

Expert lauds appeal in adoption case

By CHARLES HOFFMAN
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The decision of Lea and Eliahu Saporta to go to court to prevent the Adoption Service from taking back their adopted baby daughter has been applauded by a leading Israeli expert in child welfare.

About 10 days ago the Saportas won an interim injunction from the High Court of Justice forbidding the service from taking the child, whom they received last November. They claimed, in their petition, that the service had second thoughts about leaving the baby in their care because it was displeased with their attempt to have a "test-tube baby" a week after they got the child.

The Adoption Service, represented by the attorney-general's office, will respond this week when the case comes before a three-judge panel. Meanwhile, the head of the service, Aviva Leon, broke her self-imposed silence on Friday in an interview on Kol Yisrael in which she explained some general aspects of adoption.

Prof. Eliezer Jaffe, a Hebrew University expert on child welfare, described the Saporta's decision to avoid the internal appeals system in the Adoption Service as a "brilliant move," since that system is staffed by professionals working in or closely with the service. The "all in the family" atmosphere, he said, tends to stack the deck against couples who want to challenge the service's decisions.

Since the service has a virtual monopoly on adoptions, Jaffe proposed establishment of an independent review panel.

Leon refused to discuss the Saporta case or any other on the radio, since this would violate the secrecy imposed by law on the service. But she did say that couples approved as candidate adoptive parents do not necessarily harm their chances of receiving a child if they continue treatment for infertility.

Lea Saporta, 30, has been under medical treatment for eight years in an attempt to bear a child. A week after she received her adopted child, she entered Sheba Hospital to attempt a pregnancy by surgical implantation, which eventually failed. Since then, the Saportas claim, they have been under intense pressure by the Adoption Service to relinquish the child — who in any case is not fully in their custody until a court confirms

the adoption after a minimum six-month period during which a social worker from the service follows the family's progress.

The Saportas also claimed they were pressed to agree that they would stop further attempts to have a child by surgical implantation.

Leon told the radio that the service sees nothing wrong in a couple having both adopted children and those born to them. But, she said, the timing and intensity of infertility treatments following the adoption of a child may indicate that the adoption has not satisfied a couple's basic need to be parents. The nature of these treatments is, therefore, a legitimate consideration from the service's point of view.

Two couples who adopted babies in the last few years, and whose chances of becoming biological parents were considered poor, told *The Jerusalem Post* of the intense stress experienced when they had received their adopted children. The emotional shock of suddenly becoming the parents of someone else's child was overwhelming, they said, despite the attempts made by the Adoption Service to prepare them for it through numerous counselling sessions and group discussions.

Despite their sympathy with the Saportas, both mothers said that they fully understood the concern of the service in this case, since they, too, were aware of the intense anxiety which accompanies attempts to bear children naturally in the face of poor odds.

Observers familiar with adoption procedures ventured that one of the reasons for the attempt to take back the Saporta's baby was that the couple did not inform the service of its intention to attempt surgical implantation. The observers said that the service demands complete openness and honesty by couples seeking to adopt, and thought that the service felt that its trust had been violated.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, of which the service is a part, said, after the affair first became public knowledge, that the Adoption Service's first priority is always the child's welfare. The state's first duty, it said, is to protect the interests of the child surrendered by the biological parents, and only secondly to solve the problems of childless couples.