

**THE CHALLENGES OF CHILD ADOPTION AND THE EMERGENCE OF BABY
FACTORY IN SOUTH EASTERN, NIGERIA:**

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abstract

This paper is an exploratory research on the challenges of child adoption and the emergence of baby factory in South Eastern, Nigeria. Using Robert Merton's anomie approach as its theoretical premise, the paper posits that it is the socio-cultural pressure on married couples to have children as well as the complications in the adoption process and the perceived stigma associated with adoption that gave rise to the emergence of baby factories in South Eastern Nigeria. The paper recommends among other things the enactment of appropriate legislation, enlightenment campaigns to ease child adoption stigmatization and job creation to cater for vulnerable adolescent females who are readily enticed into the criminal trade owing to poverty and hardship.

Key Words: Child Adoption, Baby Factory, Anomie Theory, Nigeria

1.1 Introduction:

The subject of child adoption evokes mixed reactions from different persons and cultures. To some, it is a wholesome practice and socially accepted. To others, it is an aberration and culturally abominable. It has also attracted interests among scholars such as Grotevant, (197); Herman, (2000); Brodzinsky and Schecter, (1990); Boswell, (1998); Melosh, (2002); Adam and Pierce, (2000); and Cahn & Hollinger, (2004). As Leavy & Weinberg (1979) point out, child adoption inaugurates the relationship of parent and child between persons not related by nature. When the process of child adoption is perfected through the issuance of adoption order by a court of competent jurisdiction, the adoptee becomes a full member of the adoptive family (Nwaogugu, 2004). The adoption order transfers the legal responsibilities of parenthood from the natural parents to the adoptive parents (Cole, 1985). It also gives the adopted child all the rights of a biological child (Kendall, 2002). Once the adoption order has been issued, both the adoptee and the adoptive parents are stopped from denying each other what is due (Njoku, 2005).

As Eke, Obu, Chinawa, Adimora and Obi (2014) indicate, under the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, 1989, adoption is recognized as one of the forms of alternative care for children who are unable to remain in the family environment. Consequently, adoption serves as a means of prevention of child abuse, including child trafficking. It also enables the adopted children

access to good education and prevents them from being placed in foster institutions with the attendant psycho-social implications.

1.2 Child Adoption Among The Igbo Of South Eastern Nigeria.

The reasons for child adoption vary with individuals and cultural settings. For some, the reasons include intense love for children, couple desiring gender balance in children, couple with only one child, avoidance of discomfort and pain of pregnancy and labour, and infertility. In Igbo land, those who engage in child adoption do so primarily for economic and psychological reasons. In a country such as Nigeria that has no social security provision for the elderly and the unemployed, child adoption serves as an insurance policy for old age for the adoptive parents. It also gives the adoptive parents a sense of fulfillment, joy and pride, especially if they are infertile. Furthermore, the adoption of sons by infertile couples provides a means to perpetuate their family names which is very important to the Igbo in particular, and Africans in general (Isiguzo-Abanihe, 2003). In some parts of Igbo land, certain traditional titles are the exclusive preserve of wealthy men who have children, especially sons. An affluent man who desires such title but has no biological son may be constrained to adopt a son in order to qualify for such a title (Nwaoga, 2013). Other factors that account for child adoption in Igbo land include desire to stabilize a childless marriage, legitimize an illegitimate child, rescue a child in an irreversible situation of abandonment or relieve parents who are unable to take care of their children (Eke, *et al.*, 2014).

The Igbo place optimal value on children. They regard child bearing as the *raison detre* for marriage (Uchendu, 1995). In Igbo land, the woman's position in marriage remains precarious until it is confirmed through child bearing, particularly of a son. In the Igbo culture, a woman has to prove her womanhood through motherhood while a man has to confirm his manhood through fatherhood. The high value the Igbo place on children is reflected in the names given to these children. As

Ubahakwe (1982) aptly points out, Nigerian indigenous names are not simply labels for identification, rather such native names personify the individual, tell some stories about the parents and/or the family of the bearer; and in a more general sense, point to the society into which the individual is born. As Ebuka (2014) affirms, Africans, especially the Igbo, do not give or take names recklessly. The Igbo personal names which highlight the importance of children include: Nwabundu (child is life), Nwakaego (child is greater than money), Nwabueze (child is king), Ohuabunwa (a slave is not a child) and Nwabuihe (child is light/ something precious).

Despite the high regard for children in Igbo land, there are couples in various Igbo communities who are infertile. Some of these couples may have sought medical, spiritual and traditional solutions to their predicament without success. Infertility in marriage could cause marital friction and lead to divorce (Amato, 2000). The problems associated with broken homes had been highlighted (Ojukwu, 2013; Stevenson and Justin, 2007; DeGenova and Rice, 2002; Amato, 2000).

On the surface, child adoption appears to be a pragmatic and viable solution to the problem of infertility in the Igbo society. However, some studies report that in Igbo land and Nigeria, most infertile women were not willing to adopt children (Ezeugwu, Obi and Ona, 2002; Omosun and Kofoworola, 2011). This is indeed ironical in a society that cherishes children. According to Nwaoga (2013), adopting an unknown child in Igbo land is generally unacceptable. It thus appears that there are socio-cultural factors that combine to hinder people from embracing adoption in Igbo land. As Nwaoga points out, a child adopted into an Igbo community is sometimes treated as an outsider, and the child finds it difficult to interact freely because of the fear of being intimidated.

2.1 The Concept of Baby Factory in Nigeria

In recent times, a trend has emerged in Nigeria whereby unmarried pregnant teenagers are quarantined in a particular location until they give birth. Upon delivery, the teenage mothers are paid token amounts and discharged while their babies are taken from them and sold at exorbitant

prices by the proprietor (s) who engaged them. The phenomenon is now referred to as “baby factory” business (Mba, 2014). The baby factory business has become a social menace in Nigeria, particularly in Igbo land where they predominate. It is also proliferating at an alarming rate. Uzor (2014) indicates that about 2,500 teenagers were rescued by the police from baby factories within one year in the South Eastern states of Nigeria.

The baby factory business involves three essential set of actors namely: the factory owners who provide location and logistics, covering the maintenance of the girls for the pendency of the transaction. The second set of actors is the girls who serve as “breeders” or “hatchers” of the babies who will be sold on delivery. The third actors are the buyers who help to sustain the business through their patronage. In some of the factories, there could be a fourth actor as in the case of Ahamfule motherless babies home, Umuaka Orlu which was reported by Ndidi (2013) in the Nation newspaper. This fourth actor is a man who functions as a sex machine with the mandate to regularly “service” the “breeders” until they produce the babies they cannot cuddle, cherish, nurture, possess and treasure.

One of the ironies of the baby factory phenomenon is that some of the locations used as habitation for this debauched and illegal business are duly registered as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The proprietors use the emblem of recognition by government as a camouflage for their abominable activities. Ndidi (2013) reported that the Imo State police command rescued 16 pregnant girls aged between 14 and 19 years quarantined in Ezuma private hospital. The proprietor of the hospital, a medical doctor, was arrested and paraded with his victims. It was further indicated that the said proprietor runs an approved NGO known as the Ezuma Women And Children Rights Protection Initiative (EWCRPI). This official platform shields his nefarious activities from the scrutiny of security operatives who regard him as a respectable physician who owns a clinic and runs an NGO that ostensibly champions and protects women and children’s rights .

Kupoliyi, (2014) points out that the products of baby factories are sold by the baby barons for amounts ranging from five hundred thousand naira (₦500,000) or (\$ 2,500) or more depending on the gender and sometimes the complexion of the baby, with males going for higher price. According to him, the patrons of baby factories may be those who genuinely need babies for good reason while others are mischievous people who may require human parts for inhuman (ritual) purpose.

2.2 Child Adoption and the Emergence of Baby Factory in Igbo Land

It is imperative to ascertain if there is a connection or nexus between child adoption and the emergence of baby factory in Igbo land. Has the advent of the baby factory syndrome affected or challenged child adoption in Igbo land? As already established, child adoption does not enjoy overwhelming support and acceptance among the Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria.

The emergence of baby factories in Igbo land and the high patronage it enjoys challenges or impacts negatively on child adoption in two fundamental ways. First, genuine orphanages no longer have enough babies for adoption. This is mainly because most of the teenagers with unwanted pregnancies now prefer to make gain out of their mistake by selling their babies to operators of baby factories rather than placing them in orphanage homes or even dumping them where they would be located and taken to motherless babies' homes.

Second, those women who fake pregnancies will prefer to purchase babies from baby factories and claim such as their biological babies rather than formally adopting children from orphanages. The reasons for this fraudulent practice are to create the impression that the woman is capable of becoming pregnant, and that she is not barren after all. The second reason is to secure for the new baby cultural acceptability, and remove from the child the stigma associated with adopted children. This is based on the general notion that child adoption is not fully embraced by the Igbo because it is not autochthonous but a product of colonialism and globalization (Nwaoga, 2013). The Igbo are known for their penchant to adapt to, and adopt, novel cultural patterns (Afigbo, 2003). In some

cases, they prefer the new cultures to the neglect of their own way of life. This is evidenced by the dominance of the English Language, instead of the Igbo language, as the mother tongue of most Igbo families (Ugo-Ochulo, 2014). Also most Igbo people tend to prefer foreign attire to their traditional wears. It is therefore paradoxical that the Igbo that have certain xenocentricist tendencies are having reservation in fully embracing child adoption. This irony is more perplexing considering that the Igbo culture places optimal value in children.

3.1 The Rising Incidences of Baby Factory: A Theoretical Explanation.

This paper makes use of the Robert Merton's anomie theory as its theoretical premise. This theory appears apt to capture the social menace and criminal act of the emergence of baby factory in contemporary Nigeria. Etymologically, the word "anomie" has a French origin and connotes normlessness or the absence of law. Emile Durkheim anglicized and conceptualized the word to mean the absence, weakening and violation of norms (laws) and core values regulating human action in society. As Nnam (2014) points out, the anomie-strain theory of Emile Durkheim was modified to means-end paradigm by Robert Merton in 1938. The anomie theory maintains that society creates the environment for the birthing of crimes and criminals by stipulating goals and values without providing corresponding legal opportunities for realizing them. Consequently, the disconnect between socially ascribed goals and the availability of legitimate means to attain such goals in turn puts pressure on individuals to commit crime.

Merton highlighted a number of ways in which individuals may adapt to the strains brought by the inability to achieve the socially prescribed success goals, adding that not all of these adaptations are deviant or criminal. The adaptation typology also referred to as the "plus-minus paradigm" are conformity (+ +) in which goals are accepted and pursued along with the legitimate cultural means; innovation (+ -) in which the goals are pursued but legitimate means are eliminated, and illegitimate means are created and used; ritualism (- +) whereby institutional goals are rejected and the cultural means ritualized as an end in itself as in religious fanaticism; retreatism (- -) in which the goals and means are rejected and the individual withdraws into isolationism and may find solace in drug or alcohol. The fifth adaptation mechanism identified by Merton is rebellion ($\pm \pm$) in which both the society's institutional goals and approved cultural means are rejected and a new structure is advocated and pursued by the group (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008; Iheriohanma, 2010).

Whereas the anomie theory provides the theoretical underpinning for this work, the adaptation mode hinges on innovation which explains a situation whereby the individual accepts the culturally defined goal of the society (+) but rejects the legitimate means to attain that goal. As it relates to child adoption and the emergence of baby factories in Igbo land, South Eastern Nigeria, this theory holds that given the high emphasis on children in Igbo culture, and that of many African societies, couples and individuals who cannot attain that cultural goal may resort to illegal means to achieve same. Viewed from this perspective, it could be seen that it is the socio-cultural pressure on married couples (and in some cases unmarried adults) to have children as well as the perceived stigma associated with adoption that makes many families and individuals to patronize baby factories. Some of these people go to the extent of devising pseudo pregnancy whereby women fake pregnancies with the intention of deceiving people into believing that the babies which they “purchased” or “stole” are their biological children.

They do this for two reasons. First is to receive societal acknowledgement that they are productive and not barren, thus liberating themselves from the innuendoes and deprivations associated with infertility. Second is to protect the child from the stigma and social label that adopted children usually encounter. It is however, pertinent to indicate that despite the intention to hoodwink the public, the fraudulent act of faking pregnancy and subsequently “purchasing” or “stealing” a baby does not vitiate the fact that the illegally adopted or stolen children are not the biological children of the women involved.

The non-acceptance of child adoption in many parts of Igbo Land (Nwaoga, 2013) could in a sense, be regarded as a blocking of the legitimate means through which infertile couples and others in need of children could attain the socially approved goal. The deviant behavior of illegal adoption is thus an illegitimate means of pursuing the socially approved goal of couples having children after marriage. As Ritzer (2008) points out, deviants often take the form of alternate, unacceptable sometimes illegal means of achieving socially approved goals. The availability of patrons for the products of baby factories encourages the business to “boom”.

3.2 Recommendations and Conclusion

Government should enact appropriate legislation with harsh punishment regime to deter people from operating or patronizing baby factories.

Government and NGOs should work with community leaders in the area of public enlightenment campaigns aimed at eliminating stigmatization associated with child adoption in South Eastern Nigeria.

Government should create job and vocational training and scholarship opportunities to cater for vulnerable adolescent females who are typically enticed into the criminal trade owing to poverty and hardship.

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