



Cultural Factors and Baby Factory Syndrome in Ilu Titun, Okitipupa Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Baby-factory syndrome has constituted a security-threat in Nigeria. This practice has gained notoriety which threatens the lives of girls, women, and well-being of babies. This study, therefore, examines the cultural factors predisposing the syndrome in Ilu-titun, Okitipupa Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria. The study adopted both Qualitative and Quantitative methods of data-collection and analysis. Quantitative data were collected using simple random sampling technique to administer copies of structured questionnaire schedule on selected participants in the study-area, to elicit necessary information from them on their perception of baby-factory. Also, Purposive sampling techniques were used to further select respondents from quarters in the study area for the in-depth interviews (KIIs) and key-informant interviews (IDIs) which formed the Qualitative data. In all, four hundred and seventy-eight (478) respondents sum up the sample size for the study. "Anomie" - strain theory of Robert K. Merton (1968) was employed to explain why individuals sometimes resorted to illegitimate means to achieve culturally prescribed goals. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics - percentages and inferential statistics. The Chi-square hypotheses test table value of 1.1150 $p > 0.05$ implied there was no significant relationship between status and tendencies towards baby-factory. The study revealed the major reasons, such as family pressure (18.2%), and need to have children (13.6%) as reasons why individuals patronize baby-factories against the reproach of childlessness. The study also showed that most victims of baby-factories were homeless teenagers (44.3%), pregnant teenagers (25%), kidnapped girls/women (21.6%) and rent-a-womb girls/women (8.0%). This means that most victims of baby-factories were at-risk girls /women who would not have engaged in such inhuman and criminal acts if they were not in dire need of funds. The study further revealed that most respondents' general view on baby-factory indicated attitudinal change towards childlessness (88.6%), baby-factories be shut down by Government (71.4%), and none subscribed to the view that they be granted the status of community-based organizations (CBOs). The study, therefore, recommended that Government and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should embark on media sensitization to curb stigmatization of childless Couple. Government should establishment of specialized hospital for In-vitro fertilization etc

KEYWORDS: Baby-Factory, Cultural Factors, Ilu-Titun, Ondo State

Introduction

A criminal trend has evolved in Nigeria whereby unmarried and/or pregnant teenagers are kept in one place until they give birth. After giving birth, these young mothers are paid and released but the business owner who hired them takes their babies away and sold them for astronomical sums of money (Omeire, Iheriohanma, Osita-njoku, & Omeire, E. 2015). The trend is known as "Baby-factory" industry (Mba, 2014). This type of crime constitutes a major security threat to the nation (Odekunle, 2014). In Africa and Nigeria specifically, motherhood enjoys an excellent value within the context of the indigenous family institution. Every family anticipates having children, and having children is regarded as a treasure that is passionately desired. (Ojedokun & Atoi, 2012). According to Onyemachi (2010) children are seen as God's gifts. Children as the Lord's special blessing are "quivers in the hands of parents" as indicated in the Holy Bible's Psalm 127 verses 3-5. Children are mostly perceived as joy to parents and, a joy of motherhood. They are highly esteemed as spiritual creatures, well-loved, worshipped, revered, and regarded as the most priceless possession. Indeed, it is thought to be crucial for both sexes to have children since they serve as a sign of prosperity and guarantee the continuation of the family line. (Zeitlin, 1996). As a result, the birth of a child was and still is a case of celebration for the entire community. (Maposa & Rusinga, 2012). When a child is to be given a name, there are frequently many celebratory, elaborate, and expensive ceremonies. This outward sign of appreciation shows how highly valued and admired children are among Nigerians (Ayua & Okague, 1996). The importance of motherhood and biological offspring in Nigeria is overstated. It places optimal value on children. The Yoruba, as well as the Igbo, regard childbearing as the main reason for marriage (Uchendu, 1995). Despite the high regard for children in Yoruba culture, there are couples in various Yoruba communities who are childless. Assuredly, many of these childless couples often seek medical, spiritual, and traditional solutions to their problem without success (Omeire, *et al.*, 2015). Childlessness in marriage causes marital friction and often leads to divorce (Amato, 2000). In practice, child-adoption would have been a pragmatic and viable solution to the problem of infertility among the Yoruba. However, child-adoption is alien to Yoruba culture and it is seen as a western practice. Also, some studies reported that, in Nigeria, especially in Yorubaland, most infertile women are not willing to adopt children (Ezugwu, Obi, & Ona, 2002; Omosun & Kofoworola, 2011). According to Omosun and Kofoworola (2011), a child adopted into a Yoruba-community is sometimes treated as an outsider; and the child may find it

difficult to interact freely because of fear of being intimidated or rejected. Hence, childless couples would sometimes resort to whatever means, whether legal or illegal, to have children just to fulfill the cultural goal of a family having children after marriage. The desperation has triggered criminal syndicates to create a location where babies are being produced for sale. The production of babies for purely commercial purposes in different guises has become a bane in the Nigerian society. This practice represents a gross erosion of values attached to the birth of a child within the context of the traditional family-institution in Nigeria. The baby-factory syndrome as a commercialization of human babies and infants, like economic animals, is a crime with dire consequences on the physical and mental health of the victims. Previous studies such as Omeire et al., (2015) pointed out the challenges of child-adoption and the emergence of baby-factories in Southern-Eastern, Nigeria but did not address the cultural factors predisposing the practice in Nigeria. Also, Svetlana (2013) explained that the emergence of baby-factories has become a new trend in baby-dumping in the country, but the recommendations proffered in the study were not sufficient as the practice persists. Sarinus (2014) and Bridget (2015) studies were only interested in investigating how the practice has become a means for human trafficking and human rights violations. Their work did explain the factors encouraging the syndrome but failed to identify the cultural factors influencing the practice. This is a question that needs to be answered and determined empirically. It is against this background that the study is designed to examine cultural factors predisposing baby factory practice in Ilu-titun.

1.2 Purpose

The aim of this study was to examine the cultural factors predisposing baby factory syndrome in Ilu-titun.

2.0 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. What are the cultural factors that trigger baby-factory syndrome in Ilu-titun, Okitipupa Local Government Area?
- ii. What are the causes of the effects of baby-factory syndrome in Ilu-titun, Okitipupa LGA?
- iii. What are the efforts so far made by authorities which are inadequate to solve the problem or aggravate the practice?

3.0 Theoretical Framework

Anomie-Strain Theory

In this study, the criminal activity of having a “biological child” through illegal means in Ilu-titun, Ondo State, Nigeria, is situated within the framework of anomie-strain theory. Robert K. Merton (1968) developed the theory. Etymologically, the word “anomie” has a French origin and connotes normlessness or the absence of law. Emile Durkheim (1897) conceptualized the term “anomie” to mean the absence, weakening, and violation of norms/laws and the core-values regulating human action in society. Robert Merton’s anomie-strain perspective refers to the discrepancies between culturally defined goals and the institutionalized means available to achieve these goals. This theory appears apt to capture the criminal acts involved in the emergence of baby-factory in contemporary Nigeria. Anomie-strain theory of Emile Durkheim was borrowed and modified by Robert Merton for a means-end paradigm in 1968. Merton’s anomie perspective maintains that society creates the environment for the birthing of crimes and criminals by stipulating goals and values without providing corresponding legal opportunities for realizing them. Consequently, the disconnect between socially prescribed goals and the availability of legitimate means to attain such goals, in turn, puts pressure on the individual to commit crime/deviance. Merton (1968) developed a typology – a classification scheme – designed to facilitate understanding of the theory. According to Merton, there are five ways in which people could respond to success goals. These are: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion. According to Merton, Conformity involves the acceptance of both the cultural goals and the means of attaining the goals; Innovation involves the acceptance of the goals of a culture but the rejection of the traditional and/or legitimate means of attaining the goals. For example, a member of a criminal gang values wealth but employs alternative means – i.e., crime of attaining wealth. In this example, the criminal gang member’s means is deviant; Ritualism involves the rejection of cultural goals and the routinized acceptance of the means of achieving the goals; Retreatism involves the rejection of both the cultural goals and the traditional means of achieving the goals; and, Rebellion is a special case where the individual rejects both the cultural goals and the traditional means of achieving of them; but, actively, replaces both elements of the society with different goals and means.

Anomie-strain theory conceptualization for the study entails how individuals often accept the culturally defined goals of society but reject the legitimate means to attain such goal. The innovation mode of adaptation, which the study hinges on explaining situation in the society where couples and individual who could not attain cultural goal of having their own biological child(ren) often result to illegal means to achieve such. Viewed from this perspective, anomie-strain theory’s innovation mode of adaptation captures patronage and sustenance of baby-factory in the society. Married couples and even, in some cases, unmarried adults who desperately need children to fulfill the cultural goal of having children after marriage, sometimes resort to the illegitimate means to achieve such. Therefore, baby-factory provides them with an alternative to pursue and achieve the socially approved goals of couples having children, albeit through illegal means.

4.0 Methodology

The study adopted an exploratory design method to examine cultural factors influencing baby-factory syndrome in Ilu-titun town. The use of “triangulation” or multiple methods – qualitative and quantitative of data collection is to help the researcher answer questions that cannot be answered using only qualitative or quantitative method alone. In this study, a quantitative approach is applied collecting responses of respondents in the study area through a well-prepared research instrument. The findings on the quantitative research are supplemented by a qualitative approach aimed at giving an in-depth explanation of the quantitative result. Structure questionnaires were given to three hundred and ninety-eight (398) respondents selected using simple random sampling technique. A further sample of twenty (20) respondents was drawn each from the three (3) quarters using in-depth

interviews (IIDs) while key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with another twenty (20) respondents – among recruits and operator of the business in the study area. In all, four hundred and seventy-eight (478) respondents comprising of traditional chiefs, opinion leaders, youth leaders, recruits, operators of baby-factory and members of public sum up as the total sample size for the study covering qualitative and quantitative methods. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency. An alpha level of 0.05 was set for the chi-square (χ^2) tests. All data analyses were done with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

5.0 Discussions and Findings

The socio-economic characterized of the respondents are presented in table 1.

Table I: Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Respondents

Characteristics		Frequency (n = 398)	Percentage (%)
(a)	Sex		
	Male	208	52.3
	Female	190	47.7
Age			
	18 – 30 years	104	26.2
	30.5 – 40 years	140	35.2
	Older than 40 years	154	38.6
(b)	Marital Status		
	Single/never married	104	26.1
	Married	226	56.8
	Divorced/separated/widowed	68	17.1
(c)	Number of Children		
	Three Children & less	163	40.9
	Four Children & more	140	35.2
	No child	95	23.9
(d)	Parenthood Type		
	By Birth	113	98.9
	By Adoption	4	1.1
(e)	Religion		
	Islam	113	28.4
	Christianity	271	68.2
	African Traditional Religion (ATR)	14	3.4
(f)	Level of Education Attainment		
	No Education	32	8.0
	Primary School	27	6.8
	Secondary School	122	30.7
	Tertiary	217	54.5
(g)	Occupation		
	Unemployed	68	17.1
	Civil Servant	8	21.6
	Artisans	244	61.4
(h)	Location of Residence		
	Urban	195	48.9
	Rural	203	51.1
(i)	Years Lived in Present Location		
	Five years & less	81	20.4
	More than five years	317	79.6
(j)	Ethnicity		
	Yoruba	380	95.4
	Non-Yoruba	18	4.6

The distribution of the background characteristics of the respondents as presented in tables.

In Table I (a), the majority (52.3%) of the respondents are males with 47.7% are females. Thus, both male and female respondents are well represented in the study-sample.

Also, in Table I (b), a quarter of the respondents were younger than 31years (26.2%) more than a third was within the age range between 31 and 41years (35.2%) while 38.6% were older than 41years. This implies that most of the respondents in the study-sample are above 30years of age. In Table I(c), the majority (56.8%) of the respondents are married while 26.1% are unmarried. Thus, it shows that most respondents in the study-area are adults. Furthermore, in Table I (d), the majority (40.9%) of the respondents had less than three children, 35.2% had more than four children while 23.9% had no children. The study shows that most respondents have enjoyed parenthood. Moreover, in Table I (e), the majority (98.9%) of the respondents had their children by natural birth while only 1.1% had their children by adoption. Thus, most respondents in the study-sample enjoyed parenthood by birth. Also, in Table I (f), majority (68.2%) of the respondents are Christians, 28.4% are Islamic adherents while only 3.4% are adherents of African Traditional Religion (ATR). The study-sample shows that Christianity is the predominant religion practiced in the study-area. Furthermore, in Table I (g), the level of educational attainment shows that the majority (54.5%) of the respondents had tertiary education, 30.7% had secondary education, and 6.8% had primary education while 8.0% had no formal education. Thus, most respondents are knowledgeable and understand the study subject matter. Also, in Table I (h), shows that 61.4% of the respondents are working in the non-civil service sector, 21.6% are civil servants while only 17.1% are unemployed. This implies that most respondents are engaging in productive activities. In Table I(i), 51.1% of the respondents are living in rural residence, while 48.9% lived in urban area. This implies that the study area is a rural community. Also, in Table I (j), the majority (79.6%) of the respondents had lived more than five years in the study area while only 20.4% had lived less than five years in the area. Finally, in Table I (k) show that 95.4% of the respondents are Yoruba by ethnicity while only 4.6% are not. Thus, the study-sample shows that the study-area is a predominant Yoruba town.

Table II: Did you know what Baby-Factory is?

Characteristics	Frequency (n = 398)	Percentage (%)
(a) Are you aware of the baby factory?		
Aware	348	87.5
(b) Number of cases of baby-factory syndrome ever heard		
One		
Two	68	17.1
Three	72	18.2
Four & more	90	22.7
	113	28.4
(c) Opinion about motive for baby-factory		
Greed	168	28.4
Exploitation	127	31.8
Helping childless couples	45	11.4
Relieving pregnant teenagers of unwanted pregnancies	23	5.7
	27	6.8
(d) What do you think is the reason for the emergence of baby-factory?		
Family pressure	72	18.2
Need to have biological children	51	13.6
Childlessness ²⁷		
Economic gain ²³		6.8
		5.7
(e) Who is the major victim of the baby factory?		
Homeless/neglected teenagers	176	44.3
Pregnant teenagers	99	25.0
Kidnapped women/girls	86	21.6
Rent-a-womb women/girls	32	8.0
Other	4	1.1

(f) What do you understand by baby-factory?		
Selling & buying of babies	267	67.1
Infant trafficking	45	11.4
Abusing of infants	14	3.4
Ritual killing of infants	18	4.5
Money-making enterprise	54	13.6
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(g) What punishment should be awarded to baby-factory's owners?		
Long jail term		
Seizure/confiscation of money & property	104	26.1
Death penalty	82	20.5
Life imprisonment	77	19.3
	136	34.1
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(h) General view on baby-factory: shut down by government		
Yes		
No	284	71.4
	114	28.6
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(i) General view on baby-factory: granted the status of community-based organization		
Yes		
No	-	-
	398	100.0

Analysis on the information about awareness of baby-factory by the respondents as presented in Tables.

In Tables II (a), the majority (87.5%) of the respondents are aware of the baby factory while only 12.5% are not aware of the syndrome. Also, in Table II(b), 17.1% of the respondents indicated they have heard one case of baby-factory, 18.2% indicated two cases, 22.7% indicated three cases, 28.4% indicated more than four cases while only 13.6% indicated they had heard none. The sample study shows that most respondents have heard about baby-factory cases. This statement is affirmed from the summary of discussion engaged with some respondents. One of the traditional chiefs in the town put in his thought when he said:

You will hardly listen to the news nowadays without hearing a case of a baby factory being reported in the country. The rate at which this crime is being committed is alarming and government should do something about it (IDI/Male, 56years, Holder of Senior Secondary School Certificate [SSCE])

In Table II(c), respondents believe agreed (42.1%), exploitation (31.8%), helping childless couples (11.4%), relieving pregnant/neglected teenagers of unwanted pregnancies (5.7%) are motives for baby-factory while 6.8% and 2.3% respondents have no idea for motives for the syndrome. This view is substantiated by one of the youth leaders when he said:

The people that engage in baby-factory business are lazy and wicked people who want quick money. The greed to get rich at all costs is responsible for these criminal acts that threaten the lives of our girls and endanger the lives of babies (IDI/Male, 37years, Holder of Bachelor of Science degree [Bsc])

Also, in Table II (d), shows the major reasons such as family-pressure (18.2%), need to have biological children (13.6%), childlessness (11.4%) and economic gain

Furthermore, in Table II (e), respondents indicated homeless/neglected teenagers (44.3%), pregnant teenagers (25.0%), kidnapped women/girls (21.6%) and rent-a-womb girls/women (8.0%) are victims of baby-factory. The study indicates that most victims of baby-factory are those in dire need of funds.

Also, in Table II(f), majority (67.1%) of the respondents understand baby-factory as selling and buying of babies, infant-trafficking (11.4%), abusing of infants (3.4%), ritual killing of infants (4.5%) and money-making enterprise (13.6%). This indicates that the study-sample of respondents' understanding of baby-factory is consistent with the general definition of baby-factory by scholars. This is clearly demonstrated when a traditional chief passionately said:

A baby-factory is an evil business where young pregnant girls are camped in a hidden location away from the public and law enforcement agencies. After they gave birth to their babies those babies are sold to people who are looking for children or to ritualist (IDI/Male, 60years, Holder of National Certificate in Education [NCE])

In Table (g) respondents recommended long term jail (26.1%), seizure/confiscation of money/property (20.5%), deathpenalty (19.3%) and life imprisonment (34.1%) as punishment to be awarded to baby factory's owner. This statement is verified and validated in the view of an opinion leader when she said:

: Baby- factory is an evil business that must be rooted out of our society. Anybody that police arrested with an allegation that he/she participated in such inhuman business must be prosecuted. This will serve as deterrence to other (IDI/Female, 52years, Holder of Higher Diploma). Moreover, in

Table II (h), the majority (71.4%) of the respondents considered that baby-factory be shut down by Government, while 28.6% did not support such view. Also, in Table II (q), none of the respondents (100%) subscribed to the view that baby-factory be granted the status of a community-based organization (CBO). A traditional chief in his expression said:

Baby factory is a criminal act that government must wipe out of our society. I don't support granting of a status of a community-based organization to it because people that are engaging in this business are criminals without conscience. I will rather support government confiscating properties acquired from the proceed of this crime and prosecute them (IDI/Male, 65years, Holder Senior Secondary School Certificate [SSCE])

Table III: Chi-square Analysis of Relationship between Background Characteristics Respondents' Awareness and Tendencies towards Baby-Factory

Characteristics	Tendency to Support Baby-Factory			X ²	P-value
	Not supported	Supported	Total		
(a) Sex				1.7582	>0.05
Male	167 (80.4)	41 (19.6)	208		
Female	172 (90.5)	18 (9.5)	190		
(b) Age				0.1000	>0.05
18 – 30.5years	90 (87.0)	14 (13.0)	104		
30.5 – 40.5years	117 (83.9)	23 (16.1)	140		
Older than 40.5years	131 (85.3)	23 (14.7)	154		
(c) Marital Status				1.1130	>0.05
Single/never married	95 (91.3)	9 (8.7)	104		
Married	185 (82.0)	41 (18.0)	226		
Divorced/separated/widowed	59 (86.7)	9 (13.3)	68		
(d) Number of Children				5.2436	>0.05
Three children & less	136 (83.3)	27 (16.7)	163		
Four children & more	108 (77.4)	32 (22.6)	140		
No child	95 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	95		
(e) Religion				7.3300	<0.05
Islam	104 (92.0)	9 (8.0)	113		
Christianity	230 (85.0)	41 (15.0)	271		
ATR	5 (33.3)	9 (66.7)	14		
(f) Educational Level				2.6673	>0.05
No education	27 (85.7)	5 (14.3)	32		
Primary school	18 (66.7)	9 (33.3)	27		
Secondary school	99 (81.5)	23 (18.5)	122		
Tertiary	194 (89.6)	23 (10.4)	217		
(g) Occupation				4.2160	>0.05
Unemployed	68 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	68		
Civil servant	77	9 (10.5)	86		
Non-civil servant	194	50 (20.4)	244		
(h) Location of Residence				0.9807	>0.05
Urban	159 (81.4)	36 (18.6)	195		
Rural	180 (88.9)	23 (11.1)	203		

The relationship between respondents' characteristics and tendencies towards the baby-factory syndrome were tested using Chi-square analysis.

Among all the characteristics tested, only respondents' religion was found to be statistically significant in relationship with tendency to support baby-factory ($X^2 = 7.3300$; $p < 0.05$).

Affiliation to other religious beliefs (66.7%) different from Islam (8.0%) and Christianity (15.0%) was found to be most related to tendency to support baby-factory. Meanwhile, the least proportion of those who showed tendency for baby-factory support was found among the Islamic faith adherents, while the proportion of the same category of people was almost doubled among the Christians and two-thirds among other religious worshippers.

The finding revealed that family pressure and the urge for children by childless married couples fueled the case of baby-factory in the study area. This was consistent with the findings of Ezugwu et al., (2002) which asserted that childless couples in most African countries were overtly ostracized in the

community because children are considered as an essential part of life while not having them are often seen as personal tragedy or a curse. The study further informed that the family pressure to have children after marriage often forced childless couples, most especially the wives to take a back door approach to getting children instead of embracing the legal child-adoption process.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study shows that criminal activities, such as baby-factories, are prevalent in society. Therefore, most respondents are aware of the practice. The increase in baby-factory syndrome is attributed to the pressure on couples and unmarried adults to have their own children and, also, the stigma of childlessness are cultural factors fueling the syndrome of baby-factory. However, society needs to change its attitude towards childlessness. Therefore, the study suggests the following recommendations; The study identified family pressure and public perception towards childlessness as a predisposing factor encouraging the syndrome through patronage by desperate childless couples. Therefore, it is recommended that a sensitization campaign should be embarked on by the Government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) on attitude-change towards childlessness.

- i. The pressure to have children by married couples had fueled the emergence of baby factory as criminal syndicates capitalized on the desperation of childless couples to create the scheme. Therefore, the study recommended that government should establish a fully subsidized In vitro-fertilization Hospital for people who cannot naturally conceive.
- ii. Baby-factory is not only a crime against humanity but a sin in the sight of God. A situation where human babies are commodified should be condemned. The study, therefore, recommends that operators of baby-factory be arrested and prosecuted in Courts of law. Properties acquired through the crime, be seized, and confiscated by the Government.
- iii. For a better understanding of this research problem and generalization, more research on the research problem is highly recommended.

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