



# RESEARCH FEATURE

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Nick Cline



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# ADOPTING CHANGE

**FOR MANY PARENTS**, welcoming a child is celebrated at work. Excited conversations about name selections, pastel-colored baby showers and family leave plans flow through the halls. But for parents of adopted children, this isn't always the case.

Perceived adoption stigma happens when families built through adoption are seen as the “second best option to build a family” in society, according to Associate Professor of Management Kaylee Hackney, PhD. This can manifest in a variety of ways in the workplace—often as microaggressions like implying adoptive parents aren't “real parents,” or throwing a baby shower for someone who is pregnant, but not for someone adopting a child. In many cases, it's unintentional, but it affects the adoptive parents negatively.

In a recent article published in *Human Relations*, “Welcome to Parenthood!? An Examination of the Far-Reaching Effects of Perceived Adoption Stigma in the Workplace,” Hackney, along with her co-authors, examined how perceived adoption stigma negatively impacted a variety of work and family outcomes for working adoptive parents.

Hackney's co-authors included two fellow Hankamer School of Business Department of Management faculty members: Matt Quade, PhD, the Kimberly and Aaron P. Graft Professor in Christian Leadership in Business and director of Christian Leadership and Ethics, and Dawn Carlson, PhD, the H.R. Gibson Chair of Organizational Development and director of the McBride Center for International Business. Ryan P. Hanlon and Gary R. Thurgood were also co-authors of the article.

The study, using data collected from more than 500 adoptive couples with at least one of the parents working full-time, found that when an employee perceived adoption stigma at work, work-family conflict arose. Perceived adoption stigma acted as a social stressor that affected job satisfaction and opened the door to depression for the working adoptive parent.

Beyond the workplace, the effects of perceived adoption stigma impacted the adoptive parents' home life, too. It negatively affected family satisfaction and even parent-child bonding—not only for the employee but for their spouse, as well.

“I think it is important to note this stigma impacts the work domain and the family domain, and furthermore, something as relational as parent-child bonding,” Carlson said. “The impact, in this situation, on the relationship of both parents with

the child in a negative way compels us to really consider what is going on in the organization regarding stressful experiences. Considering these work-family integrations helps us better understand the world of work so we can design policies and practices that promote human flourishing.”

For organizations, providing wide-reaching support for adoptive families can be impactful. In a related study by Quade et al., 2021, researchers asked what happens when organizations are supportive of employees who adopt a child.

The research found that organizational support for adoption had positive ramifications for the employee, their family, their attachment with their adopted child, as well as an increased organizational commitment for the employee and their spouse to the employee's workplace.

These two papers together are two of the first papers in the management literature to consider the experience of adoptive parents in the workforce and the outcomes, both at work and at home, Quade said.

“So, while much has been said about parents' experiences, prior to our work, researchers had yet to consider the unique experiences of adoptive parents,” he said.

Hackney believes organizational support for adoptive parents is beneficial for everyone.

“Being supportive of your adoptive parents at work is a win for the organization and the family,” Hackney said. “By knowing better, then we can do better.” ■