



Enduring conviction in the reservation towards Child-adoption among Igbo Christians of Anambra state, Nigeria

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Abstract

The Igbo people have demonstrated a persevering reservation towards child- adoption in family preservation. This study investigates the fundamental cause of such reservation among Igbo Christians of Anambra state, Nigeria. The study was conducted in three main cities of the state. The study adopted a qualitative research method. Key Informant Interview (KII) and Survey were the two primary sources of data collection for the study. The study used a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative instruments to analyze the data. The finding associated the persevering reservation towards child -adoption among Igbo Christians of Anambra state with the enduring conviction in Igbo traditional values and worldview. It was discovered that many Christian couples in the state often opt for conventional remedies in addressing infertility, which would enable one to have a biological child instead of adoption, even with conscious awareness of the consequences of such an option to their professed Christian faith. The study therefore concludes that the choice of whatever remedial measures to adopt in addressing infertility in marriage should remain sacrosanct to the affected couples. It should be one free of all forms of persuasion or threats; implicitly or explicitly expressed. It is only by doing so that the fundamental human right of the couples is respected. Above all, the success of goal no. 10 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) would depend much on how inequality is reduced within and among members of the communities; whether adopted or biological.

Keywords: Enduring Conviction, Reservation, Child- Adoption, Igbo Christians, Family Preservation.



Introduction

Though the marital institution remains a universal social institution in every known culture and tradition, the major goal of the institution remains contestable across traditions. Virtually all the Christian denominations view marriage as a sacrament or sacred bond/ covenant, with greater emphasis on the procreation and companionship role of the institution: “So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female, blessed them, and said, “Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control...” (Genesis 1:27-28); then the LORD God said, “It is not good for a man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him” (Genesis 2:18). The Catechism of the Catholic Church acknowledging the openness of conjugal love to fertility states “By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory” (CCC. 1652). Recognizing the challenges of childlessness to conjugal love, the Church tries to de-emphasize the notion that procreation is the ultimate aim of the union; “Spouses to whom God has not granted children can nevertheless have a conjugal life of meaning, in both human and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality, and of sacrifice” (CCC. 1654).

Adoption has always assumed a viable option or alternative means of having a child by couples affected by infertility (Obi & Chris, 2019; Nachinab, Doukor& Naab, 2018; Nwogu & Mba, 2023). Ist Attorneys (2023) defines adoption as a legal process through which a child becomes a permanent member of a new family, which provides an opportunity for children without parental care to find a loving and supportive home. As a remedy to infertility, the Church, especially, the main- line Churches recommends adoption. For example, the Catholic Church not only approves of adoption but encourages adoption, especially if the married couple has a stable and strong relationship (John Paul II, 1995).

According to the Church “To come to the aid of the many infertile couples who want to have children, adoption should be encouraged, promoted and facilitated by appropriate legislation so that the many children who lack parents may receive a home that will contribute to their human development” (Dignitatis Personae, 2008, as cited in Hoffman, 2011). The Pentecostals and Evangelical Churches, on the other hand, had rather placed more emphasis on prayers and deliverance from the spirit of barrenness. Unfortunately, neither approach from the Church is sustainable for the Igbo people. Extant studies have demonstrated some level of reservation or unwillingness to adopt among the Igbo people including the Christian population (Egenti, 2022; Ohachenu, 2023). There has been a high tilt among Igbo Christians towards traditional measures of addressing infertility that encourage having one’s biological child even with the obvious implications on their professed Christian faith.

Consequently, in Igbo traditional worldviews, like in most African worldviews, childbearing is the central aim and expectation of marriage (Effiom, Ekwok & Akpama, 2021; Omosun& Kofoworola, 2011). Children are seen by the Igbo as a big blessing from the gods. The primary function of marriage for the Igbo people at large is childbearing and not really companionship. Therefore, at the heart of every marriage union among the Igbo people of Nigeria is the desire to have one’s children, preferably male ones who will perpetuate for generations. Hence, no stone is left unturned to make sure that this aim is achieved in marriage (Ekwunife, 2020). The value placed on childbearing can be seen in popular Igbo names, such as; Nwakaego (A child is greater than money), Akuakanwa (wealth is not worthier than a child), or Nwabugwu (child is the greatest honour). Also, the priority on childbearing by Igbo people can be seen clearly in the Ikpalu Chukwu Ugbo (shaking sacrificial boat for God) ritual, which is often offered for the success of an impending marriage by the father of the bride on the advice of the Divine. The sacrificial prayer goes like this “God, who created man, behold this fowl. God who created



man behold Ugwuaku (the prospective bride), my child, protect her for me. Offspring is the main thing in the world. God, who acts according to his designs, gives her children” (Metuh, 1987).

In Anambra state for example, the ofo (prayer) takes this pattern; “we want you ofuofu (one by one); 7 boys and 4 daughters to make Eke, Oye, Afor, Nkwo (the four Igbo market days) or afia n’ ano, umun’ano, but ofuofu (4 markets, 4 children, but one by one)”. In Mbaise areas, the emphasis on the number of children is eleven. In some other traditions, more emphasis is placed on male children. For example, in Umuofia, as can be seen during the Uri marriage rites of Obierika’s daughter Akueke in *Things Fall Apart*, the eldest member of the family prays that their daughter (that is Akueke) bears 9 sons for her husband (Achebe, 2008). Children are esteemed as sources of pride, strength, and economic fortune for the family, with a man’s wealth and strength being equated to his progeny (Ezegwu, Obi & Onah, 2002). As a result, having one’s child is a source of respect to the couples in Igbo society. It enhances the social status of such couples. In many parts of Igbo land, women who successfully deliver ten children are rewarded with a special celebration and rites to honour their hips (Nwoga, 1984).

Generally, in Igbo land of which Anambra state is not an exception, women are always at the receiving end of virtually all cases of infertility. The male folk are often seen as blameless. Bearing children is seen as the central role of a woman. A woman’s status is measured in terms of her ability to bear a child and this is the reason why a childless woman can go to any length to get a child, since having a child gives her the right to stay in the marriage. Any woman who does not bear a child for her husband is regarded as having failed in her primary duty. Such a woman is humiliated, isolated, derided, abused, and rebuffed (Omosun & Kofoworola, 2011). She is treated with disrespect and the woman equally sees herself as ill-fated and not favoured (Obi & Chris, 2019: 8867).

In some cases, such a woman is denied a share of her husband’s assets. In some other severe instances, to demonstrate disappointment and contempt for childless women at death, the corpse or remains of the childless woman are often mutilated by slitting her abdomen across before her burial, as an indication that she has failed to fulfil her function in life; her name is therefore blotted out forever (Nzomiwu, 1999). However with the help of enlightenment and civilization, such inhuman treatments are greatly challenged today by civil rights groups, even though it is still in practice in some remote cultures to date.

The reason behind this utmost regard for children among the Igbo people and in Anambra state is not far-fetched. Childlessness for the Igbo implies that a man’s hope for continuity in his family lineage is in jeopardy. In other words, his name will be exterminated from the face of the earth. Again, there is a common belief among the Igbo and in many African societies that all those who died namelessly (i.e without a biological child) cannot attain the status of ancestorhood (Itumeleng, 2019; Nwobodo, 2021).

To qualify as an ancestor, one has to marry and have children and live a mature, noble, holy, and exemplary stainless life of a very high moral tone (Ugwu & Ugwueye, 2004). As such, for the Igbo, just with many African societies, childlessness is generally perceived as a great threat and a curse on the family and the society at large, and barrenness and infertility are considered harsh misfortunes and as a punishment from the spirit, which entails extinction of a lineage. Life is highly valued over and above other things in Igbo society, and its preservation and continuity can only be maintained through offspring (Asikaogu, 2018).

The death of one who has no offspring is considered the end of the continuity of life, the discontinuance of the family tree, and the quenching of the flame of life of the pedigree (Ezekwugo, 1992). Among the Igbo people of Anambra state, the problem of infertility is



endemic and as Africans, the culture of the people provides that polygene that enhances consanguinity must guide any remedial action poised towards solving childlessness or the lack of a particular gender of the child (Chukwuma & Obuna, 2020). It must be resisted by marrying a second wife, allowing the woman (wife) to cohabit with another man (Nwaru, 2015).

The study was structured in the following pattern: methods, results, discussion, and lastly, conclusion. The methods addressed the study area, participant recruitment, sampling frame and techniques, method of data collection, and method of data analysis and interpretation. The results, comprising of the quantitative and qualitative were presented under the three research questions of the study: 1) What were the various reasons why people adopt in Anambra state? 2) What were the attitudes of Christians towards child -adoption in Anambra state? and 3) What were the consequences of child- adoption in family preservation in Anambra state? The discussion section revolves around the three commonly held consequences of child adoption among the people of Anambra state and how it influences Christians in the state.

Statement of Purpose

This study investigates the fundamental reasons behind the reservation towards child adoption in family preservation among Christians of Anambra State. The specific objectives of the study include ascertaining the reasons why people adopt in Anambra state, the attitude towards child adoption among Christians in Anambra state and the perceived consequences of child adoption in family preservation among the people of the state and how it influences the decision to adopt among Christians in the state.

The Framework

Enduring Conviction: Instead of the formal usage as the act or process of finding a person guilty of crimes, a conviction in the context of this research refers to a firmly held belief or opinion (Oxford Language Dictionary online), a strong persuasion or belief (Merriam-Webster). “Enduring conviction” refers to the held belief, opinion, or persuasion that has lasted over some time or is durable.

Reservation: This can take the forms of withholding or keeping back, or expression of doubt over something (English Online Dictionary)

Child- Adoption: Adoption is the statutory process of terminating a child's legal rights and duties towards the natural parents and substituting similar rights and duties towards adoptive parents (Byran, 2004). According to Nwogugu (2014), adoption is the process that “creates a parent-child relationship between the adopted child and the adoptive parents with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities between the child and the natural parents or guardians. According to Aduba (2018), adoption is the process by which the legal relationship between a child and his natural parents is severed and re-established between the child and a third party or parties.

It is the creation of a parent-child relationship by judicial order between two parties who usually, are unrelated; the relation of parent and child is created by law between persons who are not in fact parent and child. This relationship is brought about only after a determination that the child who is in an orphanage home has been abandoned, or that the person's parental rights have been terminated by court order (Obi & Aduma, 2022: 49).



Moreover, under the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adoption is recognized as one of the forms of alternative care for children who have been temporarily or permanently deprived of their family environment, and also for children who are unable to remain in their family environment. It is described as a unique form of child care because it provides permanent care and parenting for the adopted child as compared to other childcare institutions like guardianship which is a temporary action that does not terminate the parental rights of the biological parents (Obi & Aduma, 2022: 49). The three sets of participants in adoption are the adoptive parent seeking the adoption order, the child to be adopted, and the birth parents of the child. Adoption could take two forms open or closed. Open adoption allows some level of information to be shared among the parties in Adoption. While in the latter, information of the parties is permanently sealed.

Igbo Christians: This refers to the Christian population of Igbo origin. The Igbo refers to both an ethnic and linguistic group. As an ethnic group, the Igbo people are an ethnic group in Nigeria found in Abia, Anambra, Delta, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, and River states of Nigeria. They have a common border with the Igala and the Idoma on the Northern part of Nigeria, the Ijaw and Ogoni on the South, the Yako and Ibibio on the Eastern boundary, and the Bini and Warri on the West. The principal rivers are Niger, Imo, Anambra, and the Ulasi River. The Niger divides the Igbo into two uneven areas.

The bulk of the population lives east of the Niger, with heavy concentration at Okigwe, Orlu, Owerri, Onitsha, and Awka. The other part of the Igbo group lives west of the Niger. The Igbo area is an area inhabited by people with almost identical but variable cultural traits in an oscillated geographical area (Ekwunife, 1999). The Igbo belong to the Sudanic linguistic group of the Kwa division (Uchendu, 1965; Onwuejeogwu, 1981). The Igbo speak the Igbo language.

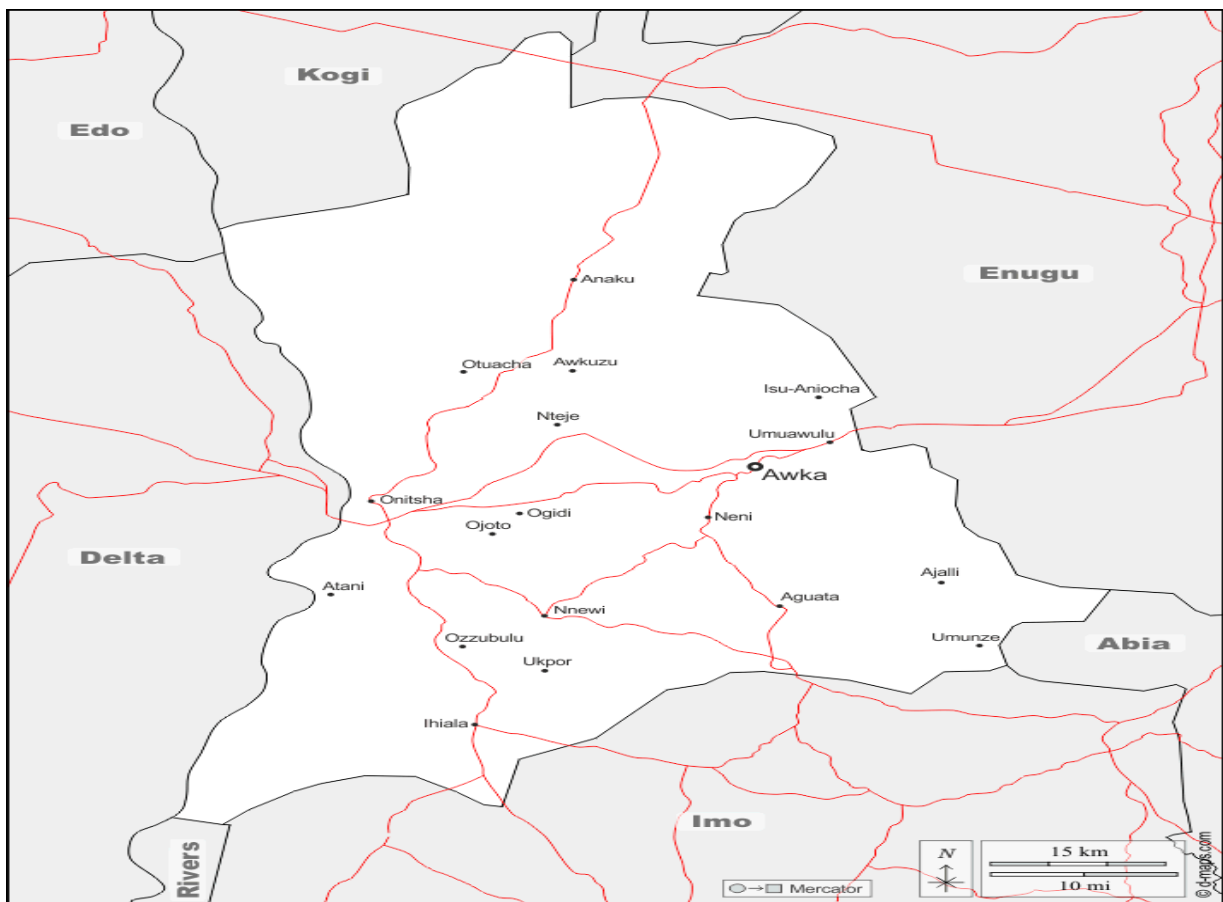
Methodology

Study Area

Anambra is a state in Southeastern Nigeria. The state shares boundaries with Delta State to the west, Imo State to the south, Enugu State to the east and Kogi State to the north. The Indigenous ethnic group in Anambra state is the Igbo (98% of the population) and a small population of Igala (2% of the population) live in the western part of the state (Nigeria Online Genealogy Records, n.d). Politically, the state is made up of twenty-one (21) Local Government Areas (LGAs), thirty (30) States Constituencies, and eleven (11) Federal Constituencies, three (3) Senatorial Districts.

The three sample towns of Awka, Onitsha, and Ihiala fall within the main cities of the state, with Awka as the State capital. According to the 2006 population figures, Anambra state had a population of 4,177,828 (Male:2,117,984; Female: 2,059,844), with a 2022 population projection of 5,953,500, and it covers an area of approximately 4,844Km² and a population density of 1,264/Km² with annual population change (2006 to 2022) of 2.2% (NPC, 2010). However, the most current data from the National Bureau of Statistics puts the population of Anambra state at 5,599,910 (NBS, 2020).

Fig. 1: 1: Map of Anambra State showing the boundaries, main cities, roads, and names



Source: 2007-2023 <https://d-maps.com>

Research Method

The study employs a qualitative research method. The qualitative research approach entails extensive data collection and meticulous analysis of non-numerical data (Lamont 2015; Nwankwor & Okafor, 2022). Because the goal of this research is to understand the reasons behind the reservation towards child adoption in family preservation among Igbo Christians of Anambra state, the qualitative technique is deemed appropriate. Qualitative methods have been critiqued for being too descriptive. They are nevertheless appropriate for this study since the objective is to identify rather than measure the various reasons responsible for the expressed withdrawal/ reservation among Igbo Christians of the state towards child adoption. Additionally, qualitative approaches are not just descriptive; they also contain an analytical framework (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Nwankwo & Okafor, 2022).

Participant Recruitment

The KII involves 13 participants at a ratio of 7 males and 6 females. These were randomly and purposively selected from the management of orphanage homes, Child welfare Centres, Orphan and Vulnerable (OVC unit) of the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Orientation (MWASO), and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Anambra state. The questionnaire was distributed among married men and women and adults of marriageable age in Awka, Onitsha, and Ihiala. The two major prerequisite qualifications for participation in both the interview and questionnaire sessions were firstly, the participant must be either an indigene of Anambra state or from other states in Igbo land residing in Anambra state, and



secondly, the participant must be a Christian. The consent of the participants was fully sought and granted.

Sampling Frame and Techniques

This study adopted a sample survey. While survey refers to techniques for collecting data from the target population of interest, sample survey involves a situation in which data are collected from only a subset of the population instead of the entire population (National Academies, 2009). This is because owing to the population of the state and its geographical spread, it is not economically feasible to study the entire state. The study made use of a probability sample, guided by simple random and purposive sampling mechanisms in determining the sample areas and size.

Method of Data Collection

Data for the study were obtained through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Questionnaire Surveys. The KIIs were collected using both written and audio notes. The audio data was later transcribed for use. A total number of two hundred and sixty (260) structured questionnaires were distributed at the ratio of one hundred (100) copies each in Onitsha and Awka and sixty (60) copies in Ihiala.

The variant in the ratio of the distributed questionnaires was informed principally by the population of the towns, with Ihiala having the lowest population. The questionnaires were printed in hard copies. While some fill out the questionnaire on the field and return it, few others go home with the form with the promise to return it later. Out of the 260 distributed questionnaires, one hundred and ninety-six (196) copies were retrieved and used for the analysis. Finally, the collection of data for the study was guided by three research questions:

1. What were the various reasons why people adopted in Anambra state?
2. What were the attitudes of Christians towards child -adoption in Anambra state?
3. What were the consequences of child- adoption in family preservation in Anambra state?

Table 1: Showing the Socio-Demographic information of participants at the KII

S/N	Name of Participant	Sex	Age	Educational Qualification	Denomination	Location/ Place of Interview
1	Paulinus	M	57	M.Ed	Anglican	Awka
2	Syvester	M	46	HND	Methodist	Enugu
3	Nteke	M	43	BSC	Adventist	Enugu
4	Tobias	M	50	HND	Anglican	Awka
5	Chioma	F	45	BSC	Catholic	Onitsha
6	Neola	F	51	OND	Baptist	Ihiala
7	Salomi	F	48	OND	Later day Saint	Ihiala
8	Amara	F	52	BSC	Redemption	Onitsha
9	Paul	M	47	MSC	Catholic	Awka
10	Jecinta	F	55	HND	Catholic	Awka
11	Paschaline	F	53	BSC	Anglican	Awka
12	Frednard	M	58	BSC	Catholic (Night)	Awka
13	Christopher	M	55	BSC	Catholic	Awka

Note: Names used in the table are pseudonyms

Table 2: Showing the Socio-Demographic information of Participants at the survey sampling



Gender			Marital Status			Educational Qualification		
Male	113	58%	Married	118	60.0%	OND	78	40.0%
Female	83	42%	Single	49	25.0%	BSC	61	31.0%
			Separated	29	15.0%	PG Degrees	25	13.0%
						Others	32	16.0%
Total	196	100.00		196	100.00		196	100.00

Method of Data Analysis and Interpretation

At the end of the data collection process, all the codes and their corresponding data were entered into the collection sheet according to the three towns within the study area. The responses from the KII were descriptively analyzed.

The methods used to analyze the data gathered from the questionnaire are descriptive analytical statistics and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as simple percentages, standard deviations and mean were used. The items in the questionnaire were scored using the four-point- Likert scale. Weight (code) was attached to each answer, such as SA (4), A (3), D (2), and SD (1).

This was used for item-by-item analysis. Weighted mean was used to determine the average of responses by the respondents. A weighted mean of 2.5 and above is accepted (as the majority position on the item on the questionnaire) for the study bearing the decision tag (A- for agree), while a mean below 2.5 is rejected for the study with the decision tag (D- for disagree).

Results (Quantitative and Qualitative)

1. What were the various reasons why people adopted in Anambra state?

Table 3: showing the various reasons why people adopt in Anambra State

S/n	Items	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Decision
1	Childlessness is the major reason for child- adoption	77 (39%)	60 (31%)	31 (16%)	28 (14%)	3.0	A
2	Infertility is another reason people adopt in Igbo land	78 (40%)	57 (29%)	33 (17%)	28 (14%)	3.0	A
3	Absence of a male child can lead to child- adoption	61 (31%)	67 (34%)	37 (19%)	31 (16%)	2.8	A
4	Child trafficking and rituals are other reasons people adopts	62 (32%)	64 (33%)	38 (19%)	32 (16%)	2.8	A

The findings from the survey sample indicated that the participants agree that childlessness, infertility, and absence of a male child are the major reasons people adopt in Anambra State with a weighted mean of 3.0, 3.0, and 2.8 respectively, and others adopt for the reasons of child-trafficking and rituals with a mean of 2.8.

The same observation was recorded at the KII. Concerning child trafficking and rituals as reasons why people adopt in Anambra state, Tobias (Personal communication) observed that



adoption is not new in Igboland; it has been in Igboland for more than 100 years. According to him, there used to be a market known as Afo Osukwu in Owerrenta, Isiala-Ngwa Local Government area where human beings are sold. Wealthy men buy them; keep strong ones back as domestic slaves (ohu) and use weak ones for rituals and burial of reputable persons in the society. He however noted that the coming of Christianity in Igboland has helped in stopping the use of human beings for rituals. Today instead of using humans, animals are used except in some remote cultures.

2. What were the attitudes of Christians towards child -adoption in Anambra state?

Table 4: showing the attitudes of Christians toward Child –adoption in Anambra state

S/n	Items	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Decision
1	Quite a number of Christian couples in the state would prefer to marry a second wife to adoption in the face of childlessness	32 (16%)	89 (45%)	56 (29%)	19 (10%)	2.7	A
2	Christian couples in state adopt as a last resort	69 (35%)	56 (29%)	37 (19%)	34 (17%)	2.8	A
3	Some Christian couples in the state adopt secretly because of stigmatization	59 (30%)	66 (34%)	18 (19%)	33 (17%)	2.8	A

The findings revealed three dominant attitudes often exhibited by Christians in Anambra State toward child -adoption. The results indicate that quite many Christian couples in the state would prefer to marry a second wife to adoption in the face of childlessness with a weighted mean of 2.7. When they eventually subscribe to adoption, it was seen as a last resort after they might have exhausted other medical measures of having a biological child with a weighted mean of 2.8 and even at that, the adoption is often carried out secretly due to stigmatization with a weighted mean of 2.8.

Salomi (Personal communication) made us aware of her position in case her daughter becomes a victim of childlessness. According to her, she would either advise her to allow her husband to go for a second wife or to cohabit with other women, especially those places like Urogbo where children without a legal father are not accommodated instead of adoption.

3. What were the consequences of child- adoption in family preservation in Anambra state?

Table 5: showing the consequences of Child -Adoption in Anambra State

S/n	Items	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Decision
1	Adoption to create a family is not indigenous to the people of Anambra state	84 (43%)	46 (23%)	29 (15%)	37 (19%)	2.9	A
2	Adopted children are less well-adjusted, more prone to medical challenges, and predisposed to drug and alcohol problems	34 (17%)	41 (21%)	69 (35%)	52 (27%)	2.3	D



3	Adopted children are not stigmatized in Anambra state	41 (21%)	35 (18%)	56 (28%)	64 (33%)	2.3	D
4	An adopted child enjoys the same rights and opportunities as the biological child in Anambra state	35 (18%)	56 (28%)	59 (30%)	48 (24%)	2.4	D
5	Adopted children hold sensitive positions in Anambra state, such as; Eze, Prince, Igwe, Obi, heads of clan, etc	39 (20%)	40 (20%)	53 (27%)	64 (33%)	2.3	D
6	Child- adoption bridges the Igbo ancestral lineage	45 (23%)	52 (27%)	61 (31%)	38 (19%)	2.5	A

The results from the survey sample and KII revealed six commonly held consequences or effects of child adoption among the people of Anambra State. The respondents agree with items number 1 and 6 with a weighted mean of 2.9 and 2.5 but disagree with items number 2, 3, 4, and 5 with a weighted mean of 2.3, 2.3, 2.4, and 2.3 respectively.

Aside from the long practice of slavery which Tobias linked to adoption, the report from the interview affirms that child adoption in family preservation is relatively new in Anambra state and Igbo land. As observed by Amara (Personal communication), adoption in family preservation in cases of childlessness has not been part and parcel of the Igbo people. The practice became more rampant in Igboland in the 1980s and this may be part of the reasons for the negative attitudes towards child adoption, especially in family preservation.

The interview reports also validated the results in items nos. 3, 4 & 5 of the survey sampling regarding the social inequality and stigmatization of adoptees in Anambra state. Chioma (Personal communication), with specific reference to Onitsha native law, observed that anybody adopted or assimilated can never become Diokpa (head of the family or clan) and if such a person is a female, she can never become Isiada or Isiokpu (head of the daughters). Occupants of these positions must have a family pedigree. However, she acknowledged a ritual ceremony known as “inyusanwamirin’nsi” (that is, urinating over the child) in Onitsha culture whereby an adopted or assimilated is initiated into the community. With this ritual ceremony, as Nteke (Personal Communication) notes, any child adopted or assimilated becomes a member of that family or clan, even though such a person cannot stay in the Ukpo (headship stool of the clan).

A similar experience is witnessed in Awka areas. Adopted children as observed by Paul (Personal Communication) are not allowed to take the Ozo title (the highest and revered title) in the area. This is because of the shared notion of the two categories of indigenes; Nwa-amulun’uno (a child or children born at home or biological child) and Nwaamulu n’ ezi (a child or children born outside the home). The adopted or the assimilated are categorized under the second group. Ozo title, according to him, is reserved solely for the first category- the biological male child/ children of the clan. As Ferdinand (Personal communication) would observe, even though the adopted could have some regard in Awka, they are not truly regarded by the immediate families or clans as true blood members of the family or clan.

In situations of serious family matters, they are not allowed to join in the deliberations, and no matter how highly- placed, wealthy, and educated the adopted may prove to be, their rights and privileges are limited when compared to the biological child. They are according to Jacinta (Personal Communication) often reminded of their historical background whenever they prove stubborn. Derogatory words such as ekweraakaakwaonu, agwayaifveejikpuya(e.i, if one makes much noise, the historical background will be unveiled to him), and ogbozu n’ ekwu,



idina ana ekwu (meaning that the son of the soil cannot be talking while a stranger talks at the same time) are used against the adopted in most communities in Anambra state.

Discussion

The results from the KII and the questionnaire all attribute the reservation toward child-adoption in family preservation among Christians in Anambra state to the perceived negative consequences of child adoption in Anambra state and Igbo society at large. A critical appraisal of the six items in Table 5 of the questionnaire and the report from the interview sessions indicates three major outstanding consequences of child -adoption as upheld by the people of Anambra state. These include claims to the non-indigenous/ foreign nature of child adoption to the people, the tendency of child adoption to bridge the ancestral lineage, and finally, the social inequality and stigmatization of the adopted. The discussion shall be anchored on these three dimensions.

Non-indigenous / foreign nature of child-adoption

The results reveal that child adoption, especially as a solution to childlessness is entirely new to the people of Anambra state just like in every Igbo society. As deduced from the findings, before the colonial era, child -adoption had never been part of the Igbo culture. As a result, adopting an unknown child in Igbo land is generally not acceptable. It is seen as a foreign practice forced on the people by the Christian religion. The concept that seems to be closer to child- adoption in Igbo land as revealed by the study is the practice of Ohu (cult or domestic slavery). As meant to understand, wealthy individuals buy these slaves, keep strong ones back as domestic slaves, and use weak ones for ritual. Nevertheless, even though a master may love and cherish his slaves for one reason or the other, such a slave no matter how diligent he may seem to be, can never take the position of his biological child. The master would rather opt for other traditional measures in addressing infertility than adopt his slave. So for the people of Anambra state and the Igbo people at large, recommending adoption as a remedy in situations of infertility is strange if not an abomination. As such, the non -indigenous nature of child- adoption contributes to a greater extent to the reservation experienced among Christians in Anambra state towards child- adoption in family preservation.

Child adoption bridges the Igbo ancestral lineage.

Another crucial challenge to child- adoption among Christians in Anambra state as revealed by the findings has been the perception of the tendency of child adoption to bridge the Igbo ancestral lineage. {Item no. 6 of table 5 with a weighted mean of 2.5 as can be seen in the questionnaire attests to this}. Both the data from the questionnaire and interview affirm this perception. There has been this dominant belief among the Igbo people that child adoption entails the introduction into the family and community of a foreign blood which removes a child from her own family and removes all the ancestors from a child. Child adoption as Ele (2018) observes, is seen by the Igbo as a Western scheme that is deficient by encouraging the introduction of strange blood in the family and kindred {Here the authors linked the findings from the field to a scholar, Ele (2018) whose observation aligns with the findings of [the study](#)}. This explains the reason for the preference of the traditionally approved remedies to infertility over child adoption by Christians in Anambra state. Because of the patrilineal nature of the Igbo family, the remedy to childlessness, as conceived by the Igbo, must enhance consanguinity (blood relationship). These remedies include marrying a second wife, allowing a woman to cohabit with another man, encouraging marriage between fellow women (matrifocal), and adopting a female child of the family to procreate for her father (mostly done in a situation of absence of a male child).



A thorough review of the Igbo worldview indicates that the Igbo have a strong reverence for their ancestral descent. The reason is quite understandable. The Igbo community as understood, consists of both visible and invisible beings. A community for the Igbo denotes first and foremost an ontological, moral, religious, and effective quality of human relations. It is ontological in so far as all the members of the community are believed to have descended from a common ancestor (Nzomiwu, 1999).

Outside the belief that the ancestors bring blessings and serve as a watchdog over their families, Igbo people revered their ancestors much because of the belief in Ino- Uwa (Reincarnation) (Ekwunife, 1999). For example, in the Awka area of Anambra state, an average Awka man does have a special regard for any of his children believed to have been endowed with the personality traits of the departed members of his family. This is why names like Nnanna (my father's father), Nnenna (my mother's mother), and Nnenna (my mother's father) were household names in Awka and most communities in Anambra state. Unfortunately, in the Igbo worldview it is believed that this coming back to life of the departed in the form of Ino-Uwa can only occur in the biological offspring of the immediate family or clan. This stands as another strong barrier towards child adoption in Igbo and is responsible for the reservation expressed among Christians in Anambra state.

Social discrimination and stigmatization of adoptees

Another strong reason behind the reservation expressed among Christians in Anambra state towards child- adoption in family preservation as indicated by the findings is the social discrimination and stigmatization of adopted children. The results from both the interview and questionnaire indicate that adopted children do not enjoy equal rights and opportunities when compared to biological children in the state. Adopted children are always treated as second-class citizens. {For instance, items nos. 3, 4 & 5 of table 5 under the result section supports the inequalities that do exists between the adopted and the biological children in Anambra state. The three items in the questionnaire had revealed that adopted children are stigmatized, denied equal rights and opportunities (such as holding sensitive positions or titles like Eze, Igwe, Obi etc) when compared to the biological children in the study areas. This observation also aligns with the information gathered from the interview sessions. Paul, Ferdinand and Jacinta (Personal Communications) had all made reference to the unequal rights and opportunities between the adopted and the biological children in the study areas. For example, Paul in paragraph 4, question 3 of the Results section made it clear that in Awka areas, adopted children are not allowed to take Ozo title; the highest revered title in the town due to the shared notion among the people of the two categories of indigenes/ citizens; children born at home/ biological children and children born outside the home. The adopted are often linked with the second class of indigenes, and as such are treated as second class citizens. According to Paul, Ozo title is reserved solely for the first category of indigenes/ citizens.}In most communities in the state, they are not to join issues with the so-called sons of the soil (the biological children). Even where they have passed through certain prescribed rituals of assimilation, they are still barred from certain privileges. The stigmatization could come in various forms; which include; discrimination, denial of inheritance, and the right to occupy traditional leadership positions in society (Chikwe, Obiageli & Okoye, 2022).

Nevertheless, the discriminatory attitude toward adopted children in Anambra state and Igbo land at large is often associated with the Igbo concept of community. For example, a community for the Igbo, as Nzomiwu (1999) observes, denotes first and foremost an ontological tie; in so far as all the members of the community are believed to have descended from a common ancestor. The link that binds all members of the same family by propagation,



according to him, is broadened to include all members of the community or clan who are believed to be descendants of the same ancestor.

In the Anambra state, as can be revealed from the findings, serious importance is attached to the ontological tier of a common ancestor. What this entails is that before one claims to be a member of any community in the state and in Igbo land, such a person must owe his allegiance to a common ancestor. This informs the third major reason behind the reservation towards child adoption among Christians in Anambra state. Ordinarily, no lovely and caring couple would wish their adopted child to go through such humiliating and discriminating treatment. To avoid such threats, some Christian couples would rather resort to any of the traditionally acceptable remedies to childlessness instead of adopting. Of course, this is not without some consequences on the professed faith of Christian couples.

Conclusion

This study has successfully investigated the major factors that inform the expressed reservations towards child- adoption among Christians in Anambra state. As the findings reveal, the reason behind the observed reservations among Christians towards child- adoption has much to do with the enduring conviction of the Igbo in their traditional values and worldview. Convictions include; the non-indigenous nature of child- adoption, the preference for traditional remedies to infertility that enhance consanguinity (blood relationship) of the Igbo family, the belief that child- adoption bridges the Igbo ancestral lineage; and the justified social inequality and stigmatization of the adopted. These perceptions of the Igbo people have continually influenced the choice of Christian couples on adoption in the Anambra state.

It has always been the wish and expectation of the Church that the Christian faithful stand by the teachings and positions of the Church on many life-challenging matters, of which infertility is one. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case as several Christian couples in the state often opt for traditional remedies in addressing infertility, which would enable one to have his biological child instead of adoption, even with conscious awareness of the consequences of such a choice to their professed faith. Although many have associated these attitudes among Christian couples towards child adoption to fear of stigmatization, the present study believes that this has much to do with the conscious conviction on the validity of the Igbo traditional values and worldview among the Christian faithful.

Whatever the case may be, and whichever school of thought one may belong, the study is of the view that the choice of whatever remedial measures to adopt towards addressing infertility in marriage should remain sacrosanct to the affected Christian couples. It should be one free of any form of persuasion or threats; implicitly or explicitly expressed. It is only by doing so that the fundamental human rights of the couples are respected. Obviously, the realization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) no. 10 (Reduced Inequality) would depend much on how members of our communities (whether adopted, assimilated or biological) received fair and equal treatment.

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