ABSTRACT

Gay Fathers with Children Adopted from Foster Care: Understanding their Experiences and Predicting Adoption Outcomes

Since the 1980s, gay men have increasingly become fathers via adoption, though little empirical information is currently available about their experiences. Two studies are presented here. In a preliminary study, social support, parenting stress, and adoption satisfaction were examined amongst 17 homosexual and 51 heterosexual parents with children adopted from foster care. No significant differences were found based on sexual orientation, although gay men tended to adopt older children than did other parents. Social support was not predictive of adoption outcomes. In the second study, 23 gay primary parent fathers were interviewed about their adoption experiences. Fathers completed measures of children’s pre-placement history and current behavioral functioning, and their own social support, adoption satisfaction, and parenting stress. Children’s behavioral functioning was predictive of adoption outcomes, while social support was not. Descriptions of fathers’ responses to interview questions are also presented. Fathers discussed such issues as interactions with the Los Angeles County adoptions system and foster/birth parents, disclosure of sexual orientation to their children, worries about children’s future responses to sexual orientation, benefits and drawbacks of being a gay parent, children’s desires for a mother, relationships with other parents, responses from family-of-origin, and advice to gay prospective adoptive parents. Of note, fathers encountered considerably more discrimination from foster/birth families than from social workers and court personnel, whom they described as generally positive.
and helpful. Fathers who adopted older children tended to disclose their sexual orientation earlier than did fathers of younger children, though nearly all had disclosed to their children by the third year after placement. Children who expressed a desire for their particular birth/foster mother did so significantly more frequently than those who expressed a nonspecific desire for a maternal figure. Fathers’ interactions with other parents were largely positive, though subtle discomfort or rejection was sometimes perceived. Families-of-origin were overwhelmingly supportive, and shared experiences of parenthood often brought members closer together. Fathers were encouraging of adoption by others in the gay community, citing benefits to children in need and rewards of parenthood. Findings might not generalize to other, less liberal, communities. A nationwide sample would add to our understanding.