

Development of international adoption



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Do you have childhood memories of playing house with your mom or playing baseball with your dad? Now, imagine your childhood if you didn't grow up with loving parents who were always there for you. It is approximated that there are more than 135 million children around the world that are not being raised within a family unit. Adoption is the legal method where an adult or couple becomes the legal parent of a child who is not biologically associated with them (Sember 1). Adoption is a subject that is not without controversy in today's society. Abuses of the process, particularly in cases of international adoption, have caused people and their governments to reevaluate how to better administer and control the adoption system. Legitimate international adoption gives the child a new family but it is an expensive process that takes the child away from his or her culture, primary language, and biological family. Although many people view international adoption as a chance to save a child and be their hero, it has also created the opportunity for some people to abuse the system and to engage in human trafficking and slavery. Over the past 75 years, international adoption has been driven by wide differences in national wealth, war, famine and other natural disasters. As information and technology have brought the world closer together, there is no denying the condition and needs of poor children around the world. This has, in part, generated more demand for international adoption from people in wealthier countries that want to create a difference in a child's life.

Historically, surges in international adoption activity have occurred following humanitarian disasters and war, especially after World War II (Sember 1). The most recent wave of international adoption growth began after 1992

when China opened its orphanages and allowed westerners to adopt children. After reaching a peak during the early 2000's, international adoption has declined more recently as China, the world's most significant source of children for adoption, has allowed fewer of its children to be adopted abroad. China has now established limits and guidelines on who is qualified to adopt and has also modified its one-child-per-couple system (Sember 3). As a result, current figures for international adoptions have declined from their peak in 2004, when 22, 990 adopted children arrived in the U. S. from different countries which accounted for more than half of the 45, 288 international adoptions from countries around the world. One of the largest waves of international adoptions in the 20th Century occurred during the period between 1939 and 1946 when thousands of Jewish children were orphaned after the deaths of their parents in the Holocaust. The United States and Europe adopted these orphans as well as others who lost their families during the war. Many of these children were sponsored by churches (Adoption 2, 3) who worked to find suitable adoptive parents in other countries. After World War II and during the early Cold War, international adoption activity levels were again driven by wars, refugee migrations, famines, and other disasters. Television helped reveal the dire situation of dependent and orphaned children abroad which made their plight even more apparent to Americans (Sember 1). Soldiers and sailors sent to Europe during World War II, as well as Korea, Vietnam, and elsewhere throughout Asia fathered significant numbers of children in those countries (Adoption 2). Many Amerasian children born from American Fathers and Asian mothers were often disgraced in their countries of origin which attracted significant attention in the United States (Adoption 3).

In 1993, the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption was approved by 103 nations seeking to protect all parties to international adoption and to prevent the international trafficking of children. These measures have helped to improve the standards and regulation of the international adoption process but problems still remain. The problems aren't just with the countries that provide the children but also exist with the relatively wealthier countries that are adopting them. At its best, International adoption provides children that were born into poverty with an opportunity to become part of a caring family in a better environment. This still requires these children to be taken out of their culture and forces them to adapt to their new country (Sember 3). In most cases, adoptive parents do not speak their child's language and have to deal with challenging health and dietary concerns (International 6). International adoption also removes children from their native customs and traditions which can create identity confusion (Sember 3.). Even after the process of adoption is complete, there are situations where the new parents decide that they do not want to be adoptive parents anymore or they no longer have the resources to support the needs of their adopted child (Sember 3). In the case of a failed adoption, children have to find new homes which can be emotionally devastating since many of these children have already experienced traumatic situations coming from war, abuse, or disabilities (Sember 3). All of these issues can be traumatizing to the children involved and raise questions and legal implications about the adoption process and post-adoption support services (Montgomery 3). The Global Policy Journal claims that part of the reason that adoption levels have increased in recent years is due to the aggressive exploitation of poor countries by rich countries interested in their children. An example of such <https://assignbuster.com/development-of-international-adoption/>

exploitation can be seen in some countries that account for high rates of international adoption yet have been accused of child trafficking largely related to the practice of paying off birth parents to sell their children (Montgomery 2). As demonstrated in the narrative above, legitimate international adoption can be both complicated and fraught with problems. The problems caused by illegitimate or illegal international adoption for the purpose of exploitation are much more serious. These issues have significantly impacted the international adoption process.

As it became more apparent that the international adoption system was being used to exploit children, action was taken by both international agencies and countries where the children were being sourced (Sember 3). Ethiopia prohibited children from being adopted by foreigners in 2011 (Montgomery 1). Countries such as South Korea, Romania, Guatemala, China, Kazakhstan, and Russia stopped international custody transfers for adopted children. (Montgomery 1). As more countries put an end to international adoptions to lessen exploitation, abduction and child trafficking related to adoption declined (Sember 3). According to UNICEF, there are an estimated 10 million children worldwide that are involved in slavery, trafficking, debt bondage or other forms of forced labor. Most of these children are the victims of poverty in their native countries but some find themselves in this situation as the result of international adoption. Often, people in the children's own home countries are guilty of the worst abuses performed mostly for monetary gain. In the 2000s, an unnamed country's regional adoption center was exposed for having a significant number of workers engaged in illegal trafficking activities. Some of these workers were

called “snatchers” who kidnapped children, others were called “caretakers” whose job it was to feed children to “fatten them” and make them more desirable. This same group recruited fertile women who were paid to get pregnant, and paid attorneys to prepare the paperwork required to make their operation appear to be legitimate (Home 1). The uncovering of such groups by international and local investigators has led a number of countries to abandon international adoption programs (Christopher 2). As a result, many poor countries have limited foreign adoptions as an action to protect the weakest members of their societies (Christopher 2).

International adoptions by Americans have decreased by almost 75 percent over the last decade (Christopher 1). As stated previously, many countries that were providing the supply of adoptive children significantly reduced the numbers available or ended their international adoption programs as a result of problems with exploitation. As one official put it, we stopped allowing international adoption because it was in “the best interest of the children” (Montgomery 2). Major western countries have been accused of child trafficking and adoption scandals have pressured child aid organizations to shut down (Montgomery 4). Critics see overseas adoption as a distraction from other ways of reducing poverty (Home 2). Many people argue that we need to shift our focus away from international adoption and target our resources toward providing greater help to children in poverty environments (Home 2). In the early 2000s, foreign adoptions began to decline (Home 1). Countries have now either tightened regulations or imposed bans on international adoptions (Christopher 2). The U. S. Government has blacklisted countries that failed to follow global adoption standards. A recent

report prepared by Reuters identified 180 advertisements posted by adoptive parents looking for replacements of their guardianship. The report said that changes of custody usually led to sexual or physical harm and that most of the children of these parents were already exhibiting social problems (Christopher 5). A child who has experienced an international adoption is more likely at risk of emotional and behavioral problems (Elovainio 1). Common symptoms included anxiety/depression, social problems, and aggressiveness (Elovainio 1). Studies show that significant aspects like background and relationship between family members can increase the chances for developing psychological issues (Elovainio 2). It has also been shown that older adopted children experience more serious mental health hazards while younger children recover more quickly from mental-health problems (Elovainio 2). Despite the many problems faced by adopted children, similar or worse problems seem to plague the children who never get adopted. A Russian study of orphan children between 16 and 18 years old showed that after leaving the orphanages, 33% are unemployed, 40% are homeless, 20% commit a crime, and 10% commit suicide (Gwilliam 3). Many families still consider adopting, but only a small number of these families follow through because adoption has become too expensive, overly restrictive, and in some cases almost impossible (Gwilliam 3). The price for some international adoptions today has risen as much as 1,000% or higher compared to the cost in 2000 (Gwilliam 5). As a result, 20 percent of adoption agencies have ceased processing international adoptions (Gwilliam 5).

The primary sources of children for international adoptions today come from China, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ukraine (Montgomery 1). UNICEF promotes funding programs that still support international adoption under strict review (Sember 3). The Hague Convention established the principles for the international adoption process and set up a legal framework for governing the process that is still in use today (Christopher 6). One of the purposes of the Convention was to make adoption more transparent and straightforward (Montgomery 4). Many international aid groups believe that international adoption should be recognized only when it is the last option (Christopher 6). Although the Hague Convention did not fix corruption or abuse, it has enabled countries to impose their own restrictions and protect their populations (Christopher 6). Over the years, countries have worked with humanitarian NGOs to put systems in place that prevent children from being taken away or internationally adopted until all other solutions have failed (Christopher 2). After the Korean War, South Korea put together a Child Placement Services Agency that housed outcast children of Korean and American soldiers. This became a steady source for young infants for international adoption and South Korea continues to selectively allow children to be adopted internationally (Christopher 3). The shortage of children available for adoption has encouraged an increasing number of families to pursue different alternatives. International Surrogacy has outnumbered international adoption in recent years (Christopher 9). International Surrogacy has become a new form of “adoption” and there are thousands of surrogates willing to comply in return for compensation (International 2). (Adoption 2). A process called Vitro fertilization allows the egg of the prospective mother to be fertilized with the sperm of the father.

This means that the child is the genetic offspring of the prospective mother and father and not related to the birth mother (International 2). There are issues of ethics surrounding such activities that need to be addressed on an international level. In the meantime, a complete review and analysis of the policies and practices of international adoption is underway with a target to cease all international adoption in 2022 (Gwilliam 2).

Throughout time, international adoption has provided a relief valve to take children away from areas devastated by war or natural disaster. The basic concept was relatively simple. Devastated areas have children who have lost their parents. Outsiders who are not experiencing devastation, have the resources to take care of these children and allow them to have a better life. The problem is that the basic concept is not as simple when an estimated 135 million children around the world are not able to live within a family unit. My solution would be to redirect the international resources focused on administering international adoption toward the larger problem of children without families. This should be a worldwide effort of the highest priority and all of the wealthier nations that have been participating in international adoption programs should provide funding and leadership.

Children who are removed from their natural setting and placed in a different environment are forced to deal with a unique set of issues. Often, these children struggle with understanding their identity and how they are different from those around them. International adoption poses significant challenges to the child, adoptive parent, home country and the international humanitarian agencies that support the process. Human trafficking and exploitation of some adopted children have brought about additional

restrictions and caused many countries to close their adoption programs. As the adoption process has become more expensive and regulated, international adoption numbers have declined and new alternatives such as International Surrogacy have emerged. While surrogacy may be an attractive option to some prospective adoptive parents, it fails to provide any support or assistance to the worldwide crisis of children growing up in poverty outside of the family unit. Even at its peak, international adoption did not make a dent against the 135 million children worldwide who do not live in established family units. These children deserve our prayers, resources and attention as adoptive brothers and sisters to push for solutions to their plight.

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