

CHILD ADOPTION AS TREATMENT OPTION FOR INFERTILITY IN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

Child adoption that may serve as an alternative treatment option for infertility for the affected couples is yet to be fully explored and integrated into management schedules. This was a cross-sectional interviewer administered questionnaire survey involving 602 consenting men and women within Ibadan metropolis, South-Western Nigeria from May to July 2008. There is a general consensus on what child adoption is among the 96.7 % of the participants who were aware of child adoption. However, only 33.1% of the participants believe child adoption is a treatment option for infertility and 44.2% will consider adopting if found in such situation. In conclusion, this study shows high level of awareness of child adoption in the community but fewer people see it as a treatment option for infertility. Measures like advocacy, community mobilization and enactment of supportive law will help in promoting its acceptability.

Introduction

Infertility is a common health problem with devastating psychosocial consequences on the affected couples especially in Africa¹. Worldwide 5 to 15 percent of couples suffered from infertility². In Africa, the prevalence is up to 45 percent^{3,4}. The childless couples suffer from the conflux of personal, interpersonal, social, and religious expectations thus bringing a sense of failure to them⁵. In some cultural settings in Africa, infertile couples are even not allowed to take lead role in important family functions and events. These challenges are not only restricted to the developing world⁵.

Although, there are many management options for infertile couples, the outcome of the treatment depends on the aetiological factors, available diagnostic tools, skills of the attending physician and above all the financial status of the couple^{6,7}. Adoption is an alternative strategy in the management of infertility aimed at bringing succor to the affected couples. This management option had gained wider acceptance even in developed countries before the era of reproductive technologies⁸.

Studies have shown that the couples that adopt grieve less about their childless challenge and also have better emotional support compared with their peers^{9,10}. In Nigeria, Ezugwu et al reported that majority of infertile Nigerian women in South Eastern region of the country have heard about adoption but only few (27.3%) knew the correct meaning, its legality and the process it entails¹¹.

This study therefore aimed at facilitating the general acceptance of adoption as an alternative management option for the infertile couples in Nigeria

Materials and Methods

The study was a cross-sectional survey among 620 consenting women and men aged 20 – 45years in Ibadan metropolis. Ibadan the study area is divided into three strata – the densely populated inner core, the transitory and the peripheral representing different socio-economic and cultural diversity of the city. A validated interviewer-administered questionnaire was used to collect data which consisted of demographic characteristics, knowledge of infertility and adoption and opinion on adoption as an alternative option for infertile couples. All research assistants were trained prior to data collection. Verbal informed consent was obtained from individual respondent before the interview was carried out.

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics

Six hundred and twenty questionnaires were administered and 602 (97.1%) were analyzable. Of the 602 respondents 38.9% were males and 61.1% females. Their ages ranged between 20 to 46years with the mean of 30.3±7.1years. About three quarter of the respondents had secondary school education or above and 94.4% were Yorubas. More than half of the respondents are in a

marital union with majority in the monogamous setting (80.8%) while over 75.0% of them have one or more children (Table 1).

Knowledge of Infertility and Adoption

Almost all respondents (96.7%) knew what infertility was a trend that was found across gender. A similar trend was found on knowledge of adoption as 95.2% correctly described what adoption is. Main sources of information in order of magnitude included health workers, print and electronic media and friends. On knowledge of any legal framework on adoption, only 47.8% were aware and could say correctly what the law says. Awareness of the existence of adoption services was lower as only 39.2% were aware and 2.5% were not sure (Table 2)

Acceptability of child adoption

Opinions of respondents were sought on acceptability of adoption as a treatment for infertility. About a third (33.1%) of the respondents was affirmative that adoption was an option while 49.5% said No and 17.4% were not sure. When asked of their personal willingness to uptake adoption if the need arise, 50.8% said they would not, 44.2% said they would while 5.0% were not sure. Reasons adduced for non-uptake of adoption by those who would not access the service were uncertainty about what the child's will be later in life, his/her pedigree is unknown, outright sentiment for not being a biological child and the child might decide to trace the biological parent later in life.

Discussion

The study documented a high knowledge of infertility which is not unexpected because as there is anecdotal evidence that infertility is on the increase in Nigeria. Although, the meaning and implications of child adoption is known respondents are not willing to access the service. This may not be unconnected with the cultural setting where the study is carried. Adoption in southwest Nigeria is not common. What is prevalent is fostering where a couple takes up children of members of the family and bring them up as theirs. This finding is corroborated by Araoye's¹² study which documented that child adoption is not a popular alternative to infertility among Nigerians.

Conclusion

The study documented high knowledge of infertility and adoption but unfavourable attitude towards its uptake. There is the need for creating awareness highlighting its benefits, community advocacy and mobilization for improved uptake of adoption as an alternative treatment for infertility.

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Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=602)

	Total (602)	Males (N=234) 38.9%	Females (N=368) 61.1%
Educational Level (%)			
None	3.0	1.7	3.8
Primary	25.4	23.5	26.6
Secondary	51.3	53.4	50.0
Tertiary	20.3	21.4	19.6
Religion (%)			
Christianity	57.5	52.6	60.6
Islam	42.3	47.0	39.4
Traditional	0.2	0.4	
Ethnicity (%)			
Hausa	0.2	0.4	0.5
Igbo	5.1	5.6	4.9
Yoruba	94.4	94.0	94.1
Others	0.3		0.5
Number of Children (%)			
None	35.2	24.8	19.0
One	13.5	25.6	22.7
Two	15.3	17.1	26.4
Three	15.3	15.4	18.7
Four or more	20.7	17.1	13.2
Years of Marriage	1 -30years	1 – 25years	1 – 30years

Table 2: Knowledge of Infertility and Child Adoption.

	Total (N=602)	Male (N=234)	Female (N=368)
Knowledge of Infertility (%)			
Yes	96.7	98.3	95.7
No	3.3	1.7	4.3
Knowledge of Child Adoption (%)			
Yes	95.2	94.4	94.9
No	4.8	5.6	5.1
Knowledge of Adoption Law (%)			
Yes	47.8	50.9	45.9
No	37.2	33.3	39.7
Not sure	15.0	15.8	14.4
Awareness of existence of adoption services (%)			
Yes	39.2	44.0	36.1
No	58.3	52.1	62.2
Not sure	2.5	3.9	1.6

Table 3: Acceptability of Child Adoption as a Treatment option (N=602)

	Total (N=602)	Male (N=234)	Female (N=368)
Is child adoption as an option to treat infertility acceptable in the community? (%)			
Yes	33.1	29.5	35.3
No	49.5	52.6	47.6
Not sure	17.4	17.9	17.1
Will you be willing to adopt? (%)			
Yes	44.2	47.9	42.1
No	50.8	45.7	54.1
Not sure	5.0	6.4	3.8
Will you support establishment of adoption agency? (%)			
Yes	75.6	79.1	73.7
No	19.6	17.1	21.2
Not sure	4.8	3.8	5.1