

Single Parent Adoption: An Indian Perspective

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Adoption is gaining an increasing acceptance in the society, and is also being researched well globally; yet, the concept of single parent adoption (SPA) is viewed with scepticism. Although, it is legally possible for prospective parents to proceed with adoption, there are several barriers which have made SPA a lengthy and arduous process. We present a strong case for SPA, in the absence of adequate research, by citing a basic flaw when fighting for SPA. Comparing SPA with a "two-parent model" is not only unreasonable but also unfair as it deprives a single parent of the pleasures of parenting and also denies the child an opportunity of living in a home outside the confines of an orphanage.

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Single Parent Adoption (SPA) defies the basic structure of a family, wherein a child is reared by a couple, namely a father and a mother [1]. The non-traditional concept of a family with a single mother, a single father, or a homosexual couple is still often looked down or frowned upon by certain echelons of society. Individuals who are not a part of a heterosexual, monogamous, and procreative marriage are not considered suitable candidates for parenting and face discrimination in various forms.

Adoption is increasingly and seemingly widely being accepted and researched in India, but SPA is still a grey area with limited scientific work and an uncertain air. Although, it is legally possible for prospective single parents to proceed with adoption, there are several constraints with respect to age (both, of adopter and adoptee), gender, and religion. The Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India (MWCD, GOI) in conjunction with Juvenile Justice Act (Care and Protection of Children), 2015 (JJ Act 2015) has laid down a list of criteria for adoption [2]. Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) is the nodal body under MWCD, GOI which deals with and monitors adoptions in India. The JJ Act allows for single parents to adopt children, but there are many hurdles that they must overcome to do so. Single parents are often required to provide additional documentation and undergo extra scrutiny during the adoption process. This can be time-consuming and expensive that may deter many prospective parents from pursuing adoption. Despite these strict guidelines and a laborious process of adoption, there has been a steady increase in SPA in the recent past in our country [3]. There being a paucity of published literature on SPA in

India, a couple of themes are common to what little research has been done globally. The adjustment issues in terms of adoption success, educational achievements, emotional and behavioral stability, and dealing with identity crises, have been found to be similar in adoptees of single versus two parent adoptions [4,5]. A few studies have even reported lower emotional and behavioral issues in adoptees of SPA, indicating that an SPA setup might be better suited to emotionally disturbed children [6].

The desire to be a parent in a single woman or man is no different than that of a couple. On the other side, the motivation is rather stronger and more grounded. The struggles of adoption, though differently angled in both genders, are equally challenging. DeJean, et al. [7] have demonstrated the society's prejudiced opinion based on the parent's gender. While they believe that men are motivated, responsible, financially stable, and thus better suited for the role of single father; single mothers supposedly have less intelligence, resources, security, and sense of duty needed for independent child rearing. However, irrespective of the gender of the single parent, the psychological and educational outcomes of children have been found to be comparable [8].

More often than not, the most robust theories are derived from best-practices, scientific research, or from plain old common sense. In the absence of the former, we must look to the latter. And the decision to ease SPA in India must be made now keeping the best interest of the child in perspective, for we are stuck in a peculiar logjam as shown in **Fig. 1**. In a manner of speaking, we are stuck in a vicious loop, which, at first glance, appears unbreachable. Who takes the first step?

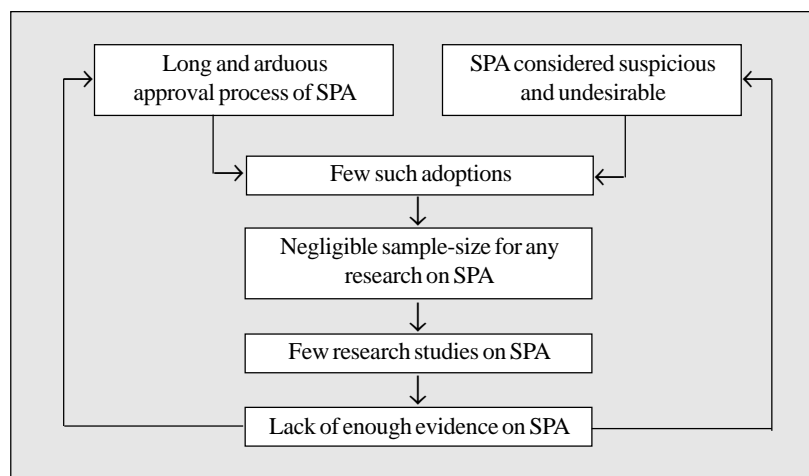


Fig. 1 The lack of evidence in single parent adoption (SPA).

If researchers really do not have overwhelming evidence supporting SPA, do we simply ease the approval process for single parents in the hope that it gives us a bigger sample size for the next set of longitudinal research? Would it not be cavalier to do so? To make a policy decision that risks the lives of children on the basis of a “let’s-see-what-happens” attitude.

However, there is a basic flaw in this premise, something that makes us realize that the vicious loop is of our own making and has no real basis for every research in the subject, the handful of studies that have been conducted, compares SPA to two-parent adoption. The only scenario in which this makes sense, is if the number of adoption requests is higher than the number of children languishing in orphanages. Only then does two-parent adoption become the alternative for SPA. It is; however, not the case. There are fewer requests for adoption being made than the number of children in need of a home. So, the alternative to a single parent is no parent. When a single parent is denied adoption due to a process biased against them, the child in question is most likely to remain in an orphanage rather than be adopted by two parents.

Thus, every research, study, anecdote being analyzed, from here on, must compare the life of a child in single-parent household with the life of a child in an orphanage. It is easy to fathom that a child’s life with substantial financial and emotional support from a single parent far outstrips his/her chances in a one-size-fits-all orphanage run by either the governments- or some non-governmental organization (NGO). It is the need of the hour to abolish any policy that discriminates against SPA, while keeping the best interests of the child in mind. What will surely follow is a rise in number

of children finding homes with single parents, increasing our ability to do research and understanding the nuances of the subject. And simultaneously, the children find homes that offer better care than an orphanage.

Simply put, a policy based on evidence-based research is always preferred. But in its absence, some common sense is not a bad recourse, either.

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