



Illustration by Khalid.

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Having been brought up by adoptive-parents and not being told till a very late age, Maria felt betrayed: "I felt I had been abandoned twice — first by my real parents and then by my adoptive parents," she says. Maria got to know her status as an adopted child during a fight between her mother and her aunt. Even though she has been a perfectly normal child all her life, Maria somehow felt lighter after being told. And her relationship with her mother? "It's just the same," she insists.

Maria's mother says that it had been her decision not to tell the child, which she now feels was wrong. Not all children are affected the same way. Some may appear to dwell on their situation all their lives while others might not appear to be affected at all. Real problems start when a child is adopted and others are not. If the child knows he is adopted, he will start looking for any signs of negligence towards him by his adoptive-parents and this may lead to severe low-esteem. "My first son is adopted," says a mother, "and then we had two other children of our own. I felt that there was this feeling of aggression growing inside my first son." What this mother did was very wise, though. She decided to

confront the issue and told her son that he was her eldest child and that meant that he was the real head of family. "That day made him realise that he was a part of the family just like the others and there has never been another problem again," she concludes. The adoptive parents tend to forget that the child they have adopted is also sensitive to talk regarding parenthood or birth etc. While people in west prefer to adopt orphans or children from adoption agencies, Pakistani parents have been adopting children since ages. The methods are somewhat different. Adopting your own kith and kin is a common phenomenon. So, does seeing your birth mother around even after adoption have any effect

on the child? Most psychologists believe that it is better if the birth-parent and the child do not see each other after the legal adoption. Some are of the view that it becomes worse for the child, especially if he knows the truth about his adoption. The pain of adoption is something the birth mother or parents have to go through if they are still alive and have given up their child for adoption. To keep seeing their child after his birth would lead to more complications. One such case is that of Asim who grew up as the adopted child of his real aunt. His birth mother lived in the same city and his own brothers and sisters were called his cousins. "Now that I think of it, I remember being very confused all the time," he confesses. For Asim, relationships took on a new turn and he didn't know how to handle father-hood as a result. For Ahmad, however, life seems fine. He is 12 years old and lives with his paternal aunt who has adopted him. He is known as an adopted child since childhood. His birth-mother does see them often enough and the system is going smoothly. A tussle between the real parents and the adoptive ones can severely affect the child and he may not be able to understand a parent-child relationship at all. The psychology of any individual in any given society might not be able to be generalised and all individuals may have different characteristics. However, some distinctive features follow every part of society. Adoption agencies and sources need to keep in mind that those people wishing to adopt children must first be made aware of the handling of an adopted child. Although many people insist, the up-bringing of the child should be the same as others, what they fail to understand is that by giving special attention to the child, it is not meant in the obvious sense. The child needs to feel wanted and with little gestures and hints early on in the relationship, the adoptive parents can build a trust that would never fail them.

Adoption has been considered the perfect solution for issueless couples. For all people involved, adoption has mostly been sought as a relief. Even with the latest scientific methods involving birth and pregnancy, the adoption option has always been there for women who cannot conceive. However, what most people overlook are the emotional and psychological effects of adoption on all parties involved, opines **Azmat Rasul**

keep their adopted child in the dark about his or her parentage, the effect might be reduced. This has been proven wrong by most psychologists believing that the adopted child undergoes stress and trauma when he or she is separated from the mother.

Children losing their mother after their birth, feel the same effect. The past psychologists believed, an infant is not able to recognise the mother until the age of two months. However, with more research and observation it has been learnt that the child suffers when being separated from the mother even at quite an early age.

For many of the children, the feeling of being 'abandoned' never goes away. The child may be an orphan but she will still feel being 'left behind' by her parents. With such children, it is even worse. The adoptive parents do, in time, make their place in the child's emotions but the effect of being abandoned by her birth-parents will haunt the child forever.

In Pakistan, a woman is thought first to be a mother and then a woman. With such an emphasis on fertility of the woman, being childless is considered a curse. This is probably the reason most adoptive parents tend to hide

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The perfect solution

Adoption is a centuries-old practice around the world but the way our society views it is a bit different from the west. The adoptive-parents and the children undergo several mental complications throughout their lives. Further, the birth-parents of an adopted child face a never ending trauma.

These issues may not be visible but can be managed only if they are understood from an early age. Lack of trust, insecurity and low self-esteem are some of the problems faced by adopted children. Most people think, in Pakistan since the adoptive parents tend to

this fact. The feeling of secrecy leads to shame in being adopted and the child is given little information about the adoption. She is expected to leave the past behind and concentrate on her present and future.

The children manage to do that and as such they have no visible signs of trauma but a part of them always tends to wonder about their real parents or possible relatives.

The feeling of being 'chosen' by the parents, makes an adopted child conscious of her

actions or words. Knowing that they are not part of the genetic family of their adoptive-parents, leads to make them feel outside. This is most prominent in case of physical features. Although most adoptive parents tend to adopt children with the same features as themselves, sometimes the genetic makeup of the person turns out to be different. Little things like different hair or nose or the fact that medical history of the child's family, is not really the child's inheritance.

A great emphasis is laid on the caste of a person and while the child might be adopted into a well-to-do family, the child may wonder for the rest of his life what his parents were.

He may feel that maybe he ought to feel obliged to his adoptive-parents for their love and affection. According to most people, the old view of not telling a child that he is adopted, is wrong. Scientists have begun to discover that a baby is more conscious of his environment than we believe.

Having been brought up by adoptive-parents and told till a very late age that he was abandoned twice — first by his real parents and then by his adoptive parents," Maria got to know he was an adopted child during her relationship with her mother. Even though she was a perfectly normal child, Maria somehow felt betrayed after being told, "It's just the same,"