehaye first saw her daughter, she couldn't express in words how she felt emotionally. All were in tears and grateful of seeing each other. Eight years ago her daughter left Ethiopia together with her younger sister. She, however, came leaving behind Mekdelawit. The reason why Tsehaye insisted to the nurse that the children go together was for them to be inseparable, but at the end all the promises that were given to Tsehaye were empty, and here was her elder daughter alone.

After she came, it was found out that the orphanage and the agency that facilitated the adoption process, falsified the document of the children. They were taken as orphans and were considered as children who were found in Addis Ababa and not Wonji Shoa. It is possible that the adoptive parents who came to take the children years ago didn't know that Tsehaye was the birthmother and might have taken her to be an extended family. May be Tsehaye assumed that that might be why the children were treated unfairly.

There was a court hearing in Addis Ababa whereby Tsehaye's daughter appealed to revoke the adoption. Tsehaye doesn't deny giving her children for international adoption willingly. However, according to Tsehaye, what is not right is to assume the children are orphaned to merely justify the adoption, while the children's mother and father are still alive. Now, when Tsehaye

thinks about it, she guesses that the reason why promises were not kept is that the adopters might not be aware that she is the real biological mother. Instead, they might have taken her to be a neighbor or a relative of the children. These foreigners who don't speak the local language were communicating with Tsehaye through the help of the nurse which she thinks created the misunderstanding. Tsehaye now thinks that the nurse who was involved in the process said all she said just to persuade her to give away the children. Tsehaye's daughter told her that she was happy the first two years while living with her adopted parents. However, there was a change in the way she was treated.

According to Tsehaye her daughter informed her that, her adoptive mother used to tell them that she is orphaned and that she doesn't have a mother or a father alive. This was very difficult for Betty to believe since she well knows that her parents were alive when the two children were given for adoption. Betty thus denied by saying 'I know my father was very sick in bed but I am sure that my mom is alive and well'. During her visit, Betty confessed to Tsehaye that this experience was so bitter. Tsehaye in tears said:

“According my daughter, her adopted mother used to tell them that she is orphaned and she doesn't have a mother or a father alive which was difficult for Betty to accept, Betty denied by saying 'I know my father was very sick in bed but I am sure that my mom is alive and well'. Betty was given a piece of bread every other day when 'misbehaving' by her adopted mother when she told me, thinking of that makes me sick, the main reason why I send my daughters was so that they eat well.”

Tsehaye wondered as to why this happened as the major reason for sending the children was for them to be well-fed.

Tsehay's perception of when her daughters went was different from what had actually taken place. She believed that foreigners are good in handling children. They take good care of even their pets, leave alone children. It didn't cross her mind that her daughters would pass through something better than of their basic needs. She never thought this kind of in-human treatment exists in a society that calls itself civilized.

Currently, Tsehay said, with the support of the foster parents of her daughter, she has gained weaving skills which made her very confident. She said that her potential is now revealed and that she can now earn her living by using her skills. She admitted that she never dreamt that this day would come. She said that, had she known in the past that she had this hidden talent she wouldn't have given her beloved children for adoption. She regrets that she wouldn't have let go of little Mekdelawit while she was still breastfeeding. Tsehay thus pleads mothers to raise their children themselves rather than considering international adoption.

According to her, reasons can be cited as the cause for the need for international adoption but it is better to find a solution in the country. Different organizations need to work together in supporting the birth families raise their kids themselves if their intention is compassion. She also emphasizes the importance of creating awareness among people. If international adoption is the only option, adoption agencies should put in place clear and strict mechanism to follow-up on the whereabouts of the children after the adoption process. If the children or the adopting parents are unhappy with the adoption process, corrective measures need to be taken as appropriate to the extent of bringing the children back to their country of origin.

Accordingly, Betty's adoption was revoked after a court hearing in Ethiopia. She is now pursuing her education living with her foster mother in the Netherlands. Neither Tsehay nor Betty has

contacts with the younger child Mekdelawit. Tsehaye was informed by Betty's foster parent that they have banned the connection between Tsehaye's daughters. Tsehaye prays that Mekdelawit will come and visit her one day and will understand the situation which forced Tsehaye to give her for international adoption. Up until Tsehaye sees her other daughter as well, she will continue keeping them in mind and praying for their wellbeing.

2.1. CASE TWO - TINGERT

The 36 year old, Tingert, was born in Wonji Shoa. She is a healthy-looking young woman and is an Orthodox Christian. Her mother and father came to Wonji Shoa to look for a job. They got employed for a blue-collar work in Wonji sugar factory and stayed in Wonji Shoa. She was raised in a big family that consisted of her seven siblings. All her brothers and sisters except one sister live in other towns of the country, in Jima, Hawassa and Addis Ababa. Her sister who is in Wonji Shoa works as a health assistant at a hospital located in the area.

Tingert gave birth to her first child after being raped by a man when she was living in Addis Ababa, where she went to school while living with a relative. One day a man gave her a ride to school. She thought he was taking her to school but he all of a sudden changed direction and took her to a residence, telling her that they had to greet some family members who came from Wonji town. She believed him and was happy that she was going to meet with people from her home town. He raped her at that time in which she tried to escape it but failed. As a 15 year old girl, she didn't know what pregnancy is and as such didn't give attention to the early signs of pregnancy. She started gaining weight. When the family she lived with, took her to the hospital for a general check up, it was revealed that she was pregnant. It was shocking for her. She dropped out of school because of teenage pregnancy and was taken to Adama town by her elder

sister who hid her in a rented house and took care of her until she gave birth. No one knew, except their mother. The reason why this was kept confidential was that they were afraid that the people would discriminate against Tingert for having a baby without a proper marriage. Tingert believed that they will blame her for what has happened. After that she went back to school leaving her child with her sister. Her sister is the one who raised her first born. Tingert's daughter is now 17 years old and lives with her aunty. Life continued and Tingert got married and moved to Wonji Shoa.

Tingert was educated up to grade 12 and is currently a housewife. Her husband is a government employee and has an advanced diploma. She gave birth to two more children; a girl and a boy. Although she had a plan of continuing her education to a higher level, she didn't score the required results to pursue her education at a government school. Furthermore, she didn't afford to join a private college.

According to her she took good care of her children. As a dedicated Orthodox Christian, every Sunday, she takes them to church for prayer and Holy Communion. She heard about international adoption from her elder sister who works as a health assistant at a hospital. Whenever she came to visit Tingert her sister mentioned to her about international adoptions and how Tingert could benefit herself and her children if she gives them for international adoption. Her sister consistently insisted that she should give them for adoption, and by so doing, she was trying her best to make Tingert accept her advice. In addition, she even sent friends and family members to Tingert so that they could convince Tingert to accept her sister's advice to give away the children. Her elder sister, whom she respects very much, was insisting day and night. Initially, Tingert refused her proposal, and when she continued on her trials, Tingert told her that she would think about it and tell her the outcome. However, her elder sister consistently insisted

that Tingert should take and use this chance which she thought would be a great opportunity for the children's future. She even reminded Tingert of her childhood to let Tingert understand the consequences of saying no to such a chance that was availed to her and her husband. When Tingert's sister was a small child, her father was working in the sugar factory which was then run by people from Holland. Her sister remembers these people from Holland asking their father to give them Tingert's elder sister who now works at the hospital. However, their father refused to give her and she was always not happy with her father's decision. She was reminded of this incident by the elderly people in the neighborhood who made her regret as to why her father hadn't given her for adoption. Through the years, she has seen some of her peers who were adopted by the Dutch people and brought up in foreign countries. When her sister saw these childhood friends during their visit to the neighborhood and observed the many differences between them and her, she would feel pity for herself according to Tingert. As a consequence, she has always lived with this unfavorable memory and regret, which she always reflects. She always tells Tingert 'if only my father had given me for adoption, my life would have been different. I would have supported my family. My dear sister, your children will raise the same question when they grow old. They will blame you for spoiling their future. They will have the same attitude I have about my father, and continue to blame you throughout their life.'

Under the circumstances, Tingert started considering international adoption seriously. One Sunday morning, she went to the church with her children and prayed to God saying: 'God if it is your will let me make the right decision. It is my sister who brought this news and you know how much I love and trust her. I know she wouldn't do something that will jeopardize the future of my children.'

Tingert hasn't totally made up her mind, but the idea of not missing this opportunity for the sake of children remained to be a case requiring final decision. Tingert believes her sister's childhood experience has great influence in her final decision on the case. Mean time, life at home became a bit difficult. Although Tingert loves her husband, they sometimes quarreled with worthless matters. Consequently, she left the house with her children and stayed with her parents for a short while. That time her sister came with the proposal again and convinced Tingert to make her decision to give the children. It seems that the situation she was in had contributed to this final decision. Tingert delivered her children (ages 6 and 5 years) to the hospital herself. Her husband already accepted the idea of the children's adoption, Even though she was not talking to him as a result of their misunderstanding, she knew he wouldn't disagree with her decision.

As mentioned earlier, Tingert was not in a position to pursue her studies at college level due to the circumstances she was in. Hence she did not want her children to have the same history as herself; she wanted her children to have better education than herself. She was also not happy with the situation of women residing in their town and wondered if this would ever change for the better. Women in the area didn't have freedom in their life according to her and she was worrying about the fate of her own children specially her daughter. She didn't want her daughter and son to lead the same life like the people in her area when they grow up. She thus finally, fully decided to hand over her beloved children for adoption.

When Tingert gave her children, the only thing that was required of her was to inform the hospital what her children liked in regards to food. Her sister was the one who provided all the information since she has more knowledge in the issue than Tingert.

Tingert got information that her children were adopted internationally from her sister. At the beginning, the adopting parents of the two children used to send pictures. However, it has been two years since Tingert received any picture from them. Her sister who works in the hospital is aware of the disappearance of the information on the children but she has no way of knowing the reason behind.

Although Tingert gave her children for adoption for reasons she mentioned above, the people living in their surroundings hated her for her action. The reason is that Tingert and her husband were ostracized for involving in international adoption because Tingert and her husband were considered healthy and well to do when compared to the living conditions of most people in their town. Tingert's daughter, born in 2000 is 12 years and her son, born in 2003 is now ten. She doesn't regret at all that she gave her children for adoption so long as they live a happy life now and in future. Her only concern is that, at later years, she wanted to give birth to other children, which she wasn't able to make. The reason as to why she couldn't conceive is unknown. She is wondering if she would be able to conceive again and have another child whom she will be happy to bring up or remain to be without one. She says "I leave my future in God's hands."

That being the general situation, she believes that her children, whom she gave for adoption, are happy where they are and that they are getting the education that she dreamt for them in a secured environment. She can prove it from the pictures she saw of her children that was last sent to her years back. She knows her children are in good hands. However, she does worry as to why their adoptive parents haven't brought them to Ethiopia for a visit, because her sister had informed Tingert then that they have promised to bring them when they reach the age of 12 and now her elder has reached this age. Tingert still hopes that their adoptive parents will bring

them and enable the children meet with their family in Ethiopia. According to her they may come this summer or they may be waiting for the younger one to reach 12 too. Tingert can't ask them through mail because she doesn't have any addresses on the picture. When the hospital at the district gives Tingert any pictures and letters, the address on the envelope is removed. Although she knows that her children are in Holland, she does not know their exact location/address. She tried to call the case worker at the orphanage with the number that she got from her sister. The lady whom she found on the other side of the phone told Tingert that she no longer works at the orphanage due to challenges encountered with the parents who relinquished their children. She told Tingert that she facilitated the process of international adoption out of good will; she has left her job as it is no more considered right. Tingert has seen on TV that there are other childcare alternatives recently, but didn't have the information when relinquishing her kids. However, she still believes that international adoption is the best, when it comes to the better life for children.

Tingert believes that, when her children grow up they will come and visit their parents, and that they will become productive citizens. She is also sure that the adoptive parents will show them their country of origin. Tingert heard from other people that, foreigners tell the truth and they will not break their promises. This gives light to her hope of seeing her children one day, a hope that keeps her stand firm in life.

3.4. CASE THREE- LEMLEM

Lemlem's story is narrated by herself as well as her brother Bisrat since Lemlem is having a depression for which she is being treated at the center for victims of human trafficking. Lemlem remembers what has happened to her. However, it is difficult for her to narrate her story as there

are things that she was not involved with when her children were given away for international adoption.

Lemlem 28 was born in Bolosole worda, Areka town found in Wolaita of Southern Ethiopia which is located around 330 km from the capital Addis Ababa. She has three sisters and six brothers. Her father and mother earned their living from farming. Her mother died while giving birth to a baby boy in 1999. The baby boy survived and was given for international adoption by her father. Lemlem was caring for her brothers and sisters assuming the role of a mother since she was the eldest of her sisters in the family. Lemelm who was grade five quieted school because of the burden she carries in taking care of her family. Being an Evangelical Christian, Lemlem used to go to the nearby church on Sundays where she met with a gentleman named Dessta whom she later married and lived with happily ever since. Although Lemlem got married and has got own family, she continued caring for her birth family by staying in the same neighborhood with her father, brothers and sisters. Besides she had the responsibility of leading her own family including looking after her two sons that were born to her after years of marriage. Then Lemlem got pregnant with her baby girl. Unfortunately, her husband was chronically ill and later died before she gave birth to a baby girl.

Lemlem started raising her children alone. However, life became very difficult for Lemlem. Hence, she decided to go to Sudan as a domestic worker like most women of her age in the town. Women migrate to the Middle East and Sudan as domestic workers, looking for a better income. As a result, her peers were going to Sudan looking for domestic employment. She thought about it and shared it with her father and siblings. At first, her family was not happy with her decision. Nevertheless, she strongly insisted that she go and they finally agreed. In order to facilitate her

travel she sold her cattle worth about ETB 6000 paid of which, ETB 4600 paid to a broker who promised to take her to Sudan and get her employment.

She then decided to leave her children with her mother- in- law who was in her old age and a brother- in-law. Lemlem decided to leave her children with her in- laws because she thought it will be difficult for her father and siblings to care for the small children. Lemlem thought if she goes to Sudan she can work very hard and improve the lives of her children with the money she earns as a domestic worker. After arranging everything she headed to Sudan with the help of a broker.

Unfortunately, things didn't work out as planned. When she went there she started working in one house where she stayed there for six months and didn't get a penny. When she claimed her salary, she was informed that, the broker on the Sudan side was collecting her payment every month. Lemlem couldn't cope up with this condition and left this house. She got employed in another house for eight months. While her life was in a misery she telephoned her family in Ethiopia to find out about her children and the rest of the family. It was then that she heard of the sad news that her two children were given for international adoption without her consent. It was a shock for Lemlem! It was after this incident that Lemlem lost her memory and finally ended up to be in the Ethiopian community in Sudan.

The Ethiopian community in Sudan sent Lemlem to a shelter located in Addis Ababa for women victims of human trafficking. When she reached the shelter, Lemlem didn't know where she is and who her family is and what has happened to her during her stay in Sudan for a total of one year and two months. That is when she told her counselor and her family identified through a telephone number she remembered by heart, since there was no identity card with her when she

came. Then she was treated for a depression and got better and started sharing what she had experienced.

In Lemlem's village there is an orphanage located very near both to her in-laws and her family. According to her brother, many families give their children to this orphanage. The children in the orphanage stay there visited by their families. The workers in the orphanage go home to home and ask parents if they are interested to give their children for international adoption. The workers inform the household they visit that if they give their children they will get good education by going abroad and that they will come when they are eighteen. For those parents who accept the proposal when their children get adopted they get pictures of the child once a month given to a family member. In Lemlem's case, it is assumed that her brother-in-law is taking the pictures that came which Lemlem has not seen yet. Currently there is no information on the status of the children. Her brother-in-law no more receives pictures. One of her son is still living with his grandmother as he was not given for adoption for being overage.

Lemelm regrets her going to Sudan as it hasn't brought any positive change in her life. Instead her children were taken. She has lost the hope of seeing her children again and always talks about them. She is interested to be with children whenever she meets one at the shelter or the hospital when she goes for treatment. Lemlem's family doesn't clearly know where the children went and have no contact of the organization that took her children. Lemlem and her brother hopes that she will get to see her children in the future if that is impossible at least a chance of knowing the whereabouts of her children which they believe will help her recover fast.

3.5. CASE FOUR- MESERET

Her name is Messert, an Orthodox believer. She is 35 years old and was born in Wonji Shoa located 110 km from Addis Ababa. Her parents used to work in the sugar factory that is located in the area. She has two brothers: one brother lives in Adama 10 km from Wonji Shoa and the other one works at the sugar factory here in Wonji Shoa where their parents used to work. She was educated up to grade four and dropped out of school. At the age of 17, she was given to a young man on arranged marriage by her parents. Her husband was a daily laborer and she was a housewife. She gave birth to three children and their life used to be good till her husband became sick and was admitted in the hospital. That was when they found out that they both were HIV positive. Her husband died a few months after he started the medication for HIV. Messert was then three-months pregnant and is HIV positive, on top of being an ailing with asthma and high blood pressure.

In her struggle for living, Messert started washing clothes and baking injera (local bread) at an individual's house and earns 30 birr a month. She continued in this in order to survive until her pregnancy allowed her to do so. She then started depending on an aid from an Evangelical church named Full Gospel that provided her with wheat and fafa (a powder used to make porridge) after she gave birth in order to feed her family. Some neighbors also came and cared for her when she was seriously sick. Whenever she felt strong enough, she went back to her daily duty which was backing injera and washing cloth. The baby was cared by her six-year old daughter at the time. The two older children went to a government school which required no payment. Sometimes when Messert got sick and stayed at home, her 13 year-old daughter replaced Messert in baking the injera so that the family could have something to put on the table to eat.

That was when some people from the hospital started coming to Messert's house. They initially came once in fifteen days and then twice a week and tried to convince her to give her one-year old son and her seven-year daughter for international adoption. Some neighbors strongly advised Messert to never miss this opportunity which they themselves have done. They said Messert was to take this option for the well being of the children. She then made her final decision in fifteen days from the time the people from the hospital first came to convince her. However, her thirteen-year daughter said to Messert: 'please don't do it; I am growing and it will not take me long to be able to help the family; I am there for you and I will support you. However, if you insist give my one-year old brother and I will not allow you to give my sister no matter what, because I have another brother but I need my only sister.' The seven-year old one also cried and refused to go.

During that week, Messert told the children she will go to the hospital for a checkup taking the one year old boy with her. Her intention for not telling them where she was going was for them not to press on her to change her mind. The little one cried bitterly when Messert took him from his sister's hand as she was attached to him very much. Messert reached the hospital but was not sure of what she was doing. She was torn between the two – she wanted to go back but then was thinking if she goes back, the better life that she wished for her son would forgo. She deeply reconsidered the issue for a while and persuaded herself to be strong and reached at the office of the health assistant. She was asked to sign a paper the contents of which she didn't know. The only thing that was asked by the health assistant was the age of her son. Messert told the health assistant that her son was one year and two months old. The health assistant warned her that, if anyone asks Messert the age of her child she should tell them that he was seven months old. The health assistant at the hospital told her that her son is HIV positive. As this was very sad news,

Messert burst into a bitter cry, and left the hospital empty handed. Messert finds it very difficult to express in words the emotional feelings she was in when she left the hospital leaving her son behind. She didn't have any other option. The only family that she knew was her parents who had already died and her two brothers were not in a position to take care of themselves, leave alone her children. Her other relatives live in Addis Ababa and Gojam which she never met because she lived her entire life in this village where her parents migrated looking for employment.

Messert decided to give her son because she wanted him to have a better life. She was told by the people that came from the hospital that if she gives him for adoption, maybe he will support her financially as he will definitely have a better life. Even if Messert dies he will come and help his siblings. This was Messert's understanding of the situation then. She still believes that the life here and there is different. Therefore, if he is successful she believes her son will come back to rescue the family from poverty. Messert knows that her son was one year and two months old when he left. Nevertheless, she was sure there will come a day when he will ask for his birthmother. The fact that he has a different color from the people around him will trigger an interest of knowing more about himself, including his biological parents and country of origin according to her.

There hasn't been a date that Messert had not thought of her son he has always been in her mind. She always thinks about him. She has never heard from the health assistant after the day she left that hospital. Time passed by and she was left curious to know the status of her son. For that reason, after a few years, she went to the health assistant's office at the hospital to find out about the status of her adopted son. Messert asked the health assistant politely to tell her the situation of her son to which he responded: 'go away. I don't want to see you again, you gave your child

voluntarily and do you think anyone cares? Don't come near me'. With tears in her eyes in a vibrating sad tone Messert said, "I didn't think I will be detached with my son. I wish I had never given my son if I knew that I would end up in not being able to seeing him or hearing from him for the rest of my life". Messert really doesn't know how her son is coping with the disease. According to her she continues to pray for his wellbeing wherever he is. She is very, very eager to know about him, at least hear about his status, if not see him physically. She says, if she knows he is dead, she would accept the reality and continue life. If he is alive it is like a dream come true for her. Messert's children ask for their younger brother day by day and always blame her for the decision of giving him. Being very restless Messert went to Adama town which is 15 km from Wonji Shoa based on the information she got from the neighbors. According to them, an organization in Adama facilitated the process of the adoption of her son. She met with the director of an organization for people living with HIV/AIDS who, after taking the profile of her son, made several calls to orphanages in Addis Ababa. However, he didn't find any information that lead to the location of her son. At the end he told Messert to go back home and not to worry promising that he would try to find out information on the status of her son and let her know. Messert had never heard from him nor went back for follow up as she has no money that she can pay for transportation. She doesn't have any answer for the question her children raise repeatedly.

She is always eager to receive pictures of her son when she sees other parents receive pictures of other children that are adopted by foreigners internationally in her neighborhood. She considers the birthmothers who receive information on their children lucky as at least they know the status of their children.

According to Messert is now living in a limb, she doesn't know whether to say she has a son or her son is dead. If she doesn't know about the status of her son, her life will continue like this till the day she dies. Her then 13 years old is now 21 and is working in a flower farm located in Ziway. She gets three hundred birr per month out of which she sends her some. She kept her promise and supports her mother sharing from her meager income, for which Messert is grateful. She sometimes becomes very sick for weeks, Messert is scared of dying of her illness before she sees or at least hears about her son. She now regrets giving her son for adoption. She always prays to hear something about her son. In the middle of all these, she thanks God that her children are now able to support each other. Her son and daughter go to a government school. Her son works as a shepherd and gets 30 birr per month. With the money he gets he buys educational material and clothes for himself and his sister. Life is bitter for Messert but she has no choice than to pray and wait for an answer to her daily prayer to at least hear about her son.

3.6. CASE FIVE- KASSECH

Her name is Kassech and she is an Orthodox believer and 32 years old. Kassech was born in a town called Adadi Mariam located 38km south of Addis Ababa. At the age of two she was brought to Addis Ababa. She grew up with a best friend of her father who lived in the capital Addis Ababa. Kassech believed that her parents gave her to her guardian at the age of two, thinking that he will educate her and raise her well since he was rich. Kassech doesn't know the whereabouts of her family. She never asked about them and didn't have any interest to ask. She grew up with 12 brothers and sisters, i.e. children of the friend of her father. The family had enough of everything and Kassech was happy with her life. One day when she was in grade six she told her guardian she would quit her school. He and the rest of the family were not happy with Kassech's decision. They were very angry with her. As a teenager, Kassech was very

aggressive and she started spending much of her time with her peers partying and entertaining instead of focusing on her studies. Her behavior was not thus accepted by the family who became very much annoyed with her behavior and told her to leave the house. She didn't care about leaving the house. She immediately collected few of her belongings and went to stay with her friends at the age of 21. Then she decided to work as a bar tender in a hotel located in Addis Ababa. While working there, she rented a house not far from her work place and started staying in that house during the day and working as a bar lady at night. The money that she got as a bar lady was low. She therefore decided to get involved in commercial sex work. She believed in safe sex and used condoms when going out with her clients. Her clients cared for her and paid her well, making the business profitable and attractive then.

One night when doing her routines which was serving beverages and drinks to customers that came to use their bar, she heard people shouting at her back. It was a bomb⁴ thrown at her back landing on the right side of her foot. This incidence changed her life clockwise. She was taken to a hospital and got treated. She stayed in the hospital for six months. Then, her guardian family had moved to America except one daughter who then lived in Ethiopia. She was the one who came for Kassech's rescue. Her one leg was amputated due to the accident at that time. Kassech was so much disappointed with herself. She figured out there is nothing left for her. She was a commercial sex worker then and has lost one leg. She imagined herself disabled. She asked herself a question like, who would come to a disabled commercial sex worker like her. What Kassech called 'beauty' in her, on which she depended much was not there any longer. She couldn't continue her work as a commercial sex worker any longer. She doesn't have any other

⁴On a Saturday night July 2003 a bomb exploded at Segen Hotel in Addis Ababa the capital city of Ethiopia in which 31 people were injured. According to eyewitnesses someone throw a bomb in front of the bar and then ran (BBC, 2003).

skill and she was left with nothing - no family no friends and money. Even though many people died because of the accident, both men and women working in the bar, Kassech wondered why she, a person with no other income and family tie, survived and left alive to face this. She regretted of the past thinking that had she behaved properly as a teenager, may be, she would have gone to America with the family of her father's friend and her story would have been different.

Years passed by without her getting any employment. As a result, her family supported her with the house rent and she begged people for her food. Staying in the same neighborhood, she was always reminded of her beauty and how men were easily attracted to her. This was heart breaking for her leaving her with no choice other than living with this sad memory.

On top of her sad living condition, she came to date a man who used to live in the neighborhood started living together , after sometime they started arguing in everything and her husband left her after she became pregnant making her life even worse. Kassech knew the man's mother and went to her so she can take care of the baby. She took care of him for nine months but always blamed Kassech for what has happened and gave her bad names because of her physical challenge. When her insult irritated Kassech, she took her son and stayed all alone. Her life became miserable. That was when she decided to give her child for international adoption. While working as a commercial sex worker, she had heard a lot about international adoption. A friend of hers, who used to work in the same bar with her, gave away her two male and female children for international adoption and shows Kassech pictures of the children and told her that she was happy that her children went abroad. This crossed Kassech's mind. With this and the additional information Kassech gathered from her neighbors, she went to the Kebele to request a certificate stating that she is poor and disabled and was not in a position to bring up her child. She took that

letter to the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs to initiate the process. Unfortunately, everything was stuck. When Kassech started the process her son was two years old, currently he is five years old. The reason that was given to Kassech was that her disability doesn't forbid her from raising her son. However, she is wondering as to how she would be able to raise him without an income of any sort. She said life has been challenging for her.

Kassech said she will be happy if she gets some kind of skill that would enable her to earn some money and lead a better life both for her son and herself. However, one thing she is sure about is that her son's life will be better if he gets the chance of being adopted by foreigners who can give him the best life. Otherwise, she believes that her son will be a delinquent when he grows up. She also fears that, she might die leaving her son with no one to care for him. Kassech tells her son every single day that God willing he will go abroad. When asked by others, he would tell them that he is preparing to go any day soon. Kassech worries about her son's future. She says she doesn't know what to do to let him have a secure future and leaves all in God's hands.

3.7.CHILDHOOD, ADOLESCENCE AND MOTHERHOOD

Based on the findings, birthmothers had wide-range experience starting from childhood to teenage and motherhood. The findings show that the living standards of the mothers' birth family were poor except Kassach who was adopted by her father's friend who was well to do. Even though all the mothers who participated in the study had the opportunity of attending school up to a certain level, they couldn't pursue their studies further due to early marriage, teenage pregnancy, childhood responsibility of caring for the family and peer pressure. All the birthmothers except Messert were raised in a large family. The birthmothers who grew up in a large family were exposed to domestic adoption. The motherhood experience of the birthmothers

was more or less the same, since all had the role of caring for their children as well as other family members.

According to the findings, arranged and early marriages were the custom in the society where the birthmothers lived. It is indicated that mothers were given for early marriage arranged by their parents in which case they started child bearing at a younger age. Tshaye was given for arranged marriage at the age of 20 and gave birth to two boys. Similarly Messert was given for an arranged marriage at the age of 17. On the other hand, Lemelm and Tingert got married choosing their partners, but the marriages took place at a young age. Those mothers, who got married at early age and on arranged marriage, were not emotionally and physically ready to raise their children. A good example can be Tshaye who ran away from her first husband leaving her children behind.

The findings show that birthmothers learned their respective gender roles from their families. The birthmothers were engaged with roles such as caring for family, looking after the sick, preparing food, caring for the sick etc. For instance, Lemelm has taken the role of mothering her brothers and sisters, in addition to taking care of her own children as a result of gender role socialization. Tshaye had the role of looking after her sick husband as well as taking care of her children while Tingert, a house wife, had the responsibility of looking after the family solely depending on the income of her husband. Likewise, Messert took care of the house chores whereas her daughter was responsible for her younger siblings on top of assisting in the house chores while Messert was sick and/or away.

The study shows that the earnings of all birthmothers were minimal. The birthmothers were engaged in jobs such as petty trade, domestic work, commercial sex work, small-scale farming,

etc. The birthmothers and their family members from Wonji Shoa depended on jobs available in Wonji Sugar Factory and Estate farms.

According to Tsehaye, it is only her husband who is HIV positive while she herself is negative. However, as a consequence of her husband's condition, Tsehaye says that her life has always been filled with worries, a major factor which contributed to her decision to give her children for international adoption. Messert, whose husband died of HIV leaving her HIV positive, felt that she was left with no hope to stay alive long enough and see her younger children grow. According to Messert, the only option available for the little ones' future was to give them for international adoption. Kassech, who was engaged in commercial sex work prior to the accident that put her in a physical challenge, couldn't continue with her work due to her status and was wondering as to how she could bring up her son. Therefore, she is considering giving her child for international adoption as the best option available to her. As cited above, health is one of the major factors for birthmothers' decision to relinquish their children for international adoption.

3.8. INFORMATION SOURCE FOR INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

The findings indicate that study participants were informed about international adoption through a friend, neighbors, and employees of the hospital, previous experience of families and through information disseminated by the adoption agencies. Lemelm became familiar with international adoption when her younger brother was relinquished. Besides, the availability of adoption agencies and orphanages in every corner of the area, and the mobilization undertaken by these institutions made her family be aware of international adoption. Messert, Tshaye and Tingert had

the chance of being informed through health professionals who have information about the issue while Kassech learned about international adoption from a friend who relinquished her children.

3.9.THE DECISION TO RELINQUISH CHILDREN FOR INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

Based on the study findings each woman had a unique circumstance that characterized her decision to take part in international adoption. However, some conditions were common for all birthmothers who were involved in international adoption such as poor living conditions, large family size with insufficient income and death of a partner.

In addition to the above factors, the birthmothers' perspectives that white people are better in bringing up children, life is much better abroad, wider education opportunities are available to children given for international adoption, and good employment opportunities for the children later in life, better fortune for the children as well as parents etc. influenced the decision of the birthmothers. In some cases, the birthmothers assume that the children given on adoption will be away only up until they complete their education and hope that they would return back home later.

According to findings from the key informants, the major causes for relinquishing children are: poverty, terminal illness, child birth out of wedlock, large family size, child birth that takes place as a result of sexual intercourse between family members (which is a taboo) and child born as a result of rape. Also, when a woman is married to a second husband, children from the first husband are given for international adoption. Further, false promises by adoption agencies contributed to child relinquishment by birthmothers.

3.10. PROCESSING INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION FOR BIRTHMOTHERS

It didn't take long for all birthmothers to make the final decision to relinquish their children after they initially heard about international adoption and initiated the process, except for Lemlem who was in Sudan when her children were given for international adoption by her mother-in-law, and who as such was not at all involved.

Even though some of the mothers didn't understand the meaning of parental consent they all signed the form provided by the adoption agencies/orphanages or health professionals. Messert, Tshaye and Tingert, left their children at the hospital responding to a few questions asked by the health assistants. All mothers did not remember going to the court in order to testify their agreements. During the time when birthmothers in the case study relinquished their children, there were other children (about 50) who were also given to the nurse who came from the orphanage. Likewise, it was not clear as to whether the mothers/families of these 50 children had gone through the legal procedures.

According to the information from the adoption agency some birthmothers change their decision to give their children for international adoption when approaching the court, and eventually return back home with their children. Others, on the other hand, are eager to see the completion of the adoption formalities and feel victorious to see their children go on adoption. According to him, in most cases birthmothers lack understanding of the implications and consequences of the parental consent, which they sign and tend to change their decisions after the process.

The findings indicated that neither adoption agencies nor orphanages provide proper and ongoing counseling to the birthmothers that relinquish their children for international adoption. According to the key informant from the orphanage, a counselor and representative from the MOWCYA the

reason for lack of proper counseling is due to the fact that creating awareness by the adoption agencies and orphanages may result in conflict of interest among the parties involved. Hence, it is indicated that birthmothers don't get any counseling prior to giving their children or after.

3.11. SUCCESS VERSUS FAILURE

After relinquishing their children for international adoption, birthmothers felt successful and at the same time regretted giving their children. Birthmothers worried about their children all the time they left them. They felt confused, hopeless and depressed as a consequence of missing their children. In addition, queries from siblings on why they gave their children were overwhelming. Moreover, some birthmothers were discriminated by their neighbors for participating in international adoption while others were appreciated and taken as models. An example for the former is Tingert whom the neighbors blamed while the later, Tsehaye was admired for her action.

Mothers worried a lot as they didn't have information on the conditions of their children and they didn't know whom to approach for an update on the status. This added to their regrets and even affected them emotionally, putting some to mental instability.

3.12. EXPERIENCE AFTER CHILD RELINQUISHMENT

Birthmothers had a similar experience in regards to receiving post placement reports about their children. Messert and Lemelm had no information on the countries where their children are placed let alone information on how they are with the new parents. Mothers were given promises that their children will come after a few years of stay with their adoptive parents which never happened. Tshaye and Tingert received pictures of their children during the first two years. Either Lemlem or family knows the whereabouts of the children as they have no contact of the

organization that processed the adoption. When birthmothers went to the agencies to enquire about their children they were informed that they gave their children willingly and as such there was no ground for complaint. Tshaye had the chance of meeting with her daughter after several years when her daughter came to revoke the parental right of her adaptive parents in the Ethiopian court which gave her an opportunity to know the status of her daughter. The contact was not facilitated by the agency that gave her children for adoption; rather it was made possible by an international organization that works in the area.

Findings showed that birthmothers do not hear about the status of their children after international adoptions. In principle, the maintenance of post placement report is the responsibility of the adoption agency which is expected to provide the required information on the status of the adopted children to the birthmothers quarterly during the first year, and once a year then after until the child reaches the age of 18. However, in practice this doesn't take place as planned, and in some cases the birthmothers do not get any report at all. According to the key informant from MOWCYA, although the mandate to follow up on the implementation of the above-mentioned regulation is delegated to Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs lack of data base system makes it difficult to trace the status of each child who is adopted internationally.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION

In this chapter discussion will be made referring to the literatures reviewed and some new concepts that have emerged which are not indicated in the literature review and the findings of the study. The researcher looked at the circumstances, perspectives and experience of birthmothers who gave their children away for international adoption, from a gender perspective.

4.1. BIRTHMOTHERS POVERTY AND HIV/AIDS

Women in Africa cherish motherhood according to the literature review (Oyewumi, 2000). This study has indicated that motherhood is cherished by the birthmothers. However, because of their problems in life mothers were forced to abandon their respected role. Women in the developing world give their children because of lack of resource (Perry cited by Sergeant, 2009), which this study has confirmed that women who are not educated well, women living with minimal or no income, women lacking permanent employment and women who are employed in the informal sectors were the once that were forced to give their children for international adoption.

Looking at the narratives of birthmothers who relinquished their children for international adoption, it is observed that their circumstances are common in nature. However some differences were observed as indicated in the reviewed literature (Mohanty, 1991). The study demonstrates this fact to be true. For example, Tshaye who gave two of her children for international adoption has a different circumstance as compared to Lemlem, a widowed mother. Lemlem's two children were given for adoption by her mother-in-law without her knowledge while Lemlem was in Sudan engaged in a job to earn her living and thereby improve the lives of her children at home. Tsehaye on the other hand gave her children as a result of the poor health

of her husband. In contrary, Kassech, a single mother, who was a commercial sex worker earlier in life and who was later physically challenged, was put in a situation where she is seeking to give her child on adoption for a different reason. Messert who is living with HIV/AIDS is not sure of what has happened to her son and is left with suspense. Last but not least Tingert, married, who was unable to conceive another child after giving her two children for international adoption is longing for the day on which she will meet her children. Their common undertakings are that all the mothers had unfavorable circumstances in life that influenced their decisions to relinquish their children for international adoption including Kassech who has not yet completed the process. As stated on the literature, children are given from the least privileged to the most privileged (Sergeant, 2009).

HIV /AIDS which increased mothers' poverty level is taken as the major reason for mothers to get involved in international adoption (Sara, 2010). However, according to this study, poverty is the major cause that leads to involvement in international adoption. On top of the birthmothers' poverty, their HIV/AIDS status, large family size, lack of secured employment etc. complicates their situation.

In the case of sending countries HIV/AIDS was considered as a terminal disease that made mothers to be eligible for international adoption, (Ethiopia Ministry of Women's Affairs child care guidelines, 2009 & US Department of State, 2013). According to a literature review birth families regretted that they gave their children because they are not dead and looking forward to meet with their children (Kjaera, 2012& Saiezt, 2013). Therefore, the researchers experience of this study HIV/AIDS is no more a shocking disease, people are now aware that one can have an extended live with the help of the ART.

4.2. BIRTHMOTHERS' DESPERATION

As indicated in the literature, securing social protection is a means of bringing solution to the root cause (Brittingham, 2010). This study has confirmed that lack of social protection has left birthmothers with no choice other than giving their children for international adoption. The concept of limited community resources has affected the social support system, which goes with the social rupture theory (Sara, 2010). Hence, the study has corroborated that the fading of societal support system is linked to poverty, increasing the number of OVC and ageing of care givers as indicated in the literature (Tatek, 2009). In addition, during the researcher's experience with the mothers, it was noted that high cost of living and inflation of price on consumer goods were some of the factors that have contributed to the diminishing of social support systems. A good example can be: Lemlem who went to Sudan to work and improve her life as a domestic worker, leaving her children with her aged mother- in- law, who then gave Lemelm's children for international adoption. Kassech is not capable of caring for her child because of unexpected accident that occurred in her life. She was not physically and financially capable to support her child and herself. Besides she is abandoned by her son's father all putting her in a situation with no one to care for her child and herself. Similarly, Messert a widowed mother was left with no choice since she has no relatives in the nearby villages except her brothers who live in poor condition and cannot afford to look for her children (Brittingham, 2012).

4.3. BIRTHMOTHERS AND THEIR ATTACHMENT WITH THEIR CHILDREN

Review of the concept of attachment theory and international adoption in relation to birthmothers indicates that it has an emotional effect (Kjaera, 2012& Saiezt, 2013). According to the study, at the time of relinquishing their children, HIV positive and poor mothers had the

feeling that they wouldn't live long enough to see their children grow. However, contrary to their assumption, the life of HIV positive birthmothers is prolonged with the help of medication while those poor mothers started leading an improved life. This way, they are put in a situation where they start distressing about their relinquished children. This incidence brings back past memories of the children and develops a growing interest to reunite with their children who live abroad.

On the attachment theory that is reviewed in the literature it is indicated that children are affected on their future life because of the attachment they develop (Buchanan, 2004). However, based on the researcher's findings mothers who have given their children for international adoption are also affected by the early attachment experience with their children whether the child was two years or above. Hence, it can be concluded that adults are also affected with the attachment experiences they had since it shaped the day to day activity of their life (Yngveson, 2010).

The literature review indicated that single birthmother who relinquished their children in Sidney had faced various kinds of emotional problems that are similar to the birthmothers that participated in this study (Deane, 1996). Although mothers in this study are married, single and widowed similar emotions were shared. Birthmothers' attachment experience, with their relinquished children is one factor that has left them to wonder on the future of their children. Some mothers who have relinquished their children have been found to be with no attachment to their children especially when they had bad memories related to birthing their baby as a result of which they abandon their children. They either suppress or erase the memory of giving birth and early attachment (Greene, 2005).

4.4. MISINFORMATION /LACK OF INFORMATION

The reviewed literature showed that there are other childcare alternatives available for the public (MOWCYA, 2009 and ACPF, 2010). However birthmothers were not aware of their existence, except the extended family service which was basically the norm of African society (ACPF, 2010). Therefore, birthmother's lack of access to information on the other alternative childcare services has put them in the position to go for international adoption. According to the findings international adoption was well advocated for, while there was no advocacy work done in the area of the other available childcare alternatives.

Birthmothers took international adoption as a chance that appeared at their door step, as something that needs not to be missed because of the misinformation that existed. Their perspective was that their children will come back after a few years to visit them, they will have a 'better life' and the adoptive family will support the birth family; they didn't assume that it is a life time good bye as in the literature review (Brittingham, 2010). This study indicated that birthmothers who relinquished their children for international adoption had similar perspectives. This perspectives have the notion that their children will have a 'better life', come back to their family and visit them once in a while and even the children moving back to their country of origin once they finish school.

The intended objective for international adoption was not clearly explained to the birthmothers during the process of giving their children to international adoption as indicated in the literature reviewed (ACPF, 2010) based on the researchers experience of the study birthmothers had understood international adoption differently than intended because the purpose was not clearly and truly explained to them at the time of giving their children. The childcare guidelines and the

revised family law states that birthmothers need to give parental consent in order for the adoption to effect (Alternative Childcare Guidelines, 2009) in this study even though all the birthmothers have given their children voluntarily, except Kassech who has not finalized the process yet and Lemelm who doesn't have the knowledge of the process on the relinquishment of her children, the rest have not been to the court in order to testify their will. In addition in the case of the birthmothers from Wonji Shoa, at the time they gave their children to the health assistance and the representative from the orphanage, there were about 25-30 parents mostly birthmothers that relinquished their children. During that time, in two weeks time about 50 children were given for international adoption according to the narratives with the birthmothers. However, all the birthmothers were asked to sign some papers in order to confirm that they gave the children voluntarily, which some didn't understand what was presented to them on the paper.

4.5. WOMEN'S OPPRESSION

Birthmothers' family of origin has contributed to their circumstances which lead them to relinquish their children for international adoption. According to the Ethiopian Young Adult Survey (2010) the vulnerability of women has roots during adolescence which is listed as limited access to schooling, early and unwanted marriage, death of parents, overburdened with house chores and coercive sexual relations and on the other hand boys and men are socially accepted when they are dominants. This study has confirmed that what birthmothers experience during their childhood and adolescence has contributed to their vulnerability.

The male dominance is one factor that was discovered in the study, it is indicated that birthmothers were put in a condition in which they were unable to exercise their right, and they were treated as a property. Messert and Tshaye were given for an arranged marriage in which

they were treated unfairly while, Kassech, a commercial sex worker, who felt that she couldn't undertake any other task after the physical challenge. For her, 'her beauty' i.e. her outside appearance was the only means of earning a living. In the cases of the birthmothers given on arranged marriage at early age, the society decided for them taking them as properties rather than human being. Women were considered as objects, and were exploited. Because of family burdens, the birthmothers were not in a position to complete their education while their male counter parts didn't have to go through similar situations. Besides, they were brought up in a society which believes that women do not have the right to decide for themselves; rather they should abide by the decision of the society and live in accordance with the prevailing values of the society. These women didn't have the right to decide for themselves; rather their future was determined by the society.

4.6. THE ROLE OF AGENCY

In Ethiopia the Ministry of Women Children and Youth Affairs (MOWCYA) is the authorized ministry that is assigned to collect and make analyses in order to give the court vital information about the personal social and economic condition of the adaptor and the eligibility of the child (revised family law article 192 & 193). Which is being implemented based on the discussion that was held with the key informants. However, this study indicated the birthmothers are not given due attention in terms of getting services rendered to their needs. Moreover, according to the key informant from the MOWCYA there was no visible intervention in regards to empowering birthmothers (as a way of family preservation) who are approaching the ministry in requesting to relinquish their children because of lack of permanent income, though it is put as an option on the childcare manual as the first step which is family preservation (MOWCYA,

2009). In addition, findings indicated that the system itself lacks strength in giving awareness in the subject of good parenting while it focuses in enhancing the economy of families.

The responsibility for informing the birthmothers on the progresses of adopted children lays on the adoption agencies that undertook the adoption which needs to be ensured by the sending countries (ACPF, 2010) However, lack of commitment with the agencies, not giving attention to ensuring the delivery of post placement report and adoption agencies leaving the country because of phasing out and changing locations were some of the reasons that were observed regards receiving the post placement report

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1. CONCLUSION

In conducting the research an attempt was made to understand the five birthmothers' circumstance, perspectives and experience before and after the relinquishment for international adoption.

Findings show that the circumstances of birthmothers influence their decision to participate in international adoption. These circumstances, in most cases the gender base violence and the gender role socialization, include birthmothers' childhood experience, early and arranged marriage, teenage pregnancy, rape, poor economic situation, poor health condition, large family size, a burden of caring for the family and lower educational background.

The study revealed that the perspective of birthmothers is another factor that influenced their decision to take part in international adoption. When giving their children for international adoption, birthmothers assume as their children will enjoy a luxuries life they are deprived of as a result of poverty and poor health status they are experiencing. However some birthmothers have uncertainty about its occurrence because they have not heard from their children for long, as promised during the process of international adoption. Birthmothers never got a chance of either meeting with the adopting parents nor were they involved in the preparation of their children life history.

The conditions of some birthmothers changed over the years regretting their decisions and worrying about the whereabouts of their children.

In summary, findings have shown that birthmothers have different feelings. While some are regretting for giving their children, others are grieving because of lack of information on the whereabouts of their children. Even though at the time of relinquishment some considered it an accomplishment, most of them felt lost, discouraged, depressed and unworthy. As birthmothers have not received post placement report of their children their concern is so serious.

Environment, lack of information and other social factors have been also found a critical issue in influencing the decision of birthmothers to international adoption. These include the proximity to the orphanage or adoption agency, the lobby and advocacy works carried out in influencing birthmothers, lack or misinformation, limited knowledge about other alternative child care services, the fading of societal support system, peer pressure, less tight adoption policies and lack of access to legality are the major factors that influence decision of birth mothers.

It has been identified that no tangible works are also observed in terms of good parenting as a way of preservation of families. There is no also any database or system that has gender disaggregated data of adopted children and birth families. This has resulted in lack of proper and authenticated information. Similarly, there are no services tailored to the needs of birthmothers who have relinquished their children or those that are looking to relinquish. This confirms that birthmothers are not given either psychosocial or legal counseling to understand about the pros and cons of international adoption before their consent.

5.2. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of the study on the circumstance, perspectives and pre/post experience of birthmothers that are involved in international adoption the following recommendations were forwarded:

- Poor documentation system has affected the quality of the international adoption process and thereby birthmothers and children. When birthmothers relinquish their children a proper documentation that incorporates gender disaggregated data has to be in place. The documentation has to be designed in such a way to indicate future references about children's identity and their family of origin. Hence, the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (MOWCYA) needs to take the initiative to take the lead.
- To alleviate the existing suffering of birthmothers, strengthening the existing weak international adoption system and provide better quality adoption services, enhancing the capability of MOWCYA in handling adoption cases and empowering vulnerable families have to be given priority. Forums and support groups have to be organized to assist birthmothers, who relinquished, come and share their thoughts with their acquaintances and cope up with their losses. A centralized system has to be also designed to identify eligible children and prospective adoptive parents. This is an area that needs the attention and close follow-up of the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs.
- Birthmothers give their children for international adoption, among other factors, because of poverty. Therefore, birthmothers have to be given opportunities to child day care services, and should be empowered with vocational skill trainings, income generation activities and further education to improve their socio economic status and reclaim dignity of the family.
- It is also vital that mothers get legal and psychosocial counseling services before giving their children for international adoption. Access to legal counseling service will help birthmothers get knowledge on the legal consequences of adoption, their right after the process, post placement report, reunification and revocation. Providing psychosocial

counseling service focusing on good parenting, family preservation and how they can benefit from other alternative childcare services, etc helps these families prepare themselves for the adoption and act knowledgeably after the adoption takes effect. Hence, this should be done by all groups that are involved in the process of international adoption such as adoption agencies, orphanages, civil service organizations, concerned ministries and etc.

- Besides, disseminating information to birthmothers about issues of international adoption in order to prevent the existing serious irregular practices , preparing informative materials that can be accessed in different languages and locations is vital. In doing so it is recommended that MOWCYA at federal and regional level, Civil Service Organizations, Community Based Organizations and concerned Non Governmental Organizations should participate in the development and dissemination of the materials.

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