

Adoptive parents put through wringer- new report finds

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The first ever comprehensive report on people's experiences of the adoption process in Victoria reveals that many found the current system to be inflexible and focused almost exclusively on administrative tasks and bureaucratic formalities. For many prospective applicants, the mismatch between their emotional experiences and the bureaucratic processes caused tension and anxiety the report found.

The report "A long gestation: the [adoption](#) process in Victoria" was launched this week by Dr Giuliana Fuscaldo, a lecturer in health ethics at the University of Melbourne and Dr Sarah Russell from Research Matters.

The research investigated the first-hand experiences of people applying to adopt a child in Victoria either through local or overseas adoption. While there has been substantial research on the history of adoption and the outcomes for adopted children, the study is one of the first to report on the experience of adoption from the perspective of the people who have applied to adopt.

People apply to adopt a child for many different reasons – for some people adoption is the end of a long process of trying to make a family. For others adoption is a first choice.

"Our findings indicate general agreement that access to adoption should protect children's best interests and that some form of assessment of potential adoptive parents is appropriate and necessary," said Dr

Fuscaldo "However, there was significant disagreement about the level of scrutiny required and the criteria used to ensure adoptive parents are 'fit' to parent. Participants described an anti-adoption culture and felt that they had to jump unfair hurdles.

"A recurring concern expressed by many participants was the length of time required to complete an application to adopt. Participants referred to long delays between each stage and suggested that these delays were due in part to a shortage of government resources. They were also critical of the 'one size fits all' approach to assessment," she said.

Not all the comments were negative however; some participants praised the current system and acknowledged that as they moved through the filtering system, it forced them to evaluate if adoption was in fact the right step for them.

The study recommends reviewing current processes and incorporating additional training and support for [adoptive parents](#), social workers and departmental staff.

It is estimated up to 106 million children around the world have lost one or both parents. However, the waiting lists in Australia for overseas adoption are up to eight years. The authors describe an anti-adoption culture in Australia. People who apply to adopt describe being made to feel like criminals. The authors recommend that government bodies review current approaches to overseas adoption to reduce both the waiting lists and the number of children who need parents.

Provided by University of Melbourne

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