



## CHILD ADOPTION WILLINGNESS AMONG WOMEN ATTENDING FERTILITY CLINIC AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA TEACHING HOSPITAL IN ITUKU-OZALLA, ENUGU

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate child adoption willingness among women attending the fertility clinic at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital in Ituku-Ozalla, Enugu. The study was guided by three objectives. A self-structured questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection from 121 women attending the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital's fertility clinic. A descriptive survey methodology was employed for this study. Frequency tables and percentages were used in the systematic analysis of the data using descriptive statistics. The results of the analysis of the data showed that 93% of the sample, had heard of child adoption. The most common places they heard about it were hospitals (36%) and social media (33%). Of the respondents, 46% think that adopting a child entails parents obtaining the child legally, while 42% realize that adopting a child is essentially purchasing a child. Eighty-two percent of respondents said they would be willing to adopt a child and eighty-three percent said adoption is a good idea. The majority of respondents (41%) thought that adoption promoted domestic peace (30%) and helped redistribute wealth. Women who were adopting children perceived difficulties in the form of the biological parents taking back the child (37%) and the child's perceived unknown parental origin (37%). Researchers concluded that although a larger percentage of women embrace child adoption, more of them believe adoption is just like purchasing a child. This false belief can be dispelled by providing appropriate education and advocating for women to gain a better grasp of the procedures involved in adopting a child.

**Keywords:** Child Adoption, Acceptance, Perception, Knowledge, Women

### Introduction

The ultimate goal of every African marriage is to have children. Infertility is thought to affect 8% to 12% of couples globally, with rates as high as 30% in Africa (Omosun & Kofoworola, 2016). Africans believe that having children is the source of power, pride, and insurance for their parents in old age, hence having children is the only way for a marriage to be considered meaningful in their culture (Tabong & Adongo, 2013a; 2013b). Adoption of children varies widely throughout communities. In addition to being a coping strategy for infertile couples, child adoption offers support to those who are impacted and provides an alternate course of infertility treatment (Ohaeri et al., 2019). The legal process of initiating a parent-child bonding between individuals who are not related by blood through open statutes or customary laws is known as child adoption. As a result, the adopted child has the same rights, privileges, and inheritance as the adoptive parents' biological children (Osagiede et al., 2019). The process by which one or more individuals who are not the child's biological parents but are legally recognized as such bring the child into their family is known as child adoption (Eke et al., 2014). It is acknowledged as one type of substitute care for children who are either unable to stay in their family context or are temporarily or permanently removed from it (Omeire et al., 2015). The ability of a couple to accept a child into their home legally and willingly is known as acceptance of child adoption.

Since women are typically held responsible for infertility in these traditional societies, the psychological and emotional strain of childlessness is especially severe for them. While infertile couples have various alternatives for care, the success of treatment ultimately depends on the etiological variables, diagnostic technologies available, attending physician expertise, and most importantly, the couple's financial situation (Abubakar et al., 2013). Moreover, in resource-poor nations like Nigeria, few treatment alternatives are often costly (Aniebue et al., 2008). Thus, child

adoption offers a different kind of treatment that hasn't been thoroughly investigated on its acceptance by couples. A common feature among the many adoption-related legislation passed by the various states is that prospective adopters must be citizens of Nigeria and be able to go through the legal procedures specific to the state from which they wish to adopt. Some of the differences between the adoption procedures in different states include the requirement that adoptive fathers and mothers foster their children for at least three months in Lagos and a year in Akwa Ibom (Chikwe et al., 2022).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Infertility, affecting 8% to 12% of couples globally and reaching rates as high as 30% in Africa, poses a profound challenge to individuals and couples aspiring to have children. In African societies, where the cultural significance of having children is paramount, the psychological and emotional strain of childlessness, particularly on women, is severe. Traditional beliefs often hold women responsible for infertility, adding to the complexity of the issue. While various treatment options are available, the financial constraints and limited alternatives in resource-poor nations like Nigeria heighten the significance of child adoption as an alternative strategy. However, misconceptions surrounding child adoption persist, with a substantial percentage of women holding ambiguous or inaccurate beliefs about the process.

Previous studies have explored aspects of child adoption, shedding light on awareness, attitudes, and practices. These efforts have revealed discrepancies in adoption acceptance, emphasizing the role of cultural variations in shaping perceptions. Despite the existing research, misconceptions persist, and there is a need for targeted interventions to address these issues effectively.

This study concentrates on women attending the fertility clinic at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital in Ituku-Ozalla, Enugu. The focus is on understanding the acceptance of child adoption within this specific demographic. The study aims to delve into the intricacies of women's awareness, perceptions, and willingness regarding child adoption. By identifying the root causes of misconceptions and exploring the motivations and concerns influencing adoption decisions, the study aims to contribute actionable insights. Furthermore, the research intends to contextualize its findings within the cultural milieu, recognizing the importance of tailoring interventions to specific societal norms and beliefs. The ultimate goal is to provide a nuanced understanding that can guide educational initiatives and support programs, addressing the identified challenges and fostering informed decision-making regarding child adoption among women in this particular setting.

### **Aim and objectives of the study**

The main aim of the study is to investigate the child adoption willingness among women attending the fertility clinic at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital in Ituku-Ozalla, Enugu. Specifically, the objectives are to:

1. assess the level of awareness about child adoption among women attending the fertility clinic at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital in Ituku-Ozalla, Enugu.
2. examine the perceptions of women regarding child adoption, including their understanding of the processes involved, such as legal acquisition or purchasing of a child.
3. explore the willingness of women attending the fertility clinic to adopt children.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a descriptive survey design to ascertain women's perceptions, knowledge, and readiness to adopt children among women who visit the fertility clinic at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital (UNTH) in Ituku-Ozalla, Enugu, Nigeria. The University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital Enugu Health Research and Ethics Committee has granted ethical permission for this project. Throughout the data collection process, the research guiding concepts and criteria were followed. The study was conducted with informed consent obtained from the participants, maintaining anonymity, and confidentiality and preventing any damage from occurring. One hundred and twenty-one women who had never given birth previously but had visited the hospital's fertility clinic between March 2022 and August 2022 were the subjects of the study. Data was gathered using a structured questionnaire. The instrument's reliability was also evaluated, and the results revealed a reliability index of 0.81. The mean and percentages were used in the analysis of the data.

## Results

The mean age of the women was 38 years, they were predominantly Christians (82%) and the majority (41%) had primary education as their highest level of education.

**Table 1: Demographic representation of the women, n = 121**

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage %
Age:		
18 – 25	20	17
26 – 30	32	26
31 – 35	38	31
36 and above	31	26
Religion		
Christianity	99	82
Islam	8	7
Traditionalist	14	12
Ethnic Group		
Igbo	105	87
Hausa	6	5
Yoruba	10	8
Level of education		
No formal education	16	13
Primary education	50	41
First degree	25	21
Masters	20	17
Ph.D.	10	8
Fertility Clinic		
UNTH	68	56
ESUTH	53	44

**Table 2: Awareness about adopting a child**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
<b>Understanding about child adoption</b>		
Parents babysitting a child	14	12
Parents training a child that is biologically theirs	-	-
Parents legally acquiring a child	56	46
Buying a child	51	42
<b>Requirements for adopting a child</b>		
Medical certificate of fitness	20	17
Marriage certificate	75	62
Rhesus group of adopted child	-	-
Birth certificate	-	-
Passport photograph	26	21
<b>Age requirement for adopting a child</b>		
No specific age	-	-
18 years	-	-
Parents must be at least 21 years older than the child		
Not less than 25 years of age	18	15
More than 25 years	33	27
	70	58
<b>Legal Place for adopting a child</b>		
Orphanage home	75	62
Church	-	-
Hospital	18	15
Court	28	23
Police station	-	-

Nine respondents had never heard of child adoption, compared to the majority of 112 respondents. The hospital was the source of information for 36% of the respondents, followed by social media (33%), family (21%), and journals (10%). A portion of the participants (42%) think that adopting a child is equivalent to lawfully obtaining one, while

others (42%) and 12% think it's equivalent to purchasing and babysitting a child. Additionally, according to the respondents, marriage licenses (62%), health certificates (17%), and passport photos (21%) are prerequisites for adopting a child. About 58% of people think that a spouse needs to be older than 25 to adopt children. According to respondents, the legal venue for adopting a child was believed by the majority to be an orphanage home (62%), court (23%) and hospital (15%).

**Table 3: Willingness to adoption of children**

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Are you willing to adopt a child		
Yes	99	82
No	22	18
<b>Reasons for Accepting Child Adoption</b>		
It will help me to get pregnant and bear my own child	45	37
To have an heir to my properties	50	41
Nothing	0	0
Enable me to have a sense of belonging in the community	26	21

The majority of respondents (82%) are open to accepting child adoption. The top three reasons given by respondents for adopting a child were to have an heir to their property (41%), assist in becoming pregnant and having children (37%), and give them a sense of community participation (21%)

**Table 4: Adoption's perceived advantages and difficulties (N=121)**

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	100	83
No	21	17
<b>Perceived benefits of adopting a child</b>		
To have a helper in the house	35	29
To ensure the distribution of my wealth	50	41
To enhance peace of mind in my family	36	30
<b>Perceived problems in adopting a child</b>		
Unknown parental background and abnormal behaviour in the child		
Psychologically unacceptable	45	37
Birth parents taking back the child	31	26
	45	37

Adoption is helpful, according to the majority of respondents (83%) whereas 17% disagreed. The benefits of adoption, according to respondents, include ensuring the distribution of my wealth (41%), improving family peace of mind (30%), and having an assistant in the home (29%). The drawbacks of adoption, on the other hand, were perceived to include unknown parental background (37%), birth parents taking back the child (37%), and adoption being psychologically unacceptable (26%).

### Discussion

The study's findings showed that nearly all respondents (93%) had heard of child adoption; yet, only 46% understood that adoption involved legally obtaining a child while over half believed adoption involved purchasing a child (42%) or babysitting a child (12%). The survey's results are consistent with a study done in southern Nigeria by Asogun et al. (2015), which discovered that only 55.6% of respondents have an understanding of child adoption. Comparably, a 2002 study by Ezugwu et al. in the Nigerian city of Ibadan examined the adoption knowledge of infertile women living in the Oke Seni, Apata, and Elere areas. Despite the high degree of awareness, the results revealed that only 27.3% of respondents understood the true meaning of child adoption. On the other hand, nearly all of the respondents (92.6%) to Ekeng et al.'s (2021) study on awareness, attitude, and practice about child adoption among women in Calabar, Cross River State, knew the practice.

The result revealed that the majority of respondents (82%) expressed a willingness to adopt a child. This research is consistent with Ohachenu's (2023) study on the adoption process, knowledge, and acceptance among the people of Orlu North East, Imo State, Nigeria, which found that 64.4% of workers were willing to adopt a child. This could be explained by the fact that researchers from similar cultures conducted both studies. This research, however, conflicts with that of Ekeng et al. (2021), who discovered that only 34.5% of respondents were eager to adopt shortly. The results of this survey contradict those of a study by Oladokun et al. (2010) on the attitudes of infertile women about adopting children in Nigeria. That study's findings showed that 64% of infertile women thought that adopting a child was not culturally acceptable, and only 17% said they would be willing to adopt. These discrepancies could be attributed to cultural variations in the study's environment.

The study's findings show that the majority of respondents (83%) think adoption is advantageous because it ensures that adoptive parents' wealth is distributed (41%), while the majority of respondents perceived adoption as problematic because they were afraid that the child's birth parents might reclaim them in the future (37%), and because they were unaware of the child's parental background, which could cause abnormal behaviour in the future (37%). The study's findings are comparable to those of a 2017 study by Aluyor and Salami on the Assessment of Awareness and Acceptability of Child Adoption in Edo State, which revealed that 83% of respondents thought adopted children could stabilize marriages and that the main issue was that adopted children shouldn't look like biological children (64%). The fact that both investigations were carried out in the same nation makes the similarity plausible.

### Conclusion

The study provides valuable insights into the acceptance of child adoption among women attending the fertility clinic at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital in Ituku-Ozalla, Enugu. Findings indicate a substantial level of awareness about child adoption, with a majority of respondents having heard of the practice. However, there persists a notable misconception among participants regarding the adoption process, with implications for understanding the legal aspects involved. Encouragingly, a significant proportion of women express a willingness to adopt a child, citing motivations such as the desire for an heir, assistance in overcoming infertility, and a sense of community participation. This willingness opens avenues for targeted educational initiatives aimed at dispelling misconceptions and fostering a clearer understanding of the legal and emotional dimensions associated with adoption. Perceived advantages of adoption include wealth distribution and family peace of mind. Conversely, concerns about unknown parental backgrounds and the fear of birth parents reclaiming the child emerge as potential challenges. These insights underscore the importance of addressing these concerns in public awareness campaigns and educational programs. While this study aligns with regional findings, the observed disparities emphasize the need for culturally tailored interventions. Bridging the knowledge gap and dispelling misconceptions should be central to future initiatives, promoting a more positive perception of child adoption within this specific demographic.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Launch targeted educational campaigns to address misconceptions about child adoption. Utilize various mediums such as seminars, workshops, and informational materials to reach women attending fertility clinics.
2. Collaborate with legal professionals and institutions to provide comprehensive information about the legal processes involved in child adoption. This can help dispel the notion of adoption as merely purchasing a child and promote a clear understanding of the legal requirements.
3. Tailor educational interventions to the specific cultural nuances identified in the study. Understanding and respecting cultural beliefs is crucial for the success of awareness programs. Engage local community leaders and influencers to endorse the importance of adoption within cultural contexts.
4. Establish counselling services within fertility clinics to provide emotional support and address concerns related to child adoption. Professional counsellors can play a key role in helping women navigate the emotional aspects and potential challenges associated with adoption.

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