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Prevalence of Baby Factory and Educational Access in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State

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Abstract

This paper examined the prevalence of baby factory and educational access in public secondary schools in Rivers State. Specifically, the paper aimed at determining the impacts of baby factory prevalence on educational access of students, identifying areas mostly used for baby factory in Rivers State, determining factors responsible for the prevalence of baby factory in Rivers State, and to ascertain the extent baby factory prevalence impacts on educational access of students in Rivers State. The study adopted qualitative and descriptive research approach where secondary data were used as the main sources of data collection. The secondary data were collected from published journals, articles, seminar papers, periodicals, as well as interviews and semi-structured questionnaire. The population of the study consisted of all 185,146 senior secondary schools Students in Rivers State. A sample of 400 students was used. This was derived using Taro Yamane population determination formula. A self-designed questionnaire instrument titled: "Prevalence of Baby Factory and Educational Access Questionnaire (PBEAQ)" was used to elicit information from the respondents. Test re-test method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument which reliability co-efficient of 0.84 at 0.05 level of significance. Data collected was analysed using mean and standard deviation with the criterion mean of 2.50 as accepted while below is rejected. The study revealed that maternity, clinics, water bottling companies, prayer houses etc., are areas mostly used for the perpetuation of baby factory. The study further revealed that poverty, lack of information on human trafficking, corruption, are among the factors responsible for the prevalence of baby factory and can impact on access to education .Based on the confirmation, the following recommendations were made among others; intensive advocacy against baby factory prevalence, promulgation of laws, enlightenment of the teenage girls on prevention of unwanted pregnancy among others.

Keywords: baby factory, educational access, prevalence, public secondary schools

Introduction

The universalisation of education is one of the central concerns of many nations and international organizations in terms of provision of education. This concern has led international bodies like United Nations to enshrine in its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the second goal target of Universal Primary Education. This goal specifically, is to ensure that children have access to full course of basic education.

In Nigeria, the quest to expand education to ensure accessibility and inclusivity in education led to the introduction of Universal Basic Education launched in 1999 which gained its legal backing in 2004. However, despite all efforts towards access to education, the prevalence of Baby Factory Syndrome has continued to threaten accessibility of education in Nigeria. For instance, on 27th February, 2020, the Rivers State PoliceCommand arrested five women at Rumuokwuta Junction in the Capital City of Port Harcourt for allegedly trading in babies using pregnant teenagers in their baby factory. Also, a couple was apprehended at a church in the Rumuolumini area of Port Harcourt on 4th July, 2020 for operating a baby factory where three pregnant teenagers were reportedly found. Similarly, on August 11, 2020 two teenagers were paraded by the State PoliceCommand for selling their babies for N900,000 the sum of N600,000 had already been paid before they were arrested with four syndicates.

In the same vein, on August 2020, a magistrate court in Port Harcourt sentenced 49 year old United State Based Nigerian woman to 10 years imprisonment for buying children produced by young girls who were of school age. In recent time, precisely, January 11, 2023 the Daily Trust reported that the police command in Rivers State Nigeria rescued 12 pregnant teenagers in a baby factory during a sting operation on two suspected baby factories. This phenomenon has continued unabated and many young girls denied access to education. According to UNESCO report (2006) the first case of baby factory in Nigeria occurred in 2006 and has continued to increase unabated over the years. This report further revealed that among the pregnant women who were at the baby factory premises were teenage girls of 16 years who by Nigerian standard should be in secondary school. Today, access to educations seems illusive as the problem of baby factory continue to increase astronomically, due to the new dimension it has assumed in the form of child trafficking and abuse. Studies have shown that this practice has continued to rise as a relative business in Nigeria despite its discovery and reports of the UNESCO in 2006. Also, despite the public knowledge of this phenomenon, it has continued to deny many young teenagers access to education, thereby contributing to 18.5 million out school children estimated in Nigeria (UNICEF,2022). This exponential increase of lack of access to education orchestrated by baby factory prevalence among other factors is a source of worry and concern, according in to Hence, the need for this study as to ascertain its impact on educational access of studentsin senior secondary schools with particular reference toRivers State.

The concept of baby-factory is relatively new to English lexicon. Several authorities have conceptualised the term differently according to their own perceptions. Reproductive Biomedicine online (2016), viewed baby factories as institution where young people give birth to children who are then placed for sale or illegal adoption market. It further stated that the term refers to any place where pregnant women and young teenage girls are kept voluntarily or forcefully impregnated and kept illegally until their babies are born and then sold for monetary gains.

IGI Global (2020) refers to the term "Baby-Factory" as being used interchangeable with baby farmers, or baby harvesting and that it refers to children that fall within the category from birth to the age of 12 months found in these factories or farms. It is all acts involved in the transfer, sale or receipt of baby/babies within national or across international

boundaries through stealing or false adoption, fraud or deception to be used for satisfying social, material and ritual purposes amongst other. It is important to note that these young women who are or may be of school age are usually held captive, access to education denied until their babies are delivered and illegally sold to illegal adoptive parents. Oluwatobi, (2018) opined that baby factory which is illegal breeding of babies for marketing purposes otherwise known as "Infant Commodification" is increasing in Nigeria and that this menace is a vice that threaten the lives and well-being of babies, young girls and women. These young girls are always kept long until after the period of gestation (pregnancy) and their babies sold while access to education becomes unrealistic. In over a decade, the emergence of this practice has continued to jeopardize and deny young girls their educational access as stipulates in UBE ACTS, 2004 section 2 (2) that states that every parents should ensure that his children or wards attend and complete his/her education. The ACT proceeded in section four to pose a fine or imprisonment against the contravention of section 2 (2) yet the monster of baby factory continued to wax stronger on daily basis thereby denying teenage girls their access to education. Many have continued to ask the cause of the emergence of this social problem bedeviling the society. Chiedvaet al, (2015) declared that the leading causes of baby factory in Nigeria include poverty, childlessness, lack of ethical behaviour on the part of medical Professional, and greed among others. They therefore opined that providing counselling, developing positive self-image in the youth and providing family counselling for childless couples by encouraging them to go for proper adoption at the social welfare and to seek advanced medicarewill help in curbing the prevalence of baby factory.

Heuntley in Onyinyechi (2017) agreed to the prevalence and stated that according to recent mass media reports, teenage girls and young women are brought by traffickers to the so-called "Baby Factory" with the false promise of jobs or safe abortion. This very practice has undoubtedly continued to deny children access to education, despite the fact that education is seen around the globe as a right, instrument to social change and a vehicle for national development. Onyinyechi (2017) observed that the trend of baby factories are usually disguised as maternal homes, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), hospitals, social welfare centre, clinics and even water bottling factory where Doctors, nurses and midwives pose as those rendering humanitarian help to these victims. Baby factories are seen as another form of child labour in modern time and have in no small measure denied young teenagers access to education.

In education, the concept of access to education has become a thing of necessity. The glossary of educational reform conceptualised educational access as the ways in which educational institutions and policies ensure or at least strive to ensure that students have equal and equitable opportunities to take full advantage of their education. Access to education is a global concern among educational policy makers; economist and social service. Studies have shown that female have had less access to education than their male counterpart (Erin & Gobte, 2015). This implies that less female attend school than male counterpart.

According to UNESCO reports on Global Education Monitoring, approximately 263 million children and youth are out of school globally equivalent to about one quarter of the population of Europe. This report further revealed that the total includes 61 million children of primary school age, 60 million of lower secondary school age, and the first ever estimated of those upper secondary school ages at 142 million. This implies that access to education has eluded many especially the female folks who by one reason such as baby factory syndrome have left school or drop-out. Social Survey Africa (2009) observed that out of the causes why students are out of school, teenage pregnancy emerged as the primary reason for girl learners not being in school in the seventeen to eighteen age groups. According to the survey, other factors may include; social and economic factors which may involve use of drugs in and

outside school, sexual abuse, in and outside school, poorly resourced schools and insufficient educators in school (teachers) which devalued the experience of education and poor prospect of finding employment after school in some communities. In all, pregnancy was mentioned as one of the biggest problems facing female youths in the participating or accessing education.

The prevalence of baby factory in no doubt has continued to threaten educational access in Nigeria, particularly in the Southernpart of the Nigerian Nation. This phenomenon which involves confining young girls of school age impregnated in specific area for a period of gestation (pregnancy) until they deliver of their babies which are meant for marketing purposes. This practice has continued unabated despite efforts or measure put in place to checkmate the menace. Social survey Africa (2009) has confirmed that pregnancy among teenagers is the most reason for females of school age not to participate or access education. This is due to the fact that the prolonged period of pregnancy, nursing the babies until they are strong for sale, orchestrated non-participation in school activities. International America Development Bank (ADB, 2011) found that majority of teenage mothers do not attend school despite having attended in the past. This goes to reveal that the baby factory prevalence is a disincentive to schooling and deny access. This is why many teenagers who had experienced pregnancy early in their educational pursuit easily quit schooling due to shame associated with giving birth to illegitimate babies and marriage out of wedlock. Baby Factory indeed, is a strong disincentive to education and immensely denies access in Nigeria. Some of the causes can be delineated as follows;

Poverty

Poverty is a state or condition in which a person lacks the financial resources and essentials for a certain standard of living. It is a situation where a group of people do not have enough money or the basic necessities needed to survive. No wonder Atioma (2021) stated that several factors which contribute to existence of baby factory in Nigeria are social stigma and poverty. Hamilton, (2020) opined that extreme poverty, lack of education and guidance and the perversion of cultural traditions and religious rituals are several potential causes that allow baby harvesting and women's abduction to increase. National Bureau of statistics in its press release on November 2022, stressed that 133 million Nigerians are multidimensional poor. According to the report; two-third (67.5%) of children 6-17yrs are also multidimensional poor. Young girls from large family size, who may have experienced poverty absolutely, may resort to indulging in this unwholesome activity of baby-factory to produce babies and get paid when the baby is sold by their patrons. The multidimensional level of poverty has occasioned multi-faceted problems, of which the proliferation of baby factory is one. A teenage girl of school age that lack required materials for learning at school, food for quenching hunger while in school may not have the moral prowess to resist the temptation of being turned into a baby factory.

Lack of Information on Human Trafficking

Many of the teenage girls lack adequate information on the activities of human traffickers who may subtly disguise as "Good Samaritan". Most times, the traffickers will promise of taking them abroad for greener pasture and assured them of quality and better education which they will claim to provide if they (females) decide to follow them. In a bid to enjoy all the unconfirmed assurances, by these unscrupulous human beings, the innocent girls will fall prey to the traffickers.

High Unemployment Rate

According to National Bureau of statistics (NBS) in 2022, the unemployment rate in Nigeria is estimated to reach 33%. This figure was projected at 32.5 in the preceding year. Chronological data show that the unemployment rate in Nigeria rose constantly in the past years. The astronomical rise in the unemployment in Nigeria has given birth to varied problems; baby-factory proliferation inclusive. Many of the baby-factory syndicates or patrons usually cite the issue of no job when caught. Many go into this illicit trade due to their claim of no employment or job, hence, their involvement. Though many have critiqued this claim as they argued that, there are other legitimate trades one can engaged for sustenance. However, unemployment remained a contributory factor to the prevalence of baby factory menace.

Social Stigmatization

The stigma associated with women who are childless/barren in Africa and Nigeria specifically is a factor that has led many women to patronise the patrons of those baby-factories. A woman without a child is seen as being responsible for her childlessness. This position has occasioned the proliferation of baby-factory as the childless women are usually the potential customers for these babies. Olusesana (2017) asserted that infertile women are noted to be major patrons of these baby factories due to the stigmatization of childless couples in southern Nigeria and issues around cultural acceptability of surrogacy and adoption. This very practice has undoubtedly continued to deny teenage girls used in this illicit act access to education.

Poor Socialization

Poor socialization of the teenagers (male & female) can be linked to the causal factor of the baby factory prevalence. Socialization which is the process of learning to behave in a way that is acceptable to the society is a sine qua non in every human race.

In Africa culture, value for life is usually held in high premium and the younger generations are groomed to attuned to the moral chastity of their culture and strict adherence to moral stipulations of the families were communally enforced through collaborative effort of other members of the community. Most of the teenagers due to poor socialization have taken wrong path such as involving in the unwholesome practices of baby factory in a bid to make quick money thereby throwing the norms, values, principles and cultures to the thin air. This massive erosion of cultural values that was once cherished and held in high esteem by the Nigerian people has contributed immensely to degeneration of Nigeria cultural value.

Globalization

This is another pertinent factor that as well contributes to a large extent to the prevalence of baby factory. Globalization can be conceptualized as the transfer, adoption and development of values, knowledge, technology and behavioural norms across countries and societies in different parts of the world. Chinnammai (2005) examining globalization in his work entitled "Globalisation and education, challenges and opportunities" stated that the negative effect of globalization include exploitation of local resource and destroying indigenous cultures of less advanced countries to benefit a few advanced countries inter alia. The negative impact of globalization has taken a tow on African culture of whichbaby factory is one of the outcome. Most of these babies produced in the baby factories are sold to syndicates or patrons who are international child traffickers.

Corruption

This is another factor that promotes the proliferation of baby factory in Nigeria. Eniola & Omoleye (2018) observed that, there have been several reports in the median on raids on baby making factories, most of these cases are not diligently prosecuted. They further asserted that concerted efforts are lacking to deal with the operators of these factories and dismantle them. It is alleged that some unscrupulous security agents and state officials are working in cahoots with the baby sellers in return for rewards (Eniola & Omoleye, 2018). This practice has continued to contribute to the increase of baby factory. Dike (2023) lamenting on the increase opined that Nigeria has a baby factory crisis and that this illicit operation calls for more attention to tackle this grave issue.

Theoretical Framework

The theory which underpinned this study is the sociological theory referred to as Structural Functionalism. The main proponents of this theory are August Comte (1798-1857), Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), Emile Durkheim (1852-1919) amongst others. The theory posits that the society is like a human body with a number of inter-related parts which performs essential functions for the survival of the society and that when each part fails in its roles or function, there will be collapse of the entire system. The society parts that perform various roles for the stability of the society are; education, family, economic, religion, polity (Government) among others. When there is failure in each of these institutions with regards to role-performance, the society will experience abnormality and collapse in the system. Hence, baby factory prevalence results due to the inability of the society to function properly. According to the functionalist perspective, baby factory prevalence emanates due to the inability of the family, education Religion, economic and the political institutions to perform their roles or function adequately.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- (i) What are the areas mostly used for baby factory in Rivers State?
- (ii) What are factors responsible for the prevalence of baby factory practices in Rivers State?
- (iii) To what extent does baby factory prevalence impacts on educational access of students in Rivers State?

Methodology

The study adopted qualitative and descriptive research approach where secondary data were used as the main sources of data collection. The secondary data were collected from published journals, articles, semi-structured questionnaire, seminar paper, interview, documents and periodicals. The data collected from secondary sources were used to confirm and support the findings. The analysis of the data collected was done through mean and standard deviation using the following as a range for decision; 1.00-1.49 (very low extent), 1.50-2.49 (low extent), 2.50-3.49 (High extent), 3.5-4.00 (very high extent) The decision level was 2.50, hence, using modified 4-point like scale ,any item that has 2.50 above was accepted, while below is rejected.

DATA ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION

Research question 1: What are the areas mostly used for baby factory prevalence as it relates to educational access of students in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean responses on the areas mostly used for baby factory in Rivers State.

S/N	ITEM	MEAN	STD	REMARK
1	Social welfare	3.83	0.43	Very High Extent
2	Water bottling company	3.87	0.39	Very High Extent
3	Maternity	3.81	0.49	Very High Extent
4	Church/Prayer house	3.73	0.71	Very High Extent
5	Hospital	3.39	0.78	Very High Extent
	Grand mean	3.72	0.58	Very High Extent

N=400 criterion = 2.50

The data in table I showed that respondents indicated that social welfare, water bolting companies, maternity, church/prayerhouses and hospitals to a Very High Extent are the areas baby factory practices are usually carried out and hinder access to education.

Research question 2: What are the factors responsible for the prevalence of baby factory in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean responses on the factors responsible baby factory prevalence in Rivers State

S/N	ITEM	MEAN	STD	REMARK
1	Poverty	3.68	0.73	Very High Extent
2	Lack of information on human traffic	3.66	0.70	Very High Extent
3	High unemployment	3.86	0.47	Very High Extent
4	Social stigmatization	3.70	0.70	Very High Extent
5	Corruption	3.61	0.77	Very High Extent
	Grand mean	3.70	0.68	Very High Extent

N=400, criterion mean = 2.50

The data in the table showed that respondents, indicated that poverty, lack of information on human trafficking, high unemployment and social stigmatization to a very high extent contribute to prevalence of baby factory in Rivers State.

Research question 3: To what extent does baby factory prevalence impact on educational access of students in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean responses on the impact of baby factory prevalence in Rivers State

S/N	ITEM	MEAN	STD	REMARK
1	It interferes with ones education	3.90	0.33	Very High Extent
2	Hinderaccess to compulsory the education	3.67	0.55	Very High Extent
3	Denial of right to education	3.81	0.42	Very High Extent
4	Leads to late completion	3.75	0.54	Very High Extent
5	Causes trauma/abuse which affect school attendance	3.80	0.51	Very High Extent
	Grand mean	3.78	0.47	Very High Extent

N=400 criterion mean=2.50

The data in table 3 showed that the respondents indicated that baby factory prevalence interferes with oneseduction, hinder access to free and compulsory education, denied right to education and causes traumatic condition and abuse. All the items to a very high extent have a significant negative impact on educational access of students.

Discussion

Area Mostly Used For Baby Factory Practices

The data in table 1 showed that social welfare, water bottling companies, maternity, churches/prayer houses and hospital are area mostly used for practices of baby factory. This is also in agreement with the view of Onyinyechi (2017) that the areas disguised as maternal home, Non-governmental organization, hospital, welfare centres, clinics and even water bottling factory where they pose as those rendering humanitarian help to these victims are area responsible for baby factory prevalence.

Factors Responsible For Baby Factory Prevalence

The data in table 2, also revealed that poverty, lack of information on human trafficking, high unemployment rate, social stigmatization, corruption among others are the causes or factors responsible for the prevalence of baby factory. This is also in consonance, with the report of National Bureau of Statistics in its press release on November, 2022 that 133 million Nigerians are multidimensional poor. The multidimensional level can lead to young teenage girls into the act(baby factory) in a bid to get daily life sustenance. Also, lack of information about human trafficking, unemployment among others can also contribute to proliferation of baby factory.

Impact of Baby Factory Prevalence on Educational Access

The data in table 3 showed that baby-factory interferes with ones education, hinder access to education, denied the right to education, leads to late completion of compulsory education and causes traumatic conditionand abuses which affect school attendance. This revealed that, young teenagers especially females suffer a great deal as a result of the impact of baby factory as it interferes with their schooling and access to education. This is also, in agreement with Social Survey Africa (2009) that confirmed that pregnancy among teenagers is the most reason for females of school going age not to participate or access education. In the same vein, the traumatic impact of baby factory as revealed by the study agreed with the view of Oluwatobi (2018) who opined that baby factory which is illegal breeding of babies for marketing purpose threaten the lives and wellbeing of young girls and women who are kept after a period of gestation (pregnancy) and their babies sold.

Conclusion

The prevalence of baby factory toa great extent impacts on educational accessof students especially the female folks. This has indeed put the student in a state of confusion and denial of educational rights. Education is said to be a right and should be granted to all in order to create an opportunities or access to individuals to develop their potentials. Denying an individual this opportunity through any form of inhuman experience or treatment such as baby factory syndrome should be condemned intotoasit hindered them from realizing their potentials, hence, the right of individual to educational access should be protected and granted by all in the society in order to maintain stability in the society and promote adequate maximization of potentials of individuals, especially the female folks.

Recommendations

The study therefore recommends that;

- 1. There should be intensive advocacy on the negative impact of the baby-factory menace by the government agencies such as National Orientation Agency amongst others.
- 2. There should be enactment of legislations (laws) banning baby-factories and infant trafficking in the country by the legislative aim of government both at the state and federal levels.
- 3. There should be adequate enforcement of harsh consequences on baby factory patrons by the government through military and paramilitary officials such as the policy, civil defense amongst others.
- 4. Adequate programmes to educate young girls on preventing unwanted pregnancies are necessary by the educationalinstitutions through collaboration with ministry of health
- 5. There should be as well creation of job opportunities by the government to cushion the effect of poverty and unemployment through establishment of cottage industries and skill acquisition centers.
- 6. Similarly, adequate sensitization of teenagers/students in public secondary schools should be greatly carried out, as well as establishment of task force to monitor the activities of baby factories syndicates by the ministry of education through paramilitary agency

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