

The Implication of Culture on Child Adoption among Christian Couples with Infertility Challenges in Warri Diocese of Anglican Communion, Delta State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Child adoption as an act of leaving one's natural family and entering into the privileges and responsibilities of another has a unique historical background. Child adoption, which could be a socially-responsive gesture or a solution for infertility, though having been weighed down by culture, is gradually becoming culturally acceptable in Nigeria. This study adopts the descriptive survey design to examine the implication of culture on child adoption among Christian couples with infertility challenges in Warri Diocese of Anglican Communion, Delta State, Nigeria. The population of the study comprises all Christian couples in Warri Diocese of Anglican Communion, Delta State, Nigeria. Three hundred couples are selected randomly from the population. Questionnaire and group discussion are the major means through which data are sourced. Data are analysed using frequency table and simple percentage. Findings reveal among others that though child adoption has been weighed down by culture, it is gradually becoming culturally acceptable in Nigeria; hence, it should not be practiced by couples with infertility problem alone. It is hereby recommended that Christian couples in Warri Diocese of Anglican Communion in particular and those in other denominations in general should happily embrace child adoption as an alternative to infertility and a means of fulfilling one of the purposes of humanity as a social entity.

Keywords: Culture, child adoption, infertility, couples

INTRODUCTION

Child bearing is the ultimate goal of every African marriage (Farawu, 2011) considering also that most cultures within the African context

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are likely to be uncomfortable with a woman who fails to conceive within the first few years of marriage. Culture, attitudes and laws regarding child adoption vary greatly from one community to another. Whereas all cultures make arrangements whereby children whose own parents are unavailable to rear them be brought up by others, not all cultures have the concept of adoption, that is, treating unrelated children as equivalent to biological children of the adoptive parents. Adopted children are sons and daughters both to parents they do not know who are genetically connected to them and to adoptive parents, with whom they share no genes (Erichsen, 2003). She also asserts that when a family accepts the differences that adoption brings to it, they can comfortably accept that their children do have two sets of parents without being threatened; they can answer their children's questions without fear; they feel no need to be secretive about the fact of the adoption; they deliberately make opportunities for their children to talk about their worries or fears or sadness about their losses (perhaps of a genetic connection, or of racial sameness, or knowledge about a culture or language, etc).

So, it is not out of place to say that adoption is part of the culture of the people and races. In one way or another, adoption is practiced. Though there are several types of adoption, but the main idea is the fact that when another person or group of persons other than the biological parents of someone assumes full responsibility of another person, there is an element of adoption embedded in such relationship. This notwithstanding, most often, people erroneously think or believe that child adoption is the reserve or applicable to barren couples only whereas, it is applicable to all categories of couples. It concerns both married couples with children and those without children; even unmarried people sometimes practice adoption. The problem we face in this part of the world as it regards adoption is that culture throws a very heavy weight on it. This makes adoption to be viewed as awful practice such that those engaging in it need not make it open. Those who practice it feel ashamed if other people get to know that they adopted. Among the several factors militating against child adoption as a viable strategy for the management of infertility among Christian couples are ignorance and the cultural value system of the people.

Christian couples with the challenge of infertility are therefore left to suffer from the agony of childbearing failure and this is evident in emotional disturbances, depressive illness and marital disharmony. However, many cultures are practicing adoption though with some variations.

In the context of the African culture, giving birth to many children is seen as a great achievement. This condition communicates a very bad signal on women or mothers' health. In this situation, child adoption is a very viable means of having children or people to live with at home. This buttresses the fact that child adoption is not applicable to couples having infertility problem alone. Child adoption can play a major part in family planning practice. From the foregoing, it is evident that there is need for an alternative means of raising a family without necessarily jeopardizing a woman's life. In many African cultures, children are often given to adoptive families. By giving their children to another family, the birth family seeks to create enduring ties with the adoptive family. While all societies make provision for the rearing of children whose own parents are unavailable, not all cultures have the same system or understanding of adoption. Hence, this study is designed to look into the implication of culture on child adoption among Christian couples with infertility challenges in Warri Diocese of Anglican Communion, Delta State, Nigeria.

Effects of Child Adoption

There are huge costs in adopting children; some are financial, while others are emotional. The effects are hardly noticeable with some, but this is not the same with others. All adoptees have effects from their adoption experience. The degree of the effects and symptomatic behaviours vary a great deal. One of the chief effects of child adoption borders on the adjustment of the couples on the arrival of the child. Adoptive parents may worry that they don't "feel" like parents, even after the adoption is complete. They wonder whether they are really entitled to parent their new son or daughter. Or, after years of keeping their parenting desires in check, either as foster parents or because of an uncertain legal outcome, they are reluctant to fully embrace

parenthood or to believe they are truly parents like other people are. Parents may even question why they don't immediately love their new child or wonder if they love their child enough. For these new parents, parenting may seem like a tentative status at best. Furthermore, the lack of role models for adoptive parents may give them a sense of isolation. Identifying as a parent or as a parent of a particular child may be a more gradual process for some parents. If the parents have adopted from foster care, they may have had visits with the child, or the child may have actually lived with them before the adoption. Clayton (1978) refers to such adjustment as including agreement on tasks and priorities of each task relative to others. It also includes agreement on flexibility each spouse is allowed in playing his/her role as regards to socio-economic background, emotional stability in marriage, sexual adjustment, changes in value system and communication.

Couples with adopted children might experience problems of adjustment with the arrival of the child as is the case when new babies are born into families. In as much as children bring joy to the home, they may also be a cause of conflict between husband and wife especially when one of the parties is not living up to his/her responsibility. Denga (1986) finds that there was a higher level of marital adjustment among women with children in Northern Nigeria. Parents are saddled with the responsibility of ensuring that their adopted child is not deprived of any right and benefit that will accrue to a biological child. Raynal (2002) observes that a holistic care for the adopted child involves the physical care of the child to enable the child experience the happiness of a stable family life. Thus, marital adjustment is attributed to a range of factors including role expectations of spouses, level of work commitment, job satisfaction, spouse values, socio-economic status, emotional instability among others (Denga, 1986).

Further, Hamilton (2007) in regards to the effects of child adoption is of the view that parents who adopt invest more time in their children than other parents and concludes, that adoptive parents enrich their children's lives to compensate for the lack of biological ties and the extra challenges of adoption. Another recent study by Gibson, (2009) observes that adoptive families invested more heavily

in their adopted children in area of education and financial support. Noting that adoptees seemed to be more likely to experience problems such as drug addiction, the study speculated that adoptive parents might invest more in adoptees not because they favour them, but because they are more likely than genetic children to need the help. Major issues triggered by adoption are loss, rejection, guilt and grief. Effects of international adoption include chances of malpractices such as child trafficking and sale of children. Also, there may be no intimacy in the new relationship as it can be difficult for both parents and the child to break the cultural barriers between them. There is a feeling of loss of control in children being adopted as they have no role in choosing who they would live with for the rest of their lives. It is not easy to accept the fact that someone has 'chosen' you to be their children. Identity crisis is commonly observed in the adoptees. Many issues intrinsic to the adoption experience come together when the adoptee reaches adolescence. At this time, there is an acute awareness of being adopted. There is a drive towards liberation accompanied by the determination to develop one's own identity. Living with the fact that you are an adopted child becomes difficult.

Another effect of adoption is loss, the loss of one's identity due to separation from his or her birth family. For the birth parents, it is the loss of their child. The feeling of rejection worsens the feeling of loss. Adoptive parents feel rejected. Both adopted parents and birth parents experience role confusion. The sense of rejection leads to a feeling of shame. The sorrow about not having children suffocates the adoptive parents. Sorrow is obvious in parents who lose their child to adoption. Feelings of confused identity lead to identity crisis. Neither the natural parents of the child nor the child feels is in control of the situation or the adoption process. Effects of adoption are seen in the adopted children, their adoptive parents and their biological parents. Adoption affects adoptive parents at two different levels, emotional and financial.

When a child is put up for adoption, both the birth mother and adoptive parents may struggle with feelings of bonding with and attachment to the child. A child may have delayed bonding issues; this may be because babies are programmed to bond almost immediately

with their birth mothers. Adopted children become vulnerable, emotionally. They know they were not involved in the decision of adoption and thus realize that they had no control over loss of their birth family and the choice of their adoptive family. During their teenage years, adoptees start feeling lonely. They long for their birth parents and feel an intense need to search for who they were and why they put them up for adoption.

It is hard for a child to feel anything more than rejection upon learning of his adoption, he may feel as though his birth parents did not want him, or that he was not good enough for them. According to Bryant and Veroff (1982), even if his feelings could not be any further from the truth, he carries the feelings of rejection with him throughout his life, and may even project it on to other relationships. For instance, she may constantly fear that the people she loves will abandon and reject her (Bryan, 1990).

Adopted children feel insecure because they are questioned about their identity. They lose one identity and borrow another from the family which adopts them. They realize that their biological parents are not parenting them, and that they are being looked after by strangers. It is difficult for adopted children to accept their adoptive family as their own. This leads to identity crisis. Separation from their real parents affects the adoptees deeply.

Adoptive parents are made to face the bitter truth of not being able to become parents. Many go for adoption after a failed pregnancy or the death of their child. Others adopt because of infertility challenge. Parents who adopt because of infertility have already experienced loss and disappointment because of the inability to have a biological child. In addition, they may have dealt with repeated miscarriages or intrusive fertility treatments. An adoptee, who is constantly questioning, creates a feeling of rejection in the adoptive parents.

Even in small actions of their adopted child, they start seeing rejection. They are unable to feel close to their adopted child. Adoptive parents may grow sadder as the child grows up, since the adoptee may not be able to meet the expectations of his adoptive parents. This may lead the adoptive parents to feel that they were never meant to be parents. They worry that the knowledge of being adopted may affect

the child negatively. Adoptive parents feel depressed with the thought of them not being the real parents of their child. In some cases, this makes the adoptive parents overprotective about their child, while in some cases, they become care less. Child adoption affects the adoptive parents at a financial level too. Having a new member in the family increases a family's expenses. The process of adoption does not end at bringing a child home. Adopting a child involves planning for his educational and other needs and giving him/her a secure future.

When it comes to a child and his birth parents, there is biology, there is genetics, and there is a blood relation which cannot be broken so easily, rather it can never be. Putting up their baby for adoption is not easy for the biological parents of the child. It is circumstances that lead them to do so. It is emotionally taxing for a parent to lose his/her child to adoption and have someone else take care of him. Birth parents hate themselves for being incapable of raising their child, and so does society. They might never know who the adoptive parents of their child are. And even if they know who, they may never know how they are and what rapport they share with their child. There is always an uncertainty about what the adoptive parents must have told the adoptee about his/her family. Birth parents feel abandoned. It is observed that birth mothers, who know they would be putting up their baby for adoption, have long conversations with the fetus during pregnancy. In some cases, mothers are pressurized to surrender their babies to adoption and they do so against their will. They hate themselves for their helplessness. They feel anxious about the welfare of their child. Perhaps, the most difficult thing for these parents is to live with a guilty conscience of not having raised their own children.

Today we see that many children from underdeveloped nations are being adopted by high society individuals. This gives the children, a home to live in and a secure future. Through the process of adoption, many kids deprived of their families, get a family to be with. Many parents even after having their own children choose to adopt. It is because of adoption that many orphaned children have families. Thanks to adoption, many have a home to live and parents who love. Adoption is indeed a life-altering event, an event that changes the identity of the parties as well as the identity of the involved families.

But if taken positively, its negative psychological effects can be minimized. From the perspective of the adoptees, adoption provides them with parents, a family, and a home. An adoptee becomes the child of parents, for whom parenthood has not come easy. Adoption gives the adoptive parents a child who can be called their own. The adopted child gives them a reason to live. Couples deprived of parenthood by nature, get an opportunity to play this noble role of being parents. A childless couple adopts a child and their life changes, changes for the better. People who never knew each other become parent and child, and a beautiful bond is born. Adesman (2004); Adamec and Pierce (2000) also assess that beyond the foundational issues, the unique questions posed for adoptive parents are varied. They include how to respond to stereotypes, answering questions about heritage, and how best to maintain connections with biological kin when in an open adoption.

Another effect is concern with adopting older children. Adopting older children presents other parenting issues. Some children from foster care have histories of maltreatment, such as physical and psychological neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. Such children are at risk of developing a disorganized attachment (Lyons-Ruth and Jacobvitz, 1999). Carlson (1995) finds that 80% of abused and maltreated infants in their sample exhibited disorganized attachment styles. Disorganized attachment is associated with a number of developmental problems, including dissociative symptoms (Carlson, 1988), as well as depressive, anxiety, and acting-out symptoms (Lyons-Ruth, 1996). The consensus among researchers is that adoption affects development of the child throughout his or her lifetime, thus they tend to face heightened risk in terms of psychological development and social relationships.

There are abundant evidences that considering adoption as a viable option to infertility has the prevailing culture of the people to contend with. The peculiarity of Warri Diocese on the subject matter borders on the fact that the three major tribes in the Diocese; namely Urhobo, Ijaws and the Itsekiris have their peculiar forms of customary behaviours, particular systems of social relationship and distinctive cultures (Otohrise, 2014). Consequently, the socio-cultural

environment where the Christians found themselves has influenced the believers negatively especially in the area of approaching the challenge of childlessness among Christian Couples. However, Warri Diocese of Anglican Communion seems to be lagging behind consequent upon the influence of the culture of the people that emphasizes on blood line inheritance. In this regard, this work poses to examine the role of culture in child adoption. This is the reason this study sees adoption from the perspective of inheritance. That is, as a thing that was transferred to this present generation by past generations. Hence, this generation owes a duty of handing down same to incoming generation by practising adoption. This is achieved by passing on the right information that will encourage people (couples with and without fertility problem) to embrace adoption without an iota of bias or guilt. This work therefore focuses on the implication of culture on child adoption. Consequently, the aim of this study is to examine the implication of culture on child adoption among Christian couples with infertility challenges in Warri Diocese of Anglican Communion, Delta State, Nigeria.

METHOD

This study adopted the descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprises all Christian couples in Warri Diocese of Anglican Communion, Delta State, Nigeria. Three hundred Couples were selected randomly from the population. The study employed historical and contextual approaches to complement especially in the area of application while the sources of data were basically the administration of questionnaire, structure and unstructured interview. The questionnaire was verified and certified by the supervisors before they were administered. Data gotten were analysed using frequency table and simple percentage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Among the three tribes in Warri Diocese, there is a prevailing culture of adopting a child to serve as succour to couples with infertility

challenge. However, it has some socio-cultural challenges to contend with. This is because the three major tribes in Warri Diocese value legitimacy as evidence to paternal lineage which shows through generation to generation. The typical *Urhobo*, *Ijaw* and *Isekiri* families are patrilineal. The implication of this is that the supreme authority that empowers entitlement to resources flows from the 'father figure' which is hereditary but restricted to only legitimate and truly biological sons of the father of the family.

The bottom line is that in Warri Diocese, most people do not have regard for any child adopted by any family, and such adopted child is often regarded as 'bastard' and as such will not have right of inheritance. Adopted sons and daughters have no say in serious family matters and this is contrasting the freedom of expression. However, evidence gathered from the study shows that the couples in the study area have good idea of child adoption. Some of them (childless couples) boldly state that though they have the idea of child adoption and have actually practiced it, they are not comfortable making it open for others to know because of the attitude of some people towards the practice. However, they maintained that some people do have good understanding about the concept and do not see anything bad about engaging in it

Based on table 1, it is obvious that majority of the respondent know about the problem of infertility as well as child adoption. This implies that a good number of the people in the study area are conversant with both variables. Table 2 indicates that 67% of the respondents express the opinion that the prevailing culture and custom of the people within Warri Diocese are hostile to the practice of child adoption, 20 respondents representing 7% said the culture is friendly, 30 respondents representing 10% said the culture is fair while 50 respondent representing 16% said they were not sure. This position notwithstanding, the respondents have the general believe that adoption is a practice common among the people though practised within the covers of tradition.

Considering whether child adoption is permissible in their culture, some respondents opine that it is permissible while others said it is not (table 3). The preponderance of the majority corroborates the

finding of the preceding table that the respondents have the general believe that adoption is a practice common among the people though practiced within the covers of tradition. Table 4 reveals the position of the respondents regarding whether adoption is a reserve or applicable to couples with infertility problem alone.

Majority of the respondents are of the opinion that adoption is not a reserve of those couples that have infertility problem. This, they buttress with the fact that some families in the study area with biological children also have some members who are not their biological children yet live and are adequately cared for in these families. However, others had contrary view. When asked if they would consider adopting a child if faced with similar situations, 40% of the respondents say they would adopt, 33% say no, while 27% say they are not sure (table 5). Reasons adduced for non-uptake of adoption by those who would not access the service were uncertainty about what the child will be later in life; again some believed that the child might decide to trace the biological parent later in life.

As regards their disposition about child adoption, table 6 shows that 30% of the total percentage of the respondents see it as a foreign concept. They stressed that it is the practice of the Whiteman; they also considered it as against the culture of the people; 40% considered it a good idea stressing that it would reduce lots of tension and bring joy to the family and will help them to hang on to the Lord as they wait for their biological child, while 30% is of the view that they should be given time to study the concept. To them the concept is very elusive.

Table 1: Knowledge of Infertility and Child Adoption

Options	Frequency	Percentage	Remarks
Yes	270	90	High
No	30	10	Low
Total	300	100	

Source: Descriptive Survey, 2014

Table 2: The Practice of Child Adoption and Culture

Options	Frequency	Percentage	Remarks
Hostile	200	67	High
Friendly	30	10	Low
Fair	20	7	Low
Not sure	50	16	Fair
Total	300	100	

Source: Descriptive Survey, 2014

Table 3: Does your cultural practice permit adoption

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	70	70
No	25	25
Not sure	5	5
Total	300	100

Source: Descriptive Survey, 2014

Table 4: Do you think adoption is a reserve or applicable to couples with infertility problem alone?

Types of Adoption	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	90	30
No	180	60
Not sure	30	10
Total	300	100

Source: Descriptive Survey, 2014

Table 5: What is your personal Stand on child adoption?

Options	Frequency	Percentage	Remarks
Yes	120	40	Good
No	100	33	Fair
Not sure	80	27	Fair
Total	300	100	

Source: Descriptive Survey, 2014

Table 6: What is your disposition about child adoption?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Foreign Concept	90	30
Good Idea	120	40
Vague	90	30
Total	300	100

Source: Descriptive Survey, 2014

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The benefits of child adoption cannot be over emphasized. There are cases of biological children who abandoned their birth parent because of poverty, but some parents found relieve in the hands of their adopted child. Therefore, there is the need to disabuse the wrong ideology of many over adoption. The need for orientation on child adoption and the values inherent in it cannot be played down on. In fact, from the study, it is seen that the respondents have the general believe that adoption is a practice common among the people though practised within the covers of tradition. Also, there should be drastic efforts directed at putting to an end the gap that exist in culture or tradition which is against the practice of child adoption among Christian couples generally. Christian couples in Warri Diocese of Anglican Communion in particular and those in other denominations in general should happily embrace child adoption as a means of fulfilling one of the purposes of humanity as a social entity. Also, the church should engage in dialogue with custodians of various cultures within the Diocese with the view to compromising in favour of child adoption.

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