



Opening the Cultural Enigma to Survive: The ‘Gangster’ Adoption (Guddifachaa) Practices Experience of Orphaned Child in Arada Sub-City

Dessalegn Guyo, Ph.D., MSW

Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Youngstown State University, United States.

Article Details

Article Type: Research Article

Received date: 29th November, 2024

Accepted date: 11th January, 2025

Published date: 13th January, 2025

***Corresponding Author:** Dessalegn Guyo, Ph.D., MSW, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Youngstown State University, United States.

Citation: Guyo, D., (2025). Opening the Cultural Enigma to Survive: The ‘Gangster’ Adoption (Guddifachaa) Practices Experience of Orphaned Child in Arada Sub-City. *J Soci Work Welf Policy*, 3(1): 131. doi: <https://doi.org/10.33790/jswwp1100131>.

Copyright: ©2025, This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0](#), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Abstract

Guddifachaa, mostly referred to as adoption, is a socio-cultural and legal practice with deep historical and cultural roots in the Oromo people of East Africa. This case study explores the experience of impoverished and previously gang parents experience of adopting an orphan child to integrate himself into the mainstream community in Addis Ababa (Finfinnee) City slum area of Gedam Sefer where many orphan children dwell on street. The adoption process described here is practically unique, highlighting how the adoptive parents informally navigated the cultural systems to adopt the orphan by providing the safety and permanency. The parents' experiences offer a typical practice that demonstrates the potential for individual actions within a community's cultural framework to protect children from harm and promote well-being. Notably, this study sheds light on the uncommon practice of a single man as gang adopting an orphan child in contrast to the more socially accepted practice of single women as adopters. Besides using the core cultural practice of guddifachaa, the adopter's change of their Orthodox religious sect to protestant and beliefs played a crucial role in facilitating the adoption process, maintaining a family structure led by a single man, and ultimately transitioning into a couple-based family system.

Keywords: Parenting, Orphan Children, Guddifachaa (Adoption), Spirituality, Finfinnee, Arada Sub city

Introduction

This case study delves into the dynamics of adopting and parenting an orphan child in Gedam Sefer located in the Arada sub-city of Addis Ababa (Finfinnee city). The study was conducted during summer of 2015, and the primary objective of this research is to grasp the experiences of low-income gang single male parents in the adoption process of an orphan child. The orphan crisis in urban centers in Ethiopia is larger than many sub-Saharan countries according to recent UNICEF report (UNICEF, 2021) Furthermore, this study aims to shed light on the implications of encouraging local adoptions among orphaned children as a means of integration into the community after being labeled as a gang. The research questions guiding this study are: How does a single male parent in Gedam

Sefer experience the process of adopting an orphan, and how does he manage these experiences as a means of integration into the community?

Cultural adoption (AKA Guddifachaa) is a prevalent practice in Ethiopia's rural areas in most ethnic groups, where it serves to strengthen social bonds, forge ties with non-related families within the community, and provide support to families who are relatively less fortunate. This form of adoption is essentially psychosocial and legally recognized or considered legitimate due to its being of the cultural practice. People who lived in the rural areas in a community whose cultures promotes adoption were acculturated to perpetuate the practice as core cultural milieu. In urban areas, the trend of adoption, while similar to rural practices, has its distinct characteristics. This similarity primarily stems from the cultural backgrounds and orientations of families who have migrated to urban centers for reasons such as education, employment, business, or other social factors. Unlike their rural counterparts, urban adopters engage in the practice for several reasons. The urban adoption landscape has evolved, extending beyond the creation of social ties to focus more on assisting vulnerable children, creating familial bond with the adoptees and support influenced significantly by the adopters' psycho-spiritual perspectives. This research gives emphasis on the role of family institution playing a significant mutual supporting role using the core cultural practices of adoption and religion as social cohesion and coexistence. However, some researchers try to emphasis childcare systems through institutions as a vital role player in offering comprehensive psycho-social support to marginalized and vulnerable children who face challenges such as parental loss, displacement, political unrest, disabilities, and extreme poverty on larger scale [1].

Justification for the study

The number of orphaned children in Ethiopia is significantly high compared to the adoption opportunities availability locally. Children in Ethiopia face myriads of challenges, including sexual abuse, labor exploitation, neglect, and orphanhood, largely due to the socio-economic problems, health, psychological, and political

circumstances of their biological parents [2]. These adversities often lead to children who are homeless and, on the street, becoming victims of assault, or engaging in antisocial behaviors for survival. While the family system is the ideal environment for nurturing and supporting children of any situation, Ethiopia's limited resources hinder effective institutional support at both government and non-government levels. Most organizations addressing children's issues tend to seek solutions externally rather than leveraging the community's cultural practices.

It is crucial, therefore, to critically evaluate the socio-cultural resources within communities to address these challenges. Traditional practices like 'guddifachaa' (adoption), 'moggaasaa', or 'matego' (foster care) are prevalent among various ethnic groups in Ethiopia and represent inherent, community-based solutions to these problems [3]. When harnessed effectively, these practices can be pivotal community assets for interventions, encouraging voluntary adoption without reliance on external organizations.

This case study focuses on a parent in Gedam Sefer, an area in the Arada sub-city, Addis Ababa / Finfinnee, known for its socio-economic challenges, who adopted an orphan child. Gedam Sefer's prominence in the cultural practice of 'guddifachaa' is noteworthy. This practice, originating from the Oromo society, involves ceremonial rituals and vows in the presence of Shanacha leaders in the gada system [3, 4]. With the Oromo being the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, 'guddifachaa' has become a widespread practice since the 1960s Civil Code endorsement [2-4]. Parents in Gedam Sefer, representing a blend of Ethiopia's ethnic groups, adopt children like their rural counterparts.

Understanding the experience of these parents in adoption is vital for future social work interventions and for promoting social justice for children in Ethiopia, beginning at the family unit level. The case parent was selected for two reasons: firstly, adoption is a prevalent cultural practice across most ethnic groups in Ethiopia, serving purposes such as relationship building and ensuring an heir. Secondly, despite the poverty in Gedam Sefer and the presence of biological children in most families, there remains a willingness to adopt children, both relatives and non-relatives. This study aims to understand how impoverished families manage to adopt orphans without external assistance, offering insights that could be beneficial in resolving similar challenges faced by other families.

Literature review

This study's conceptual framework encompasses several variables: parents' income and assets, child's attributes, religion and parenting, attitudes towards adoption, parents' past experiences, child's access to basic social services (health, education, food), marriage, and wedding events, the adoption environment, and child rights issues relevant to adoptive parents' experiences (refer to Fig 1. in the annex for more detail). Parenting, in this context, refers to the role played by one or two adults in a socially recognized relationship caring for a dependent child, whether biological or adopted. This study uses 'family' and 'parents' interchangeably, acknowledging their varied meanings in different theoretical contexts. Yngvesson [5] defines parenting as a secure emotional connection with the child, emphasizing the role of the 'real' mother (p.19). An orphan child is defined as under 15 years of age, having lost one or both parents [6].



The term 'adoption' spans various disciplines including sociology, anthropology, law, and social work. It refers to the permanent care of a non-biological child as one's own, distinct from foster care, which is temporary. In 'Ethiopian' customary adoption practices (guddifachaa), the adopted child gains full rights akin to a biological child, while foster care focuses on meeting basic needs for a limited time [2, 3]. Traditional adoption often signifies a complete break from the child's birth family, although connections between adoptive and biological families can sometimes be strong. Adopters often discourage children from seeking biological parents to prevent them from leaving.

Customary adoption historically prioritized parental relationships over the welfare of the child. However, Ethiopian adoption practices are evolving, with parents adopting from outside their immediate social circle, aiding orphaned and abandoned children. This shift has not yet gained significant attention in professional or academic circles [7]. Based on my emic knowledge and literature review, the researcher believes cultural adoption plays a crucial role in addressing orphan issues. As societal changes can inform social theory, understanding similar changes in related conditions is essential [8]. The burgeoning population and urbanization in Ethiopia have led to a noticeable increase in orphans, often found in public places like churchyards, roadsides, and near aid organizations [9].

Community-based adoption and foster care are vital in managing the large orphan population in Ethiopia. These practices offer the best local alternatives for orphaned and vulnerable children, with family adoption being a primary form of care [10, 11]. Ethiopian adoption is both a social-cultural and legal process, with changing societal attitudes leading to more 'open' adoption practices [12].

Yngvesson [5] highlights the contractual nature of adoption, where birth parents transfer care responsibilities to adoptive parents or agencies (p.23). In Ethiopia, rural adoption often involves silent agreements, driven by empathy or religious obligations. Urban families may adopt without agency involvement, reflecting past practices where adoption served infertility needs or strengthened socio-economic ties [13].

Fonseca's [13] ethnographic research in Brazilian Favelas underscores the role of extended family networks in child 'circulation,' often overlooked by legislators and social workers (p.397). Similarly, Ethiopian adoption practices extend beyond family networking, supporting orphaned and neglected children even in non-relative contexts. However, local adoption practices, often informal and without government intervention, are not adequately recognized by legal frameworks [13]. Phiri and Webb [9] note the challenge of quantifying the impact of local advocacy or 'community parenting' on orphan care. A gap exists between available resources and the realization of children's rights, underscoring the need for a deeper understanding of local adoption practices in Ethiopia.

Research Methods

The choice of a case study focusing on the adoption of an orphan child in Gedam Sefer was driven by the researcher's interest in promoting cultural adoption (guddifachaa) practices as a means of empowering communities with their assets and serving the vulnerable children in poor society. This aligns with a core social work value of permanency and service: facilitating self-help among vulnerable groups to achieve normal social functioning and promote social justice. The informants for this study were residents of Gedam Sefer – specifically, a single gang leader who later became a couple who had adopted an orphan child as a means of integration into the community. They were selected through purposive sampling, aided by community members' discussion.

My engagement with the Gedam Sefer community initially occurred during a community-university partnership project meeting in 2010 as PhD candidate. This interaction, initially focused on the challenges

faced by unemployed youth, provided insights into the phenomenon of impoverished families adopting orphan children.

The informant's family was identified through discussions with the project coordinator of the community-university partnership, who served the researcher as a gatekeeper. The researcher established contact with the parents via telephone, setting up an initial meeting to introduce by arranging a time and place for an interview. This family's decision to voluntarily adopt an orphan child without external assistance was a critical factor in their selection for the study. Their experience serves as an instrumental case, potentially instructive to other parents within the community and beyond, in supporting vulnerable orphan children in Ethiopia.

Data collection methods included observations of family in their home and community during interviews, field notes, and discussion memos. Additionally, a review of literature about cultural adoption in Ethiopia and other African contexts was conducted. Given the limited availability of literature specific to Ethiopian adoption, comparative insights were also drawn from studies on adoption in other developing countries and the United States.

Sampling and Recruitment Criteria

In the Gedam Sefer community, the number of parents engaging in the adoption of orphans is relatively limited. Given this context, purposive sampling was employed to identify and select participants for this study. This method was chosen due to its effectiveness in focusing on families or parents who have demonstrated a commitment to adopting and nurturing a child amidst the various social challenges prevalent in the area.

The reality in Gedam Sefer is that many parents face significant difficulties in raising their biological children, deciding to adopt an orphan child even more noteworthy. Therefore, the criteria for inclusion in this study were specifically tailored to capture this unique case. Participants were selected based on three key criteria: they must have adopted an orphan child, be residents of Gedam Sefer, and have lived with the adopted child for at least six months. This approach ensured that the study focused on parents who not only made the significant decision to adopt but also had sufficient time to integrate the child into their family life and community.

Interview technique

Before conducting the interview, the researcher contacted the informants family twice to obtain their consent guided by a gatekeeper from community leaders. To ensure a sense of security and freedom during the interview process, the researcher prepared an informed consent form and presented for their review. This document, originally prepared in English, then was translated into Amharic for the informants' ease of understanding. After reading, the father signed the Amharic version one for himself and for the son, then the mother did hers with each retaining a copy.

The researcher emphasized to the informants the importance of openness and transparency, encouraging them to freely express their feelings and experiences and the possibility of withdrawing from the interview if they want. The researcher assured them of the confidentiality of any sensitive information that could potentially create familial or neighborly conflicts. This assurance facilitated a more open and detailed recording of information during the interview process. The interviews were tape-recorded for accuracy in data transcription and analysis.

The interviews with the adoptive parents were conducted in two sessions, each lasting between 90 to 120 minutes. The timing and location of these sessions were chosen based on the informants' preferences, with their consent. Before interviewing, the researcher established a sense of reciprocity between the researcher and the informants. As a token of appreciation for their time of stay, the respondents received an incentive of 80 Ethiopian birr back then for each session by then.

Data Collection and Analysis

Given the nature of this research, it involves two parties: the child and the adoptive parents. However, my data collection was focused on the adoptive parents, employing in-depth interviews. The entire interview was tape-recorded, extensive observation and notes were taken regarding the interview setting and context of the parent child interaction, adopted child to the biological children interaction.

During the analysis phase, the researcher highlighted the experiences and emotions of the parents who adopted an orphan child, particularly focusing on the implications and meanings of adoption and parenting within the community context. To maintain the confidentiality of the parents' identities, the researcher employed pseudonyms such as Mr. Buta, Mrs. Marge, Kobbe, Tesfa, and Nagase for the adoptive family in Gedam Sefer, and Chaltu and Gurmu for the biological parents. In discussing the findings, the researcher used terms like 'adopting father' for Mr. Buta, 'adopting mother' Marge for Mr. Buta's wife, 'the siblings' or Tesfa and Nagase for the biological children born after Kobbe, and 'the child' for 'the adopted Orphan as Kobbe.

Limitations of the study

This case study encountered limitations that are important to acknowledge. There was a limit to exactly transcribing the interview. Transcription can sometimes alter the nuances and details inherent in nonverbal communication, which may affect the interpretation of responses. Another significant limitation was the dominance of the adoptive father as the primary source of information where participants referred him repeatedly. This imbalance in information sourcing can be attributed to two factors: the adoptive father had adopted the child before his marriage and thus had a longer history and deeper connection with the child; and the adoption process was an 'underground' practice, less formally recognized and structured. In the interviews, the patriarchal structure of the society, where male perspectives tend to dominate, was evident. The adoptive mother deferred to her husband, allowing him more opportunities to speak on the issue. This dynamic may have influenced the depth and variety of perspectives captured in the study.

Furthermore, due to time constraints, the external environments of the parents were not fully utilized as data sources. While different views of the parents were considered to check the trustworthiness of the information, the use of a few external data points could limit the study's comprehensive understanding of the adoption context. These limitations highlight the need for cautious interpretation of the findings, acknowledging that they represent a specific viewpoint that may not fully capture the broader context of adoption practices in Gedam Sefer and beyond. The adopting father was a known gangster in the community where he had created a serious social problem of rubbery, theft and assaults. Yet their commitment to cultural adoption in lieu of the benefits of cohesion with community could be exemplary to be used for the looming number of unattended Orphans on the streets as homeless.

Findings

The findings of this case study were seen from nine interdependent domains about the adoptive father, the mother, and the adopted-child relationship. The researcher classified the domains according to their relationship and interconnection in meaning as well as usage in the expression of ideas by the informants. These domains are the 'single father' (parents status and asset), the child attributes, religious attributes, events and contexts in the process, the metaphors used, attitudes and perceptions, the challenges, the assumed child benefits, and the nature of adoption processes. The domains have a relationship according to the reports of the parents in shaping the experiences of adoptive parents (See Annex One Fig 1).

The Single man Mr. Buta's adoption journey

Mr. Buta was a known gang leader and then a dangerous gang

leader in the slum area of Gedam Sefer, Piasa, and Marcato area in and around the Arad sub-city. His life is complex and transformative. Buta, 42 years old during the 2015 interview, adopted Kobbe, as the first socially born child. Born in Bishoftu, approximately 50 kilometers from Addis Ababa / Finfinnee, Buta's early life was marred by his parents' divorce and his father's death, all occurring before he completed eighth grade. Consequently, he and his siblings fled their stepfather after their mother remarried, seeking refuge with relatives. But relocated to Addis Ababa / Finfinnee with his elder brother, who supported him through his high school education at Ethiopia Tikdem No 1 School, concluding in 1986 with a grade 12 completion.

Buta's post-school life led him into the national military service under the Dergue regime, but he soon deserted, seeking refuge back in Addis Ababa / Finfinnee city. His return coincided with the Dergue government's downfall and the rise of the EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front). The ensuing years, 1992 to 1998, were tumultuous for Buta, characterized by substance abuse, trust erosion within his community, and rebellion against various social norms. A pivotal life-changing situation happened in 1998 when Buta switched his belief to 'Protestant' Christianity from Orthodox Christianity and then adopted a child as a means of survival in the community he revolted against for a long time. This transformation has driven him into entrepreneurship, opening a mobile retail shop and hiring a woman who informed him about Kobbe's approaching abandonment.

The adoptive father, Mr. Buta, underwent a significant religious transformation in 1998, shifting from Orthodox Christianity to Protestantism. This change had a profound impact on his life and behavior. Embracing his new faith, Buta became actively involved in his religious community, taking on the role of a preacher. He regularly shared his beliefs with locals and street children, spreading his newfound convictions. Buta's commitment to his faith extended to his personal life. He pursued a relationship with a woman from his church, adhering to traditional customs by sending shingles (elders) to her family for marriage approval, a practice rooted in respect and tradition. The church played a pivotal role in his life, providing support not only for his wedding in terms of financial and material aid but also in spiritual and occupational aspects.

The family's reliance on faith is evident in their approach to health and other challenges. Prayer is a cornerstone of their life, often favored over conventional medicine for healing. This deep religious conviction also extends to Buta's professional life, as he participates in Protestant church conferences, often held in stadiums, which also serve as business opportunities. This change in religious affiliation was instrumental in helping Buta overcome his previous addictions. The family, as a whole, is deeply immersed in their religious beliefs, indicating the profound influence of faith on their daily lives and decisions.

Moved by demonstrative change compassion, Buta adopted Kobbe, despite his bachelor status. But faced numerous challenges thereafter. The closure of his retail shop, multiple job losses, and a significant period of mourning following his mother's death in 2002 led to financial and personal hardships, including a disconnection of power in his home and a struggle to provide food for himself and the child. These narrative captures Buta's life from his troubled childhood, through phases of personal struggle, to a transformative change and the challenges of single parenthood, painting a vivid picture of resilience and transformation.

Kobbe, the adoptee Child

Kobbe Gurmu, a ten-year-old child in the fourth grade at Bethlehem Primary School in Gedam Sefer, carries a story marked by early tragedy and resilience by the time interview. Named after his maternal grandfather, Kobbe's last name was Gurmu which honors his mother's lineage rather than his biological father's. His early life

was turbulent; his father passed away when he was just six months old, and his mother, Chaltu Gurmu, subsequently abandoned him four months later on the street of Gedam Sefer near the store of Buta.

For one year and four months, Kobbe's maternal aunt assumed his care because he was abandoned on the street. Once again, at the age of two years and four months, he faced the prospect of being neglected and abandoned. It was at this critical juncture that Mr. Buta stepped into the child's life and later claimed that he adopted the abandoned child. This brief account of Kobbe's early years highlights the challenges he faced from infancy, including the loss of his father, abandonment by his mother, and the transient care of his aunt, culminating in his adoption by Mr. Buta. Despite these early upheavals, Kobbe's story is one of survival and the forging of new familial bonds. Unaware of his complicated past, Kobbe grew up believing that Mr. Buta was his biological father.

Events and contexts in the experience of parents

The adoptive father's journey, intertwined with his deepening religious faith, is marked by remarkable events, and turning points. His engagement with the church led him to a night prayer program, where he met his future fiancée. His entrepreneurial venture into the mobile burger stores also intersected with his religious activities, notably at a church conference held in a different place in the city. One of the events was conducted in Addis Ababa stadium. This event not only facilitated the growth of his business, as the church community supported him by purchasing items for his venture, but also played a crucial role in expanding his relationship with his intended wife.

However, the path to marriage was not without obstacles. His fiancée's parents initially rejected his marriage proposal due to concerns over his previous gang life and the child Kobbe, whom they believed was his illegitimate child. They demanded that he relinquish care of Kobbe as a precondition for marriage. He respectfully declined this condition and determined to send a mediator informally to the mother of his fiancée to persuade her at her workplace. This effort was successful, leading to an acceptance of the marriage proposal and the arrangement of a wedding date by church customs. Despite the initial rejection rooted in a misunderstanding about Kobbe's paternity, the adoptive father persevered, and Kobbe, then five years old, played a significant role in the wedding as the best man, reinforcing his status as a son within the family.

In the marriage life, the new family was blessed with the birth of two biological children, a son, and a daughter. While the family celebrated the birthdays of these two children together. Kobbe's birthday was notably not celebrated, despite his requests. This discrepancy, alongside the adoptive father's awareness of Kobbe's birth date, highlights a complex dynamic within the family, reflecting both inclusion and subtle distinctions in their treatment of Kobbe compared to the biological children. That is why this silent enigma of adoption by gang leaders became the focus of the study as unique approaches to integrating oneself into the community were undertaken.

The adoptive father's narrative is richly layered with metaphors that vividly capture his lived experiences before and after adopting Kobbe. His use of metaphorical language offers a deeper insight into his transformation and the silent adoption process. He linked his state of life before changing his religion to blindness, saying, "I was blind before changing my religion while I was inconsiderate to different aspects of personal and others' lives." This metaphor reflects a lack of empathy, awareness, or understanding of his own and others' needs and emotions, suggesting a significant shift in his perspective following his conversion.

In another narrative, his description of Kobbe's real life and potential fate before the adoption was "sleeping with a dog." This metaphor starkly illustrates the dire and vulnerable situation Kobbe was in, equating his potential life on the streets to that of a stray

animal, devoid of care and comfort. The adoption process is described as the practice of "planting orange and eating an orange fruit after ripe." This captures the idea of nurturing and reaping the benefits, symbolizing the care and effort put into raising an adopted child and the joy and fulfillment derived from it.

In describing the neglect some children face, adoptive fathers referred to certain families as "dead alive," indicating that they are physically present but emotionally and supportively absent in their children's lives. The adoptive parents' view on developing a child's freedom is condensed as, "reading loud can be heard by the reader." Allowing children to express themselves openly and freely is akin to reading aloud, where the expression is clear and audible. It emphasizes the importance of giving children a voice and listening to their needs and interests. These metaphors provide a profound and poetic insight into the adoptive father's journey, his perspectives on parenting, and the transformative power of care and nurturing in a child's life.

Attitudes and perceptions

The attitudes and perceptions within the adoptive family of Kobbe display a complex mix of emotions, acceptance, and societal influences. The adoptive father holds a deeply affectionate and positive attitude towards Kobbe, stating that he is "everything for me before and after marriage, even after the birth of my children." This statement underscores his unwavering commitment and love, irrespective of the subsequent changes in his life, including marriage and the birth of his biological children.

The adoptive mother also expresses a bond with Kobbe. She remarks, "I do not remember when I mistreated Kobbe as an outsider," indicating her seamless acceptance of him as part of the family. Her attitude is branched into the periods before and after the birth of her biological children, yet she consistently regards him as her eldest son, followed by Tesfa and Nagase. The extended family, particularly the later adoptive mother's parents, were initially more skeptical. They perceived Kobbe as illegitimate, mirroring societal stigmas associated with the process of claimed adoption, especially by a bachelor which became uncommon in the community by a gang. Their initial refusal to consent to their daughter's marriage to Buta, due to Kobbe's presence, reflects these prejudices. The community's reaction to Kobbe's adoption was mixed. Some members suggested that Kobbe would be better off with an NGO, while others speculated that Buta adopted Kobbe to receive financial benefits from organizations like CCF which was operating in the community by then. These perceptions highlight societal misconceptions and stigmas surrounding the gang leaders' behavior in the community. Contrasting with adult perceptions, Kobbe's peers and siblings display more accepting and inclusive feelings. His peers interact with him without discrimination, engaging in playground, and school activities, and doing assignments together. Similarly, the siblings at home exhibit strong mutual affection and do not perceive him as an outsider.

However, Kobbe's relationship with his adoptive mother is somewhat distant compared to his bond with his adoptive father. He tends to be more reserved around her, not asking her questions. The child would ask his father and become silent in case she enters the room while in a discussion. These varying behaviors within and outside the family reflect the complexities of socialization and gang behavior, the influence of societal norms and stigmas, and the blended family dynamics of relationships. While Kobbe is largely accepted and loved within the family, the broader societal and extended family views reveal lingering challenges and biases regarding a gang leader's role in adoption.

Challenges of the Adoptive Father

The adoptive father faced a range of challenges during the underground adoption process and thereafter, reflecting the

complexities and difficulties of single parenthood and societal perceptions. One of the early difficulties he encountered was Kobbe's health condition, which included incidents like continuous bedwetting every night. This aspect of care which is an uncommon experience for the ex-gang leader's father along with the general responsibilities of parenting, led to moments of frustration and doubt about his ability to continue as a parent.

Another significant hurdle was the lack of acknowledgment and acceptance from community members regarding his status as a single man adopting a child which never happened in the community. This skepticism likely stemmed from the views in the community on a troublemaker gang trying to create family structures and roles, creating an environment of doubt and judgment around his decision. In addition, the adoptive father's financial situation was precarious. The death of his mother not only was a personal loss but also coincided with the loss of his job by the closure of the small shop he owned with a friend. The father fears that Kobbe might leave home to become a street child, and the father would be considered untrustworthy in the community as usual.

Another remarkably problematic challenge was revealing the truth about Kobbe's adoption and his biological parents to the child. Over time, the adoptive parents believed in the importance of honesty, yet they were concerned about Kobbe's reaction to the news. Then at age nine, Kobbe was informed about his adoption, a revelation that the parents feared might make him feel alienated or unwanted. This created a little confusion on the child's perception of the parents and feeling different in the family while explaining to Kobbe about Family Life. The adoptive father expressed that Kobbe is central to the family, being deeply intertwined with his struggles, marital decisions, and life experiences. Despite the challenges, the adoptive father views Kobbe as integral to his life's journey, impacting his decisions and perspectives. This family's commitment shines through despite societal pressures, financial hardships, and the delicate task of navigating Kobbe's understanding of his place in the family. The adoptive father's experience underscores the complexities of adoption and gang life in the community, especially for single parents in a structured society.

The benefit of adoption to the Child

The adoptive parents have taken several steps to ensure that Kobbe benefits from a nurturing and supportive environment, emphasizing his fair treatment within the family and access to resources and opportunities. Kobbe is enrolled in a private school in Gedam Sefer, indicating the parents' commitment to providing him with a quality education. This choice signals their desire to give him the best possible start in life, academically. The child is given ample time to play, both with his siblings at home and with friends around the school. This aspect of his life is essential for his social development and overall well-being, allowing him to build relationships and enjoy a normal childhood. Recognizing Kobbe's age and capabilities, the parents do not obligate him to engage in household chores. They view him as a child, ensuring that his primary focus remains on his education and personal development.

In line with their religious beliefs, Kobbe's initial treatment for any illness involves prayer healing, followed by medical attention at clinics, mirroring the treatment of their biological children. The hygiene and sanitation need of Kobbe, as well as the other children, are well taken care of, due to the mother's background as a Kindergarten teacher.

Kobbe was provided with clothes, shoes, educational materials, and uniforms, just like his siblings. In terms of material needs further demonstrates the parents' commitment to treating all their children equally and ensuring that Kobbe does not feel left out or less valued. The actions taken by the adoptive parents illustrate their dedication to

providing Kobbe with a supportive, healthy, and normal upbringing. Their approach underscores their commitment to his well-being and development as a member of their family.

The nature of the adoption process

The adoption process for Kobbe by the adoptive father, and later by the adoptive mother through her marriage, deviated from traditional cultural practices and legal formalities, relying instead on community recognition and personal commitment based on the claim of the gang leader in the community. Unlike typical cultural adoption practices, which may involve specific rituals or ceremonies, the adoption of Kobbe did not adhere to these traditions. The adoptive father bypassed the customary cultural rituals when taking Kobbe from the child's aunt, indicating a more informal approach to adoption.

Despite the absence of formal rituals, the adoptive father gained recognition from the community as Kobbe's adopter due to changes in behavior and religion demonstrated by the gang leader and the community's observation of the responsible actions over time. Then they started to support his decision to care for Kobbe, even in the absence of traditional ceremonies.

Personal Motivation and Circumstances

The decision to adopt Kobbe was primarily driven by the adoptive father's personal feelings and his economic struggles. His willingness to adopt Kobbe, despite not having a stable income or job at the time, reflects a deep sense of responsibility and compassion. Family Background in Adoption Practices: The adoptive father's parents were part of a community that frequently practiced guddifachaa, a local form of adoption for vulnerable children. This background likely influenced his understanding and acceptance of adoption as a viable way to provide for a child in need.

Informal Adoption without Legal Procedures: The adoption did not involve legal processes or court visits. It was an informal decision, a commitment made by the adoptive father (and later by the adoptive mother) to take Kobbe into their home and care for him as their child. Guddifachaa Without Ceremony: The parents described the adoption as guddifachaa, a traditional form of adoption, but noted that it was done without any ceremony. This signifies a departure from the usual practices but maintains the essence of the concept, which is to provide a home and family for a child in need.

The nature of Kobbe's adoption was unorthodox, lacking in both the legal formalities and cultural ceremonies typically associated with adoption. Instead, it was characterized by personal commitment, community acceptance, and the adoptive father's background in a community accustomed to the concept of guddifachaa. This approach underscores a more flexible and personal interpretation of adoption, driven by empathy and a desire to provide care, rather than adherence to formal or traditional procedures.

Discussion

The findings from this case study in Gedam Sefer provide crucial insights into the complex dynamics of adoption in a socio-culturally diverse Ethiopian community. Despite the challenges inherent in their environment, including prevalent social ills like poverty, violence, and poor sanitation, families in Gedam Sefer demonstrate a shared commitment to aiding vulnerable community members. Mr. Buta's family exemplifies this ethos, managing to care for an orphan child despite their limited resources.

In Ethiopia, with an estimated five million orphan children under 18 years old, the exact number of those adopted remains unrecorded. This study sheds light on the lived experiences of one such adoptive family, revealing the motivations and challenges inherent in their journey. Gedam Sefer residents engage in adoption for various reasons, ranging from seeking assistance in the name of the adoptee to fulfilling psychological or spiritual pledges. This diversity in

motivations reflects the multi-faceted nature of adoption within the community.

The adoptive father's transformation from a life marred by addiction to one of responsibility and community integration is particularly noteworthy. Matheny and McCarthy [14, 15] highlight the role of spirituality in confronting life-threatening events, a theme echoed in Mr. Buta's life. His religious conversion marked a turning point, facilitating his reintegration into society and altering his approach to life and adoption. In Ethiopian culture, adoption, or 'guddifachaa,' is a widely practiced child-caring system, recognized both culturally and legally. It is often the first choice for orphans who have lost both parents and a secondary option for those with one surviving parent. However, in Gedam Sefer, the type of adoption practiced by the parents diverges from both legal and traditional cultural norms. Termed as 'silent enigma' adoption, it involves adopting a child discreetly, with the community becoming aware over time. Such adoptions can serve multiple purposes, including the adopter's social reintegration and reputation enhancement.

This study also addresses the potential influence of the adoptive father's newfound religious beliefs on his decision to adopt. His exposure to the child's story and the circumstances of potential street life played a significant role in his decision-making process. However, local suspicions about adoption, often linked to the involvement of NGOs in child welfare, posed challenges, including assumptions about child labor exploitation.

The trend of child neglect in Ethiopia often leads to complete abandonment due to several reasons. Cultural adoption, supported by public institutions and NGOs, is being promoted as a solution. The well-being of the adopted child in this family system is intertwined with the family's challenges, the child's rights and freedoms, access to basic services, and the parenting style adopted. The adoptive parents encountered numerous challenges, such as job loss, family bereavement, and societal skepticism. Their approach to these challenges was grounded in their religious faith, family discussions, and a collective search for solutions. Berry [16] describes open adoption as a system where there is information sharing between adoptive and biological parents, which was evident in this case when the child was informed about his biological mother.

Symbolic meanings played a significant role in the parents' expression of their adoption experience. For instance, they used the metaphor of 'alive dead' to describe parents who fail to support their children and 'reading loud is better heard to the reader' to emphasize the child's right to express their feelings. The metaphors of 'dog' and 'orange fruit' were used to depict the life of a street child and the nurturing required in adoption, respectively. This case study thus provides a window into the nuanced realities of adoption in an Ethiopian community, highlighting the interplay of cultural practices, societal attitudes, and individual motivations in the care of orphaned children.

Research Implications

The adoption experience of this family, which deviates from traditional practices, offers significant implications for further research. This case illustrates evolving trends in cultural adoption within Ethiopia, especially among poor families. There is a need for in-depth studies on how 'poor families' manage to adopt vulnerable orphans and abandoned children. Such research could inform strategies to promote similar types of adoption in urban centers, where the issue is more acute.

A critical area of inquiry is whether the 'enigma adoption' practiced by this family can be a viable solution for orphaned children in similar socio-economic contexts. Additionally, it is vital to explore how professional practitioners can advocate for and implement local adoption laws that address the needs of such adoptive parents and

orphaned children. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing effective child welfare policies and practices in Ethiopia."

Conclusion

The adoption practice observed in this study bypasses formal legal processes, representing what can be termed as 'silent enigma' adoption. This approach is shaped by a combination of poverty, cultural practices, and individual circumstances, such as the parent's religious beliefs and behavioral transformations. A key aspect of this adoption is the equitable treatment of the adopted child compared to biological children within the family. The adoptive parents' skills, knowledge, and religious orientation played a crucial role in facilitating family discussions and socializing the children, with the adoptive mother's background as a kindergarten teacher proving particularly beneficial.

However, there are nuanced challenges in this adoption arrangement. For instance, the way the family discloses the number of children they have and the different treatment in celebrating birth dates could inadvertently create a sense of discrimination or psychological impact on the adopted child.

In conclusion, this case study highlights several factors that facilitate the adoption of orphans, including the influence of birthplaces, religion, socialization, and family environment. The research has also illuminated areas such as child rights, the economic status of parents, and social contexts like weddings and cultural attitudes, all of which play a significant role in the adoptive family setting. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of adoption practices in Ethiopia, offering valuable insights for policymakers, social workers, and researchers in the field of child welfare and adoption."

These revisions aim to provide a more detailed understanding of the study's implications and the broader context of adoption practices in Ethiopia. If there are other sections or specific elements you would like to focus on further, please let me know.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. Melese AK, Pedro A, Somhlaba NZ (2024). Pros and Cons of Orphanage Centers in Ethiopia: A Qualitative Analysis. *Psychol J Res Open Volume* 6(4): 1-5.
2. Varnis, S. L. (2001). Promoting child protection through community resources: Care arrangements for Ethiopian AIDS orphans. *Northeast African Studies (New Series)*, 8(1), 143-158.
3. Dessalegn, N. (2006). Guddifachaa practice as child problem intervention in Oromo society: The case of Ada'a and Liban districts (Unpublished master's thesis).
4. Beckstrom, J. H. (1972). Adoption in Ethiopia ten years after the civil code. *Journal of African Law*, 16(2), 145-168. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/journals/soas.html>
5. Yngvesson, B. (2002). Placing the "gift child" in transnational adoption. *Law & Society Review*, 36(2), 227-256.
6. Monascha, R., & Boermab, J. T. (2004). Orphanhood and childcare patterns in Sub-Saharan Africa: An analysis of national surveys from 40 countries. *AIDS*, 18(Suppl 2), S55-S65.
7. Garrett, P. M., & Sinkkonen, J. (2003). Putting children first? A comparison of child adoption policy and practice in Britain and Finland. *Critical Social Policy*, 22(3), 202-222.
8. Lough, B., & Panos, P. (2003). Rise and demise of orphanages in Ukraine. *European Journal of Social Work*, 6(1), 178-190.
9. Phiri, S., & Webb, D. (2002). The impact of HIV/AIDS on orphans and program and policy responses. In G. A. Cornia (Ed.), *AIDS, public policy, and child well-being* (Chapter 15). Retrieved from www.unicef-icdc.org

-
10. Hegar, R. L., Scannapieco, M., (1999). Kinship Care Providers: Designing an Array of Supportive Services. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 19(4). https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Kinship_care_providers_Designing_an_arra.pdf
 11. Keller, E. T., Whetherbee, K., Le Prohn, S. N., Payne, H., Sim, V., & Lamont, R. E. (2001). Competencies and problem behaviors of children in family foster care: Variations by kinship placement status and race. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 22(12), 93-109.
 12. Costin, B. L., Bell, J. C., & Downs, S. W. (1991). Child welfare policies and practice (4th ed.). Longman Press.
 13. Fonseca, C. (2002). Inequality near and far: Adoption as seen from the Brazilian Favelas. *Law & Society Review*, 36(2), 397-432. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>
 14. Matheny, K. B., & McCarthy, C. J. (2000). Write your own prescription for stress. New Harbinger Publications.
 15. Miller, R. L. (2005). An appointment with God: AIDS, place, and spirituality. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 42(1), 35-45.
 16. Berry, M. (1993). Risks and benefits of open adoption. *The Future of Children: Adoption*, 3(1), 125-138.