

## THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL WORKER IN THE ADOPTION

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### Abstract

The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has caused feelings of fear and an unprecedented state of uncertainty especially for children or adults at risk. The effects of isolation and the risk of infection can be particularly severe for those who are part of vulnerable groups, people who lack their families, and emotional or financial support. The social distancing and quarantine caused anxiety, depression, and a deterioration in physical health. A considerable number of institutionalized people do not have digital knowledge or devices to maintain virtual contact with outside world or with social services providers. In our paper we studied the effects of the interruptions or delays in the processing of application files for adoption, which occurred as a result of stopping activity of specialized social workers and institutions. Our research focused on the adoption process after the pandemic, when the procedures could be re-opened, and the children who had to wait so long, were able to meet their families again.

Our sample included a group of 30 social workers, experimented in the adoption field. A survey and an Interview Guide have been used, in order to achieve the goals and to validate the hypotheses of the research.

**Keywords:** coronavirus pandemic, adoption, social worker

### Abstract

La pandémie de coronavirus (COVID-19) a suscité des sentiments de peur et un état d'incertitude sans précédent, en particulier pour les enfants ou les adultes à risque. Les effets de l'isolement et d'infection peuvent être particulièrement graves pour les personnes qui viennent de groupes vulnérables, les personnes qui n'ont pas de famille. La distanciation sociale et la quarantaine ont causé de l'anxiété, de la dépression et une détérioration de la santé physique. Un nombre considérable de personnes institutionnalisées n'ont pas les connaissances ou la technologie nécessaire pour maintenir un contact virtuel avec le monde extérieur, ou avec les fournisseurs de services sociaux. Dans notre article, nous avons étudié les effets des interruptions, ou retards dans le processus d'adoption, qui se sont produits à la suite de l'arrêt des activités des travailleurs sociaux spécialisés et des institutions. Nos recherches ont porté sur le processus d'adoption après la pandémie, le moment où les

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procédures pourraient être rouvertes, et les enfants qui ont dû attendre si longtemps ont pu retrouver leur famille. Notre échantillon comprenait 30 travailleurs sociaux, expérimentés dans le domaine de l'adoption. Un sondage et un guide d'entrevue ont été utilisés pour atteindre les objectifs et valider les hypothèses.

**Mots clés:** Coronavirus pandémie, adoption, travailleur social

### **Abstract**

Pandemia de coronavirus (COVID-19) a creat sentimente fără precedent de teamă și incertitudine, în special pentru copiii sau adulții la risc. Efectele izolării și riscul de infecție pot fi deosebit de severe pentru persoanele provenite din grupuri vulnerabile, persoanele fără familii, lipsiti de sprijin emotional, ori financiar. Distanțarea socială și carantina au provocat anxietate, depresie și deteriorarea sănătății fizice. Un număr considerabil de persoane instituționalizate nu au dispus de cunoștințele sau de tehnologia necesară pentru a menține contactul virtual cu lumea exterioară, sau cu furnizorii de servicii sociale. În articolul nostru, am studiat efectele întreruperilor sau întâzierilor în procesul de adopție a copiilor, care au apărut ca urmare a încetării activităților asistenților sociali și instituțiilor specializate. Cercetarea noastră s-a concentrat pe procesul de adopție în perioada post-pandemică, atunci când procedurile au putut fi redeschise, iar copiii care au trebuit să aștepte atât de mult timp au fost reuniți cu familiile adoptatoare. Eșantionul nostru a inclus un grup de 30 de asistenți sociali, cu experiență în domeniul adopției. Un sondaj și un ghid de interviu au fost utilizate pentru a îndeplini obiectivele lucrării și pentru a valida ipotezele.

**Cuvinte cheie:** Coronavirus, pandemie, adopție, asistent social

## **1. Introduction**

Obviously, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly amplified the existing psychosocial concerns and imposed an entirely new set of challenges for communities and specialists, affecting millions of children and adults around the world. The health and social crisis among 2019-2021, has undoubtedly generated a new era of interprofessional practice dedicated to a fuller understanding of the issues faced by the vulnerable people, and the development of responses that address their contextualized needs. One of the most affected categories was represented by adoptable children and adoptive couples whose steps in the process were delayed and discouraged, by suspending the adoption stages. The coronavirus pandemic made the adoption in Romania even more difficult, which was anyway obstructed by the bureaucracy. During the state of emergency, and the restrictions imposed by the authorities, no child could reach the adoptive family. Before the pandemic, the number of the adopted children was approximately 1286 for a year, but then, we are talking about a much lower number (729 children) who reached the new families. According to figures presented by the national Authority for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Children and Adoptions (ARPDCA), the number of adoptable children doubled to almost 8.000 after the pandemic.

The main measures took by the National Authorities, in the context of the worrying evolution of the COVID-19 virus epidemic, comes with some clarifications related to the adoption process, regarding why a suspension of the

process was needed, and how adoptive families will be notified to receive information during this time. On 12.03.2020, ARPDCA elaborated the Methodology nr. 6912 through which it recommends to the General Directorates of Social Work and Child Protection from all the districts, the application of special measures, in order to ensure protection during this period, as follows:

- The suspension of practical matching activities between the child and the adoptive family. The matching procedure of the adoption is defined as: „practical activities, aiming to prepare the child, the adopter/adoptive family and other reference persons for the child, by organizing meetings between the child and the adopter/adoptive family, in order to facilitate their accommodation.”

In other words, during the Covid limitations, there are no more meetings allowed between children and adopters for a period of time, with the statement that the resumption of activities will be announced by the central authority. Contacting adoptive families by phone to explain the reasons for temporarily suspending matching procedures, with the express statement that the adoption process will resume immediately after the situation regarding the coronavirus infection has stabilized will be put into practice by the responsible institution, explaining in the same time, the circumstances of the interruption.

- Providing information to children regarding the reason for the suspension, if there were meetings of adoptive families with the children in the past. Every child will get explanations depending on age and maturity. During this time, the children to be adopted are carefully protected by the persons who care for them (maternal assistants or staff, in the family apartments or placement centers).
- Restricting family access to information about the child and his/her photos on the Child Profile page, during the restrictions. Normally, the criteria for initial match between the child and the family, are age, gender, number of children, and the health of the child. On average, at national level, adoption process lasts one year. During the pandemic, the adopter can visit him/her where he/she lives or in another place, such as in the mall, in the park, for example, and they can host the child, visiting him in environment, without him knowing the purpose of the visit. Following the adjustment procedures, the adoption specialists will make a report in which they will write their conclusions. If the match went well, they would make a request to the court, for the family to have the child at home, for 90 days for adoption. If everything went normal, based on a final report, the specialists of the authority propose to the court the adoption consent.

In 2021, ARPDCA continued its activity of monitoring the adoption process and case management, following the internal adoption procedure changes. In August 2021, the Government approved the methodological norms for the application of the adoption Law, which makes the adoption procedure more flexible and increases the state support for adoptive families.

The document sets out a series of amendments and additions to the adoption procedure, aimed at increasing the number of adopted children. During 2021, 1563 adoptions were concluded, of which 1413 national and 150 internationals, this being a record number of adoptions since 1999. In 2020, the number of adoptions was 1042. (Activity Report of the National Authority for the Rights of Persons with disabilities, Children and Adoptions, 2021 p. 4).

**General rules for adoption.** A family that has decided to adopt a child in Romania should also be prepared for the bureaucratic aspect that adoption entails, and which must be overcome in order to meet legal forms requests. The adoption process is a long and complicated one, in which adoptive parents have to go through numerous stages, to prove first of all that the child's interest is above their own, and that their motivation for adoption is stable.

Adoption is concluded only if it is in the best interests of the child, and any child can be adopted only until the age of the civil maturity (18 years old). By way of exception, a major person can be adopted if the adopter or adoptive family raised him during the childhood. When there are several brothers to be adopted, the competent adoption service will take the necessary measures to confer them together and only if it is in the best interests of the children, they will be conferred separately.

Another rule is that the adopter or adoptive family must fulfill the moral guarantees, and material conditions necessary for the full and harmonious development of the child's personality, conditions that are attested by the competent authorities.

The Justice Court also has the possibility to request the consent to adoption of the natural parents again, when there are indications that after the date on which the consent became irrevocable new elements arose, such as to lead to the return of the original consent. In this regard, the General Directorate of Child Protection who requested the opening of the internal adoption procedure is obliged to inform the court, about the existence of any new elements regarding the situation of the natural parent or extended family, which could lead to a change in the finalization of the individualized child protection plan.

## **2. The skills of a social worker in charge of adoption**

The social workers are the „turntable” of the interinstitutional and interpersonal interactions (Corman, 2010), and of the relational dynamics that develop in the adoption process. They facilitate the access of the candidate couples to information about the stages of adoption, provide support based on professional skills, as well as emotional counseling to future adoptive parents. The social worker coordinates the stages of the adoption process and monitors the matching between parents and adopted children.

Also, the social worker will establish a relationship of trust with the adoptable child, so that he can explain them in his own terms and in relation to his capacity for understanding (depending on age and degree of maturity), the elements that can ensure the fit and compatibility with the adoptive family and

thus, a successful adoption. The social worker will also monitor the post-adoption process to ensure that any disagreements between the child and the parents are overcome. The main characteristics of the social worker are, as follows: a good listening capacity, but also adequate communication of messages to the beneficiaries, attentive, reflective and patient in relation with the children, skills of negotiation and mediation for the participants in the process, social diagnosis and problem-solving skills, critical and objective thinking, ethical behavior with respect to the principles and values of social work.

### **3. Reasons for parents to give up a child**

Studies identified some categories of natural parents who are at risk of abandoning their children and giving them for adoption, such as:

- young and/or single women who believe they are not ready to raise a child, or do not have the resources, women with long-standing histories of disadvantage who hold fragile and restricted social statuses (Broadhurst, Mason, 2020, pp. 15–37);

- single or married parents who have more children and cannot financially and emotionally support them. The existing research showed that 'single parents are likely to experience higher levels of depression, anxiety, and general stress, despite making extensive efforts to meet their financial obligations in order to raise a child' (Stack, Meredith, 2017). Furthermore, more consideration needs to be given to the geographical location of single parents, highlighting the difficulties faced by parents in rural locations versus inner city locations (Simmons *et al.* 2007, apud Stack, Meredith);

- teenage mothers who offer their child up for adoption because at that point in their lives they do not see how to cope. 'Adolescent parenthood reduces the opportunities and optimal outcomes for both mother and child, yet pregnant teenagers rarely consider adoption. Four phenomena were found to be pivotal to the teenage moms' willingness to consider adoption: (1) societal sanctions, (2) low level of knowledge, (3) anticipated psychological discomfort, and (4) lack of support from helping professionals'. (Custer, 1993, pp. 891-902);

- women who are in a less pleasant situation, and thus give up their child in order not grow up in different environment than theirs. Many women who choose adoption for their baby express the desire to offer to him/her, the opportunities they didn't have in the childhood. The opportunity to choose the family that raises their baby can be an empowering experience during an emotional and stressful time. Finding an adoptive family with certain values, educational resources, housing or financial resources is a positive part of the adoption experience. (e.g women from violent environment; immigrants who no social support etc.). (<https://www.adoptionstogether.org>).

An adoption social worker, sometimes called an adoption agent or adoption specialist, is a certified and licensed professional who provides emotional support and counseling and facilitates the adoption process for the adoption triad: the birth parents; the adoptive parents; the child.

Because this professional provides counseling, case management and general oversight throughout the process, you might think of your adoption worker as an „adoption coordinator.” An adoption social worker plays a vital role in a successful placement and can specialize in many types of adoption, such as: private family adoption; foster care adoption; national adoption; international adoption.

These specialists give their all so that prospective birth parents, families and children can experience the life-changing process of adoption in a safe, ethical and legal way. Their support should always be valued and encouraged.

Adoption itself is an emotional process for all people who are involved in the process. Counseling is necessary and has proven to be important for future mothers who are about to give birth and who choose to place the baby in for adoption. These women make a courageous choice, and it is completely normal to have doubts or questions during the adoption. Social workers specialized in adoption, thanks to their education, training and experience are able to provide the support to the mothers in need, in order to clarify the doubts and questions that arise. (<https://www.americanadoptions.com>).

In Romania, The Law of adoption (nr. 273/2004) regarding the adoption procedure, provides: during the adoption the child is encouraged and supported in expressing his opinion, this being recorded and taken into account, depending on his age and degree of maturity; all the steps aimed at the adoption of the child take into consideration to ensure:

(a) the continuity in the child's life, maintaining his personal relations, if this does not contradict his best interest and preserving significant personal objects;  
(b) facilitate the separation of the child from the important persons and ensure a smooth transition in the adopter's family; (c) during the adoption the child is provided with clear and concrete information and explanations, according to his age and maturity, regarding the duration and stages of the adoption process. In this process, the case manager is obliged to collaborate with the child reference person(s), as well as with the child case officer” (art. 2-3).

There is no age limitation for people who want to adopt, but there is mandatory a social and psychological assessment that is carried out by specialists in which it will be noticed if future adopters have parental skills for raising a child and if they can offer to the child a place where he or she can grow as well as possible. Adoption between relatives can take place, but adoption between two or more brothers is not an option according to the law.

#### **4. Profile of the adoptive parents**

Research shows that the adoption process is likely to succeed if adoptive parents fit into a certain profile. The elements that define this profile are, as follows: the desire to adopt and an intrinsic motivation, age, ethnicity, financial level, educational level, especially women. Studies show that the majority of adopters are married (95 percent for most Western countries). The length of the marriage and its stability are also important factors for a decision taken by the two

spouses regarding the adoption, which strongly correlates with a successful adoption. As for „hard-to-adopt” children, it is necessary that adoptive parents have a higher level of involvement, than for typical children. The figures show that in the US, the age of adopters is about 10 years older than those who give up their children, giving them up for adoption, and in Canada, this difference is even bigger.

In Romania, the candidates for adoption are younger than in other countries, having access only to Romanian children, while on other continents, international adoption is favored, the options being multiple. Older families are less likely to adopt very young and healthy children from their own country. From an educational perspective, studies show that adoptive parents often have a higher level of education than the biological parents of the child they want to adopt (Bejenaru, 2011, pp. 146-151).

### **5. Profile of the adoptable child**

It is known that most people or couples who wish to adopt are considering a certain type of child, which the social workers responsible for adoption must take into consideration in matching the parent-child. The characteristics that the candidates for the adoption usually refer to, are the health of the child, age, gender, ethnicity, school situation and data about the natural family. In terms of gender, the results are equal, both girls and boys being desirable for adoption. As for age, research shows that most couples want to adopt children younger than 4 years old. The Romanian adoption Office (ORA) also indicates that the majority of adopted children are healthy children aged between zero and four years old (Bejenaru, 2011, pp. 151-154).

As for hard-to-adopt children, the legislation describes them as: children with health problems, children from a certain ethnicity, children for whom the adoption process has not been completed within 9 months of its initiation, children for whom the legal procedure of matching with parents has failed, children from families with many brothers and who cannot be adopted individually etc.

In the case of these children, other potential adopters will be sought, resuming the procedure with all its legal stages. Thus, the social worker creates a profile of the `hard-to-adopt child` and will look for a family that takes into account his or her specific needs. The list of children and potential parents, made by case managers in the field of adoptions will be updated every month, according to a Methodological Norm 579/2016 of implementing the Law of Adoption).

Studies found that institutionalization of children represents a risk factor for their development and, at the same time, represents a negative element in view of their adoption, despite the efforts made by the specialists with attributions in the field, toward rehabilitation. Some institutionalized children have experienced abuse in their pre-adoption history, a risk factor that is frequently reflected in the interruption or even dissolution of adoption. This is due to psychological disorders that can occur due to trauma experienced by the child.

In the stage called „entrusting for adoption”, the child goes to the parents who want to adopt him for a 90-day probation period. After the trial period, the

judge decides whether the child is compatible with the family that wants to adopt him and whether or not he consents to the adoption. „After 90 days, parents don't always want the baby anymore. The most easily adoptable are very young children, and the most difficult to adopt are disabled children” said Andreea-Doris Tomescu, judge of the Bucharest Court of Justice. (<https://acasa.ro/social>).

However, in the case of the adoption of a disabled child or a child with chronic diseases, studies show that this is not a factor in interrupting or discontinuing adoption, instead it is shown that the adoption of a disabled child is associated with a positive evolution (Bejenaru, 2011, pp. 164-166).

## **6. Research methodology**

The general objective of the research is to establish and describe the role of the social worker in adoption, starting from his attributions revealed in the job description, ending with their stories related to the expertise acquired in the field. Our main research goals, were:

- Identification and ranking of the main reasons for adoption from the couple's perspective
- Describing the adoptable child profile from the perception of the adoptive couples
- Identification of the level of knowledge and information of the candidates, regarding adoption
- Identification of the stereotypes and bias concerning the `hard to adopt children
- Highlighting the difficulties of a social worker as expert in the adoption field
- Emphasis of the emotional involvement of the social worker in the adoption process

### *6.1. Hypotheses*

1. We presume that, in the perception of the social workers, more than a half of couples (husbands and wives) are motivated in the same extent for the adoption.
2. We presume that, a majority of potential parents wants to adopt children among zero and four years old.
3. We presume that over 50 percent of parents willing to adopt, do not have realistic expectation towards the children.

### *6.2. Sample*

Our survey was attended by 30 social workers in the field of adoption, with a seniority in the profession between 5 and 15 years, of which 18 women and 12 men, coming from urban (73 percent) and rural area (27 percent). The data collection was carried out using a questionnaire that we developed and disseminated using the Google forms platform.

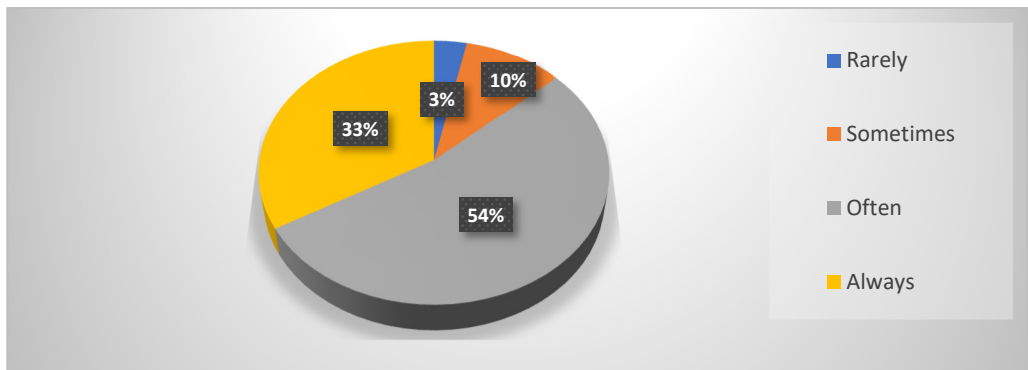
Research instruments



A survey named 'The role of the Social Worker in the Adoption', and an interview Guide for specialists were used in order to gather the data for our study. Our questionnaire contains 25 items, closed questions, with the answers being distributed on a 5-step Likert scale. The items refer to: the role of the social worker in the adoption procedure; obstacles encountered in the career; elements of counseling of the adoptive parents and professional relationship; motivation for adoption; the level of information and knowledge of the candidates for adoption. We also used an Interview Guide made of five items, which enabled us to conduct a qualitative analysis of the issues being considered.

## 7. Results and discussion

By analyzing the answers of the subjects regarding the measure of the involvement of parents in the decision to adopt, we see that, in the social workers perception, in most cases (54 percent) husbands and wives willing to adopt are 'often' involved in the same extent, while 33,3 percent 'always' agree, and 10 percent only 'sometimes' (Diagram nr. 1). We believe that this aspect of the agreement between spouses regarding adoption is particularly important for its long-term success. Dissensions between spouses, who may have different views on family expansion, could have negative effects on the development of the adopted child, especially since he/she comes from the protective system and could already have some emotional disorders. Hypothesis 1 is confirmed.



*Diagram 1. In your opinion is the level of motivation for both adoptive parents the same? (N=30)*

One of the objectives of our study was to identify the main reasons that lead couples or single people to adopt, as we believe that in not all situations, they are in favor of children available for adoption. Unconscious reasons of the candidates for adoption, can strike this process of necessary objectivity.

We argue our statement, by quoting research carried out in 2016 by Ana Baciu (a social worker in the adoption office in Constanta), on a sample of 60 couples willing to adopt. The author found that each adoptive couple presents a constellation of reasons that they were aware of, in the time of the adoption

application, most of the reasons being personal, followed by social motivation, and altruism. Thus, most couples adopt in order to fill the lack of their own capacity to have a biological child. There is a fierce battle with their own biological limits, and when it becomes apparent that only a miracle would make it possible to become biological parents, they turn toward adoption. The feelings of helplessness, despair, and hopelessness generated by the impossibility of having children, leave room for hope that they will adopt the ideal child, the child they mentally designed at the beginning of their marriage.

*Personal motivation to adopt*

Being a parent represents a desire of every person who has reached sexual and emotional maturity, and has entered into a married, or cohabiting relationship. The appearance of the child is a natural and pleasant consequence of marriage, when he is desired and expected. In the first years of marriage the couple is centered on accommodating to marital status, and strengthening the relationship, regulating relations between spouses. For most married couples this is the sequence of events. For other couples, however, the pregnancy event is delayed.

Anxiety about the absence of pregnancy arises and begins a journey through the specialized medical offices, countless analyzes and complicated medical procedures, which increases the stress of partners. The stressors accompanying the investigations create feelings of guilt in the affected person, insecurity, anxiety and affect the self-image as a whole person. Relationships can suffer from stress, guilt, anxiety etc. Infertility it's causing damage to the institution of marriage, and many couples fall apart due to their partner's desire to have biological children. But couples in whom partners value each other, resist after all the medical procedures of assisted reproduction, and begin to think about the alternative of adoption.

Most of the subjects of the study (93 percent out of 60 participant couples) cited infertility as a main reason to adopt, but besides this objective reason, the following have been formulated: the desire to enjoy the presence of the child; the wish to have the opportunity to manifest the set of parental behaviors that they have learned in their family; feeling the need to be loved as a parent; wanting a bigger family and therefore happiness; achieving the ideal family with children; wanting company for their biological children: having more than average financial conditions and feeling able to raise one or more kids. Very few of them want to adopt a child that they have really attached themselves to.

The altruism as reason for adoption is implicit. The subjects refrained from writing this reason in their written statements, but the interview clearly shows the altruistic component of the motivational system. The need to help, to support, to protect a child without parental protection, giving love, education, material resources, and sharing personal values with their adopted child, comes secondly as motivation.

*Social motivation to adopt*

The most well-represented social reason invoked by the subjects was the need for social comparison, `to be like their other congeners`. The subjects in the situation of adopting are adult persons, mature couples on the threshold of the stage of seeking stability on the long-term, having more than 7 years of marriage. The couple stopped evolving because the baby is missing. Most of the time, they are the only ones in their group who do not have a child yet. Group activities also involve the socialization of children and they do not have one. Compared to others they are „poorer”, in discussing about children, so they are not involved in some activities. They want to be `with others, like the others` (62 percent of respondents cited this reason). Another social reason is to have `a depository of the material and spiritual values they have accumulated`. Other reasons were `initiating a line of heirs`, `the social and moral duty`, `compliance with the partner's expectations`, `compliance with extended family expectations`, `following the example of their friends`.

In the perception of the social workers involve in our study, the main reason a couple wants to adopt, as seen in the diagram nr. 2, is infertility (54 percent). The second reason is for starting a family (18 percent), also „to have someone to rely on, in old age” (14 percent), „the replacement of a lost child” (eight percent); „substitute for children who have left home” (four percent); „developed attachment to one child” (two percent).

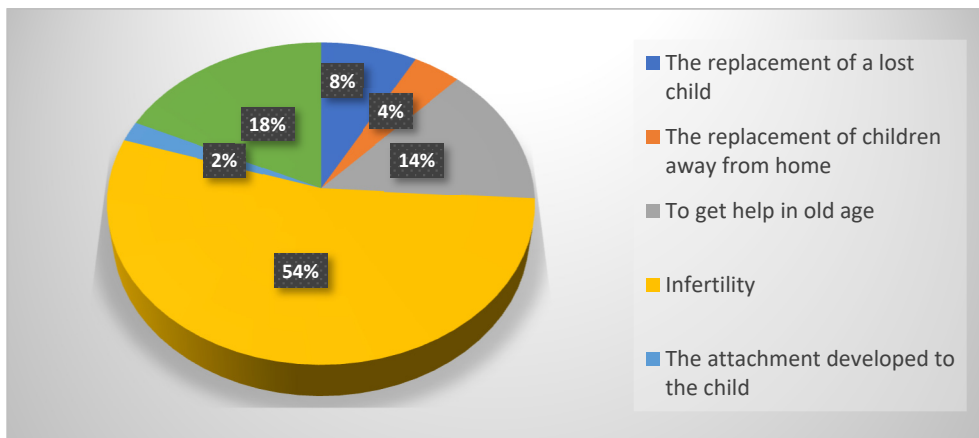


Diagram 2. The main reasons to adopt in the perception of practitioners (N=30)

*The opposition of the extended family*

Analysis of the results from the diagram 3 highlighted the fact that less than 50 percent of couples who wanted to adopt a child, had encountered opposition from one of their extended families, or both.

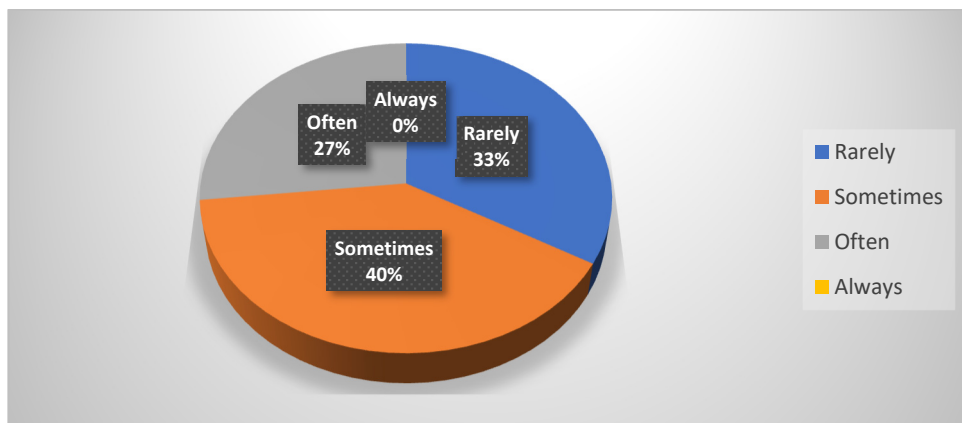


Diagram 3. The frequency of the opposition of the relatives towards adoption

The desire of couples to adopt children between zero to four years old, is reflected in the responses of social workers attending our study, as follows: 27 percent of the respondents consider that couples `exclusively` accept a very young child, while 66 percent from the participants thinks that `most of time`, a small child is desirable. The perception is that only seven percent of the perspective couples have the flexibility to receive an older child. Hypothesis nr. 2 was confirmed.

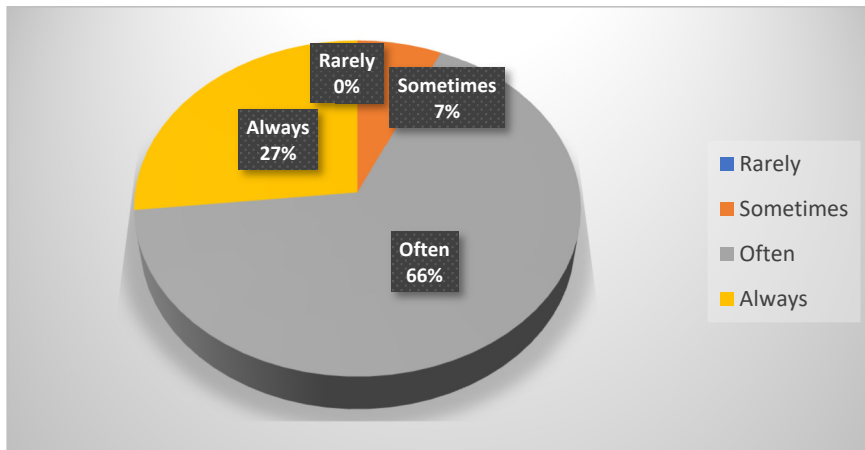


Diagram 4. Frequency of the desire to adopt very small children

The objection to adopt older children is related to the fear that they might not fit into the family, because `they already manifest dysfunctional behavioral patterns`, caused by the abandonment of natural parents and subsequently accentuated by the institutional environment. Bowlby's studies (1951) showed at the time that children who suffered maternal deprivation encounter negative and irreversible effects as a result so, they frequently exhibited behavioral disorders. Bowlby also pointed out that proper maternal care is essential during the first two

and a half years of a child's life and almost useless after that time frame, conclusions that were later invalidated.

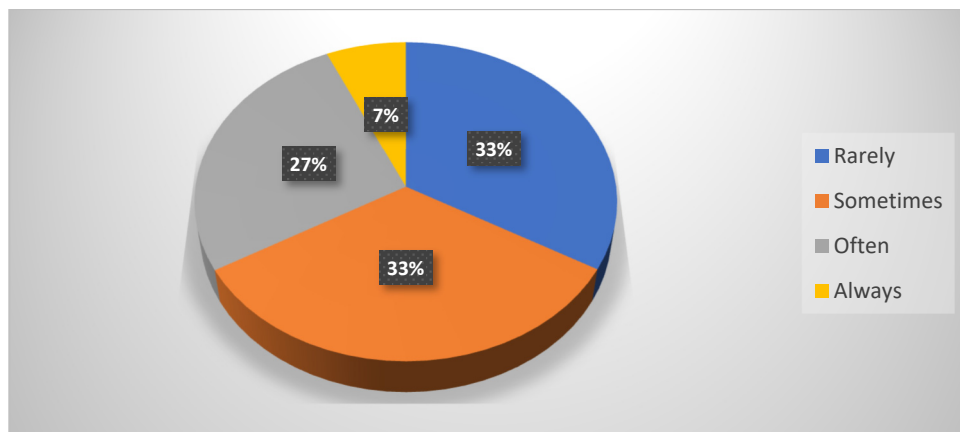
Recent research (Rutter, 1991, apud Neamtu, 2003, pp. 810-813) proves that in many cases, the possibility of recovering and compensating physical and cognitive deficits exists, as soon as the child changes the existing environment with a more favorable one. Paternal deprivation can also occur in the context of partial or total absence of the father from the child's life, which leads to the impossibility of training a secure attachment to him. Without absolutizing, we can recall a number of risks to which some abandoned children are exposed, depending on the duration, severity of deprivation and the stage of development at which it occurred, such as: food deficiency or malnutrition, intellectual deficiency, antisocial behavior and even juvenile delinquency. This makes it difficult for pretender parents to decide in favor of adopting an older child.

#### *Rejection of disabled children from the adoption*

Most of the adopters tend to refuse disabled children who have been offered for adoption. Generally, the refusal is generated by doubts about their ability to care for children with special needs. In our study there are few parents who accept the idea of adopting a child with disabilities, the percentage being less than 10 percent.

#### *Motivation to adopt siblings*

Taking into account the respondents' answers, 33 percent, of the participants in the study consider that „rarely” adoptive parents embrace the idea of adopting siblings. A percentage of 27 percent of social workers thinks that siblings may be adopted together `often`, seven percent choose the `always` version, and 33 percent `rarely` (diagram 5).

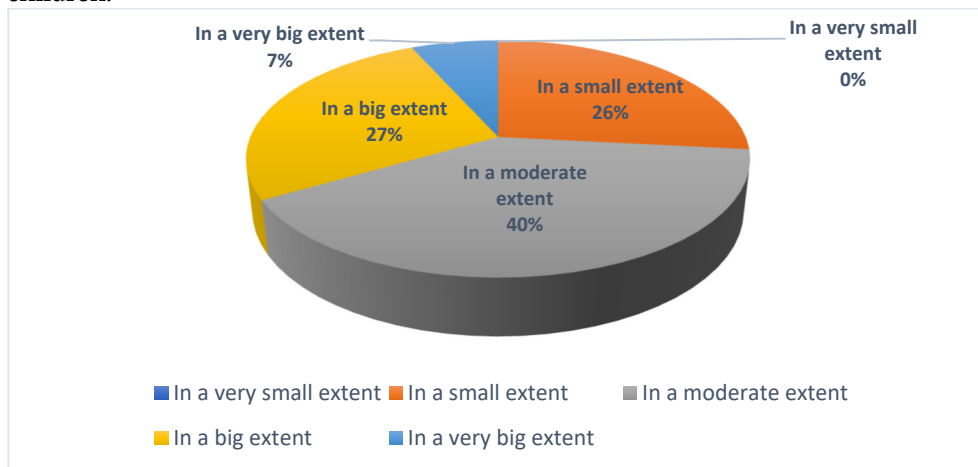


*Diagram 5. The frequency of sibling's adoption in the perception of the practitioners (N=30)*

*Parents' expectations toward adopted children*

There are a lot of parents who, once the adoption process starts, have a lot of expectations toward the child. This may be related to gender, ethnicity, age, health and academic achievements for older children.

These expectations may change along the way, depending on each adoptive family and their lifestyle or status, but the practitioners included in the study believe that most parents do not have realistic expectations toward adopted children.



*Diagram 6. Do you believe that adoptive parents have realistic expectations from their children?*

For this item (according to Diagram nr. 6), seven percent of the practitioners consider that the adoptive parents have no realistic expectation towards the child, or have 'in a very small extent', 27 percent consider that they are realistic 'in a big extent', while 40 percent appreciated 'in a moderate extent', and 26 percent responded 'in a small extent', regarding this issue. Our third hypotheses were confirmed. One of the practitioners related briefly about the case of a eight-year-old girl who was adopted, the parents investing a lot of effort and money in her school training. After two years, finding that the girl was unable to achieve satisfactory school results, a conflict occurred between them, so the parents threatened to send her back.

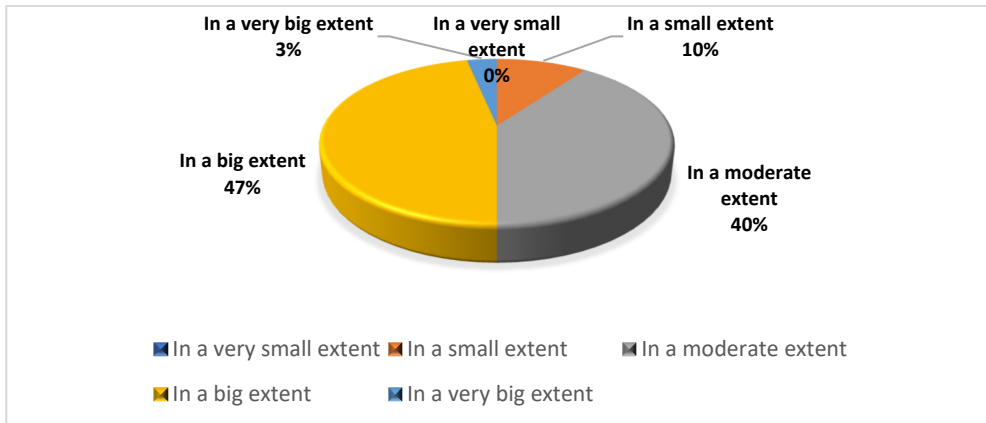
It was the role and the success of the adoption counselor to settle the situation and restore the harmony in the family. Another issue that respondents were asked to answer was advising the family to speak openly with the child about what it means to have biological parents and adoptive parents at the same time, in order to create with time a correct perception of the child on the mental level and not to affect his self-esteem. In our paper 46,7 percent of the social workers believe that during counseling sessions with adoptive parents, it is necessary to advise them to tell children that they are adopted, and 13,4 percent of them believe that this is not necessary.

However, research which explored intercountry and domestic adoption from the child's point of view (Beckett, C., & Sonuga-Barke, E. (2008) - *The Experience of Adoption*, 32/1, pp. 29–39) showed that parents underestimate the challenge for their children to talk about adoption. Children who found this harder, showed lower self-esteem at age 11 and were also more likely to feel different from their adoptive families, and both factors were related to the child's individual level of development (cognitive and behavioral).

For the children adopted from Romania, together with a sibling, seemed easier to talk about their adoption. In short, the ease with which children can talk about adoption seems to be associated with higher self-esteem and individual difficulties of the child, as well as with the composition of the family.

*The awareness level of the candidates for adoption*

Practitioners, as a result of their professional experience, believe that generally 47 percent of candidates for adoption are informed „to a big extent” about the procedures, and only three percent are informed `In a very big extent` what is going to happen in this long and difficult process. 40 percent of the applicants are „in a moderate extent” informed, rather waiting for the meetings with the specialist, who will handle their case.



*Diagram 7. The awareness level of the candidates regarding the adoption process*

Counseling the family for adoption has a particularly important role in its success, the social workers considering that the results are „always” favorable (43,3 percent), and „often favorable” in a proportion of 56,7 percent. Also, when asked about the ability of parents to respond to the needs of the adopted child/children, specialists believe that following repeated meetings and the compatibility process, 80percent of parents begin to understand the profile, the desires and needs of the child and manage to address them properly (diagram nr. 8).

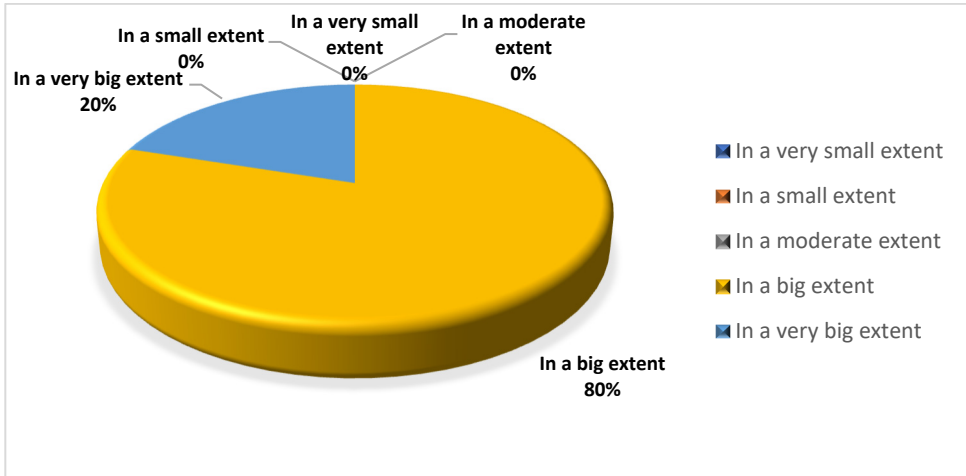


Diagram 8. Do you believe that adoptive parents have the abilities to meet the needs of their children?

Monitoring the relationship between parents and adopted children in the post-adoption phase, specialists are able to say that „largely` (70percent), and `very largely` (30 percent), the accommodation of children in the family occurs in very good conditions (diagram nr. 9).

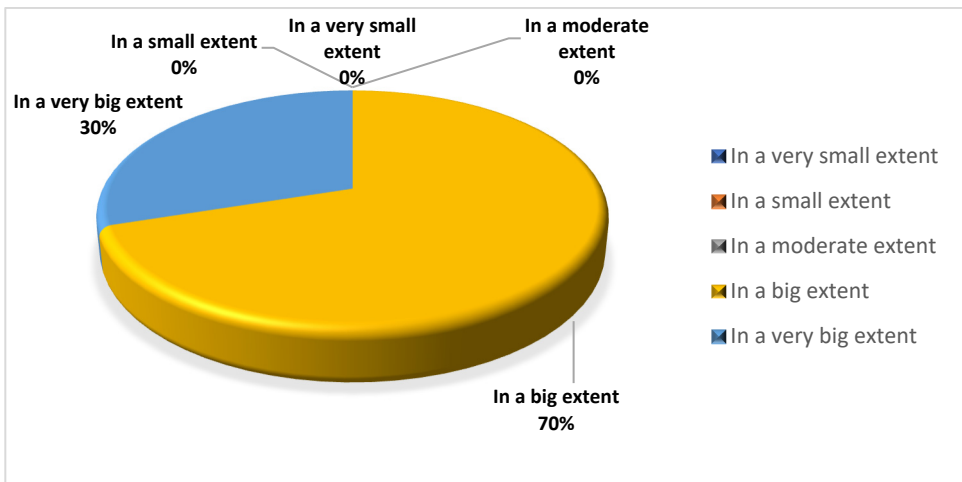


Diagram 9. By monitoring the adoption, can you tell if the child has settled in?

Regarding this issue, Boswell, S., & Cudmore, L. (2014, pp. 5–21) found that, when children move from foster care into adoption, there is no more interaction between the child and the foster parent. Very little attention, or research has been aimed at understanding these procedures. Together with social workers involved in monitoring the child and the family, researchers found that the emotional experience of the child, particularly their experience of losing their foster career,



became less prominent in people’s minds during this transition. The way the child adapts to the new family structure, the multitude of novelties that occur in his life and the lack of obvious emotions when separated from the previous caregiver can be interpreted as signs that the child is „well”. However, he may experience intense loss of connection with the attachment person and may set in motion defense mechanisms against the pain felt. Specialists believe that this would be a field for further investigation, with implications in practical work.

During the adoption, a relationship of trust is created between the social worker and the family and also with the child, without which it would not be possible to have open discussions and resolve problems or doubts that arise from both sides. 77 percent of the social workers surveyed say `often` the information about the child and the adoption can only be properly transmitted and understood in a safe and cautious context, while 23 percent consider this `always` necessary (Diagram nr. 10).

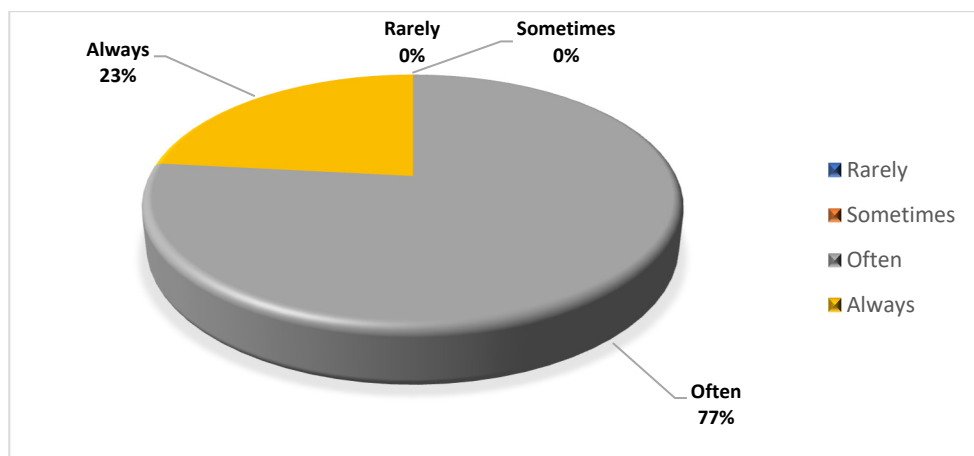


Diagram 10. Frequency of a trustful relationship between the practitioner and the family

#### *A successful adoption*

For 67 percent of the participants working on an adoption case, `always` manage to have the satisfaction of a successful adoption, while 33 percent „often” feel this way. Monitoring the process, the social worker notes that: `parents and children are compatible`; `a bond of trust has been established between them`; `the child begins to have a favorable development, thanks to the parents responding properly to his needs`.

All this gives the practitioner, professional satisfaction and personal fulfillment (Diagram nr. 11).

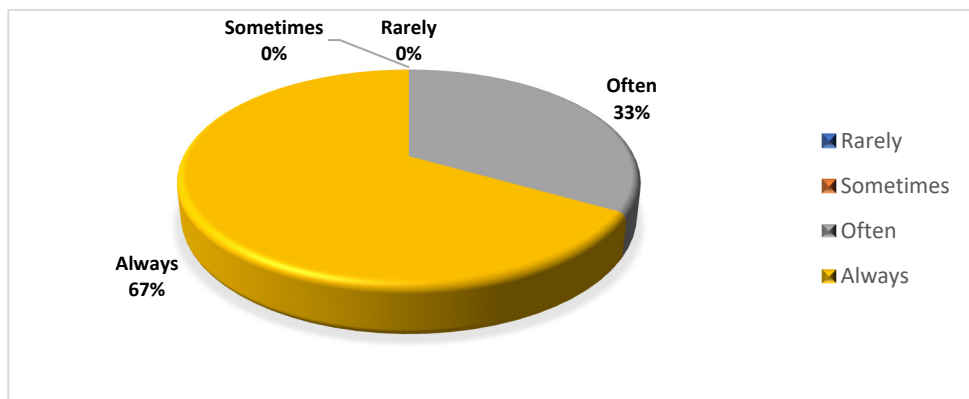


Diagram 11. The satisfaction level of the practitioner working in the adoption field

### Failure of adoption

The item nr. 18 of our questionnaires provides free answers from the participants, so we had the opportunity to make a qualitative analysis on the reasons of failure. `Despite the counseling of child and family, have you encountered cases where the adoption was canceled? Please relate`.

From the experience of the respondents, it is apparent that few of them have encountered cases of annulment, the main reasons being: „the child could not adjust to the adoptive family”; „the child did not integrate”; „the child was abused in the adoptive family”, „the parents neglected the child”; „the parents did not care for the child or protected him`.

The practitioners also said that in some cases (where is no abuse), by raising the awareness during the counseling, the annulment can be prevented (Diagram nr. 12). Thus, 17 percent of the participants strongly believe that counseling can always prevent the failure, while 40 percent thinks, in a big extent”, and 40 percent `in a moderate extent`.

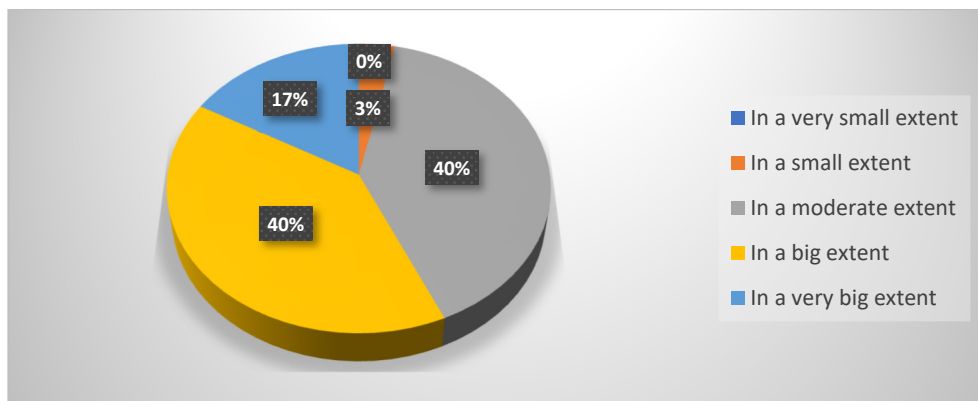


Diagram 12. Can post-adoption counseling and monitoring help prevent annulment? (N=30)

Regarding the improvements that can be done in the adoption legislation (item nr. 28), almost 80 percent of the respondents thinks that the legislation is better now than a few years before, and only some of them consider that there is still room for the improvement. The practitioner recommendations are, as follows: `the process should be faster, so the child should not wait too long`, `the legislation should be less rigid, since the cases are so diverse`. Generally, the participants believe that international adoptions should be facilitated. They agree that `every child deserve to have a family no matter the country`, and `every child deserves love and protection, because is in his best interests, for a proper development`.

The item nr 30 refers to `the biggest obstructions` that the specialists met in the field of adoption, and the answers shows that the respondents encountered situations that limited their professional options, such as: `the extended family disagreed with the adoption`; `unforeseen events such as the death of one of the adoptive parents interfere with the adoption`; `the appearance of misunderstandings between partners, which led to serious conflicts`; `misunderstandings between adoptive and biological parents` etc.

*The emotional involvement of the practitioner*

In the diagram nr. 13, we can see that 10 percent of the social workers consider that they are `in a great extent` emotionally involved in the adoption process, while 76 percent of them are exposed `in a big extent` to various emotions. So, 86 percent of the respondents believe that their experiences are quite unique, every family and every child being special. Thus, involvement in each case brings with it diversified and intense experiences for the workers in the field. Just 14 percent, of the participants do not agree with the emotional involvement during the adoption process, regarding the child or the parents.

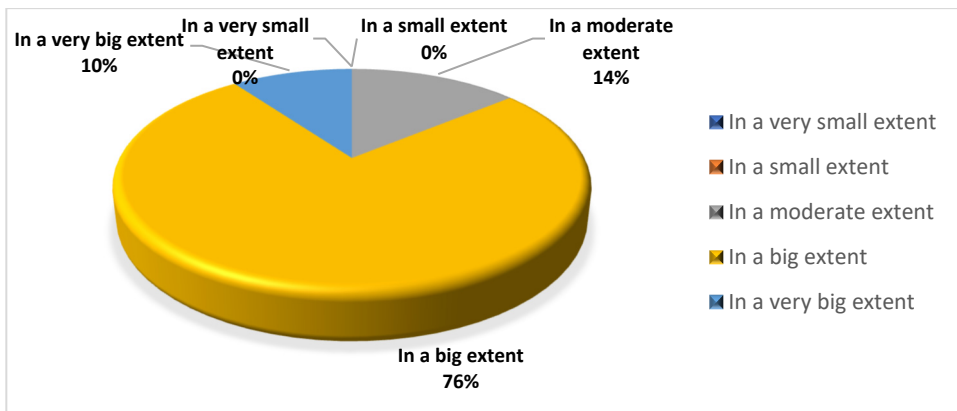


Diagram 13. `As a specialist, do you consider yourself emotionally involved during adoption?`

## 8. Conclusion

In our paper we wanted to present, in a complete manner, the aspects related to the role of the social worker in the adoption procedure, with emphasis on his evaluations, opinions, experiences and perceptions trained in his career, based on the deep analysis of the phenomenon. We highlighted the difficulties and interruptions of ongoing adoptions caused by pandemic restrictions as well as the unfulfilled parents, or the frustrations of children who were on the brink of finding a family. Importantly, the procedures have been resumed and a record number of national adoptions have been recorded in the post-pandemic period. The main objectives of the research were achieved, and the assumptions were confirmed.

Thus, by relying on the opinions of professional social workers with experience in the field and who manage dozens of adoption cases every year, we were able to identify the main motivations of the candidates for adoption as personal and social, accompanied by a manifest altruism. In the category of personal reasons, the first is infertility, the biological inability to procreate, but also less aware aspects of the suitors, such as feelings of helpfulness, separation, and hopelessness that make room for the desire to adopt 'the ideal child', they mentally designed from the beginning of their marriage. The participants in our study also noticed that some adopters manifest: the desire to enjoy the presence of a child in the couple's life; the need to practice a set of parental skills with which they were endowed; the need to be loved as parents and to devote their efforts to raising a child to whom to pass on their concepts, beliefs and ideals of life.

Very few of them want to adopt a child to which they have attached themselves in a genuine and truly manner, and whose interest is put on the first place.

The social pressure of childless couples is reflected in the social reason for adoption, meaning the comparison with people of the same age and social status, of mature couples with over 5 - 7 years of marriage. Those couples are usually the only ones in their group who do not yet have children. In this way, they are excluded from group activities, from discussions about children, or from events dedicated to families with children. Other couples are eager to make the adopted child their heirs and depositaries of personal assets and values, to fulfill a social and moral duty in order to meet the expectations of their partner or extended family, or, enjoying a high financial status, they want to give the adopted child what they did / or did not have in their childhood.

At the same time, we reaffirmed that parents who want to adopt are mostly oriented toward very young children (between zero and four years old), while older children are less desirable, as they are considered to have some dysfunctional behaviors, acquired either in a disorganized family, in foster care or in residential system. Children with special needs, or those with more siblings, are also less desired by couples, being considered as 'hard-to-adopt'.

From the results of the interview with specialists, we highlighted their views on the legislation, most of them agreeing that adoption procedures should

be facilitated, in order to give the opportunity to both children, and families to meet in the least possible time.

The biggest obstructions encountered by the practitioners in their work are related to the extended family disagreement with the adoption, the unexpected death of one of the parents who want to adopt, the misunderstandings that may arise in the couple, or between the adoptive and biological parents.

Practitioners are aware of the degree to which they are emotionally involved in the adoption procedure, over 83 percent of them considering that emotional consumption is high, in efforts to make the child compatible with the family, to create a relationship of trust with each of them, to speak to the child according to his/her understanding capacities, to inform parents about the course of adoption and unforeseen problems. Counseling and post-adoption monitoring activities prove to be particularly useful in avoiding adoption failure, but also in preventing child neglect, which can lead to inadaptation.

Our research had its limits caused by the pandemic restrictions, which led to the application of the Survey through Google forms, another limiting factor being the distance from the city where the respondents live (Constanta, Braila, Galati, Tulcea, Slobozia and Calarasi), the interviews being conducted online. We bring special thanks to the Social Work student Gabriela Rotaru, who supported us in data collection.

Our conclusion is that the adoption process is a very complex one, which, once completed, will change the life of the couple and the child for the rest of their lives. The practitioner's work is extremely delicate and subtle in the compatibility of the parties, requiring special skills and emotional involvement without which, the adoption would not have the desired success.

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