

UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIO-CULTURAL DRIVERS BEHIND BABY FACTORY PHENOMENON IN SOUTH EASTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

While baby factories may not be a recent phenomenon in Nigeria, there has been an appreciable increase in the number of cases in recent times. Hardly does any month passes without a media report of discovery of baby factory. Over eighty percent of the cases are in the South eastern part of Nigeria. This has raised the question of why the south eastern part of Nigeria? It is against this background that we carried out this research to ascertain the possible cause(s) of prevalence of baby factories in the south east. This work probed the prevalence of baby factories phenomenon in the South eastern part of Nigerian as having a plausible explanation in the culture of the people. Based on data collected through questionnaire and interviews, the researchers came to the conclusion that, the culture of the people of that part of the country plays a significant role in the prevalence of baby factories more than poverty or any other single variable. We used simple percentage table and the chi square to illustrate the responses of our respondents and the existence of any relationship.

Keywords: Baby factory, Socio-cultural pressure, cryptic pregnancy.

1.Introduction

The culture of every human society impacts on the lives of the people. We are said to be an embodiments of our cultures. Our behavioural traits tend to reflect our cultural background. We are always trying to meet our cultural expectations most a times unconsciously. Childlessness carries a very strong social stigma in Igbo culture and so is teenage pregnancy. Above all human achievements, having your own child or children has very high premium among the people. When you have excelled in any human endeavour, after extolling you, the next “important” question an average Igbo person will ask will be “Q mu kwara nwa?”, (does he/she has children?) If the answer is no, the next expression will be that of pity. It is “believed” that all your achievements in life are worthless or “empty” if you have left no offspring after you. That belief is reflected in the names the people bear. For example; NWAKAEGO, AHAMEFULA, NWAGBO, ONOCHIE, AHAMDI etc. The importance of children in Igbo society cannot be over-emphasized. The premium on children in Igbo society is high and biological children for that matter. Adopted children are rarely considered part of the clan in many Igbo societies. Every individual is expected to reproduce. The most important social role of marriage in Igbo land is procreation. Therefore when any marriage fails to produce children, such marriages usually face hostility and resentment from close relatives. It is regarded as a fruitless or failed venture. It bears upon the couple a heavy weight of social pressure. The trending practice of secret adoption in Nigeria and in Igbo States in the SouthEast is a reflection of a still very strong socio-cultural belief of the people. Achebe captures a stinging reflection of this in Arrow of God in that incident between Mazi Ebo and Mazi Akukalia. Again the Igbo society frowns strongly at pregnancy out of wedlock. This carries a stigma that every family would want to avoid. It portrays the loose moral, and waywardness. Reference is one strong phenomenon in Igbo culture. When a description is being made of an individual, usually a reference is made of the individual’s family or any near relation’s remarkable deed(s) in the community; good or bad. Nobody wants to be associated with anything unpleasant or bad. Depending on the situation event or atmosphere, reference can be made regarding the individual or family under discussion. Issues

such as pregnancy out of wedlock, barrenness/infertility make strong reference points just like wealth, act of kindness, and bravery make strong reference points in a positive sense. The Igbo remain attached to their root no matter where they are. The proliferation of community based associations outside of their immediate community is a way they seek to remain in tune with their kiths and kins and by extension their cultural identity. Change in this direction is very slow. The cosmopolitan cities do not totally obfuscate communal nature of the Igbo. The strong cultural attachment to procreation in marriage is contributing in 'cryptic pregnancy' common nowadays among couples that had difficulties in conceiving. There are mushrooming of miracle maternity or unconventional fertility centres in the region. These fertility centres have claimed to have made women who had fertility problems that had defied conventional and orthodox medicine conceive and bear their own children. This paper examines the reason for the prevalence of the

'cryptic pregnancy' phenomenon and the baby factory in south-eastern Nigeria.

2. Research Objective

The objective of this research was to determine the reason(s) why Baby-Factories are predominant in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria.

3. Statement of the Problem

The practice of secret and illegal trading of new born babies in the country has generated substantial media attention over the years. Scholars are beginning to pay attention to this social malaise called baby-factory. Baby factory refers to the practice of keeping young women and girls in secret and secluded places for the purpose of breeding children for sale to interested buyers. Across the South east the Police have been uncovering and smashing baby factories syndicates. But it seems that as some are being discovered and closed more also are opening up. The BBC Eye on Africa programme carried a story of a couple who fell victim of 'cryptic pregnancy' in Anambra State. An account by Philip Obaji Jr. in Leadership Newspapers of 23rd October, 2015 shows that rather than being reduced or eradicated, the syndicates have only gone underground. His account is similar to the one given by a Swedish journalist Terese Christiansson who was able to infiltrate this baby- factory trafficking networks in the South east Nigeria. The various State Governments in the South eastern part of Nigerian have taken varied steps to address this menace. This include demolition and confiscation of properties found to be used by operators of baby factories. In December 2013, the Imo State Government had to ban all non-governmental organization operating under the platform of motherless babies' home following increasing discoveries of baby factories across the State. In July 2015, The Punch reported another discovery of baby factory in Isiala Ngwa in Abia State where not fewer than 14 pregnant girls were rescued.

Eseadi observed that "..., the proliferation of baby factory in Nigeria has actually taken more treacherous and multifarious dimensions..., baby factory has become an emergent human trafficking industry and a steady source of income to criminal cohorts involved in the act ..." Such factories have been discovered in different parts of the country, the South east accounts for the highest number leading many to conclude that it a regional problem. According to a Non-Governmental Organization Campaign for Democracy "There is no other part of the country that has the problem of baby factory; it is a peculiar case with the South-East." The Police and other security agencies in the country have made many discoveries across the country and the South east in particular. Beginning from the first reported case of the incidence in 2006, there has been a steady reportage of such cases. (see; Ahaoma, 2014, Madike, 2013b, Njoku, 2013, Alichie, B.O.,2014, Eseadi C, et al 2014.)

Oberabor and Fatunde argued that baby factories can be seen as the application of a reversed treatment of fertility, a situation whereby people resort to buying children in secret to overcome the fertility problems instead of undergoing orthodox treatment. Writing on the issue they state, "The Nigerian baby factory begins operations when rich gullible women seek spiritual consultants and rogue healthcare workers who promise to make them conceive and bear children even when they have passed their reproductive years"

It has been established that the cases of baby-factory in Nigeria is more in the south-east than any other part of the country. Over seventy percent of the cases of baby-factories are located in the region. Many researchers and journalists have attributed this phenomenon to different reasons; however, those reasons commonly adduced as being responsible for baby factories are present in every part of the country, they are not peculiar to the south-east. Some of the reasons are far more endemic in other regions of the country than in the south-east. Why then does this despicable and callous act thrive in this region? Why are they not as prevalent as they are in the South Eastern part? Previous works on this incidence have focused on the motives behind the actions of these vulnerable girls and women who got unwanted pregnancies or are forcefully impregnated (to be rejection, poverty, lack of education and stigmatization) and the operators of such facilities (to be greed). Not many have really interrogated the other side i.e. the buyers. If there are no demands there would not be that need to engage in it. It is clear that not all who patronize these baby factories are barren. Some have gone there to buy just a male child. This research has gone further to probe this incidence within the context of the prevailing sociocultural condition within the area. Therefore this work was an attempt to examine the social and cultural factors that may be responsible for baby factories' proliferation in the south East. The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

Research Questions

Does the people's culture contribute to the prevalence of baby-factory?

children? Hypothesis

Ho: there is no difference between the prevailing culture in an area and the preponderance of baby factories.

H₁: there is a significance difference between the prevailing culture in an area and the preponderance of baby factories.

4. METHODS

Research Design and Participants

The study was carried out in South-East Nigeria and South-South. South-East Nigeria is one of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria comprising of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo states, while South South comprises of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers States. Two states from each of the zone were selected. The South East is predominantly inhabited by the Igbo, while the South South is predominantly non-Igbo. From the South East Imo and Abia were selected, while Akwa Ibom and Bayelsa were selected from the South South. From reported cases, the prevalence of baby factory is more in the South-East of Nigeria, in fact from available reports, more than seventy-five (75%) of the such cases occur in that area. A sample of 800 respondents selected from 4 (four) states, namely: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa and Imo states participated in the study. Because of the peculiar nature of the study and the characteristics of the target population (security personnel, childless couples, repentant baby factory syndicates, practitioners of motherless baby homes, the academia and traditional rulers); mixed research method was adopted and the target respondents were purposively selected. The mixed method was adopted because the issue under interrogation is multi-dimensional. The field work and analysis was guided by the principles of qualitative and quantitative approach using survey research design. Apart from using well-structured questionnaire and interviews to elucidate the needed information from the well-informed targeted stakeholders, conversational interview method was also used to solicit information from the target population. While the interviews were used to solicit information from traditional rulers, repentant baby-factory syndicates, security personnel, childless couples, questionnaires were shared among all the groups except the traditional rulers. Both the interview questions and the questionnaire were structured in line with the research objectives. Based on the categories of our respondents 800 questionnaires were distributed; academia, operators of motherless babies homes, repentant baby-factory syndicates, security personnel, and childless couples. On the overall, 200 respondents were sampled from Abia state, 200 from Akwa Ibom state and 200 from Bayelsa and 200 from Imo State.

Also 40 individuals were interviewed including, traditional rulers, security personnel, repentant baby-factory syndicates, childless couples, in the four selected States.

Table 1 shows the occupational status characteristics of the respondents across the 3 selected states.

Occupational Status	Abia	Akwa Ibom	Bayelsa	Imo
Traditional Rulers	25	25	25	25
Security Personnel	30	30	30	30
Repentant Baby-Factory Syndicate	20	20	20	20
Childless Couples	25	25	25	25
Academia	100	100	100	100
Motherless Babies Homes Operators	100	100	100	100
Total	300	300	300	300

Measure

A 20-items questionnaire entitled “The Socio-cultural Imperative of Baby Factory in southeastern Nigeria Questionnaire” was designed by the researchers and used for the study. The questionnaire has two sections – A and B. The section A sought for information regarding the respondents’ sex, marital status, number of children given birth to, religion, and place of origin. The section B contained questions eliciting information regarding the influence of culture/society on baby factory. The questionnaire was developed utilizing a mixture of the different scales. The questionnaire was face validated by a Professor and a Senior lecturer in Sociology and another Professor in Political Science department in Imo State University and University of Port-Harcourt both in Nigeria. The questionnaire was trial-tested in Rivers State of Nigeria before it usage for the actual study. The trial-testing was necessary as it provided constructive feedback which was employed to enrich the questionnaire.

5. Data Collection and Analyses

Trained research assistants helped the researchers in conducting the field work which took place between March 5 and April 10, 2015 in the three selected states. Respondents were met in their places of work or convenient pre-arranged places in the selected states. A total of 400 questionnaires were returned out of 450 distributed. The questionnaires were distributed equally to the selected states in the south-east and south-south.

The interviews took place between April and June 2015 at the scheduled/agreed places for the various respondents in the selected States. A percentage table was used to show the respondents’ answers to the question, while the chi square test of independence (two-tailed test) was used to analyze the data collected from the two different regions in the country regarding their views on the issue. The hypothesis was tested at $df = 1$, $p = .05$. In the hypothesis testing, the decision rule is that if the $df = 1$, $p = .05$ is less than calculated X^2 value, the null hypothesis is rejected, otherwise it is not rejected.

Results

Table 3. Culture of the area influence is responsible for Baby factories.

	Igbo area	Non Igbo area	
Yes	178	45	223
No	22	155	177
	200	200	

N=400

$X^2 = 150.78$ $df=1$, $p=.05$ value = 3.48 The value was 3.48 which is less than our calculated X^2 (150.78), therefore the null hypothesis is rejected and we accept the alternative position which is that there is a significance difference between the prevailing culture in an area and the preponderance of baby factories. **Table 4.** A Percentage distribution of respondents answers

	Igbo aea	Non Igbo area
Yes	178(89%)	45(22.5%)
No	22(11%)	155(77.5%)
Total	200	200

From table 4., we can see that while the Igbo speaking areas consider their culture a strong factor in the preponderance of baby factories, the non-Igbo speaking areas do not think so. The reason for this can be explained in terms of the cultural perception and implication of childlessness among the different peoples. While the cultures of the south-south region are more friendly and easily integrate adopted, non-biological children the Igbo do not. The reason for this can be attributed to the fact that discrimination and rejection suffered by non-biological children mostly find expression within the family (nuclear and extended) and community circles. This makes it difficult for outsiders and casual observers to notice. Strong emphasis on biological children and discrimination against non-biological children is common among the Igbo. People with fertility problem face very strong socio-cultural pressure that can drive them to desperation.

Findings

The study found that there is a significance difference between the prevailing culture in an area and the preponderance of baby factories. That is to say, the culture of a people contributes significantly to the prevalence of baby factories. The Igbo who predominantly inhabit the South Eastern part of Nigeria has strong cultural attachment to biological child and discriminate against non-biological child. Adoption carries stigma not just for the parents but also for the child. To protect the child, parents from this part of the country who adopt children try to conceal it. We discovered that many use different methods to conceal their infertility. In some cases the women are given some substances and drugs which make them displays some vital signs of pregnancy (such as protruding stomach, which is only a tumor)for public acknowledgement but goes underground few weeks or Months to due delivery date. She resurfaces with a new born baby. Some have lost their lives in that process. All these are in a bid to conceal or avoid the shame that childlessness carries in igbo culture.

6. Conclusion

Poverty, childlessness, greed among others is not only found among the Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria. In fact, their economic standing is better than some other regions of the country. However, the menaces of baby factories are more in this region. We therefore set out to probe other possible factors that might explain this situation. On closer interrogation we have come to discover that the culture of the people play strong role. The study which examined the same variables between the Igbo and their neighbours found the explanation in the cultural behavior of the people.

Based on this finding, we are of the view that a successful approach to eradicating this menace must be holistic.

1. There is the need for the governments show political will and commitment to tackle the menace.
2. The Local and State governments which are closer to the people must be involved.
3. There must be a sustained education of the people of the need to jettison the harmful cultural practices that discriminates between peoples.
4. The traditional rulers and other influential personalities within the various towns and communities should be properly involved in the campaign for change in cultural perception of adopted children and attitude towards adoption.
5. The government should make adoption processes easier.
6. Government should task the law enforcement agencies to smoke out Baby factories syndicates and prosecute them.
7. The government should look into girl-child education and poverty with a view to improving their lots in those regards.

Acknowledgments

The researchers are thankful to all the people who participated in the study, especially the traditional rulers in south eastern and south-south Nigeria.

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