



Factors influencing child placement in adoption practices in South Western Nigeria: In the best interest of the child?



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ABSTRACT

Article 3 of the United Nations on the Rights and Welfare of Children provides that in all matters concerning children, the consideration of the best interest of the child must be primary. Placement of children must therefore be child-centred. The increasing use of child adoption as a management strategy for infertility results into creating a wide gap between the demand for child adoption and the available adoptable children. This raises a concern over the management of adoption request, particularly in ensuring the best interest of the child throughout the process. Using qualitative methods of data collection, factors influencing child placement in Southwestern Nigeria were examined. Findings revealed that tax payment history, adoption charges, adopter's neighbourhood characteristics, adopters' preferences, and adopters' demeanour were requirements for placement decision. Although these factors were designed to enhance the best interest of the children, they at times produce dysfunctional consequences owing to its perversion. The study therefore makes a case for a more child-centred placement structure.

1. Introduction

In the past, humanitarianism and compassion were present in the practices of child adoption (Boswell, 1988; Triseliotis, 2000). More so, the legitimacy of child adoption as seen in most industrial societies has basically been based on what was empirically known to be the best interest of children (Triseliotis, 2000). Hence, in the Triadic adoption relationship (biological and adoptive parents and the adoptees), the concern for children should always be at the centre of all considerations (Barth, Berry, Yoshikami, Goodfield, & Carson, 1988).

In recent times, the demand for adoption in most parts of south-western Nigeria is reportedly more than the supply could immediately meet. According to Awoyinfa (2014), out of 3000 couples who placed order for child adoption in Ogun State, only 36 were able to get adoptable children (representing a ratio of one child to 83 applicants). Also, in Lagos State, 88 babies were released for adoption, while 87 (62 local adoptions and 25 international adoptions) were legalised through family court after screening over 1200 applicants (Olufowobi, 2014).

This situation raises serious concerns over the management of adoption demands, as it has the propensity to engender unhealthy competition among prospective adopters. Such competitions could encourage the flouting of principles governing child welfare. While a number of environmental and social factors have been highlighted in previous studies (Crettenden, Wright, & Beilby, 2014; Haggard &

Rosenthal, 2011; Harden & Whittaker, 2011; Perry & Price, 2018), to impact on development outcomes and general well-being of children within the foster care, strategy for child placement must be ascertained to reflect the best interest of children, and safeguard their future, in a way that assures children's complete rescue. Anecdotes reveal that the present process of child placement creates an avenue where child adoption practice appears shrouded in secrecy and laden with ambiguities and illegalities. Iphey (2007)¹ revealed that in a part of south-western Nigeria, adoption officials sometimes capitalise on the long-waiting list of prospective adopters for gains. Consequently, the process has attracted diverse scandals and unempirical or unfounded claims, particularly those bordering on the legitimacy of the procedure for adopting children. Research in some parts of the world have also attested to claims such as adoption occurring along a gradient of power (Bartholet, 2005) as well as market forces directly or indirectly influencing adoption to a great extent (Goodwin, 2006; Stein, 2001). The claims cannot be disregarded because adoption workers have been found to engage in some forms of illegality in the placement of children many times (Smolin, 2006).

1.1. Socio and legal context of child adoption in Nigeria

In some parts of the world, adoption of children has reduced due in part to development in fertility through technological innovations

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¹ Iphey conducted interview with some orphanage managers in some parts of southwestern Nigeria. http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/index.php?option=com_content&views=article&id=4675.

(Gerrand & Nathan-Tetuela, 2013). However, in Nigeria, where there are limited assisted reproductive mechanisms, and specifically, South-western Nigeria, where, culturally, a childless woman is treated with contempt, the demand for child adoption is reportedly higher than the available children. Even in places where assisted reproductive devices exist, the cost of accessing them, and the low success rate, despite huge financial investment, constitute a hitch and discouragement for those who could have adopted such measures (Giwa-Osagie, 2004). Hence, the proportion of people who may need to adopt as an alternative to infertility continues to increase (Adetoro & Ebomoyi, 1991).

Studies carried out in Nigeria and other developing nations have shown that child adoption is not a well-accepted option for management of infertility (Adewunmi, Etti, & Akinlusi, 2012; Ezugwu, Obi, & Onah, 2002; Oladokun et al., 2010). The acceptability of adoption was significantly lower among poor women and those with limited education (Adewunmi et al., 2012). Reasons provided for this poor acceptability include: fear of future denial by the child, poor knowledge of the child parents' mental history, and particularly, fear of what people would say (Oladokun et al., 2010). There is, however, increasing acceptability of child adoption in Nigeria over the years, and this has been attributed to a growing awareness and knowledge about adoption through media publicity (Adewunmi et al., 2012).

On acceptability of child adoption, Onah and Ogbuokiri (2002) reported that while acceptability of child adoption practices may be poor, over two-thirds of their respondents, especially women indicated preference for child adoption to traditional management options for infertility such as adultery, polygamy, surrogacy, acceptance of childlessness, divorce and remarriage. However, when adoption becomes a choice, an intending adopter may become careful in preference for who to adopt, as well as how to go about the process of adoption. In Omusun and Odeyemi's (2011) study, 45% of the respondents chose new-born, younger than six months as the preferred age while 35.5% indicated ages six months to two years were preferable. The increasing demand for child adoption for the purpose of managing infertility, therefore, somewhat portends a shift from the child-centring philosophy. In the face of this, adoption workers have the responsibility of thoroughly assessing adoptive families, considering the contributions that placement characteristics make to the quality and stability of placement (Uziel, 2001).

The 1965 adoption law of the defunct Eastern Region which was later called Adoption Law of Eastern States, and regarded as the earliest statute on adoption in Nigeria, was inherited by all the states that were later created out of the Eastern Region. Hence, up till 1965, there was no statutory basis from any part of Nigeria for the adoption of persons (Clement, 2011). Subsequently, other states of the Federation followed suit in enacting legislation of child adoption. For instance, Lagos State Adoption Law of 1968 came shortly after the creation of the 12 states structure in 1967; Cross Rivers State came up with adoption law in 1981; Ogun State enacted adoption law in 1968; Oyo State Adoption law was promulgated in 1984, No. 4 of 1985 (Uzodiike, 1991). Though there are substantial similarities in these legislations, significant differences exist in operation, most especially in the procedures and requirements for adoption. This is to submit that in Nigeria, there is no uniform national law. In fact, none of the states in northern Nigeria has any legislation on adoption, as this region is predominated by Muslims whose religious beliefs do not favour the practice of adoption as prescribed by the statutory laws (Chukwu, 2012; Ojo, 2013). Adoption of children in Nigeria is supported by International legislation, such as the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Children (UNCRC), as well as regional instruments, such as, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare (ACRWC), all of which have been domesticated into a federal Instrument known as the Child Rights Act (CRA). The *Child's Right Act of 2003* was enacted by the National Assembly for the purpose of establishing the rights and responsibilities of a child in Nigeria, as well as providing for a sound system of child justice administration, and of care and supervision of children (Chukwu, 2012).

1.2. Factors influencing child placement

Several factors have played in child placement across cultures. Some of these factors are necessary in order to assure the proper growth and development of children to be adopted. There have also been socio-cultural undertones to placement of children, as well as a mix of these factors, playing in the determination of how children are placed within various intending adoptive families.

In some multiracial societies, placing a child within his/her racial origin is a significant consideration (Gerrand & Nathan-Tetuela, 2013). Locust (2000) revealed the importance of a culturally-congruent placement in his study of the Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal children, and concludes that when children are connected with families, community and culture, they would have positive racial identities. Apart from cultural considerations, sex of the child, as it is the case in China, also influences child placement; adoption orders are made for a family to achieve sex parity or ideal family size as a result of China's "one-child-policy" (Johnson, Huang, & Wang, 1998). In South Africa, an overwhelming majority of children in care awaiting placements are usually found to be blacks, few whites, coloured or Indian children are only available for unrelated adoption as the majority of the white children being adopted, are adopted by their step parents (Gerrand, 2011), white children who are eligible for adoption are almost immediately placed with already screened South African adoptive parents.

It is the fact that different forces at different times and spaces have shaped the consideration of child placement; some of these are limited to the prevailing cultural, legal and states' predictions or interventions in some societies. This present study, in the face of baby shortage and concomitant pressure on system of adoption in the studied locality, explored factors determining placement of children, and how these factors relate to the best interest of the child.

1.3. Purpose of the research

This research was set to answer three major questions. (1) What factors are considered in the placement of children? (2) In what ways do these factors influence child placement? (3) Are these considerations primarily in the best interest of children? The need to assure the deployment of systematic knowledge and skill in the placement of children, particularly in the face of scarcity, stems from the awareness that its lack readily subjects the life of children to diverse insecurity. Adopting Antony Giddens' (1984) analysis of function, the essence of social analysis is to understand people's activity. Giddens' perception of human agency reveals the important place of people's activities (Whittington, 2015). This calls to distinguish actions from intentions, or what is being done from that which is said. It may be popularly believed that factors influencing child placement are child-centred, whereas its implementation may be far from the belief. In a child-centred adoption, child adoption is informed by the principle of humanitarianism. Boswell (1988) and Bruce and Amy (2011) noted that humanitarian-driven adoption contributes to greater child welfare than a family-building driven adoption.

1.4. Limitation of the study

Effort was made to secure figures on the flow of children, in and out of the system, in order to triangulate with the qualitative research findings. However, in Nigeria, adoption matters are conceived with utmost confidentiality in a manner that affects access to profiles of persons concerned with adoption. The conception of the system of adoption as closed impacts on the range of discourses on Nigerian adoption, as such figures are far from the reach of researchers who may wish to make sense of them. Onayemi and Aderinto (2017) note this as a major bane of conducting a reliable adoption investigation in Nigeria.

2. Methods

2.1. Study settings

The study was conducted in the southwestern region of Nigeria which consists of six (6) states, namely, Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Oyo, and Ekiti. Three States in the southwestern geopolitical zone were chosen as study areas. These states are Lagos, Ogun and Oyo. The choice of these states rests on their different characteristics that may directly or indirectly affect adoption processes and practices. These three states were among the first twelve states created in Nigeria.

The choice of Lagos State was predicated on the fact that legally approved institutional adoption in southwestern region of Nigeria, according to family law, started with the Lagos State adoption law of 1968 which came after the twelve state structure of 1967. The adoption laws of Lagos State remain the basis from which many other southwestern adoption laws are fashioned.

Ogun State adoption law, No. 3 of 1968 came shortly after the creation of the 12-state structures in 1967. The choice of Ogun State was founded on the fact that at the outset of this research, this state was one of the states in South-western Nigeria faced with grave difficulty in meeting the needs of prospective adopters as a result of higher demand (Awoyinfa, 2014). The peculiarity of this state is marked by wide a gap between the demand and availability of adoptable children.

Oyo State, according to the 2006 Census, emerged as the second (after Lagos State) most populated state in south-western Nigeria, and also the largest state, in terms of land mass in Nigeria. Also, the state is one of the first twelve states created in Nigeria, from which Osun state was later hewed out. Oyo State passed its adoption law (No. 4 of 1985) in 1984, and since then, the state has been deeply involved in the practice of child adoption. At present, Oyo State operates four zonal adoption offices, headed by principal officers. These four zones are Oyo zone, located in Akunlemu; Ogbomosho zone, located in Oja-Igbo; Saki zone, located in Secretariat annex, Ajegunle; and Ibadan Ibarapa zone, located at Iyaganku, Ibadan. Preliminary study during the visits paid to the state ministry handling child adoption revealed that, in Oyo state, the demand for adoption in recent times has greatly surpassed the number of available adoptable children.

2.2. Samples

The data for this study were collected through the conduct of 32 sessions of interviews with a total of nine Child Welfare Officers (CWO), 13 Adopters (AD), five Orphanage Managers (OM) of where children are adopted, and five Magistrates (Legal Practitioners, LP) of family courts, across the three states. Three States (Lagos, Ogun, and Oyo) in Southwestern Nigeria were purposively selected because of their well-established system of adoption of child adoption. In each State, purposive sampling was adopted in the selection of participants whose opinions were considered necessary in meeting the objectives of the research.

The child welfare officers and legal practitioners were selected using purposive sampling technique; appointments were sought with only Magistrates of courts where adoption matters are domiciled. These were followed up until the interview took place. For the CWO, in each of the three States, the head of adoption unit was interviewed with two other CWOs. Getting the adopters was more challenging, however, once one was got in a State (sometimes through the Magistrate after adopters' appearance for validation), others were achieved through snowballing; prior to the researchers' introduction to adopters, the already-interviewed adopter took on the role of a mediator, and performed such exercise as informing them about the research purpose, as well as securing their consents to participate in the interview. Interviews were conducted with five OM from Oyo (1), Ogun (1), and Lagos (3); five LP from Oyo (1), Ogun (2) and Lagos (2); Nine CWO from Oyo (3), Ogun (3), and Lagos (3); and 13 ADs from Oyo (4), Ogun (4), and Lagos (5).

The sample size and its distribution across the three States were in part, much informed by individual consent. Despite the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity, a number of the respondents still did not feel obliged to participate since participation of the respondents was voluntary.

2.3. Methods of data collection and analysis

Qualitative method of data collection was adopted. This comprised the use of face-to-face in-depth interview, as well as key-informant interview. The key-informant interview was conducted with 13 adopters who provided experience-based submissions into the identified factors, as well as clues into ways by which these factors influence child placement. This category was adjudged suitable informants, considering the direct dealing they have with the system of adoption, and as likely bearers of the burden of adoption system irregularity, where confirmed. Through reiterative process, emerging facts stumbled upon during interviews and, which were considered as requiring further cross-examination, were constantly included in the interview guide for subsequent interviews. Adopters were interviewed first, and useful submissions made constituted additional queries for the other strands that were latter interviewed.

The interview guide was semi-structured, and therefore, gave room for a pool of ideas that were constantly examined. These themes were developed through intra-textual coding. Being an explorative study, basic questions probing into the determination of adopter's eligibility were raised, covering items such as: "what are those things you look out for in the placement of a child? How do you ascertain the adoption is not ordered for ulterior motives? After the general requirement for adoption is met, what are the things you look out for in prospective adopters to ascertain him or her as best suited for the child? Also, major questions for the prospective and successful adopters include: "in terms of access, how would you describe the process of adoption? Do you consider the system of adoption to be transparent enough? Do applicants pay same amount? If no, what do you think is responsible for it? Can you tell me about your prospect on this corridor of child adoption? The authors generated transcript from each audio-recorded file within 24 h of their recording, in order to vividly grasp the context and sub-texts underlying respondents' submissions. These were immediately coded to generate themes and subthemes that formed category of all identified items. This same set of scripts were taken through another cycle of coding so as to confirm item placement within already generated themes, hence, aiding accuracy check.

Thematic analysis of data was adopted. The data coding was inductive, allowing for emergence of the various themes. Similar thoughts expressed across methods were identified, coded and grouped together. There was constant data review which gave room to refining and relating themes to each other. From this, unifying concepts or underlying themes were derived. To arrive at this, submissions were collated and recurring ideas were grouped together to form themes that finally defined factors influencing child placement. Rather than providing individual strand's submission, there was data triangulation across different evaluative strands; submissions made by and of these strands were raised during interview with some other strands. This process allowed for crosschecking, confirming and further probing among the evaluative strands. Key-points, catch-phrases and illustrations and countenance dispositions were also keenly analysed, and were used to match the verbally-revealed findings. Finally, emerging themes that were similar were grouped together to create major themes. Major themes emerged as influencing placement centres around adopters' economic standing, adopters' preferences, neighbourhood characteristics of intending adopters, adopters' educational background, and adopters' demeanour especially when presented with a child.

3. Results

3.1. Factors influencing child placement

In the interviews with adoption officials, adopters and legal practitioners on what major factors are considered in the placement of children, analysis of their responses revealed common theme which emerged between and within all the respondent groups: economic factors, adopters' preference, adopter's neighbourhood characteristics, and adopter's demeanour (facial and general physical deportment, particularly to the child to be awarded). It was also generally noted that respondents are of the opinion that in all of these considerations, the best interest of the child must take primary place. A respondent clearly stated: "The most important thing is that you are not looking for a child for a parent, but a parent for a child (CWO, 2).

Much emphasis was laid on the economic status of the adopter; adoption officials noted clearly the need to ascertain the child's well-being, particularly the economic status of the adopters: "A poor man cannot just wake up to say "I want to adopt a child, we would ask you: "How do you want to sustain yourself and the child? (LP, 1).

While this was considered very important, a respondent assured that such considerations are not prejudicial or discriminatory but of necessity, on the ground that most of the adopted children have had a history of trauma while in the institutional care, hence necessary precautions must be taken to stem this tide, in order to assure the children a proper developmental upbringing. Also, among other factors stated was the consideration of the intending adopter's personality traits as well as behavioural inventory:

One of the things the court considers is the means, the statement of accounts, the suitability, and the kind of job you do.... Also, we don't give babies to convicts or to people who have had history of abusing children (LP, 1).

Implied in most of the respondents' submissions is the need to certify the economic statuses of the intending adopters then their personalities as suitable for the prospective adoptive children. Notably, financial suitability of the intending adopters becomes recurrent in most of the submissions. The idea of ensuring the financial security of the children remains logical and important; however, as logical as this appears, there is the question of how, and to what extent economic considerations bear influence on the placement of children. The following subsections revealed the deployment of these factors that are listed as considered in the placement of children.

3.1.1. Economic factor influences on the placement of children

Apart from the need for adopters to present a suitable statement of account to adoption officials, without which such an adopter would not be granted audience, respondents also made a list of avenues through which an adopter necessarily would have financial engagements within the system of adoption; *adoption charges, extra-adoption charges, tax payment.*

All of the respondents submitted to have paid one adoption charge or the other at the time of this interview: You would have to pay an adoption charge; this is an administrative cost of adopting; they said that is the money they use in processing the adoption (AD, 5).

Commenting further on the financial requirement, an adopter posted:

Adoption is not for low-income earners, you know in Nigeria, there is no job...I would say adoption is not a poor man's business, some families cannot afford it (AD, 2).

To determine how adoption charges influence child placement, a number of questions were raised. Some of these questions sought to know the stage at which these charges were requested, and respondents' perceptions of difference in charges based on certain characteristics of prospective adopters. Information on these were necessary in

establishing the significance of the charges that adopters pay.

On the stage in the adoption process where adoption charge was requested, many of the respondents indicated their displeasure about the stage the charge is usually requested, mentioning that it suggests "a pay-before service" strategy in the system of adoption: "the charges are paid at the early stage, before the interview. "It is those that pay that are known to be ready (AD, 5).

Some commented on the uncertainty that characterises the system and yet, the non-refundable nature of the charges:

Immediately you are submitting your application, they would call you for interview, after which they would ask you to pay. At this time, you do not know whether you would be successful or not because at this point they would not have done the scrutiny. And they even wrote boldly, "a non-refundable sum of ₦ 80,000(approx. \$ 300) (AD, 2).

In the interviews with adoption officials, a question was raised on the likelihood of having an adoption request terminated based on financial incapability, and it received a very prompt response: "That would not happen because payment is before approval. If you cannot pay, that's your problem" (CWO, 2).

Adopters were also asked for observation of any marked difference in the adoption charges, particularly differences with regards to any social characteristics of the intending adopter. Many of the adopters submitted that adoption charges were same regardless of intending adopters' social statuses. However, accounted differences were in the number of times individuals had to reapply and pay reapplication charge:

The adoption charge is fixed across board. Reapplication charge is what makes the difference. I only applied once, meanwhile there are some that would reapply twice, thrice, and some might not reapply at all (AD, 3).

At that level, nobody pays more, nobody pays less; they would not officially request any other from you except for reapplication and I am yet to see anyone who did not reapply but the number of times individuals reapply differs (AD, 2).

However, many of the adopters had a wrong view of the re-application charge and questioned the need for this, some even saw this as a form of institutional corruption wherein adopters are "ridden" upon to make money:

After approval, I waited for two years six months. I paid once for application and thrice for reapplication; they said "your letters are expired, you have to go and pay". I feel they used that to generate money. I even told them I was not the one who delayed, they said I should go and act on instruction. (AD, 1).

Similarly, another commented on the exploitative nature of the re-application fee and its perceived function: "That renewal money has no meaning; they only use it to generate funds (AD, 5).

Though many of the respondents clearly stated that they did not really observe any marked difference suggesting that charges are differentiated across economic characteristics of intending adopter, interactions with adoption officials as well as some prospective adopters revealed a differentiated cost that is based on countries of residence of intending adopters: "The only reason why the charges may be different is if one is going for domestic, and the other for international adoption (CWO, 3).

Adoption charges for international adoptions are twice as much as the domestic adoptions for all charges made. An adoption official responded without any concrete reason as the justification for the differences:

In the international ones the people are coming from abroad to adopt the child. The local one which is "tiwantiwa" (our very own), the fees would be different from the abroad people (CWO, 3).

Also commenting on the financial requirement, the majority of the intending adopters submitted that apart from the adoption charges which they believed was recognised by the state law, some other charges were made outside the prescriptions of the law:

There is a particular officer that promises to give me a child, but she said I need to pay her to investigate the adoptability status of the child. I have been given her money, and she keeps requesting for the money, at times I wonder what they do with the processing cost they charged us...we know that the processing cost is required...but what about this one without end...I am just seeing it as a risk that must be taken...it might work and...(AD, 10).

...even at times, you have to pay the officials that would come to inspect your house; you may have to pay for cabs. Although there is no fixed price, they only would remind you that taxi is very expensive. Each of the two times they came to my house I gave them (an un-receipted amount) up to 8000 (approx. \$ 30) even though the eighty thousand naira they collected was said to be administrative charge (AD, 2)

Some adopters complained that even when they got to some orphanages with their letters of validation, the majority of orphanage managers kept waiting for a preferred category of adopters: "Some of the orphanages would have children and they would be keeping them, waiting for someone from UK, United States to come and adopt (AD, 3)." A respondent confirmed this:

The problem lies in the orphanage. Although I do not know if orphanage officials work hand-in hand with those at the Ministry of Welfare. I had a funny experience where after completing the process with a child in view, I was told the child could no longer be awarded to me...officials at the orphanage would divert a child in view if bribed. I later got to know that the child was allocated to a London-based adopter who had been given money to them (AD, 11).

Evidencing the event of bribery for allocation of children, an experienced faith-based private orphanage owner remarked:

It takes the grace of God because these intending adopters would even tell you that they are ready to pay any amount to get a child adopted. ... You have to be careful for the sake of your good name. They are desperate people looking for children at all cost. We have thousands of people who are looking for children, if you ask them to go and bring millions now, they would bring it now. I use to tell them it is not a matter of money. However, some persons are lured... but we are missionaries...OM, 6.

In an effort to cross-examine this information, social workers were asked if placement of children is "first-come, first served", a number of them confessed that this is not always the case. One of the respondents stated:

Actually..., placement is supposed to be systematic but at times, it is not always the case, at times we are compelled from the "top" to give preference to some special persons in the State (CWO, 7).

The idea that adoption officials have preference was however confirmed in an interaction with one of the orphanage managers who submitted that children from her orphanage had been set for a standard which not every intending adopter who may even have been validated by the ministry for adoption could meet. Although she confessed that such a decision may not be a good one but that was her stand:

What I want to say right now is not a very good thing. The truth is, I have set these children for a standard, it is not everyone that comes here for adoption that I can just give; there was a time I had very many approval letters and I had just a child. While going through to see whom I was going to give, I came across a Nigerian based in America, with the way she sounded, I just told her I had a child for her. (OM, 3).

There were difficulties believing that out of the acclaimed majority who wanted the child, only the America resident had the wherewithal to meet the already laid standard. In the minds of so many intending adopters, the preference is not unconnected to the belief that foreigners are richer and can "rub the officials' palms" better than an average Nigeria, hence, questioning the motives of economics in the screening. Adopters interviewed mentioned paying countless extra charges that are different from the one stipulated by the State. A respondent lamented:

After visiting many orphanages with my letter of validation, all to no avail, I was in one of the orphanages where after many visits, one of the workers asked me "Madam, where is your car? After I told them I do not have one, they started speaking in a different tribal language which they would never have expected me to understand. One of them concludes my case thus: "this one is poor, let us discard her. That was after they have made several request from me, to the extent that I had to take loan from my bank to satisfy. I am just a primary school teacher; I may not be very rich but I am comfortable. The official does not know that it is possible that a billionaire would have no time to care or a child like I would (AD, 7).

Some adopters also disagreed with the notion that, having so much money would automatically translate to proper care and smooth developmental upbringing of adopted children.

In addition to economic factors that influence the placement of children, payment of tax was also noted, particularly in two of the three sample states:

It is expected that you are a tax payer if you are to adopter from the state...it shows the person is actually from the state, and contributing his quota to the state through tax...it also shows that the person is a responsible citizen (CWO, 4).

While payment of tax was considered a prerequisite to the determination of an adopter's patriotism and fulfilment of his/her civic responsibility, adopters confessed that people who defaulted prior to the time of application were only requested to pay some amount:

If you are not a tax payer, you pay ₦10, 500 into the government's coffers for the period of time you are processing the adoption (CWO, 7)

Another stated function of tax payment is to be able to track the intending adopter as resident of the state, since most state adoption law prescribes that adopters should be residents of the state in which they have applied for adoption for proper follow-up of the children. Adopters revealed in many instances that this function of tax was perverted. A respondent lamented:

...Before then, I had gone to our local government to pay my tax. When I got to the state secretariat, they said, "Who told you to pay your tax to the local government? The tax you would pay is here at the secretariat". So, I was asked to go and pay another one (AD, 4)

3.1.2. Adopters' preferences

Interviews with adoption official and adopters revealed that preferences of the would-be adopters is an important consideration in placement of children. Commenting on the difficulty of meeting the demands and matching an adoptable child to several intending adopters who were on queue, a respondent said:

...when you come to register, in the form that is given to you, there is a column to state the kind of child that you would like to adopt; age, sex, and so on. If we have any one that falls within the specifications, we would call the intending adopter on phone (OM, 4).

An adoption official similarly commented on the difficulty encountered based on the fact that an average adopter has a lot of preferences: "You would see a dark woman who would say, "I want a dark

child, some also, on the basis of age; they want to see and choose the child they want by themselves (CWO, 2).

An orphanage manager expressed that considering adopters' preferences is necessary. She stated that intending adopters have the opportunity to ensure their satisfaction with the child presented to them. This is usually for the intending adopters to ascertain that the child given to them matches their desires, and would not give any form of problem afterward:

It is not just about physical sighting, they (prospective adopters) also, as a matter of necessity, must carry out their own medical test, independent of what we had done, so that it would not be like the child was packaged for them. Ultimately, the choice of babies are made by adoptive families (OM, 2).

3.1.3. Adopter's home vicinity, and neighbourhood characteristics

Living environment as a social characteristic was also investigated. This was basically to see if/how neighbourhood characteristic, as well as living environment of an intending adopter could influence their chances of having a child to adopt. A child welfare officer mentioned that the chance of an intending adopter may also be largely dependent on the living condition or environment:

We look at the conduciveness of the environment, if the person who is adopting stays in a one room apartment, the chances of such a person might be adversely affected because we would write a report, stating such environment as not being conducive to proper child upbringing (CWO, 3).

Corroborating this, a child welfare officer summed the essence of home investigation in the need to check the environment where the would-be adopted child would be placed. This was stated as needful to safeguard child upbringing and a determinant of adopters' chances:

You cannot expect somebody living in a tout-populated environment to be given a baby... it is not conducive to proper upbringing of the child...the house you live may determine the success of your application (CWO, 5); if you are living inside "Bere" (Bere is a slum), such a place would not be in the interest of a child (CWO, 6).

However, some prospective adopters in Lagos were of the opinion that, considering the cosmopolitan nature, it is difficult to secure a good housing condition, at an affordable price, particularly by the average income earners, it might be difficult for some individuals to secure the kind of residence that is required:

The first challenge I had then was that of accommodation; you know...accommodation is very expensive in Lagos. I went into adoption process at the time I was living in one-room apartment. From the ministry, I was told they would never attend to me in such an apartment...for the health of the proposed adopted child. I had to rally round for money. That resulted in my relocation to where I could get a good accommodation (AD, 2).

3.1.4. Adopter's educational status

Due to anecdotal claims that access to adoption is differentiated across social statuses of adopters, the study also investigated the possible influence of educational backgrounds of prospective adopters on child placement. A majority of the adopters did not view educational level as necessary and opposed the views that adopters were discriminated against on this:

For me, it is not how well-read you are, but the love you have for the child. We have cases of people did not go to school takes care of their biological children than the educated ones. (CWO, 6).

Contrary to many Child welfare officers' opinion though, an orphanage manager submitted:

"...I pay attention to how educated the person is, how sound the person is..." (OM, 3).

However, there were claims that the majority of the successful adopters fall within the educated category: "Most of our adopters are educated, the chances of awarding a child to an illiterate are slim. But the level of their education varies." (CWO, 7).

Explaining the high preponderance of cases of adoption by the educated category, a respondent offered an explanation that situates the reason outside favouritism or of discrimination of the uneducated category: "The illiterates (those who do not have substantial formal education) do not consider adoption as something to do... (LP, 2).

Summarising this, a child welfare officer submitted: "...educational background of prospective adopter does not inform the success of the adoption, but you can hardly find people who are not educated, opting for adoption (CWO, 1).

3.1.5. Adopter's demeanour

Adopter's demeanour here speaks to intending adopter's reaction to the child presented to her/ him right from the time of sighting the child, through the process. Adoption officials mentioned checking prospective adopters' attitudes through adoption processes. The prospective adopters as well as adoption officials reported that there is usually a panel set to interview the intending adopters, where through the stages, the prospective adopter's countenance and responses to the questions determined the intending adopter's chances:

As a social worker, you have been trained, merely looking at these prospective adopters' relationship with the child, for instance, when a child steps on you, your reaction to the child would tell us what you are likely to do in the future (OM, 1).

Considering some verbal or facial expressions of some intending adopters at times when they are awarded children, a child welfare officer buttressed:

...there are lots of things you have to read meaning into. At times, you bring an adopter whom when just sighting the child is squeezing her face...imagine an intending adopter saying that a child presented to her looks like a lizard...at times, you say that a child was rescued from a mad person, at they would ask you, "would he/she not be mad? Many people have lost the opportunity of having a child to adopt that way (CWO, 6).

Even after politely refusing to adopt a child, an intending adopter could still stand a high chance of being considered for another child by his/her kind gestures meted to children in the orphanage:

...if for one reason or the other, an adopter does not want to take a particular child but volunteers to care of the child afterwards, he would be placed on priority list because he has saved a life (CWO, 6).

4. Discussion

Economic-related factors were noted as some of the distinct factors that influence child placement in many ways. However, these factors do not stand alone; they were found as interacting, and underlying some other identified factors such as adopters' preferences, adopter's neighbourhood characteristics and adopter's demeanour that were mentioned as important factors in the determination of child placement. Adopters' financial statuses or commitment was found underlying several other stated factors, except adopters' demeanour and adopters' level of education. The original justification for these factors cognates with child protection and welfare. Although these justifications enjoy the support of what has mostly been considered by many previous writers (Johnson, 2002; Triseliotis, 2000) as the essential motives for child adoption practices, a number of adopters raised some forms of suspicion as they

observed that there were more to the acclaimed motives provided for the deployment of these factors.

Intending adopter's financial capability, payment of tax and adoption charges were components of economic factors that determined placement of children. Although, adoption officials' justification for these payments is in consonance with Rivers' (2003) submission that such cost was needed to cater for transportation and the living expensive of the child before adoption, many of the adopters queried this as a number of them had to give some amount to those who came for home investigation, in the name of reimbursing them for their transportation cost. While some earlier studies (Efrat, Leblang, Liao, & Pandya, 2015; Smolin, 2004) have explained the differences in adoption cost as a function of race of the would-be adopted child, and some other socio-demographic variables, these race-based differences were not noted in Nigeria adoption studies although undoubtedly present in a different form.

Adoption charge differences were not clearly noted between intending adopters, applying within the country, but between domestic and international adoption. In domestic adoptions, adopters as well as adoption officials recorded variations between the amount individual prospective adopters paid in the number of times each adopter had to revalidate their letters of approval. Some of these adopters were of the opinion that payment for reapplication was unnecessary and a trick designed to delay intending adopters, resulting in accretion of funds for the State.

The manifest function of certifying intending adopter's economic status was basically to protect the interest of children who are to be adopted. Payment of tax was considered a functional prerequisite to the determination of intending adopter's patriotism and fulfilment of her/his civic responsibility. This criterion was considered important to ensure that the intending adopter is a responsible citizen in whose care a child could be entrusted. However, sometimes, intending adopters who were found faulty during this screening process are still given the opportunity to pay the tax just for the purpose of the adoption. Here, Giddens' structuration ideas become relevant. Giddens separated an agency from intention, knowing that action has the tendency to be different from what was intended (Ritzer, 2008). The justification for the tax payment and some financial requirements such as the revalidation of approval appears defeated, fraught with lack of genuine reason and producing unintended consequences like extortion of intending adopters. It therefore advances Merton (1968)'s idea that although structures put in place could contribute to the maintenance of a system, they could also produce some unintended consequences. This is because, a shift from the original function, most likely, would result in building a new structure that is antithetical to the goals of the original function.

Also, a number of the adopters indicated their displeasure about paying adoption charges at the entry of the system when it was not sure that they would have a child to adopt as it suggested to them a "pay-before-service" strategy in the system of adoption. The payment is usually done before the approval stage where an intending adopter receives a letter from the State Ministry clearing him/her as suitable to adopt a child. Yet after the approval stage, many are reported to leave the process for lack of children available for adoption. The request for adoption fees at the point of application suggests that the system is driven by economic factors. In the words of Smolin (2004), "it does not matter the explanations offered for the payment of any charge, the effect is to create a market in babies, with high-demand characteristics of the infants' age and health status or the speed of the adoption being allocated to the highest bidder". Such payment as well as the reason somewhat contradicts the legal conception. Such process, characterised by a compulsory payment of these charges at the entry of the system, and profound uncertainty, may undoubtedly inform intending adopters' navigation through the system. This is because after such investment, adopters may want to ensure at all costs, that they have the result for the money paid.

Cost variations noted between domestic and international adoption lacked tangible explanation although Goodwin (2006) explained that the rationale for adoption cost differential must be situated in money expended in the preparation of the child for adoption. The lack of justification by the officials suggests that such difference may have been motivated by a common belief that people filing for international adoptions are "international candidates", from a better economy, whose charge must be made higher than that of their other local counterparts, hence, aligning with Cardarello's (2009) submission that "the profit for individuals and "donations" from adoptive parent is responsible for a system of interest and exchange that encourage the supply of children to foreign families".

While payment of tax was considered a functional prerequisite to ensuring that a person to whom the child would be awarded is ascertained patriotic, and responsive to her/his civic responsibility, the evidence provided that sometimes adopters are found faulty during this screening process and yet given the opportunity to pay, may be suggesting the payments as lacking in the principle that guides it, thereby raising suspicion on the motive behind it. This is in line with Giddens' idea on the distinction between the motive and the act. Of very great importance is the way Giddens separated an agency from the intention, knowing that action has the tendency to be different from what was intended (Ritzer, 2008). The departure from the stated justification for the tax payment produces some unintended consequences such as extortion of intending adopters and a deviation from focusing on the children, since the essence is to ensure that intending adopters are responsible citizens.

Prospective adopters' preference dominates the decision regarding the placement of children in a manner that attests to child placement practices and procedure as strongly adopters-centred. The idea of adopter's preference becomes more important because it automatically opens the door for rejection of children; it is as well as capable of encouraging market forces. When children are allotted with no provision given to intending adopter to accept or reject any kind of child, the likely result is a situation where people who would opt for adoption are those who would not mind to cater for any child given to them. By implication, adoption would be more child-centred. Findings revealed that principles such as the consideration of adopters' preferences, in many cases, work against the consideration as paramount in adoption decisions. While the determination of the best interest of the child might involve some complex analysis (Mezmur, 2009), such subject might greatly benefit from embracing the level of functional analysis (Merton, 1968). For instance, if the consideration of adopters' preference is beneficial, to who? While the consideration of adopter's preference may be viewed as indirectly beneficial to the adoptive child given that such consideration may foster adopters' commitment to the children, such ideology somewhat negates the principle of humanitarianism upon which child adoption is originally anchored. Onayemi (2019) reported cases of child rejection prior to finalising adoption process, as well as disruption of already-concluded adoption when adoptive children were noted to be suffering from one ailment or the other. Children were rejected and stayed longer in dilapidated orphanages, where they did not meet the aesthetic values of intending adopters.

The need to see the children grow within a safe environment was reported as one of the factors that determine their placement. This consideration of prospective adopters' environment is laudable for the protection of the child's interest. However, some of the adopters, particularly intending adopters' resident in Lagos who found fault with this requirement, were of the opinion that to determine adopters' prospects by their environment is to deny the low socio-economic class, who could not afford to reside within the usually preferred location, the opportunity to adopt. Also, adopters complained that at times the home checking provides officials with opportunity to give flimsy excuses that even when you seem to have met the requirements, they may find a way to drop you to attend to another applicant that they probably reserve

interest in.

The majority of the officials did not view educational level as necessary and opposed the view that adopters who lack formal education are discriminated against. However, the fact that the majority of those who have successfully adopted fall within the educated category situated adoption as being almost exclusively the choice of educated people and mostly not considered by people who have little or no formal education. This might support some people's idea that liberalism somewhat cognates to formal education. Hence, this was logically situated outside favouritism or the discrimination of the uneducated category.

Adopter's attitude at the point of awarding the child was also found contributing to the determination of placement of children because it is believed that adopters' countenance and reaction, particularly at the stage of awarding the child, is a reflection of the value the intending adopter places on the child. Hence, where a prospective adopter displayed lack of interest in a child that was about to be awarded, a sensitive child welfare officer may halt the process. However, where the same intending adopter extended a hand of gesture to the same child he/she was not willing to adopt or to some other children in the home, such applicant might be reconsidered for another child.

4.1. Implication of the research

The findings of this research provide insight to what factors are put into consideration in the placement of children, and in what ways these factors are deployed, bearing in mind the interest of the children who are to be adopted.

The inconsistency that marked the deployment of all components of identified economic factors that inform placement indicates the risk of substituting the interest of children with adoption officials' self-profiting. This, therefore, instructs that adoption officials, around whom the duty of child placement revolves, be followed up and overseen to ensure a child placement strategy that is more child-centred through proper review and stringent adherence to the principles that inform the eligibility of intending adopters. This principle is therefore expected to discourage and prohibit some ideas, such as the consideration of "adopters' preference" in the placement of children. By so doing, placement would be more child-centred.

Conflict of interest

I write to inform that there is no conflict of interest regarding this paper submitted.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.02.041>.

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