



# A REVIEW OF PERCEPTIONS, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF CHILD ADOPTION IN NIGERIA

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CHIKWE, PRINCEWILL CHIGOZIRI, OBIAGELI, F EMELUMANDU AND OKOYE, OBIANUJU CHINELO,

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## ABSTRACT

Child adoption in Nigeria is still an evolving process. The enactment of the Child's Right Act in Nigeria has legalized child adoption. The Objective of this study include to access the perception of child adoption in Nigeria; to determine the challenges of child adoption in Nigeria, and to investigate the prospects of child adoption in Nigeria. The method used was to explore secondary data, policy documents, existing studies and reviews from scholars, local and international organizations. Perception of child adoption slightly vary across the country, with most Nigerian having fair knowledge of the term "child adoption" which does not translate into its practice. It was also shown that infertility is the main factor that has influenced the rate of willingness and acceptability of child adoption in Nigeria. However, the ideology that biological ties are fundamental to family relations is associated with several stigmatizing beliefs about adoption, which may cause both the adoptee and the adoptive parents to feel socially marginalized and devalued. Just like other part of the world, child adoption in Nigeria is faced with several challenges ranging from stigmatization, unknown parental background, possible inherited or genetic diseases, psychological and religious beliefs, poverty, establishment of illegal adoption and orphanage homes, future claim by the biological parents, disloyalty or abandonment of adoptive parents the child when the child learns that he or she was adopted. The future prospects of child adoption lie in Nigerians taking seriously the principles and standards enunciated in the international adoption law of Nigeria that the best interest of children (which include their survival, development, protection and participation) should be the guiding principle in the whole adoption process. In conclusion, the perception, challenges and prospects of child adoption reviewed in this study shows child adoption in Nigeria is still evolving and requires the government, churches, other religious bodies, NGOs, individuals and the public at large to join hands in welcoming and implementing the right practices of child adoption, as well as 'Child's Right Laws'.

**KEYWORDS:** Perception, challenges, prospects, child adoption

## INTRODUCTION

**Background:** Adoption is a very serious and important subject matter in every society because

it touches on the status of the adopted child and invariably, affects his or her rights and obligations. It is a legal and social process whereby the parent-child relationship is

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**Chikwe, Princewill Chigoziri**, Department of Community Medicine, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital, Nnewi, Nigeria.

**Obiageli, F Emelumandu**, Department of Community Medicine, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital, Nnewi, Nigeria

**Okoye, Obianuju Chinelo**, Department of Community Medicine, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital, Nnewi, Nigeria

established between persons not so related by birth (Issa and Awoyemi, 2006). By this means, a child born to one set of parents becomes legally and socially related to another parents and family and assumes the same right and roles as those that exist between children and biological parents.

Adoption is the legal process whereby a person obtains judicial or administrative authority to take the child of another person as his own and parental rights and obligation are permanently transferred from the child's natural parents to the adoptive parents (Chukwu, 2012). It is a unique form of child care because it provides permanent care and parenting for adopted children (P.N Aniebue and U.U Aniebue,2008), thus the adopted child can access the quality of life in a family setting (Dimkpa,2010). More so, the child becomes a complete member of the adopter's family, takes up the adopter surname and assumes the right and privileges of biological child, including the right of inheritance. However, a relationship of consanguinity between the adopted child and all members of adopter's family is absolutely prohibited (Ojelabi, Osamar, and Owumi, 2015). Upon complete adoption procedure, the transfer of rights by the adoptee and the responsibility assumed by the adopter becomes sealed and irrevocable. The only possible exception is where it is discovered that fraud, duress, or undue influence was exerted on any of the party involved (Tajudeen, 2013).

**Statement of the problem:** It is a common idea in Nigeria that a true family is one that is biologically related. This idea has had notable consequences for social institution of adoption and for the individuals most intimately affected by the social construction of adoption. Specifically, this ideology is associated with different perceptions and challenges towards child adoption in Nigeria. Thus, this study will provide overview of the understanding, common challenges and the opportunity for adoption to succeed in the future.

**Significance of the study:** Previously, child adoption was poorly understood. But the enactment of the Child Right Act in Nigeria has simplified child adoption process across the country. This review is going ahead to show the developing awareness, a few demanding situations and possibilities of child adoption in Nigeria and the high appreciation of the benefits of child adoption to families. Through this research, the society will no longer see child

adoption as a hard issue to understand and practice.

**Objective of the study:** The Objectives of this study are to access the perception of child adoption in Nigeria; to determine the challenges of child adoption in Nigeria, and to investigate the prospects of child adoption in Nigeria.

#### **Literature Review**

This review of literatures includes different scholarly journal articles, textbooks, newspapers and government publications which has shown growing recognition of child adoption in Nigeria. As a result, the following literatures has a significant information in the area of knowledge, willingness, acceptance, challenges and prospects of child adoption in Nigeria. However, there is dearth of research examining what happens to a child after adoption into their new families. A post adoption investigation is necessary (Onayemi and Aderinto, 2017) because it tells us about the welfare and development of the child, and how the child integrates into the society. This paper therefore, reported the factors confronting post adoption follow up in Nigeria and how post adoption checks is done in other countries.

**History of child adoption in Nigeria:** Child adoption has a long and chequered history (Omeire, Iheriohanma, Osita-Njoku, and Omeire,2017).In ancient times, emphasis was on the political and economic interest of the adopter. During the period, the emperors Tiberius, Nero, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius were all adopted (Wasson, 2018). The practice of adoption declined in the middle ages as bloodlines were regarded as sacrosanct in medieval society (Gager and Finley-crowwhite, 1997) The history of adoption in modern times can be traced to 1851 when the Massachusetts Adoption of Children Act was enacted. The law was significant because it recognized adoption as a social and legal process based on child welfare rather than adult interest (Chan and Hollinger,2004).Hence, a new pattern in adoption practice from helping adopters to find children to finding a safe and permanent families for the children; became the norm.

In Nigeria, child adoption takes place either by statutory or by customary law. Statutory adoption is the type backed up by adoption laws and it permanently extinguishes the rights and legal relationship between the child and his natural parents (Ogwezzy,2018); while on the contrary, customary adoption believe a child can never be

cut from his root (Isochukwu, 2017). Meaning that in customary adoption the right a child have with the birth parents could exist after adoption. Customary adoption is less formal and in most cases occur between blood relatives (Umoh, 2021). Unlike statutory adoption, customary adoption has not developed sufficient criteria to make the institution readily identifiable, that is the reason sometimes adoption is confused with guardianship or fostering (Nwogugu, 2014).

The common law under which Nigeria was governed during the colonial dispensation had no provision for child adoption (Nwaogugu, 2014). Child adoption in Nigeria was pioneered by the Eastern Region Government. The Eastern Nigerian Adoption law came into effect in 1965 and the Eastern region which pioneered legislation on child adoption is the progenitor of the present five Igbo States of Imo, Abia, Anambra, Enugu and Ebonyi (Omeire et al., 2017). This regional legislation kick-started other similar legislation in other part of the country. (Kigbu, 2002). However, in Northern Nigeria, Islamic law does not recognize adoption, and this account for why no adoption law is in existence in Northern Nigeria (Nwaogugu, 2014). Nevertheless, the issue of guardianship is recognized and Islam believed in a concept called Kafalah which permits a family to live permanently and cater for a child who cannot be cared for by his biological parents but the child is not eligible to take up the family name or partake in their inheritance (Tajudeen, 2013). Soon after 1965, Lagos State enacted its adoption law in 1968 and many other states followed suit viz, Bendel State (1979), Cross River (1981), Ogun State (1983), and Oyo State (1984) (Ogwezzy, 2018). There was no unified adoption law until December 2003 when the Nigerian federal government enacted the child's Rights Act which regulates all law relating to children. Still adoption rules may differ from state to state, for instance, adoptive parents must foster their children for at least three months in Lagos. In Akwa Ibom, the adoptive parents must foster their child for one year. Abuja allows adoption if one parent is a Nigerian (Aluyor and salami, 2017). The reason is because Nigeria law allows for establishment of a parent-child relationship (temporary custody) before adoption is approved (Daily Digest, 2017). The Act provides that prospective adopters must make application to a court of law, only children whose parents or guardians consent to adoption or those who have

compelling reason to be adopted can be adopted. The Act prohibit payment to facilitate the adoption of a child except the court sanctions it, no adopter or any other person shall facilitate the readoption of an adopted child except with the court sanction, and periodic visit to every child adopted under the Act must be maintained to ensure the wellbeing (Isochukwu 2017; Nwaogugu, 2014).

#### **Simplified steps for adoption in Nigeria:**

Submission of a formal letter of request to the permanent secretary, ministry of social Development of Youth and Sports of the respective state or its equivalent. Prospective parents will be invited for an interview. If successful, a letter of approval would be given to search around for an adoptable child in any of the government-approved homes. Payment of the prescribed fees. Mandatory pre-counseling and post counseling session on approved dates. The courts order for the release of the child will be issued and the parents adopting the child are allowed to take the child for a probationary period of three months. After three months, the child would be presented for legalization in the court and final approval granted for the adopting family (Daily Digest, 2017). After the Adoption order by the court, the Adoption will be registered in the adopted children register by the chief registrar of the family court (Nwaogugu, 2014). After the adoption is completed, a follow-up (Post-adoption check) is required as a means of monitoring the adopted child wellbeing. Nevertheless, post adoption investigation in Nigeria is unpopular and insufficiently practiced. More so, the system is challenged with the unavailability of needful logistics, loss of synergy among adoption officials, inadequate training and retraining of adoption official and lastly, legal regime backing up the practice (Onayemi and Aderinto, 2017). Furthermore, in Nigeria intercountry adoption, some Nigerian States may require status updates on the child until the child's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday (U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Nigeria (n.d.). Many countries (e.g Ghana, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Burundi, e.t.c) require adoptive parents to provide information regarding the progress and welfare of their adopted child after they join their new homes through submission of post adoption report (Travel.States.Gov, 2021). - Finally P.N Aniebue and U.U Aniebue (2008) purported that the thriving practice of adoption in Nigeria is laudable but post adoption care is poor. Adding

that emphasis on post adoption care is vital in developing countries where complex social and logistic factors militate against it.

**Documents to be submitted by the applicant for an adoption:** Marriage certificate (for married parents) and letter of consent from the other spouse. Birth certificate or sworn declaration of age. Two passport photographs. Medical Certificate of Fitness. Proof of Nigerian citizenship (international passport, National ID card or letter of indigene from Local government area or Liaison office). Evidence of income. Where the applicant is single, evidence that he has attained age of thirty five years and child is of same sex with him. Others are police report, three referees, and court affidavit (Okolie,2018;Umah,2021;Daily Digest,2017)

### PERCEPTION OF CHILD ADOPTION IN NIGERIA

**On knowledge of child adoption:** Perception towards child adoption slightly vary in Nigeria. However, most Nigerians have a fair knowledge of the term 'child adoption'. In a number of studies like (Avidime et al.,2013 ; Eke, Obu, Chinawa, Adimova and Obi , 2014 ; Nwobodo and Isah,2011 ; Omoson and kofworola,2011), almost 80% of the respondents are aware of child adoption practice. Unfortunately this high level of awareness does not translate into the actual practice of child adoption. Nonetheless, it is important to note that formal adoption practice is generally gaining ground in the country but kinship adoption which can be likened to fostering is still being practiced (Chukwu,2011). However, this popularity only portrays an awareness of the term 'child adoption' as compared to understanding the true meaning of the concept of child adoption, its legality and process. Omosun and kofoworola (2011) observed that participants thoughts that child adoption meant buying a motherless child and majority did not know the requirement to accomplish it. A study to assess the knowledge and attitude of women towards child adoption in Zaria, Northern Nigeria indicated a high level of knowledge and acceptability of child adoption practices in our environment (Avidime et al., 2013). Similar study by Nwobodo et al (2011) on knowledge of child adoption was also high among infertile female patients in Sokoto , North West Nigeria. In Orlu Northeast of Imo state, there is high percentage (98.9%) of people's knowledge and remarkable acceptance of child

adoption and the adopted child is seen as great asset for the family provisions, stability and continuity (Ohachenu, 2016). Nwachukwu et al (2020) conveyed that most of the respondents in Ibadan South West, Nigeria have high knowledge of child adoption but not familiar with the details. Another study by Ezenwankwo, Robert and Balogun (2014) showed that the knowledge of child adoption is an alternative option for infertility management for women with intractable infertility. Child adoption has recently been chosen as a more successful and affordable option of becoming parents than the assisted reproductive techniques which is uncertain and encumbered with financial and emotional rigors (Ezenwankwo et al 2014).

### Acceptance and willingness to adopt a child in Nigeria

The acceptance and willingness to adopt a child in Nigeria is variable. Studies from Southeast and Southwest have shown low level of acceptability (Avidime et al, 2013; Aluyor and Salami,2017).However Avidime et al (2013) in the same study discovered high level of acceptability and uptake of adoption for fostering because of cultural and religious reasons. Willingness to adopt a child in the South - South Nigeria is low, despite good knowledge of child adoption (Ezenwankwo et al, 2014). Likewise, in the study by Nwobodo et al (2011), willingness to adopt a child is low in the North Western Nigeria. Aluyor and Salami (2017) in their study on acceptability of child adoption in Edo State revealed high acceptance but adopted child should not have equal right to property with biological children. Furthermore, Avidime et al (2013), stated that some modern literatures have shown that infertility is the main factor that influenced the rate of willingness and acceptability of child adoption. Ezenwankwo et al(2014) supported that by stating that there is marked increased in the willingness to adopt and is indicative of the scope for utilizing adoption as an interim measure for management of long term infertility.

**On stigmatization:** Despite the trend on the rise of perception of child adoption, most couples are discouraged by stigmatizing beliefs about child adoption. The stigmatizing belief is not only found in Nigerian setting, for example, an Iranian study revealed that one common stigma believe is that the adoptive family members lack the permanent blood relationship of genetically tied families and

are therefore not as bonded to one another (Bokaiem, Farajkhoda, Enjezab, Heidari and Karimizarachi, 2012). Similarly, Baltimore (2008), noted that many Americans believed it is harder to love an adopted child and regards it as a last alternative. Bokaiem et al. (2012) furthered that the social stigma has tend to make people believe that all nonbiological children are abnormal and pathogenic. In Nigeria, Eke et al.(2014),had noted that social stigmatization is a major factor contributing to the unpopularity of adoption in Nigeria. An adopted child is not seen as a real son or daughter of the soil especially in the Eastern Nigeria (Onwuka, 2013).They suffer discrimination , denial of inheritance and cannot be allowed to handle traditional positions in the community. This type of attitude towards the adoptee discourages childless couples who may wish to adopt children that will inherit their property when they (adoptive parents) pass away (Agbo,2014). Another study investigating the social work intervention strategies against illegal child adoption in Enugu State shows that the majority 142 (71%) of the respondents saw adoption as acceptable and government-approved while 58 (29%) said it stigmatizes and culturally disapproved. It also indicated that the majority 126 (63%) go for illegal adoption, and; 81 (40.5%) does it for fear of being stigmatized by neighbors (Udechukwu, 2019). In addition, some infertile couple are still psychologically traumatized after adopting a child, as implied in a study done in South west Nigeria which show that 33.7% of respondents who were willing to adopt still complained that the practice will not remove the stigma of infertility (A. Oladokun, Arulogun, R . Oladokun, Morhason-Bello, Bamgboye et al, 2010).Because of the unknown genetic past, adopted children are seen as illegitimate and some cultures do not accept them(Nachinab, Donkor and Naab, 2019)

**Challenges Of Child Addition In Nigeria:** According to Eke et al (2014), Social stigmatization, lack of biological/genetic linkage with the child, future claim by biological parents, fear of the unknown, high premium, the hijacking of the adoption process by middlemen, and religious beliefs were found to be the major obstacles militating against the smooth running of the adoption process(Eke et al, 2014). Numerous fears and misconceptions are one of the constraints, for example, that an adopted child would be a child of such persons as a drug addict, criminal convict, mental retarded,

prostitute, and likes. Furthermore, a common idea in Eastern Nigeria which sees an adopted child as a stranger serves as a limitation to accepting child adoption (Ojelabi, Osamor, and Owumi, 2015). Likewise, For instance in the southwest, some Yoruba cultural belief perceives an adopted child as a bastard. As result men in infertile marriages are rather encouraged to marry another woman (Ojelabi et al, 2015). In another study by Obeta and Chimezie(2013), it was revealed that adopting children into families pose challenges for both the adopted child and the adoptive parents. For instance, some adopted children face the challenges of acquiring a sense of belonging and the adoptive parents also face the challenges of adopting a child who may develop one form of deformity, or abnormal/undesirable behaviors later in life. Others are illegal adoption fraud which is a criminal act and involves establishing illegal adoption agencies and orphanages; obtaining money from adoptive parents under false pretenses ;wrongful adoption; and exploitation (Olusesan, Olalekan, Olufunmbi, Svetlana and Brandan, 2017). Olayemi and Aderinto (2019) findings on child adoption investigation in Nigeria revealed that insufficient training/re-training of adoption officials, poor funding of adoption institutions by government and lack of synergy between adoption officials are challenges thwarting effective adoption in Nigeria.

#### **Prospects of Child Adoption in Nigeria**

The purpose of adoption has evolved over time. Historically, the Roman emperor adopted primarily to gain a successor and to maintain bloodlines. (Overland, 2021; Gager and Finley-crosswhite, 1997). The notion that adoption was a means of promoting children's welfare did not take hold until mid-nineteenth century (UN, 2009). Before the enactment of the Child Rights Act in Nigeria, Child adoption was not embraced. Adopted Children were highly stigmatized, discriminated and ostracized. People feared that abandoned and illegitimate children once adopted will grow to exhibit the vices inherited from their unknown parents. However, the rate of inhuman treatment against adopted children began to reduce after the legitimizing of the Child Right Act in 2003. Soon after that, public awareness through media, social research and personal testimonies started escalating. Today the principles of ensuring the best interest of a child are served (UN, 2009); as this is central to the adoption law. Child adoption is now trending

as many Nigerians are inclining towards the practice. Government and none government agencies has started promoting child adoption as a substitute to abortion in unintended pregnancy (P.N Aniebue and U.U Aniebue, 2008).It has been revealed by many indigenous orphanages , especially in Lagos that child adoption has gain acceptance as things has changed from when they use to appeal through media for Nigerians to adopt a child to having a waiting list of couples interested in adopting babies (Anu and Oluwatoyosi, 2019).Also, careful review of literatures consistently show that positive and acceptability of child adoption are heightened by prolonged infertility, level of education and annual income, of families (Omosun and Kofworola, 2011; Adewunmi, Etti, Tayo, Rabi, Ottun et al, 2012; Oladokun et al, 2010). Ojelabi et al ( 2015) maintained that cultural presence for children in the family, increased intractable infertility and the limited access to Artificial Reproductive Technique (ART) have upsurge the acceptance of child adoption in Nigeria., Omosun and kofworola ( 2011) reported a high adoption rate of 13.9% in Lagos, southwest Nigeria. In Sokoto North West, they adoption rate reported was 1.2% .The adoption rate reported by Eke et al(2014) in South East Nigeria was 1.9%.. There are few data on the number of adoption in Nigeria, but the recorded few, show a gradual increase than what it was in the past.

## METHODOLOGY

**Data sources:** Data for this review was assembled from journals of Medicine and Medical research, Google scholar, Tropical medicine, Community Medicine, Social Sciences, research gate and PubMed. Other sources were United Nations convention reports, World Health Organization documents, United Nations Children Educational Fund reports, articles and media reports. From these harvest of documents that have recorded the topic under review, it was narrowed down and the most suitable studies and documents that conveyed, specific objectives were included.

**Selection of study sample:** Selection of study population was based on unique knowledge, experience, or view of participants on the subject of study. Participants include parents and caregivers (Eke et al, 2014), orphanage managers, social welfare officers, legal practitioners (Onayemi and Aderinto, 2019); and

group discussions involving communities (Oladukon et al, 2010). Approval and consent were gotten from institutions and adults who participated.

**Data collection:** Questionnaires to collect information on personal data (sex, age, gender, occupation, level of education, marital status, religion, socioeconomic status); perception of child adoption, fostering, previous history of adoption of children, reasons for adoption of babies, knowledge of Child Right Act, Government adoption Laws (Eke et al, 2014).Others were barriers facing child adoption practice in Nigeria (Oladukon et al, 2010).

## RESULTS

### Perception of Child Adoption

The findings by Avidime et al (2013) shows high level of knowledge and acceptability of child adoption among women in Zaira Northern Nigeria. Majority of the respondents(89.4%) in the study are aware of child adoption and 77% accepted that it is a good practice. About 62% of the respondents are aware that there were laws governing child adoption in Nigeria. Still on the same study, the orphanage home was the most popular place that 67.2% respondents knew adoption can be done. The willingness to adopt a child in 75% of the respondents attests to the high level of acceptability of the practice in Zaira. Meanwhile, Nwobodo et al (2011), in a study to determine knowledge, attitude and practice of child adoption among infertile women in Sokoto North West Nigeria revealed high (74.8%) knowledge of adoption, willingness is low as only 27.2% were willing to adopt .Their reason being that the practice won't allow them fulfill their conception role as women. It was found that willingness for child adoption is high among women with protracted infertility more than five years, those with secondary or tertiary education and in those with no surviving child, compared to their reverse counterparts. The knowledge and willingness to adopt a child in another study among infertile women in Northern Nigeria, shows good knowledge of child adoption in 59.2% of the respondents. However, willingness to adopt or foster a child was low as 28.2% and 44.4%, respondents were willing to adopt and foster a child respectively (Abubakar, Lawan and Yasir, 2013).

Furthermore, in a study to determine the knowledge of child adoption and adoption services by civil servants in Ibadan, South West

Nigeria, Nwachukwu et al (2020) discovered that the majority of participants (91.8%) had heard about adoption. However about half (59.8%) could not correctly define it. 37.7% of the respondents at least knew one person who had adopted a child and a few (16.8%) knew someone who would like to adopt a child. Most of the adopted children (58.6%) were from orphanages. Others were either abandoned (31.6%), given up by birth parents to adoptive parents (3.9%), transferred from mothers who had unwanted pregnancies to adoptive parents via intermediate agencies (3.3%), members of the extended families.

Similarly, findings by Eke et al (2014) found that 94.27% of care givers in Enugu South East Nigeria are aware of child adoption and 79.2% of them understood the actual meaning of the term child adoption. In this study, general knowledge of government adoption laws and process was generally below average (49.2%) among his respondents.

In another study to determine the knowledge, attitude and practice of child adoption among women in Calabar, South South Nigeria, a very high knowledge of child adoption was discovered but only 2% of the participants had adopted a child while 34.5% were willing to adopt in the future if their infertility situation persist. The study unearthed that infertility more than six years, secondary or tertiary education and not having a living child are the factors strongly influencing child adoption, than factors like adopting to satisfy the need for domestic chores and errands. Willingness is also low as most respondents (77.3%) were unwilling to adopt a child (Ekeng et al, 2021).

Udechukwu, (2019) findings shows that majority 142 (71.0%) of the respondents saw adoption as acceptable and government approved, while 58 (29.0%) said it stigmatizes and culturally disapproved. Eke et al, (2014) opined that 107 (41.3%) respondents he studied suggested that stigmatization is one of the factors hampering child adoption in Nigeria.

#### **Challenges of Child Adoption in Nigeria**

Many factors were shown by Eke et al (2014), as problems facing child adoption in Nigeria and it includes social stigmatization 107 (41.3%), fear of the unknown 63 (24.3%), future claim by the biological parents 71 (27.4%), religious bias 23 (8.5%), lack of genetic linkage 77 (24.7%), high premium 64 (24.7%) and middle men 46 (17.8%). Likewise, Oladokun (2009), reported that the

barriers mentioned by respondents were cultural practices, stigmatization, financial implication and procedural bottle necks. Also, findings like poverty, bastard syndrome, and denial of inheritance are some of the challenges of child adoption in Nigeria (Agbor, 2014). Furthermore, the emergence of illegal adoption agencies commonly known as "baby factory" in Nigeria, has been identified as another challenge jeopardizing the smooth operation of child adoption in Nigeria. Baby factory are illegal adoption agents, not approved by the government to run adoption services. The perpetrators source teenagers who had unwanted pregnancies and hide them in a particular place until they gave birth and their babies are sold at exorbitant prices by the proprietors who engage them (Omeire et al, 2015). A lot of negative reports have been given concerning children adopted via this route, which includes the exploitation of children, possible involvement of these children in illicit activities like drug pushing, prostitution, domestic servitude and organ harvesting. Also children from baby factory have been reported to have ended up as sacrifice to deities at shrines (Olusesan et al, 2017). The study by Omeire et al (2015) posited that 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. There is also dearth of non-governmental organizations (NGO's) including support groups on child adoption in our society for adequate support of adopting couples, especially during trial periods (Eke et al, 2014).

#### **Prospects of Child Adoption**

Surprisingly, child adoption is now becoming a growing culture in the country. Prior to now, adoption wasn't really a well-embraced tradition in the country. But now, the trend seems to be changing as more Nigerians tilt towards the practice. It has been revealed by many indigenous orphanages, especially in Lagos, that things have changed from when they used to appeal through the media for Nigerians to come forward to adopt children, to having a waiting list of couples interested in adopting babies. According to a high ranking source from the Lagos State Ministry of Youth and Social Welfare, the Ministry now receives over bloated number of applications on a weekly basis without a corresponding availability of adoptable children

(Anu and Oluwatoyosi, 2019). With the recent trend of globalization and influence of Western culture in Africa, Nigeria inclusive, child adoption is fast becoming socially and culturally acceptable and practiced (Eke et al, 2014).

Adoption in Nigeria is currently on the increase. Many States in the country have adopted the Nigerian Child's Right Act and subsequently modified their adoption laws. This is unlike before when few states have room for child adoption. In Nigeria, every family desires a child. A child is still regarded as social security to their parents, and, in situations where a couple faces infertility or desirous of a male child for propagation of the family name, the choice of child adoption is usually a more preferable one (Eke et al, 2014).

A lot of results from researchers have shown the growing trend of child adoption. In an earlier study, P.N Aniebue and U.U Aniebue (2008) established that majority (65.5%) of respondents in Enugu South East Nigeria were willing to adopt a child, and the prevalence of child adoption in the study was 5.5%. In another study, majority (89.4%) of the respondents in Zaira Northern Nigeria are aware of child adoption and 77% agreed it is a good practice (Avidime et al, 2013). Likewise, Omosun et al (2011), in Lagos, South West Nigeria made similar observation with about 85.7% of the respondents having heard about child adoption while about half of them knew the correct meaning of the term child adoption and the adoption rate was reported to be as high as 13.9%. Eke et al (2014) observe similar trend in the quest for child adoption following its acceptability in our contemporary society. The adoption rate observed in their study was 1.9%, which was comparable to a similar study in the United States of America (2%) (Baltimore, 2021). Furthermore, because the rate of infertility has become common, child adoption has become much more prevalent in recent times. Though there is no comprehensive data on the total number of children adopted in Nigeria each year, the available studies done in the different geopolitical zones is a prove that child adoption in Nigeria has experienced growth and more adoptions will take place in the future

## DISCUSSIONS

According to the result, researchers maintained that majority of their respondents have good knowledge of child adoption (Avidime et al, 2013; Nwobodo et al, 2011; Abubakar, Lawan and Yasir, 2013; Eke et al, 2014; Udechukwu, 2019). However, not all of them know the in-depth meaning of child adoption even though they are aware of it. For instance, Nwachukwu et al (2020) found out that about half (59.8%) of his respondents could not correctly define child adoption. Also, Eke et al (2014) asserted that knowledge of general adoption laws and process was below average (49.2%) among the respondents they studied. This finding is related to the study by Oladokun et al (2010) where people lack the factual information of what child adoption entails. Eke et al (2014) and Avidime et al (2013) in a separate study, have recorded high number of respondents who know the true meaning of child adoption and are aware of government laws guarding the practice of child adoption. So it can be seen that knowledge of child adoption is different among respondents and this could be traced to cultural and religious beliefs of the people. Example, respondents in the South East Nigeria where the existing culture opposes child adoption on the ground that an adopted child is not a true blood will not be interested to know the facts about it while the Muslims in Northern Nigeria where child adoption is not approved because of religious reason may lack the detailed knowledge about it.

There is a growing acceptability and willingness to adopt a child in Nigeria but it is varied across the country. The adoption rate in South East Nigeria is 1.9% with 65.5% being the majority of the respondents who are willing to adopt. This is higher than what is obtained in South South where willingness to adopt a child is as low as 43.5% and in South West where only 33.7% are willing to adopt a child. In the North, the idea of fostering is accepted in Muslim religion but it does not reflect in the study by Abubakar, Lawan and Yasir (2013) where low willingness to foster as well as adopting a child is low. Close observation of the result revealed that though



willingness and acceptability of child adoption is low but it is evolving because the case is not as it was before when there was no existing interest. The poor but rising interest in child adoption found in these study correlates with the research done by Ezenwakwo et al (2014).

The level of stigmatization in child adoption is high in Nigeria. The study finding showed that there is high premium on biological parenting. In Nigeria, a family is defined by how the members are related by blood or by marriage. A person who is not connected to a family by blood or marriages therefore not considered a member of the family. The participants, especially in the South East were generally aware of this stand and thought that one will have problems if you try to bring adopted child into family. They further indicated that the child will not enjoy any sense of belonging in the family and will be treated as an alien. Besides, a study in Orlu, Imo State, South East of Nigeria, reported that the stigma is high that it prohibit the adopted child from assuming any leadership position in the community (Ohachenu, 2016) Another study in the South West Nigeria ascertained that even the infertile couple who are willing to adopt still believe that the practice would not wipe the stigma of infertility (Oladokun et al, 2010).

Findings indicated that child adoption will be practiced in the future history of Nigeria. Available studies expressed optimism that child adoption will thrive as awareness is improving through media, personal testimonies, social research and other sources. Furthermore, some literature reviewed, consistently demonstrate that positive attitude and acceptability are increasing by prolonged infertility, high level of education, lack of surviving children and annual income of the family (Omosun and kofworola, 2011; Adewunmi et al 2010; Oladokun et al, 2010). Staff of many orphanages especially in Lagos affirmed that child adoption has gained wide acceptance, as gone are the days they beg via media to having a waiting list and application letters from couples in need to adopt a child (Thomas and Ojo, 2019). Another trend of child adoption is influenced by the recent trend of globalization and influence of Western culture in Africa and Nigeria as a whole. Thus, child adoption is fast becoming socially and culturally

acceptable (Eke et al, 2014). Many years back, child adoption was brutally resisted by Nigerian cultures, however, as economic and social conditions changed, child adoption began to be perceived as an acceptable way to place a child with a family. Though there is limited data on the growth pattern of adoption in Nigeria, current literatures have reported a high adoption rate of 13.9% in Lagos South west Nigeria (Omosun and kofworola, 2011); and in Enugu, South East, Nigeria was 5.5% ( P.N Aniebue and U.U Aniebue, 2008) . Similar study in Sokoto, South West Nigeria reported a prevalence rate of 1.2% ( Nwobodo and Isah, 2011).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion therefore, the knowledge of child adoption in Nigeria is good but does not translate into good practice as a lot of misconception and ignorance abound concerning child adoption process in our society. Only but few understand the concept of adoption, it's legality and process despite the popularity.

There appear to be a growing acceptability of child adoption but it is varied across the country. Child adoption is poorly accepted in the South East due to cultural believe that adopted child is illegitimate. There is low acceptability in the South West and high level of acceptability of adoption for fostering in the North due to cultural and religious reasons. The willingness to adopt a child is high among infertile and educated couples; and low among fertile and uneducated couples. Various sociocultural factors and misconceptions associated with adoption have impaired it's full acceptability and willingness in our society.

The level of stigma in adoption is high and the situation threatens the adopted child identity and makes him or her develop sense of grief. The adoptive families, in other hand, often face stigmatization from the community members. For this reason some Nigerians withdrew from the practice of child adoption.

Some challenges discussed in this study tends to be manifesting as Nigerians tilt towards the practice of child adoption. However, a lot need to be done to boost understanding about all that adoption entails so that more Nigerians could get involved in the practice.

The prospect of child adoption in Nigeria is good provided enough advocacy and sensitization of communities are carried out using the existing social structures specific to each community.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made to the government, adoption agencies, social welfare system and religious bodies.

1. Continued advocacy including community mobilization and further public enlightenment campaign should be strengthened in order to harmonize adoption process in our society.
2. Awareness creation should be done for the society about the benefits of child adoption to enhance willingness, acceptability and participation.
3. Seminars and workshops should be organized where the society will be taught not to worry about hereditary and how it will affect the child's future. There is no evidence that specific social abnormalities like alcohol, immorality, delinquency or irresponsibility are inherited.
4. Educating family and community members to shun any form of stigmatization and discrimination against adopted children and adoptive parents.
5. Special care should be given to children with special needs by training them in skill acquisition in order to pursue a career and earn livelihood. Loans can be given to them to establish business which they will pay back after a period of time.
6. All illegal adoption agencies should be closed down and perpetrators duly punished.
7. More research is needed to improve on the trend of prevalence of child adoption in the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria.
8. People should help the law enforcement agencies about any sinister activity that indicates that babies are trafficked by informing the police

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