



KNOWLEDGE, ACCEPTANCE AND PRACTICE OF CHILD ADOPTION AMONG THE PEOPLE OF ORLU NORTH EAST, IMO STATE, NIGERIA

Ohachenu, Elizabeth Ifeoma

Department of Sociology/Anthropology,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Email: ifeomaohachenu@yahoo.com

Abstract

Childlessness sometimes become an issue in marriages and provides a strong motive for child adoption. Child adoption has dual role of giving joy having children to the adoptive family as well as providing abandoned, parentless, impoverished, homeless children with the affection and emotional security needed to develop and mature into a resourceful adult. That is lifelong security to the child and the adoptive family. Nevertheless, adoption is not beyond controversy as the adoptive parents face the challenges of full social recognition of their adopted child, while the adopted child is entrapped with issues of social acceptance and adjusting to care plans of his/ her new family. In fact adoption triad is beset with issues of loss, rejection, stigmatization, conflicts etc. This study was conducted in four communities in Orlu North East of Imo state namely, Akokwa, Akpulu, Dikenafai and Umuma-Isiaku to investigate the people's perception and attitude towards adoption of children. One thousand two hundred (1200) questionnaires were administered to 600 unmarried males and females, 600 married males and females drawn from these communities selected through multistage sampling. Sixteen focus group discussions and fourteen in-depth interviews with 142 study participants comprising the communities' traditional rulers, opinion leaders, social welfare officers, adoptive parents and members of the community development associations were conducted and used to generate the qualitative data for the study. The results of the study show high percentage (98.90%) of people's knowledge of the concept of child adoption and remarkable acceptance of child adoption and the adopted child as a great asset for family provisions, stability and continuity (64.42%). Findings also show that child adoption was practised in this area in an informal manner and it was characterised by high level of secrecy, anonymity and sealed records. Majority of the respondents (43.2%) maintained that the main reason for child adoption was to solve the problem of childlessness. It was mainly childless couples that adopted children according to (45.2% of the respondents, followed by couples with one sex children (girls 17.9%) then couples with one sex children (boys 17.7%). The type of adoption that was mostly practised in this area was closed



adoption. There is a social stigma often attached to adoption was however high. The study recommended implementation of relevant laws on adoption, as well as public enlightenment on child adoption by social workers and the media.

Keywords: child adoption, childlessness, acceptance, knowledge, practice

Introduction

Evident in happy family life are signs of shared interests, mutual support, enjoyment of one another's company, appreciation of similarities and differences, laughter, tolerance of idiosyncrasies, ability to share and give as well as receive, genuine respect and understanding of the other's point of view and the ability to quarrel and make up. Also evident in family life is a balanced and suitable division of family responsibilities between husband, wife and children. Such families are often most successful, full of interest and zest. It is a relationship of interdependence. No institution could be considered more important to Africans than the family. Men consider that they must have children, in order to ensure continuity with the ancestors (Ritchie, 1978).

A truly loving marriage relationship that enriches and supports each partner is essential for happy family life. Anything which weakens family life is prejudicial to children and to our whole social structure (Cummings and Davis, 1994). Children have a right to a family of their own, whether by birth or by adoption. The presence of a child in a marriage brings an element of security. The security is normally strongest where the marriage relationship is not stable or that crises situation exists at the extended family level. For the latter, children are means of forming alliances to combat such crises thereby enhancing power and influence for the parents.

Children are a source of pride and social status for both men and women, and women often define marriage primarily in terms of having children (Karanja, 1987; 1994; Calve-Dominic, 1999). The fact that having children increases a woman's social status, and her chances of receiving economic support from children in old age, appears to make it advantageous. This preference for having children has been attributed mostly to traditional pro-natalist belief systems that stress the importance of the lineage (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1987) and the economic advantages of children in terms of labor supply and support in old-age (Boserup, 1985). Ejiofor (1981) maintains that children are considered very precious and parents are expected to toil for their survival, suitable up-keep, and recognition in the society. Parents believe that their children ought to achieve greater success than they themselves have achieved in life. It is therefore usual to see illiterate parents saving up to give their



children at least secondary school education. Low-earning workers sacrifice all comfort to send their children to school. Families are thus considered unfortunate if there is no child in the family. In such family, there is no real family; the couple never had an established stable home together. This kind of family becomes 'dysfunctional'.

Developed countries experience childlessness too. Agrawal (nd) highlights statistics of childlessness in India. According to him 7% percent of married women aged 20-49 years in India are childless, which accounts for more than total population of Australia. Significant differential in childlessness has been found by age, residence, education, religion, and standard of living. That is to say that the problem of childlessness cuts across boundaries of social life. Childlessness may be voluntary. Frejka & Sardon (2006) argue that the postponement of first births is an on-going and persisting process which started in Western countries in the 1940s, and in the 1960s in Central and Eastern Europe.

The problem of childlessness can make relationship sour. Being born a human is a blessing and ability to reproduce is a double blessing. In our society a woman perceives her inability to bear a child as an unbearable suffering especially as loss of fertility means the loss of women's hope for future inheritance. Infertility and childlessness thus cause great personal suffering and distress. Infertile couples are socially isolated and emotionally very vulnerable (Hashmi, 2011). Most of the agony and misery are hidden from the public gaze. Some of the danger signals to be noticed among childless couples include being quarrelsome, harsh, rigid or erratic discipline or threat of divorce. In fact sociologists believe that childlessness is also a common cause of divorce. Most of the studies indicate that marital breakdown is clearly associated with childlessness (Unisa, 1999; Kiernan, 1989; Tilson & Larsen, 2000). In India, the males feel that childlessness is because of the inability of the female partner to procreate. They always find fault with the females, divorce them and remarry. Surprisingly, in many such cases even the second wife fails to bear a child because of the defect in the male (Mishra, 2001). Childlessness has long been seen as a personal tragedy for childless couples in general and women in particular.

Results of a survey of families and households, in order to update and test earlier findings of negative consequences related to childlessness in later life, by Koropecj-Cox (2008) indicate that both loneliness and depression are significantly related to childlessness for women but not men. Thus it is clear that women generally feel a stronger need for children than do their husbands.



This is due to the fact of cultural prescription that a woman's firm hold of her place in her family is directly related to her ability to bear children (Karanja, 1987; Mawere & Mawere, 2010; Calve-Dominic, 1999). Ignorance of the fact that there is much more to parenthood than the biological ability to procreate and that partners can still satisfy their sexual partners emotionally creates tension in the family without children. Sterility and infertility thus prompt adoption and is often a reason for divorce ((Parkin & Nyamwaya, 1989; Feldman-Savelsberg, 1994; Geschiere, 1982; Miall, 1986; 1987; Chester, 1972). Sterility is irreversible, as in cases when a man becomes sterile from a severe attack of mumps, or a woman by surgical removal of her ovaries. Infertility is a lowering of ability to reproduce and can quite often be cured.

In developed countries, and in this era in developing countries like Nigeria, some childless couples seek to resolve this problem by wanting to adopt a child instead of the man marrying a second wife. Marrying more than one wife is associated with some stigmatisation with the advent of Western civilization and Christianity (Ejiofor, 1981). "In the adoption procedure a legal relationship identical to that between the biological parent and child is established between the child and another individual. Adoption is the act of legally placing a child with a parent or parents other than those to whom he was born. An adoption order has the effect of severing parental responsibilities and rights of the original parent(s) and transferring those responsibilities and rights to the adoptive parent(s) (Kigbu & Konkat, 2002). Adoption of a young infant becomes a realistic possibility for infertile couples (Modell 2000). Such couples come to adopt with greater certainty and security after they have explored all the medical possibilities. In such cases, couples not only need counselling but help with their basic need of a child. Adoption social workers provide an initial assessment of the situation and mobilize other needed services. They work with these prospective adoptive parents, offering support throughout the process, which continues after the adoption.

Although, Modell (2000) saw child adoption as a plausible option to address the problem of childlessness; the practice of child adoption has more to it than is assumed. For instance, Smit (2003) argues that adoption raises unique issues and challenges for the child and adoptive parents. The issue in question is 'is child adoption readily acceptable by the Igbo of Orlu North East'. This study therefore sought to investigate the opinions and issues about child adoption among the Igbo of Orlu North East of Imo state. The focus was on identifying the people's knowledge or conception of child adoption, the level of acceptance of the issue of child adoption and the prevailing child adoption practices in the area with a view to proffering recommendations.



Objectives of the Study

From the problems identified, the following study objectives became apparent:

1. To ascertain the knowledge/ conception of the people on child adoption in Orlu North East, Imo State, Nigeria
2. To find out the level of acceptance of child adoption in Orlu North East
3. To find out the prevailing practices on child adoption in the area.
4. To identify the challenges to child adoption in the area

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses guided this study:

1. There is a perceived positive relationship between respondents' educational attainment and level of acceptance of child adoption in Orlu North East
2. Female respondents are more likely to have a positive perception of child adoption than male respondents.
3. Married people are more likely to accept child adoption than single people.
4. Acceptance of child adoption tends to be more with older people than younger people.

Theoretical Framework

This work adopted the attachment and labelling theories as its theoretical framework. Child adoption raises issues of ability to manage a wide range of feelings, both in oneself the adopter and the adopted; the resolution of any past losses and trauma; and the acquisition of reflective function. Emphasis is then paid by adoption social workers to gaining an understanding of the attachment patterns of both the child and potential adoptive parents. Current ideas from attachment theory can help to inform both the selection of adoptive parents and the needs and vulnerabilities of looking after children. Ways of matching the child with the care givers are thought about, including an analysis of particular areas of vulnerability.

As Schofield and Beek (2005: 3-25) comment, 'attachment theory continues to offer a scientifically rigorous and yet practical framework for making sense of children's troubled and challenging behaviours and for supporting caregivers in providing them with a secure base.' Within the child welfare system, attachment theory has significant implications for the work that takes place between the adoption professional- social workers and the family. In addition, it is relevant to prospective adoptive parents. Bowlby (1958) stated



that attachment seems to emanate from a biological desire for proximity or closeness. In addition, it may meet a survival need, whereby children seek the protection of their caregivers (Bowlby 1958). The type or quality of the bond can have lifelong implications. All parties to adoption shared some form of psychological dysfunction.

Labelling theory is associated with stereotyping. Its relevance to this research is that if the adopted child knows that he/she is labelled as adopted; not belonging to the family of her adoptive parents, this stigma can actually make deviance become central facts of existence for him/her. It alters psyche structure, producing specialised organisation of social roles and self-regarding attitudes. This reduces the child's bond with conventional others and fosters the social learning of abnormal behaviours. Thus labelling of the adopted child should be avoided.

Methods

This study was conducted in four communities in Orlu North East of Imo state namely, Akokwa, Akpulu, Dikenafai and Umuma-Isiaku. The purpose was to investigate the people's knowledge, level of acceptance and practices towards adoption of children. One thousand two hundred (1200) copies of questionnaire were administered to 600 unmarried males and females, as well as 600 married males and females drawn from these communities. The respondents were selected through multistage sampling. Sixteen focus group discussions and fourteen in-depth interviews with 142 study participants comprising the communities' traditional rulers, opinion leaders, social welfare officers, adoptive parents and members of the community development associations were conducted and used to generate the qualitative data for the study.

Findings/Results

Generally, the study investigated the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, their knowledge and practice of child adoption, the pattern/ type of child adoption practiced in the area, reasons for child adoption, the respondents assessment of adoption, problems/challenges of child adoption and how these challenges can be met.

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

The major socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents covered in this survey included their age, sex, educational attainment, marital status and number of children.



Table 1:Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Socio-Demographic characteristics (Sex) (n=1200)

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	600	50.0
Female	600	50.0
Total	1200	100

A total of 1200 respondents (600 males and 600 females) were studied.

Table 2:Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Socio-Demographic Characteristics (Age) (n=1200)

Age last Birthday	Frequency	Percentage
15 – 19	174	14.5
20 – 24	202	16.8
25 – 29	133	11.1
30 – 34	99	8.3
35 – 39	102	8.5
40 – 44	118	9.8
45 – 49	91	7.6
50 and above	281	23.4
Total	1200	100

Respondents within the age bracket of 50 years and above were 23.4%. That ranked highest and can be explained by the fact that rural community like those studied, normally is populated by the aged. Those within age 20-24 years and 30-34 age brackets were 16.8% and 8.3% respectively.

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Socio-Demographic Characteristics (Number of Children) (n=1200)

Number of Children	Frequency	Percentage
No child	11	0.9
1 – 5	380	31.7
6 – 10	194	16.2
11 and above	15	1.3
Total	600	50.0



Details of the number of children of the married respondents as shown in Table 8 showed that 0.9% of them did not have children. Most of them, 31.7%, had one to five children while few, 1.3%, had eleven and above number of children each.

Table 4: *Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Socio-Demographic Characteristics (Educational Attainment) (n=1200)*

Educational Attainment	Frequency	Percentage
No formal Education	51	4.3
Primary Education	179	14.9
Secondary Education	498	41.5
Tertiary Education	472	39.3
Total	1200	100

The majority of the respondents 41.5% acquired secondary school education, 39.3% had tertiary education, 14.9% had primary education while 4.3% never had any formal education.

Table 5: *Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Socio-Demographic Characteristics (Marital status) (n=1200)*

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	557	46.4
Single	600	50.0
Separated	6	0.5
Divorced	7	0.6
Widowed	30	2.5
Total	1200	100

Fifty percent of the respondents were single, 46.4% were married, those who were separated 0.5%, 0.6% divorced while 2.5% were widowed.



Table 6:Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Socio-Demographic Characteristics (Location) (n=1200)

Location	Frequency	Percentage
Akokwa	340	28.3
Akpulu	260	21.7
Dike na fai	320	26.7
Umuma – Isiaku	280	23.3
Total	1200	100.00

Source: *Field Survey*, 2012

The above table shows the distributon of respondents across communities.

Objective 1: Respondents’ Knowledge of the Meaning of the Concept of Child Adoption

Table 7: Distribution of respondents by knowledge of child adoption (n = 1200)

Knowledge of Child Adoption	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	1187	98.90
No	13	1.10
Total	1200	100.00

Source: *Field Survey*, 2012

Table 7 above shows high percentage (98.90%) of people’s knowledge of the concept of child adoption. Only few respondents (1.10%) did not express knowledge of the true meaning of child adoption in the study communities.

FGD/IDI Result: The participants expressed their knowledge of the meaning of child adoption as quoted below: ‘It means buying a child; a couple taking a child not begotten by them and owning him/her as their ownand the whole rights /privileges, gains of children automatically transfers to the adopter and the adopted.The process is hidden and the child is gotten from outside that environment.’ ‘Child adoption means a couple who have no child, happily married and have lived for many years without a child agree and buy a child.’ Akokwa community leader said, ‘There are two levels of meaning of child adoption



- a. Taking children whose parents are dead and caring for them as Christian duty. The man I know that did that adopted only girls.
- b. Taking another's child as one's own child to ensure continuity of the family lineage otherwise called 'Ukutazu.'

Objective 2: Level Acceptance of Child Adoption in the Study Area

Acceptance will be established by the preponderance of adoption cases and the response rate to specific questions; questions such as to whether adoption serve useful purpose, personal impression about adoption, acceptance or otherwise and whether adoption should be abolished etc.

Table 8: Distribution of respondents on whether child adoption serves a useful purpose (n = 1200)

Do you think child adoption serves a useful purpose?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	915	76.25
No	248	20.67
Don't know	37	30.83
Total	1200	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Results of the study as shown in this Table 8 show that 76.25% of the respondents maintained that child adoption served the purpose for which it was done.

FGD/IDI Result: The participants' comments are quoted below: The adopter through this practice now has a successor; somebody that takes over from him and takes up the family name. The female child does not answer her family name but male children do.' 'Adopted male children are more important than adopted female children.'

Table 9: Distribution of respondents by level of acceptability of child adoption (n = 1200)

Personal impression about child adoption	Frequency	Percentage
Acceptable	773	64.42
Unacceptable	170	14.17
Partial Acceptance	257	21.41
Total	1200	100.0



Source:Field Survey, 2012

From Table 9 majority of the respondents(64.42%) accepted child adoption, 21.41% accepted it partially because they had their reservations about it especially the adopted child’s unknown descent and likely questionable genes. Only 14.17% respondents did not accept it.

Table 10: Distribution of respondents by reasons for acceptance of child adoption (n = 773)

Reasons for Acceptability	Frequency	Percentage
Service to humanity	281	36.35
Removes stigma of childlessness	155	20.05
Fills gap created by barrenness	337	43.60
Total	773	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2012

The respondents’ reasons for accepting it as shown in the above table were because it filled the gap created by barrenness (43.60%), it was service to humanity (36.35%) and that it removed the stigma associated with childlessness (20.05%).

FGD Result: Most FGD participants in all the communities endorsed child adoption with these reasons;

It filled the gap created by barrenness. It maintained family lineage because it afforded a childless couple opportunity to have a child and reap the benefits thereof. In the past, girls threw away unwanted babies, but now due to the practice of child adoption, girls no longer threw away unwanted babies. A well trained child made positive impact on his/her family. One Dikenafai married male participant said that he accepted child adoption because children were very important treasure (*ihe okpu*), and gateway to family and community wealth. Children were a regeneration of family because they maintained family lineage and continuity. They provided care for their parents in sickness, in old age, and at death accorded them befitting burial rites. An Umuma-Isiaku FGD participant said that children whether adopted or not serve as security to parents because they can weed off enemies amongst kit and kin. They consolidate family, unify it and it is because of children that women get married. An Igbo proverb sees a child as a woman’s prestige. Other reasons they gave for doing so are quoted below: ‘It is service to humanity; that is helping less privileged children to succeed in life.’ ‘It is worthy to bring up children who have nobody to care for them. Instead of abandoning an illegitimate child or aborting him /her, the child should be



given out for adoption because some adopted children are very helpful to their communities. One interviewee said that adoption is in the Bible because St Paul adopted Timothy.’

Some of the FGD and IDI participants in the study communities adopted indigenous terminologies to express the indispensability of children in the family as follows: *Nwa bu uto ntochi, Nwa na-eme ama ghere oghe, o gaghi echi. Nwa bu ukutazu.* This means that children enhance family continuity. “*Nwa bu ihe okpu, Nwa ka e ji atuturi aku*” meaning children are a treasure. “*Nwa lee tiji m*” meaning children lending helping hand (child pick this for me). Some of the songs they use to show the place of a child include “*mgbei maa m n’aka maa m n’okpa (DC) Ya amakwana m n’otu, otu ga-eji atuturi aku,*” “*o bugh ma nwa onye ga –enye m, akwa jooji onye ga-enye m, okporoko onye ga-enye m*” meaning it is through procreation that one amasses wealth.

Table 11: Distribution of respondents on reasons for unacceptability (n = 170)

Reasons for unacceptability	Frequency	Percentage
It is against culture	70	41.18
Opposed because of inheritance	100	58.82
Total	170	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2012

14.17% of the respondents outrightly rejected child adoption. Results in this Table 43 show that 58.82% of the respondents that didn’t accept child adoption argued that it created problem in property inheritance.

FGD/IDI Result: Only few interviewees in Akokwa and Akpulu said that an adopted child was a problem to his parents. Other reservations about adopted children include the issues of unknown genetic background and inheritance. Hence they made these comments. ‘any adopted male child has right over his father’s property, but the father’s kinsmen would want to take over that inheritance and will not accept the adoption and even the adopted child. ‘One said ‘I don’t endorse it because of the issues involved in it. They are many. 1. The adopted child is not my blood and is begotten by an unknown person who may be of questionable character or with chronic ailment. 2. Adoption causes competition and conflict between biological and adopted children over the issue of inheritance. For example a case arose in my community where an adoptive father allocated a land to the adopted child within the family premises which traditionally is the first son’s inheritance. That caused rancour and when the case was reported to me as the chief I intervened and resolved it.



Eventually that allocation was revoked and the adopted child was given another land outside the compound.’

Table 12: *Distribution of respondents on whether child adoption should be abolished (n = 1200)*

Should child adoption be abolished?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	151	12.58
No	952	79.33
Don't know	97	8.09
Total	1200	100.0

Source: *Field Survey, 2012*

Information in this table shows that most respondents (79.33%) did not endorse that child adoption should be abolished. Only insignificant few respondents (12.58%) wanted it to be abolished.

Objective 3: Respondents’ Views on Child Adoption Practices in their Areas

Table 13: *Distribution of respondents by practice of child adoption (n = 1200)*

Ever Practised child Adoption	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	39	3.25
No	1161	96.75
Total	1200	100.00

Source: *Field Survey, 2012*

Even though many research participants demonstrated appropriate knowledge of child adoption, the practice is minimal. Only 3.25% of married respondents adopted children.

Table 14: *Distribution of respondents by how long ago they undertook/ practiced child adoption (n = 39)*

How many years ago did you adopt?	Frequency	Percentage
0-5	28	71.79
6-10	5	12.82
11-15	0	0.00
16-20	3	7.69
More than 20	3	7.69
Total	39	100.0

Source: *Field Survey, 2012*



Results in this table show that the practice of child adoption has increased remarkably in the last five years.

Table 15: Distribution of respondents by location and and their opinion on category of people who adopt children (% in parenthesis, n = 1200

	Category of people who adopt				Total	
	Childless Couples	Couples with one Sex children boys,girls (collated)	Couples with few Children	Love for Humanity & Others		
Location						
Akokwa	274	214	47	70	605(10	
Akpulu	(45.3)	(35.4)	(7.8)	(11.6)	0)	
Dikenafai	269	199	42	62	572(10	
Umuma-Isiaku	(47.0)	(34.8)	(7.3)	(10.8)	0)	
	270	228	55	75	628(10	
	(43.0)	(36.3)	(8.8)	(11.9)	0)	
	274	216	43	68	601(10	
	(45.6)	(35.9)	(7.2)	(11.3)	0)	
Total	1087(45.2)	857(35.6)	187(7.8)	275(11.4)	1200	

Source: Field Survey, 2012

In Table 15 above, 45.2% respondents showed that it was mainly childless couples that adopted children, followed by couples with one sex children (girls) (17.9%), then couples with one sex children (boys) (17.7%). This was confirmed by the focus group discussion (FGD) and in-depth interview (IDI) results in which the participants maintained that the people who adopted children were either married people who were unable to bear children or married people who had one sex children. That is, people who do not have a male child or a female child, or required number of children. This is adoption to augment the size or sex composition of their children.

In-depth Interview Result: The interviewees in Akpulu, Umuma –Isiaku said that a married man that had waited for a long time without a child could adopt. Another said it was husband and wife who did not have a child or a couple who did not have a male child. An opinion leader in Akpulu said anybody that wanted to adopt could adopt but most often it was childless



couples that did so. An interviewee in Dikenafai said that an unmarried male or female could agree with his or her kinsmen and adopt a child.

Other assertions of the interviewees are quoted below: ‘People who have children can adopt out of love for humanity and as a Christian duty.’ Another has this to say ‘somebody who has a child has no need to adopt a child.’

Table 16: *Distribution of respondents by Location and their opinion on prevalent types of child adoption practised in the area (% in parenthesis, n = 1200*

	Type of Child Adoption Practiced						Total	χ^2
	Intra – family	Single Parent	Open Adoption	Closed Adoption	Relative Adoption	Non – Relative Adoption		
Location								$\chi^2 = 6.03$ df = 15 p = 0.979
Akokwa	18(2.2)	105(13)	83(10)	237(29)	179(22)	196(24)	818	
Akpulu	16(2.0)	108(13)	101(13)	209(26)	185(23)	186(23)	805	
Dikenafai	21(2.7)	94(12.0)	89(11)	221(28)	179(23)	179(23)	783	
Umuoma - Isiakwu	16(2.0)	95(12.0)	91(12)	219(28)	180(23)	188(24)	789	
Total	71(2.2)	402(13)	364(11)	886(28)	723(23)	749(23)	n=1200	

Source: Field Survey, 2012

The responses in Table 16 above show that closed adoption is the type of adoption that is mostly practised. This was confirmed by the FGD and IDI findings in the communities studied. This is followed by relative and non-relative adoption, (23% each), intra-family adoption (2.2%). Open adoption (11%) was among the least practised.

Majority of the focus group discussion participants and In-depth Interview respondents in the study communities maintain that child adoption practised in this area of study was mainly closed adoption; that is, adopting from an unknown, hidden source. This might be to avoid stigmatization or reclaiming of the child by the biological parent(s). Also adoption in Akokwa and Akpulu could be closed or open when a childless couple arranged with a teenage pregnant girl, so that when she gave birth, they paid her off and took over the child, i.e. both parties knew each other.



Another situation is that a childless couple could notify their kinsmen through traditional ceremony that they were adopting their relation. The implication is that at their demise that adopted relation could inherit their property. It was reported in Akpulu that the inheritor accorded the adopter a befitting burial and took over the man's property. At Akpulu an opinion leader also reported:

Formal child adoption practice in Akpulu is a new trend. In the past a couple with only female children would arrange and keep one of their daughters to be a male head, live and make children for them. These children are bona fide children of that couple and are entitled to all rights and privileges. This is because the childless man performed some rites to the kinsmen notifying them that those children were his and would take over his inheritance. This is called 'iha nwanji'. The rites so performed settled the problem of illegitimacy emanating from stigmatization of the adopted child and even his/her generation – *iguru ha agugu* meaning recounting their family descent or history. It is the surety, the female head that is now "male daughter" has.

Objective 4: Challenges to Child Adoption

Feedback from FGD and KII shows that there may exist possible conflicts between the adopter and adopted child and their kinsmen. The issue of the financial cost of embarking on child adoption is also a militating problem to the practice of child adoption in the area. Availability of the child to be adopted, meeting up with the eligibility requirements to qualify for adoption and the waiting period are also serious challenges.

On the other hand, respondents also stated that the adopted child's acceptance of and relationship with the adoptive parents could be impaired. There may exist preferential treatment of the biological child and his or her competition with the adopted child where adoption is embarked on to augment the number or sex of children in the family.

Other issues are conflicts between the adopted child and the kinship groups, and the possible conflicts between the adopter and his/her kinsmen. There are other challenges to child adoption mentioned, which include the adoptive parents' fantasies, fears, and perceived lack of entitlement to the child which can detrimentally influence their parenting abilities. Furthermore, issue of cost of an adopted child, adjustment of the adopted child and adoptive parents, and issues of culture influence and bias on child adoption are still very problematic. Above all, respondents lamented lack of strong institutional arrangements/framework for child adoption, whether traditional or modern.



This includes the rules for adoption, enforcement characteristics of such rules as well as other challenges entailed in successful adoption procedures.

Test of Research Hypotheses

Having done series of analyses as shown above, it is necessary to take one or two independent variables in order to determine their effects on the dependent variables. The independent variables considered included the respondents’ educational attainment and sex, marital status, and age. These socio-demographic variables were used to test respondents’ acceptance of child adoption as contained in the hypotheses.

Hypothesis One

H₁: There is a perceived positive relationship between respondents’ educational attainment and level of acceptance of child adoption in Orlu North East

H₀: Respondents’ educational attainment do not influence acceptance of child adoption.

To test this hypothesis, a cross-tabulation of respondents’ educational attainment and their level of acceptance of child adoption was done (see Table 17). Here, partial acceptance was merged with the category “unacceptable”. Partial acceptance meant that they accepted the practice but have reservations because of the adopted child’s descent and possible questionable genetic background.

Table 17: *Distribution of respondents according to educational attainment and level of acceptance of child adoption (% in parenthesis)*

Educational Attainment	Level of Acceptance		Total	X ²
	Acceptable	Unacceptable		
No formal Education	33 (4.3)	18 (4.2)	51 (4.3)	X ² = 8.874 df = 3 p = 0.031
Primary Education	100 (12.9)	79 (18.5)	179 (14.9)	
Secondary Education	318 (41.1)	180 (42.2)	498 (41.5)	
Tertiary Education	322 (41.7)	150 (35.1)	472 (39.3.)	
Total	773 (100)	427 (100)	1200 (100.0)	

Source: *Field Survey*, 2012

Critical Value of X² = 7.815

Respondents with tertiary education tended to accept child adoption more with 41.7% followed by those who had secondary education 41.1%. Just 12.9% of



respondents who acquired primary education accepted child adoption, only 4.3% of the respondents who had no formal education accepted child adoption. The critical value of X^2 is 7.815 and the level of significance is 0.05, with P value of 0.031 which is less than 0.05 and x^2 value of 8.874. Thus the relationship between respondents' educational attainment and their acceptance of child adoption is significant. This means that respondents' perception of child adoption changes with their educational attainment thereby confirming the hypothesis that there is a perceived positive relationship between one's educational attainment and one's level of acceptance of child adoption. In other words, those with higher educational attainment seemed more disposed to accepting child adoption. Education widens one's horizon of conception and perception of issues. It increases one's intellect and chances of appreciation of developmental issues. That is why educated elites are said to easily analyse situations objectively than non-educated ones.

Hypothesis Two

H₁: Female respondents are more likely to have positive perception of child adoption than males.

H₀: Female respondents are not more likely to have positive perception of child adoption than males.

To test this hypothesis, a cross-tabulation between respondents' sex and level of acceptance of child adoption was done, and the distribution is summarized in Table 18 below.

Table 18: Distribution of respondents according to sex and level of acceptance of child adoption (% in parenthesis)

Sex	Level of Acceptance		Total	X ²
	Acceptable	Unacceptable		
Male	380 (49.2)	220 (51.5)	600 (50.0)	X ² =2.896 df = 1 p = 0.102
Female	393 (50.8)	207 (48.5)	600 (50.0)	
Total	773 (100)	427 (100)	1200 (100.0)	

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Critical Value of $X^2 = 3.841$

Table 18 shows those who accepted the practice of child adoption as follows - (49.2%)were males while 50.8% were females. Similarly, of the 427 respondents who did not accept, (51.5%) were males while 48.5% were females. From the above findings it can be seen that there was really no significant difference between the sexes in terms of acceptance or non-acceptance. The P value of 0.102 which is more than 0.05 showed non-



significance. This implies that there is no significant evidence to claim that females are more likely to accept child adoption than the males. Also comparing the χ^2 value of 2.896 against the critical value of X^2 which is 3.841, (df=1, p=0.05), the relationship between sex and level of acceptance of child adoption was non- significant. One's sex had no effect on and did not have any impact on one's acceptance of child adoption. In other words, the hypothesis H_1 above was rejected.

Hypothesis Three

H_1 : Married people are more likely to accept child adoption than single people.

H_0 : There is no association between one's marital status and acceptance of child adoption

To test this hypothesis, a cross-tabulation of respondents' marital status and level of acceptance of child adoption was done, as shown in Table 19 below.

Table 19: Distribution of respondents according to marital status and level of acceptance of child adoption (% in parenthesis)

Marital Status	Level of Acceptance		Total	X^2
	Acceptable	Unacceptable		
Married	397 (51.4)	160 (41.7)	557 (48.1)	$X^2 = 1.349$ df = 1 p = 0.246
Single	376 (48.6)	224 (58.3)	600 (51.9)	
Total	773 (100.0)	384 (100.0)	1157 (100.0)	

Source: Field Survey, 2012 Critical value of $X^2 = 3.841$

51.4% for the married respondents against 48.6% for the single respondents appears to support the hypothesis that married people are more likely to accept child adoption than single people. However the P value of 0.246 which is greater than 0.05 shows that there is no evidence to support the hypothesis. This can as well be seen in the χ^2 value = 1.349 which is less than the critical value of X^2 (3.841) at df = 1 with 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the research hypothesis was rejected. In other words respondents' marital status did not have any direct influence on their acceptance of child adoption.

Hypothesis Four

H_1 : Acceptance of child adoption tends to be more with older respondents than younger respondents.

H_0 : Acceptance of child adoption tends not to be more with older respondents than younger respondents



To test this hypothesis, a cross-tabulation of respondents' age and level of acceptance of child adoption was done, as shown in Table 20 below.

Table 20: Distribution of respondents according to age and level of acceptance of child adoption, (% in parenthesis)

Age	Level of Acceptance		Total	
	Acceptable	Unacceptable		
Younger respondents	568(73.5)	142 (33.3)	710(100.0)	χ^2 =184.21. df = 1 p = 0.000
Older respondents	205 (26.5)	285 (66.7)	490 (100,0)	
Total	773 (100.0)	427 (100.0)	1200 (100.0)	

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Critical value = 3.841

The distribution of younger respondents was established from the respondents' ages 15 to 39 while that of older respondents was taken to be from the respondents' ages 40 and above. Younger respondents (73.5%) ranked highest, of all the respondents that accepted the practice of child adoption while 26.5% of the older respondents accepted it. Even among those who did not accept it, it was greatly older respondents (66.7%) that rejected the practice.

The P value of 0.000 shows significance. This can as well be seen with the χ^2 value of 184.21 which is greater than the critical value which is 3.841 at df = 1 with 0.05 level of significance. From Table 50 above, data in "Acceptable" column show that 73.5% of the younger respondents accepted child adoption while only 26.5% of the older respondents accepted child adoption. However, the critical value of X^2 which is 3.841 is less than the calculated value which is 184.21, which indicated a rejection of the null hypothesis. In other words, older respondents tended to accept child adoption more than the younger respondents. This could be true because as people get older, their chances of bearing their own children are reducing and so they may resort to adopting children.

Brief Discussion of Findings

The results of the study showed high percentage (98.90%) of respondents' knowledge of the concept of child adoption and their remarkable acceptance of child adoption (64.4%). The adopted child is seen as a great asset for family provisions, stability and continuity. In as much as respondents expressed their fears about the unknown descent of the adopted child and possible transfer of undesirable traits like stealing, lying, cheating, etc, as well as chronic,



terminal sicknesses like epilepsy, madness, sickle cell, etc, majority of them endorsed child adoption practice, since it ensured family lineage continuity and brought joy to the family. These findings were also in confirmation of Okonkwo's (1990) assertion that the promotion of adoption in our society could help to ease both our social problems as well as meet the needs of many childless couples.

Furthermore this study revealed that the respondents' level of educational attainment was associated with their acceptance of child adoption as shown in the four study locations, namely Akokwa, Akpulu, Dikenafai and Umuma-Isiaku. This means that respondents' perception of child adoption changes with their educational attainment. This study further revealed that child adoption practised in the four study areas was in an informal manner. It was characterised by high level of secrecy, anonymity and sealed records due to fear of stigmatization, or that a birth parent would attempt to reclaim her child or otherwise intrude in adoptive family's lives. According to them, closed adoption was the type of adoption mostly practised in the study. This confirms Pennington's (2004) study in New York in which he stated that in developing countries, child adoption is carried out secretly in order not to expose the fact that "the parents" are not the biological parents.

The research results also showed that 43.2% of the respondents maintained that the main reason for child adoption was to solve the problem of childlessness. This is in line with a study by Kim (nd) who reported that the result of a pilot study of open adoptive families in Korea showed that the main motive of adoption was sterility. The findings in the present study were also in line with the report of Steck (1998) who saw adoption as an alternative strategy in the management of infertility aimed at bringing succour to the affected couples.

Conclusion

The following conclusions were drawn from the study. The main reason for child adoption was to solve problem of childlessness, for couples to have children who will inherit their property and also make up for the male and female sexes respectively. People of Orlu North east mainly practised closed adoption and majority of the respondents accepted child adoption. There was a relationship ($p < 0.05$) between educational attainment and acceptance of child adoption, but marital status and sex of the respondents had no significant relationship with acceptance of child adoption. There was a belief that an adopted child would bring the risk of an inherited disease or bad behavioural trait to his/her new family and community.



Recommendations/Policy Implications

The history of adoption legislation in Nigeria dates back to 1958 (Kigbu, Salome & Konkat, 2002). Yet these legislations were never fully enforced. The researcher therefore recommends that government should implement adoption laws. Formal adoption institutions owned by the government and run by professional social workers need to be established both at the local government and communities. It will enhance the screening of prospective adopters and even the child before adoption order is concluded.

The adoption agencies should help the biological mother and relatives to make the right decision as to whether to give the baby up for adoption or not. It should use its judgment and experience in deciding which couples should be dissuaded from adopting. The agency worker should also help the child and family during the adjustment period.

The stigmatisation and discrimination against adopted children and their adoptive parents should be discouraged by mass media, traditional societies, civil right protest and activism, specific programmes in school systems and litigation. It is therefore recommended that traditional councils abolish discrimination against adopted children.

Adoption agencies should organise enlightenment programmes and teach people about roles of environment and heredity in a child's personality development. Too much emphasis on heredity as roots of disease and deviant behavior must be corrected.

Among the reasons for child adoption is the need for male children. There's need therefore for education on sex determination. This can be introduced to women organisations such as association of patrilineage wives (Otu nwunye) during their meetings.

References

- Adamec, C. & Pierce, W. (2000). *Adoption*. In the Encyclopedia of adoption, 2nd edition.
- Agrawaal, P. (nd). Childlessness in India: Are we ready as developed countries. Monitoring & evaluation, *India Hiv/Aids Alliance*. New Delhi
- Boserup, E.(1985). Economic and Demographic Inter-relationships in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Population and Development Review*. 11(2),
- Calve-Dominic (1999). Major trends affecting families in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Comparative Studies*, 30 (4).



- Caldwell, J.C. & Caldwell, P. (1987). The cultural context of high fertility in sub-Saharan Africa. *Population and Development Review*. 13(3),
- Carroll, L.(2009). *The history of open adoption*. Retrieved from [www adoption.com](http://www.adoption.com)
- Child Welfare Information Gateway (2012). *Adoption from foster care*. US Department of Health and Human Services, USA.
- Cummings, E. & Davis, P. (1994). *Children and marital conflict: The impact of family dispute and resolution*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Drame, D. (2008). *The impact of infertility on couples*. Available from <http://www.NYscc.org>. Benin City: Women Health and Action Research Centre, 8,128-56.
- Ejiofor, L. U.(1981). *Dynamics of Igbo democracy: A behavioural analysis of Igbo politics in Agunri clan* . Nsukka: University Press.
- Federal Government of Nigeria (1999). The various state legislations on adoption e.g *Adoption Law*, Chap 5, Laws of Lagos state, 1968, 1973
- Frejka, T. & Sardon, J.P. (2006). *First birth trends in developed countries: Persisting parenthood postponement*. Available from <http://www.demographic-research.org/volumes/vol15/6/>pp 147-18
- Friedlander W. (1992). *Introduction to Social Welfare*, Illinois: Dorsey Press.
- Geshiere, P. (1982). *Village, communities and the state: Changing relations among the Maka of Southern Cameroun*. London: Kegan Paul International.
- Hashmi, H. (2011). *Childlessness, herbal fertility treatment*. Available from [http:// doctoradvice. org //childlessness – support. html](http://doctoradvice.org//childlessness-support.html).
- Jernigan, K. J. (2010). *Reasons for adopting a child*. Available from internet
- Karanja, J.(1987). Help Needy Children.*Social Welfare. Kenya Times Column.2-4 p 20*
- Kiernan, K. (1999).*Social policy and social work*. Otago: Otago University.
- Kigbu, Salome & Konkat (2002). *Child adoption: nature and procedure under Nigerian law*. Jos. Faculty of Law, University of Jos.
- Kim, H. (nd) *Open adoption in a traditionally closed society: problems and needs for post adoption services*. Korea: Kosin University, Dongsamdong 149-1.
- Koropecykj – Cox, T. (2008). Loneliness and depression in middle and old age: are the childless more vulnerable. Philadelphia. PARC Working Paper Series WPS 96-02 National Institute on Aging, *Grant Number P30 AG12836, B.J. Soldo, P.I.*
- Larsson, G., Bohlin A., & Stenbacka, M. (1986). Prognosis of children admitted to institutional care during infancy. sixth congress of the international society for prevention of child abuse and neglect,. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 10 (3),361-368.



- Leon, I. (2002). Adoption losses: Naturally occurring or socially constructed? *Child Development*, 73 (2), 652-663.
- Mawere, M. & Mawere, A.M. (2010). The changing philosophy of African marriage. The relevance of the Shona customary marriage practice of Kukumbira.' *Journal of African Studies and Development* vol. 2(9), 224-233
- Mishra, B. (2001). Divorce, the deadly divider. *Goa Today*, Oct 2001
- Modell, M. (2000). Children's adjustment to adoption: Developmental and clinical issues. *Family Practice* ,17, (1), London. Oxford University Press. p 94-102
- Nagera, H. (nd). *Adoption: problems, successes and psychiatric consequences*. University of South Florida.
- Okonkwo, I. (1990). *Youths and the development of Nigeria's third republic*
- Parkin, D.& Nyamwaya, D. (1989) eds. Transformation of African marriage. *International African Institute Seminar Studies* (3), Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Ritchie, I. (1978). *African family in transition*. Retrieved from [http:// www3.simpatico.ca/ian/ritchie/ATSC](http://www3.simpatico.ca/ian/ritchie/ATSC), chapter 8, htm. Kupalo.
- Smit, E. (1996). Unique issues of the adopted child: Helping parents talk openly and honestly with their child and the community: *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing Mental Health Services*, 34, (7),29-36.
- Smit, E. (2003). Adopted children: Core issues and unique challenges. *Journal of Child Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 16, (3), 90
- Tilson, D. & Larsen, U. (2000). Divorce in Ethiopia: The impact of early marriage and childlessness. *Journal of Biosocial Science*.32,(3), 355-72.
- Thorndike, B., Nault, W., Robert, O. & Ludgin, D. (1974). *The World Book Dictionary A – K*. Chicago: Field Enterprises Educational Corporation p 30.
- Turner, J.N. (1995). *Adoption or anti-adoption*. Available from <http://www.austilii.edu.au/journal> (2). Pdf.
- Ukwuome, E. N. (2013). *The attitudes of couples towards child adoption practices in Abakaliki Urban of Ebonyi State*.
- Unisa, S. (1999). Childlessness in Andhra Pradesh, India: Treatment-seeking and Consequences, *Reproductive Health Matters*,7,(13).