

Family Values and the Emergence of Baby Factory in Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract

UNESCO, the United Nations agency for education, science, and culture, has recognized Nigeria as a leading African country grappling with a notable problem of human trafficking. Despite notable progress in the fight against human trafficking within Nigeria, a new and troubling trend has emerged, referred to as "baby factories." This phenomenon involves the exploitation of individuals through tactics such as deception, undue influence, kidnapping, and abduction, by illegal imprisonment of pregnant teenage girls or getting them pregnant for the sole purpose of giving birth of babies for sale or other purposes. This research paper delves into the examination of family values and their correlation with the emergence of baby factories in the South Western region of Nigeria, utilizing the approach advocated by Robert K. Merton's anomie theory as a theoretical framework, this paper posits that the emergence of "baby factories" in South Western Nigeria can be attributed to the socio-cultural pressure placed on married couples to have children and the perceived stigma attached to childlessness. The paper recommends among other things the enactment of appropriate legislation, re-examine programs addressing poverty and illiteracy in Nigeria, enlightenment campaigns to ease stigmatization associated with childlessness, controlling the cost of in vitro fertilization (IVF) by establishing more centers and providing for IVF-coverage in health insurance plans.

Keywords: Baby, factory, human, trafficking, teenager, pregnancy

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INTRODUCTION

Family, as a social group and as an institution, plays important roles both social life and society. One of such roles is procreation, i.e., reproducing the human species. Apart from the fact that procreation helps in the production of young members in the family and for the society, it brings joy to the family. Motherhood holds a significant and esteemed position within the indigenous family structure in Nigeria. Throughout Africa, the norm dictates that every family is expected to engage in childbirth, and a child is widely regarded as a cherished treasure, ardently yearned for. [1]. Children, according to [2] are seen as the gifts of God. Children, often described as the Lord's unique blessings, are likened to "quivers in the hands of parents" (Psalm 127:3-5). They are primarily seen as a source of joy for parents and are especially celebrated as the embodiment of the joy of motherhood. Children are not only deeply

admired and adored but are also revered, being viewed as the most precious of possessions, valuable not only in their physical form but also in their spiritual essence. Indeed, having children is considered of utmost significance for both men and women, as they symbolize wealth and play a crucial role in ensuring the continuity of family lineage. [3].

As a result, the arrival of a new baby has historically been and continues to be not just a family affair but also a cause for celebration within the entire community [4].

The naming of a child in Nigeria is often accompanied by exuberant celebrations, elaborate ceremonies, and significant expenditures. This extravagant display of joy and gratitude serves as a clear indication of the deep admiration and high value that Nigerians attach to children. It underscores the premium

placed on the arrival of a new member of the family. [5].

The Yoruba cultural practice over-emphasizes the place of motherhood and biological children within the family. It places optimal value on children. The Igbo, as well as the Yoruba, regard child bearing as the main reason for marriage [6]. The high value Nigerians place on children is reflected in the names given to these children. In Nigeria, as appropriately emphasized [7], indigenous names hold a significance beyond mere labels for identification. These names personify the individual, narrate stories about the parents, and frequently reflect the heritage and history of the extended family of the parents. And, in a more general sense, the names point to the society into which the child is born. Some of the Yoruba's personal names that highlight the importance of children include: "Omolafe"—it is children we want/desire; "Omoyajowo"—a child is greater than money/riches; "Omolade"—a child is a crown; "Omolola"—child is wealth; "Omolabake"—it is children we need to adore; "Omotebi"—children are the same as a lineage; "Omotaso"—children are more than clothing; "Omotobi"—children are, indeed, great; "Omolehin"—children are a legacy, or "Omotayo"—children are joy, etc.

In Yorubaland, where children are highly esteemed, there exist childless couples in various Yoruba communities. Undoubtedly, many of these childless couples would have explored medical, spiritual, and traditional remedies in their quest for a solution to their predicament, often without success. Childlessness within a marriage context can result in marital conflicts and, on many occasions, even lead to divorce. [8]. At first glance, child adoption seems like a practical and workable solution to the issue of infertility in Yoruba society. Nevertheless, certain studies have indicated that in Yorubaland and Nigeria, a significant proportion of infertile women are reluctant to consider adoption as a viable option. [9, 10]. As mentioned in reference [10], a child adopted into a Yoruba community may sometimes experience challenges in being fully integrated, as they may be treated as outsiders. This can lead to difficulties in freely interacting with others

due to the fear of potential intimidation or rejection. Moreover, childless couples, particularly the wives, often face routine ridicule and stigmatization from their husbands' extended family members and the immediate community. As a result, desperate childless couples may resort to any means, whether legal or illegal, in their quest to have biological children of their own.

According to Onuoha [11], it was also noted that in numerous cultures, the act of having children is regarded as a fundamental aspect of life, to the extent that being unable to have children is often viewed as a significant personal misfortune or a profound curse.

In "developing" countries, as highlighted by Ezegwu [8], where childbearing holds significant cultural value, infertile couples encounter a range of challenges. These challenges can span from overt acts of ostracism or even divorce to more subtle forms of social stigma, which ultimately result in their isolation and mental distress. The agonizing situation that childless couples in the society are made to face is quite compelling.

As a result, some of these couples often opt for alternative and unofficial methods to have children with a biological connection instead of going through the formal and legal child-adoption process.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The term "baby-factory" is often used interchangeably with "baby farms" or "baby harvesting." As described by Onuoha [11], baby-factories encompass a range of activities involving the trafficking, sale, or transfer of babies within a country or across international borders. These activities may include stealing, fraudulent adoption, deception, and are employed to satisfy various needs, such as social, material, and ritual purposes, among others. The current and widespread production of babies for purely commercial purposes under various disguises has become a detrimental issue in Nigerian society. This troubling practice, which involves the presence of facilities where babies are purchased and traded, represents a substantial

deterioration of the societal values. Many studies have been conducted on the emergence of baby-factories' syndrome in Nigeria; but, little attention has been paid to family-values and the attendant socio-cultural pressure associated with childlessness. Further investigation delves into the intricacies of child adoption and the rise of baby factories in the southeastern region of Nigeria [12]. Recent literature, for instance, [13, 14, 15] have investigated the emergence of baby-factories as a new trend in baby-dumping, human trafficking, and human rights' violation. Surprisingly, little focus is directed to family values, e.g., procreation, and the perceived stigma associated with childlessness as socio-cultural factors that compel many families and individuals to patronize baby-factories. This study is an attempt to fill this gap. regarding the birth of a child within the context of the traditional family-institution in Nigeria.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the nature and extent of baby-factories in Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between the main family-value of procreation and the emergence of baby-factories in Nigeria?
3. What are the fundamental societal factors responsible for the widespread emergence of the baby-factory phenomenon in the nation?
4. What potential remedies exist for addressing the issue of baby factories in Nigeria?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective is to examine both the family values and the emergence of the baby-factory syndrome in south-western Nigeria. Specifically, this study examines:

1. The rising incidence of baby factories in Nigeria, particularly the southwest.
2. The cultural significance of motherhood within the traditional family structure in Nigeria.
3. The high cultural value placed on biological children within the family system.
4. The stigmatization and ridicule associated with childless couples and, most especially, the wives.
5. Both government bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are

actively engaged in offering assistance to couples grappling with infertility or the inability to have children.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

A study of this nature is timely and necessary as the socio-cultural factors encouraging the emergence of baby-factories have received little attention. Therefore, the study can help to generate insight and data on the factors encouraging the now rampant incidence of baby-factories in south-western Nigeria. Beyond this, there is an obvious need to explore the social cultural factors, such as procreation and motherhood, to generate knowledge on the prevalence and experiences of childless couples. This shall help the Government, policy-makers, agencies, and institutions to review their existing programs and policies or implement new plans and policies especially for childless couples and public-enlightenment campaigns aimed at reducing the stigmatization associated with childlessness. With little focus on family values, particularly procreation, findings from a study like this could serve as part of baseline data for further studies as well as contribute to the existing body of knowledge by bridging the gaps created by past studies on factors contributing to the emergence of baby-factories in Nigeria.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study is limited in its extent to the South-west Geo-Political zone of Nigeria. The south-west zone comprises of six states in the current Nigeria's Federation; viz, Ekiti, Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, Osun, and Oyo. The region is home to the Yoruba population, who make up the second-largest ethnic group in Nigeria. The Yoruba have been variously described as culturally inclined, democratic, industrious, and accommodating. The culturally inclined orientation of the average Yoruba naturally make them to cherish motherhood and prefer having their own biological children to adopting a child.

The Concept of Baby-Factory in Nigeria

Lately, there has been a development in Nigeria where unmarried pregnant teenagers are gathered and kept in a specific place until they deliver their babies. After giving birth, the teenage mothers receive small amounts of

payment and are discharged, while their infants are taken from them and sold at significantly high prices by the individuals who have engaged them, typically referred to as proprietors or proprietresses. The phenomenon is now referred to as “baby-factory” business [16].

The term “baby-factory,” also referred to as “baby harvesting,” has been recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). UNESCO's initial documented case of a baby-factory in Nigeria was found in their 2006 policy document titled “Human Trafficking in Nigeria: Root Causes and Recommendations.” Subsequently, the media has reported on additional cases of “baby-factories” in Nigeria, shedding light on this phenomenon and providing information about the fundamental aspects of human trafficking [17]. The baby-factory syndrome has evolved into a more perilous and intricate form, often encompassing human trafficking and other illicit activities. This problem is notably widespread in three Nigerian states: Abia, Ebonyi, and Lagos. The identified cases exhibit similar characteristics and patterns. Pregnant teenagers or adult women facing unwanted pregnancies seek assistance from doctors, clinics, nurses, or orphanages, which offer support during their pregnancies. Following the births, the babies are sold to couples, and the biological mothers of the infants are compensated monetarily in exchange for relinquishing their newborns.

The business of baby-factory is not peculiar to Africa alone. Within the past decade, a number of baby-factories have been identified in: Bulgaria, Spain and China. In March 2014, Chinese authorities took action against baby-selling networks, leading to the rescue of 382 babies and the arrest of over a thousand suspects [11].

According to Masako [18], baby-factory entails three specific features which distinguish it from conventional infant-trafficking in the past. They are: the purpose of trafficking; how babies are trafficked, and the players involved in the trafficking. The objective of trafficking is to market infants to

couples without children who intend to adopt them. Pregnant girls were reportedly kept in orphanages or hospitals until they gave birth, at which point they would be compensated by the doctor or trafficker who retained the babies for sale. The pregnant girls took on different forms: First, there were desperate teenagers with unplanned pregnancies, fearing societal isolation, who were lured to a clinic and coerced into relinquishing their babies after giving birth. Second, young women, driven by poverty, offered to lease out their wombs and voluntarily acted as surrogate mothers or rented their wombs for the purpose of producing babies for sale. There are at least two factors that rendered these victims vulnerable: their age, as most victims were teenagers, and their status as pregnant individuals out of wedlock, which carries a significant social stigma among the majority of Nigeria's ethnic groups.

The baby-factory business primarily involves a set of key actors, which include the ‘factory’ owners. These owners are responsible for providing the physical location and logistical support, which covers the care and maintenance of the pregnant girls throughout the duration of the transaction. The second set of actors is the girls who serve as ‘breeders’ or ‘hatchers’ of the babies who are then sold on delivery. The third actors are the buyers who help to sustain the business through their patronage. In some of the factories, there could be a fourth actor as in a case of the “Ahamefule Motherless Babies Home,” Umuaka-Orlu [19].

The fourth actor in this baby-factory scheme is typically a man who is tasked with a role described as a “sex-machine.” His responsibility is to engage in sexual activities with the pregnant girls, often referred to as ‘hatchers,’ on a regular basis until they give birth to the babies. These babies, unfortunately, they are unable to care for, cherish, nurture, possess, or treasure. A paradox connected to the baby-factory issue is that some of the places used as dwellings for this unlawful and unethical activity hold official registrations as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The properties use the

emblem of recognition by Government as a camouflage for their abominable activities. Operating under the guise of a non-governmental organization (NGO) or a faith-based organization (FBO), the proprietor or proprietress establishes a seemingly legitimate platform, which is strategically designed to facilitate and further the illicit baby-factory business [20].

Kupoluyi [21] highlighted that the babies produced by baby-factories are sold by individuals known as baby-barons for varying amounts, typically starting from five hundred thousand Naira (N500,000) or more. The price can be influenced by factors such as the gender and, occasionally, the complexion of the baby, with male babies often commanding higher prices. According to Kupoluyi, the patrons of baby-factories can include those who genuinely desire babies for legitimate reasons, as well as mischievous individuals who may seek babies for ritualistic purposes, including the acquisition of human body parts.

Discovery of Baby-Factories in the South-West of Nigeria

The sale of new-born babies has been a recent criminal activity in Nigeria, especially with the discovery of baby-factories in the South western part of the country. Individuals engaged in this reprehensible trade have continued to profit from this criminal activity, often masquerading as legitimate businesses or charitable organizations and using various forms of disguise. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) has connected the rise of baby-making 'factories' to a decrease in the traditional child adoption procedures.

The head, Media and Communications of NAPTIP [22] stated that stigmatization by the society encouraged the increasing rise of baby-factories in the country.

The existence of baby factories in the southwestern region of Nigeria has been linked to several factors, which include:

1. The high value placed on having children to guarantee the inheritance and perpetuation of one's family lineage.
2. The social prejudice against infertility and the inability to have children.

The societal disapproval of adolescent pregnancy and single parenthood, as indicated in reference [23].

The 'Root' Causes of Baby-Factory Phenomenon in Nigeria

The rise of baby-factory networks in Nigeria can be ascribed to various factors affecting both individual and societal levels. One of the principal underlying reasons for this phenomenon is the cultural tradition in Nigeria that places a disproportionate emphasis on the role of biological children within the family structure, as cited in reference [24]. In Nigeria, one of the most distressing challenges that married couples commonly face is the issue of infertility or not having children. Childless couples, particularly the wives, frequently encounter mockery and social stigma from their husbands' extended family members and the local communities. As a result, couples experiencing the despair of childlessness frequently turn to whatever methods, whether lawful or illicit, in their pursuit of having their biological children. Baby-factories have emerged as a recent and significant choice for some of these couples, involving the acquisition of infants from baby-factory networks. According to a World Health Organization report [11], approximately 12 million couples in Nigeria experience infertility [25, 10]. It is also noted that in many cultures, the act of having children is seen as a fundamental aspect of life, and being unable to do so is often regarded as a personal tragedy or a curse.

As per Ezegwu [8], in developing nations where the act of having children is greatly cherished, couples experiencing infertility encounter a range of issues, including clear-cut rejection or separation, as well as more discreet types of societal stigma that result in seclusion and emotional suffering. The challenging predicament confronting childless couples in society often drives some of them to opt for alternative, unofficial methods to have their biological children rather than going through the established legal child adoption process.

Another important factor promoting the

phenomenon is the very high incidence of rape and rampant pre-marital sex among the youths in Nigeria. Recently, Nigerian society has witnessed a notable surge in rape and pre-marital sexual activity, resulting in an elevated number of unintended pregnancies across the nation. The prevalence of rape has reached concerning levels, with incidents affecting toddlers, teenage girls, and elderly women on a daily basis, involving rape, incest, and other forms of sexual abuse [26]. Likewise, the increasing prevalence of pre-marital sex in the country is also a significant contributing factor to the occurrence of baby factories. In a recent publication, Simon [27] found that in order to avoid the labeling and ostracism that usually accompany out-of-wedlock pregnancies, some pregnant teenagers and young ladies do sometimes voluntarily offer their infants to individuals running baby factories, who frequently present themselves as "divinely appointed helpers" aiming to aid them in their challenging circumstances.; Rattakrishnan [28] have equally observed that discrimination and social stigma are among the major factors responsible for the occurrence of baby-factories in Nigeria.

In a study aimed at uncovering the fundamental economic factors behind the baby-factory phenomenon in Nigeria, Alfred [29] identified poverty as the primary motivating force for young women who opt to sell their babies. The majority of these women come from impoverished backgrounds and often hail from remote communities, seeking a better life in cities and towns. Adewale [30] emphasized that those participating in this illicit child adoption arrangement are primarily driven by greed, while the parents who give their children to these syndicates are typically motivated by either poverty or lack of awareness. Additionally, the exorbitant prices at which babies are sold serve as the main incentive for baby-factory networks to engage in baby trafficking, while the prevalent poverty and ignorance in Nigeria act as predisposing factors prompting some individuals to sell their children as a means to improve their living standards. Recently, the National Bureau of Statistics [31] reported on

Nigeria's poverty-index that about 61.2% of Nigerians were living on less than US\$1 a day at the end of 2013. These statistics indicate that most Nigerians experience poverty, making it difficult for them to secure fundamental essentials like food, housing, and clothing [32].

Onibokun [33] pointed out that urbanization is another potent factor fuelling the phenomenon of baby-factories in Nigeria. Presently, it is evident that the robust social cohesion and communal living structures deeply ingrained in traditional Nigerian society are rapidly diminishing as a result of urbanization. The quasi-anonymous feature of most of Nigeria's urban centers breeds fertile environments where different deviant practices, including baby-factory syndicate, could thrive. In contrast to the customs of the traditional Nigerian society, it has become challenging for individuals in modern Nigeria to have a comprehensive understanding of the occurrences in their immediate surroundings or to genuinely care about their neighbors' affairs. This is particularly noticeable in many of the major urban areas in the country. Consequently, it becomes plausible for certain childless couples to acquire babies and present them as their biological offspring. Furthermore, the ability of certain baby factories to operate discreetly in specific locales for extended periods without the awareness of the local residents can also be attributed to urbanization.

Similarly, the inadequately developed child adoption laws in Nigeria are also a strong 'driver' in the issue of baby-factories. At present, not only is there a lack of a standardized legal framework for adoption [10], but there is also the absence of a national agency explicitly tasked with overseeing the child adoption process in Nigeria. As a result of this gaping lapse, many fraudulent individuals are capitalizing on it to operate illicit child-adoption centers. In a similar manner, Okorundu [34] has expressed concern that there are no officially recognized adoption agencies tasked with the role of overseeing child adoption in Nigeria. As a result, couples

in dire need of children, or a child, frequently choose to circumvent the bureaucratic hurdles associated with the formal system by exploring the informal or illicit alternative provided by baby-factory networks.

Family Values and the Emergence of Baby Factory in South-Western, Nigeria

It's essential to investigate whether there exists a connection or relationship between family values and the proliferation of baby factories in southwestern Nigeria. An examination of the factors identified by multiple scholars as contributing to the growth of baby factories in Nigeria reveals a correlation between family values and the emergence of such facilities. Research has indicated that the various types of stigma and other socio-cultural elements that lead to discrimination, ultimately causing childless couples to suffer from a loss of self-esteem and social acceptance, have exacerbated the increasing prevalence of baby factories [28].

Social biases contributing to the continuation of baby factories in Nigeria encompass those linked to adolescent pregnancies, pregnancies that occur outside of marriage, couples' inability to conceive, and the formal adoption process [17]. The first two factors contribute to a significant supply of women, especially teenage girls, and their infants to baby factories. The latter two factors stimulate the demand for these infants, as adoptive parents often seek their biological offspring to avoid societal disapproval and stigma.

Probable Recommendations

Based on the probable findings, the study may likely make the following recommendations:

1. Nigerian Government should replace weak policies on child abuse by creating a strict and clear-cut rules and severe punishments for defaulters like it is in developed countries. The heinous crime of buying and selling of human babies should be clearly put in categories ranging from murder to attempted murder, culpable homicide, exposing a child to injury, selling of an infant, and complicity thereof to concealment of birth; and, thus, punished accordingly. This can serve as a

deterrent to others aspiring to engage in the buying and selling of newborn babies and other forms of child abuse.

2. The government should conduct a thorough review of its initiatives aimed at tackling poverty and illiteracy in Nigeria, with the goal of identifying the primary obstacles in combating these significant contributors to the proliferation of baby factories, and then modify these programs accordingly.
3. Government should access to infertility-care, control the cost of In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) by establishing more centers and providing for IVF-coverage in health insurance plans. This may help women who cannot pay the exorbitant sums, currently charged, by the very few centers available in the country.
4. Government should develop enlightenment and re-orientation programs aimed at breaking social stigmas and taboos associated with childlessness so that infertile women are not stigmatized and ostracized from the society.
5. All applicable regulations concerning child trafficking must be rigorously implemented, and those responsible should be subjected to the full extent of legal consequences. To accomplish this, all law enforcement agencies should collaborate closely with NAPTIP to ensure effective intelligence gathering in safeguarding the community.
6. Government should ensure that Maternities and Orphanage Homes are closely monitored to the point of delivery of babies and discharge of babies and mothers from Maternities Homes.
7. It is essential to provide ongoing counseling for young girls, enlightening them about the consequences of teenage pregnancies and the disgrace linked to the sale of infants.
8. The government should take steps to ease and make child adoption laws more adaptable and accommodating, allowing genuinely interested couples to adopt children with less bureaucracy and financial burden.

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