

Role of Social Work on Adoption to Single Parents

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The adoption process is a particularly hard and complicated for most single parents. Despite the challenges, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) found that up to 17,000 single parents adopted children or youth from foster care in the Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2017 (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019). This accounted for 28% of all adoptions in 2017, with single women taking up over 85% of the children and youth. Social workers play a crucial role in facilitating the adoption process by facilitating the adoption for the parent and the child. Social workers train and prepare single parents before the adoption and offer ongoing support even after the adoption is finalized. While the adoption process and being a single parent can be challenging, social workers play the integral role in facilitating, training and preparing the individual for parenthood, and bridging gaps to create meaningful relationships between the adopted child and the parent. The benefits are accrued by the child or youth as well as the single parent.

The adoption process fundamentally helps the child get adoptive parents and helps individuals and families help children. As a legal and permanent process, adoption is bound by a wide range of eligibility guidelines and ethical standpoints. Social workers play the critical role in assessing the ability of the adoptive parent to cater and take care of the child and matching the child and the parent. The home study requirement, provided by state, federal and international laws, is often facilitated by a social worker who examines whether the home of the parent is fit for raising a child. In most assessments, the social worker examines the parent's history and background, examines financials and the ability of the parent to cater to the child adequately, and the stability of the home environment (McNulty, 2015). The social worker also determines whether the parent(s) are committed to providing a nurturing home for the child.

Social workers have an influential decision making role in the adoption process that warrants the guidance of the code of ethics. The code expects social workers to maintain their integrity in the entire process as they are deciding and shaping the future of children. In processes of conducting home studies, social workers have to maintain their values of integrity and show dignity and worth of the child. Besides, social workers have to portray competence in their service to the children. The ability to perform their work efficiently and effectively helps make the transition for both single parents, families and the child more comfortable.

The National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics outlines the need for social workers to promote social justice in their work with others (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019). In this, the social worker has to ensure all children get equal opportunities, participate in decision making where possible, and attain services that allow them to thrive in society. Hence, the social worker has to guarantee that the children receive what they need and are treated with dignity and respect in the process. Besides, the social worker offers child protection from oppression, adverse discrimination, human rights violations, and economic injustices, especially in the adoption process. Ongoing support to the parent and the child after the adoption process is complete is one of the most effective approaches to protect and safeguard the child and ensure they receive the parental support and environment they need.

The adoption process is challenging for most single parents due to the eligibility guidelines have to be met. Single parents have the option of adopting locally or internationally through the support and facilitation of either private or public agencies. For private domestic adoptions, the birth parents of the child can select a single parent. Child welfare reports that some birth parents may choose a single parent based on the appreciation that they do not face a substantial risk of divorce, separation or domestic violence issues (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019). The role of preparing and ascertaining single parents will be able to parent often left to social workers. Through home studies, the birth parents are assured that the adoptive parent's background, financial standing, and home environment are stable and suitable for the child. The decision on whether the single parent should adopt the child or not lies with the birth parent.

Moreover, social workers also play a critical role in facilitating intercountry adoption. Even though the eligibility laws vary from country to country, single parents can adopt children from other countries. To facilitate the process, social workers perform the role of preparing the parent, performing a case analysis through home studies on the single-parent (Segal, Gerdes, & Steiner, 2015). The social worker also conducts an assessment of the child's past, the family, and the background of a single parent. Hence in cases involving children from different ethnic and racial backgrounds, the social worker provides services that bridge the gap between the parent and the child. This includes ongoing support even after the adoption process is complete and cultural training to the child.

For single adoptive parents, preparation is one of the core roles of the social worker. Preparation involves two processes of educating the single parents on the adoption process and the issues involved with adoption and after matching with a child, providing child-specific information, training and supporting the parent (Teska, 2018). The educative framework before matching the parent to a child focuses on what, how, where and who of adoption. In what, the social worker informs the parent on the legal, ethical and social guidelines of adoption and ensures that the single parent has a comprehensive understanding of the underlying processes of adoption. The social worker then guides the single parent on how the process occurs and where the children may come from depending on the preferences. These initial processes are essential as they ensure that the social worker is aware of the motivations, expectations, and abilities of the single parent and prepare them for placement.

Studies point out that the safety, stability, and long-term success of placements is reliant on the expectations of the parent and the preparation they receive (Teska, 2018). After placement, the social worker educates trains and supports the single parent by providing child-specific information that enables the parent to develop a relationship with the child. The child-specific information includes the background of the child, the impact the background has on the child, the emotional support the child requires and the realistic expectations parents should have on the child. The training will also involve self-assessment, where the single parent assesses his/her strengths, limitations, and preferences and note how they will be able to parent the specific child successfully (Segal, Gerdes, & Steiner, 2015). In this, social workers aim at

ensuring that the parent attains all the information required to understand and take care of the child during the transition period and on the long-term commitment.

Further, the premise of pre-adoptive training and education is to prevent alienation difficulties of adoption (Bergeron, & Pennington, (2013). These difficulties include cases of child abuse, neglect, disruption, displacement, and dissolution. Studies indicate that from 9 -15% of children in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K, experience disruption before the finalization of the adoption process, 10% return to foster care and dissolution occurs to up to 10% of the adopted children (Thomas, & Larsen, 2019). In cases of child abuse and neglect, the social worker has the mandate of protecting the child by instigating measures that safeguard the child. In such instances, the well-being of the child is the only priority of the social worker and different measures such as dissolution through a court case can be taken to ensure the child is safe.

Social workers enable parents to understand that adoption is a lifelong experience that encompasses the intricacies of relationships between children, biological families, and parents (Teska, 2018). Social workers help guide parents, especially single parents on the challenges of becoming a parent, the change of schedules and navigating birth-family issues as the child grows up. Besides, studies show that the preparation of the adoptive parents assists in formulating the complex relationships between an adoptee and the adopter. The challenge is amplified for single parents as the child has to adapt to living with a single parent. Social workers, henceforth, nourish and support the development of the relationship.

The child's adjustment to the single parent is influenced by the capacities of the child and by the characteristics of the child (Segal, Gerdes, & Steiner, 2015). The social worker's relevance is tied to the ability to assess the child's capacities and match him/her with a suitable parent. The integration process takes longer for older children that have already established relationships with their birth parents or in foster homes compared to infants. Hence, the social worker's input before, during, and after the adoption process plays an integral role in facilitating the child's transition to the new home.

Pre-adoption training and assessments take longer for single parents as social workers have to ascertain the parent is capable, and the child will fit. Finding the right match and preparing the parent to take care of the child takes longer and can be marred with challenges including the preference of the child's birth parents (Thomas, & Larsen Gibby, 2019). Other factors such as finances, support systems, and careers often create barriers for most single parents. Since the single parent assumes primary care and support to the child upon adoption, most social workers are keen on ensuring expectations are clear, and the parent can sustain the responsibility.

Requirements are also more for single parents as the gender and age of the child are factored more than in couple families (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment at AdoptUSKids, 2014). Some countries, for instance, do not allow single men to adopt girls and have also enforced stricter measures on single parent adoptions. While social workers can play their role efficiently in preparing single parents to adopt and facilitating the process, the requirements make the process grueling and challenging to most single parents. Further, single-

parent cases are often approached on a case-by-case system that often takes a long time compared to coupled parents.

Conclusion

The role of social workers in the adoption process is fundamental for both parents and single-parent families. However, for single parents, social workers play an amplified role in pre-adoption training, and after the adoption. They facilitate the transition of children and help prepare, train and empower single parents to create a stable and nurturing environment for the adopted children. The well-being of the child is of paramount concern, with the social worker playing the role of safeguarding and protecting the human rights and dignity of the child with integrity. Single parents face a longer adoption process, but with the support of social workers, they provide a safe, stable and supportive environment for the child.

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