

# The Phenomenon of Baby factory, Infertility and Religion in Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

Infertility has been recognized as a universal social problem with no cultural or geographical boundaries. It has economic and political language in Nigeria where nepotism, ethnicity and tribalism are the order of the day in allocation of social amenities and economic activities. Infertility has gone beyond being the couple's predicament to being family concern, the community and State. Modern technology has assisted greatly to reduce the problem of infertility yet, issues relating to baby factories and sales of babies are still on the increase which is a serious concern. The Assisted Reproductive Technology cannot be reached by some couples because of accessibility and affordability, thereby contributing to the patronage of baby factories by couples. The increasing poverty rate in the country has helped to boost the market as couples sell some babies to take care of others, and the monetary reward makes the business very attractive. Though the government through law enforcement agencies has been arresting and persecuting offenders, yet the problem seems unabated. Effort of the government alone has not been able to bring permanent solution to the problem just like some other social problems such as armed robbery, drug abuse, prostitution, herdsmen/

farmers clashes, militancy in the Niger Delta Region, kidnapping, cultism etc. This paper looks at some newspaper's online reports from 2016-2019 on baby factory activities. Nigerians are very religious as such laws are better obeyed than the constitution. These religious organizations are everywhere; they are found on every street. To solve this problem holistically, religious organizations should borrow a leaf from Omega Power Ministry in Port-Harcourt, Rivers State, by providing welfare services to members and the general public. Government should make surrogacy legitimate, well publicized and enact enabling laws to aid religious organizations to provide these services.

KEYWORDS; BABY FACTORY, Infertility, Religion.

## INTRODUCTION

The problem of infertility is universal and not confined to a particular region or social group, but the difference is in the approach for seeking solutions. Infertility, most times, is misinterpreted or not adequately understood. For example, immediately after the expensive traditional and white wedding ceremony in Nigeria, it is expected that within the first anniversary of marriage the couple should be celebrating the birth of their first child or children as the case may be. Both parents and

even some couples themselves would become worried that pregnancy has not taken place after this time. The questions they failed to ask are "Are the couples ready to raise children immediately after marriage? Do they stay together and how often do they meet or whether they are using protective measures to prevent pregnancy and the duration should not be less than one year. While it is the desire of every couple to raise their own kids in Africa, answers to the questions raised would will make it easy to diagnose or come to a conclusion of cases of infertility. As much as child birth is critical to African couples, their families and to some extent communities, in developed countries it might be the choice of the couple without unnecessary interference. Infertility is a social problem that affect not only the direct people concerned, but the country or nation at large and so it can be said to be a social problem with economic and political languages. Social implication of infertility includes stigmatization, isolation, humiliation, divorce and separation. About 70-80 million couples worldwide with infertility had faced some of these problems (Balen & Bos, 2009).

In Andoni in Rivers State, Nigeria, for example, a man or woman without a biological child is tagged an ora, (ugwuora) barren person, they are compared with unfruitful tree and a ritual is performed for such a person at death so that in the next world the person would not be barren again. This is done by making an incision on the abdomen before burial. Some communities see them as wicked and unproductive. To them, the whole idea about marriage is for reproduction and so they encouraged especially the men to marry a second wife, while the wife is asked to accept the young wife as her daughter. Sometimes, it works but some leads to separation or divorce.

Traditionally, Africans depend on their children and ward for welfare in old age, even when parents are active, they use them to run errands which also explain why child labour is recorded more in Africa and mostly in the rural areas. Imagine a couple without children and the economic lost. The cost of infertility is more than the cost of marriages because it involves series of test, investigations, and treatment that are very expensive beyond the reach of an average Nigerian. Some also managed infertility spiritually and traditionally by making sacrifices or atonement to the gods. Herbal medicine and various concoction are also used to treat infertility in both partners. In Nigeria respect and recognition comes with achievement. For an infertile woman respect is replaced with stigmatization, name calling and isolation. Hollos & Whitehouse, (2009) asserted that women from Ijo community in Delta State and Lopon in Yakur in Cross River State, do not take part in family meetings and are more likely to change locality as a result of shame and humiliation because of infertility.

When people are not producing children it also affects the economy of the state or nation due to lack of productive work force. For example, in Rivers State, Nigeria, appointments, employments are based on local government quota. Politically, the population growth is very important especially in a country like Nigeria where ethnicity and tribalism play-out in most places of endeavor such as job engagement and placement, political appointments. And so, infertility is seen as something that affect the entire community or nation due to its effect on the population growth rate and productivity.

Infertility therefore, is a social problem with multiple challenges. Some people seek for solution traditionally and spiritually, others utilize modern health care facilities. Advancement in medical science has reduced the level of infertility, but has not eradicated

cases of infertility. The introduction of (ART) In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) being the commonest have greatly increased the chances of couples having their own babies. According to Fernandez, Pelegrina, Kessler, & Raulins, (1991) about 30,000 infants have been produced through these technologies world-wide. Infertility is still a major challenge in marriages, especially among rural dwellers in Nigeria, due largely to poverty, ignorance and absence of modern reproductive technology in their locality. Infertility is expensive and so most of the rural dwellers do not have money to pay for investigations and treatment or to travel to urban cities where help can be found. There is a link between poverty and infertility among rural dwellers where land sharing is dependent on the number of male children, common among poor countries like Bangladesh, Nahar (2012) and even Nigeria. It is observed that poor people would always think of people that would inherit their properties whereas the rich would engage in some philanthropic foundations to touch the lives of other people and leave their names on the sand of time. The male system of inheritance is common among the Ikwerre's, in Rivers State and some other upland communities where land acquisition is a very serious issue of contention for farming and property development. It is a little different in the riverine communities, apparently because there is little or no land to share, but worse in oil producing communities where government and the people drag for compensation from companies operating in their communities.

Ignorance plays a key role in infertility as most times, the men usually do not go for investigations, some do not even know the right places to seek for help. Religion also adds to ignorance as most of them would claim the biblical saying of "non shall be barren in the land" according to Exodus 23v26 and their pastors would promise them miracle babies.

The cost of (ART) is very high and so it is only few medical facilities that are able to afford them in both public and private sector. These services are said to be very costly and time consuming in Nigeria.

Baby factory phenomenon; while some couples struggle with the problem of infertility yet babies are being sold by others. In simple terms, factories are where goods are manufactured for consumption but in Nigeria in recent time, it is common to hear that children are sold to buyers from home where young girls are kept to be having babies for sale. Most of them are kept without their consent, but by compulsion. These homes include, churches, maternity homes, native doctor homes and traditional birth places. Babies from these places and elsewhere are being trafficked across towns and borders. Agents in this trade are some doctors that own private clinics, nurses and midwives, pastors, teenage mothers, poor couples etc. Poverty is given as a primary reason why babies are sold, especially by married couples which is suddenly becoming rampant now in Nigeria, for the past 3 years due largely to increasing rate of poverty and unemployment. There are reports of parents selling their children to take care of older ones. Some couples are poor because they do not want to work hard since there is no mouth to feed. This goes to explain that infertility can affect job performance. An emotionally unstable person cannot be focused on the job and might also not derive satisfaction from it. Whereas in some developed societies people have children by choice and the number they can cater for, (Price, 2013). Teenagers sell their babies due to spouse refusal to accept responsibility for the pregnancy, cases of rape and not being sure of the child's paternity. Pregnancy out of wedlock is a taboo in some societies and religious bodies to avoid shame to their parents' teenagers find these places to hide to have these

babies. Desperation on the part of couples have led many to buying children or even stealing babies at times. Poverty due to unemployment has also made this business lucrative as a child can be sold for between #150,000-500,000 depending on the sex. Young girls most times are sent into prostitution as a result of poverty, Nigeria, is a place where people often have reasons for rendering assistance to anyone. These girls sell themselves to survive since there is no sustainable social policy for the unemployed in Nigeria. It is usually difficult for a female to get any favour from the male folks in Nigeria without compensation. When they are desperate, they give in and some of these relationships with married men can result to unplanned pregnancies which they may end up denying.

#### **The Role of Government in This Social Menace.**

Just like most social vices the government effort alone seems to be inadequate as the problem is on the increase by the day. Government policy on adoption in Nigeria is embedded in the child's Right Act, of 2003. Most people complained about the long process of applying to the family court or civil court with such documents as evidence of being married, birth certificate or sworn age declaration of both intending parents, two passport size photo of each parent, certificate of fitness from a recognized government hospital. Legal facilities are not available in the rural communities as there is one magistrate court in each local government area in Rivers State by 2019. These courts are situated at the headquarters which are usually far from the people with poor means of transportation. They must also meet the requirement from child's welfare department (Young, & Evans, 2017). The adoption process varies from state to state. Queues for adoption are too long and contributes greatly to people looking for a faster means. There is no provision for singles

who want to have children. Government has not really shown enough commitment in making Assisted Reproductive Technology accessible and cheap for majority of infertile couples especially rural dwellers as these services are not available. The lack of electricity in the rural areas of Nigeria could be responsible for lack of modern medical technology and electronic devices in the rural hospitals and clinics. There is no enlightenment about surrogacy so most couples and people that are ready to help are ignorant about it. Cases of rape and prostitution have not received adequate attention. Most rapists are not prosecuted because victims do not open up due to shame and victimization. Government owned children homes are suffering from dilapidation of infrastructure, lack of trained personnel, medical care, lack of daily provisions for the children except for few donations from individuals and NGOs, example is the Port-Harcourt Children's Home, Borokiri, in Rivers State, Nigeria. There is no proper registration of births and documentation of new born as to ascertain where and when delivery took place in Nigeria. Birth certificates can be issued at any stage in life by the population commission agency, sworn affidavit is usually accepted and so there is no proper documentation.

#### **Baby Factories as a social phenomenon**

Though there has been major improvement in the management of infertility with advanced technology in reproductive medicine, yet many couples still do not have children of their own. Reasons could be lack of fund to finance treatment, accessibility to modern facilities and ignorance.

The adoption process in Nigeria is cumbersome and this puts away most people as they see it as time consuming, expensive and marred with irregularities. Just like any other process of getting something from the public system in

Nigeria, tribalism, nepotism and favouritism play out, most times the highest bidder have it.

Family is the cradle of socialization for the child, but this is not so again as parents are rarely at home with their kids. The issue of pregnancy outside wedlock is not usually welcome yet, sex education is hardly mentioned in homes. Parents have less time to discuss with kids due to their busy schedules to meet up with the family budget and the use of smartphones and computer. This has greatly affected family communication and interaction. Children rather learn more now, from their teachers that attend to many children at the same time and social media. What parents do not have time to teach and educate their kids on, are done by peers and of course the internet. Some see it as offensive discussing sexual matters with their children and wards. Much attention is not also given to pregnancies resulting from rape or even the emotional state of the victim. These are reasons for giving the children up for sale. There were times when families valued their offspring's even in the absence of both parents as a result of death or chronic illness in Nigeria, but with the present economic situation people are barely able to feed their own children. This has made it impossible to accept other responsibilities like fostering kids for family members and assisting the less privilege. Selling the babies or abandoning them seem the easiest way out. Traditional societies that place important value over male child than female, force some couples into looking for male children by all means including patronage of these homes. Religious bodies are not exempted as most people are deceived into believing that they can never be barren. This makes some not to take to medical advice or delay investigations and treatment. They also forbid discussions about sexual matters, thereby making people to wallow in ignorance. Some of the churches are used for this lucrative business. Some ministers

are involved in raping, getting teenagers pregnant, selling their babies to infertile couples and celebrating them as miracle babies.

Insecurity has been a big challenge in Nigeria, especially in recent times, women and children are most vulnerable. Women and girls are being raped during armed robbery attacks and kidnapping which sometimes result in pregnancies. The trauma and stigmatization that comes with it does not allow them to keep the pregnancy and if the babies are born, they sale them off to avoid permanent remembrance of their past experiences.

### **Problems of Infertility.**

Many scholars have tackled the problems of infertility in Nigeria through various research projects and investigations. Most of them identify the causes of infertility, rate of infertility in some regions; for example, the analysis of infertility in northwest Nigeria by (Panti, & Sununu, 2014). It was observed that majority of the cases were due to genital tract infection, resulting majorly to secondary infertility. For acceptance of Assisted Reproductive Technology among women, attending gynecological clinics in tertiary institutions in south western Nigeria, result showed low patronage due to lack of awareness of (ART) and the cost. It was also discovered that educational status influences level of awareness, no wonder rural dwellers are not benefitting much because illiteracy rate is high, (Olugbenga, Adebimpe, Babatunde, & Oke, 2014). Some other studies have proven that cultural beliefs are major determinants in prevailing explanation for infertility from layman perspectives in Nigeria among them is the study of (Fehintola, Fehintola, Ogunlaja, Amotunde, Ogunlaja, & Onwudiegwu, 2017) in southwestern Nigeria. Baby factory has also been seen as a form of child abuse as children are not supposed to be sold, and this has



received comments from various organizations and individuals and yet the problem is on the increase.

These are examples from some online publications on Baby Factories in Nigeria from 2016-2019

Baby factories in Nigeria; a new and Challenging source of Abuse, (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.rbmo.2015.11.0101475-6483>).

Adelakun, (2016) Nigerian Churches and the problem of baby factories, October, 27, 2016, punching.com

Ikokuwu, (2016) Police uncover baby factory in Abia, August, 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016, punching.com.

Olowoapejo, (2018) Lagos seals three baby factories, rescues 162 abandoned babies. Vanguard, April, 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

Udeaja, (2018) AIG worries about increasing baby factories in Abia. guardian.ng, 27<sup>th</sup>, November, 2018.

Iheamnachor, (2018) Police burst baby factory in Rivers State, arrest cleric, 16 pregnant girls. Vanguardngr.com, 1<sup>st</sup>, October, 2018

Okeoma, (2018) Imo uncovers 257 illegal baby factories, June, 16, 2018. punch newspaper.

Nwafor, (2018), NAPTIP seals baby factory in Nyanya, Abuja, February, 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018, vanguard.

Nanlong, (2019), I wanted a baby to call me mother, says a woman after stealing a three-day-old baby, June, 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019. punching.com

Adebayo, (2019) Nigeria: Agency uncovers "Baby Factory" Rescues pregnant victim in Ibadan.

These are but just a few of the publications about baby factory issues, stealing and kidnapping of babies for sale in Nigeria. These

stories revealed some of the factories as churches, herbalist homes, private clinics, maternity homes own by orthodox medical practitioners and unregistered non-governmental organizations. These activities are worrisome and calls for urgent reassessment of all the strategies involve in solving infertility problem. The major concern of this paper is to look at the problem holistically, proffer solutions which, if properly implemented could help to reduce or eradicate baby factory and bring succor to infertile couples because as long as life exist, the problem of infertility would still exist. This is so because there must be the problem of urinary tract infections due to dirty environment, promiscuity among people which is like part of nature, especially for men to cheat or have many wives. Infertility due to congenital malformation of the reproductive organs of both males and females cannot be ruled out. Trauma from road traffic accident and other sources can cause damage to reproductive organs thereby causing infertility. Also, single parents that might want to have their own child or children.

### **Solutions to Baby Factories in Nigeria.**

To tackle this problem holistically religious institutions should rise up to this challenge. The history of Mary Mitchell Slessor of the Scottish Presbyterian mission who spear headed and stopped infanticide of twins among the Ibibio people of the southeastern Nigeria is always fresh in our mind because the same country that forbade twins now welcomes quadruplet and sextuplets (Charles, 2016). She lived among the people and was able to provide basic needs such as shelter, food, drugs, clothing for them. Poverty was tackled by the provisions she was making and the good news messages from the scripture was able to deal with the cultural and traditional beliefs. Excuses of ignorance was buried in religion. This was a holistic way of solving social problem which corroborates with

the statement of Karl Marx, (1844) that religion is an opium for the masses as it relieves the immediate suffering of the people. Ministry of mercy Nigeria, was founded by Paul & Caroline Gross and family in 1992, at Lokoja, to care for orphans and children with special needs. Love Home Orphanage was established in December, 2005, to provide respite and care by housing, minding, providing medical services to abandoned and children that suffered abuse. Likewise, in recent time Omega Power Ministry with headquarter in Port-Harcourt in Rivers State, Nigeria which was founded by Apostle Dr Chibuzor Gift Chinyere in 2006, has taken bold stapes in tackling various social vices (Serekara-Nwikan, 2017). Some of the welfare programmes includes, rehabilitation/empowerment of repentant prostitutes, cultist and militants all over the country. Others are proposed free restaurant in 23 local government area of Rivers State, free education and scholarship for indigent church members, free boutique, free hospital for pregnant women and children etc. There was an incident where the Rivers State police commissioner rescued some ladies from baby factories and sent them to OPM, (Emenike, 2019). This is just one church doing all of these. It is observed that most of the streets in Port-Harcourt have not less than 3 churches and it is so all over the country. The article is basically calling on religious institutions to stand up and tackle this very important social problem that has refused to go despite all the effort of government. Nigerians are very religious people as there is no one without a religious affiliation. Some of the atrocities of children hiding in baby factories to have their babies and to sale is to avoid condemnation from their members or the shame of going against their religion. Religious leaders should stop sexual abuse of teenagers and women but rather provide succor to the abused and less privileged. If all religious organizations will rise up to provide welfare for

their members, it is believed that poverty which is a major cause of this problem will be reduced. The churches/mosque should provide accommodation for their members as OPM is doing. As they preach the various gospels, let sex education be freely discuss in churches/mosque so that parents and guardians will also be free to discuss with their children and wards at home. For children who will make mistake of getting pregnant, rape cases, the church/mosque should accommodate them, take care of them instead of condemnation. Wealthy couples and infertile couples should be allowed to adopt these babies according to the law of the land. This way adoption will be easier and no one will be left out. Religious organizations should assist members to access medical facilities and afford ART. It is believed that counselling that is done by the religious body will be readily accepted because religious laws are better obeyed.

Churches/mosque should build schools and make the fees affordable or free for members and the less privilege in the society. Skill acquisition centers should be established by churches to teach and empower members especially people that have such talent. It is good for everyone to be literate but University or college education should not be forced on everyone. With religious organizations handling these problems the government will be left with the responsibility of making enabling laws and providing conducive environments for people to live and work.

Government should legalize surrogacy so that both volunteers and infertile couples will be able to use this option freely in Nigeria. Nigeria law should be made in such away that religious institutions are given free hands and enabling environment to assist their members who have these needs. Government should make law that can allow couples or single parents to voluntarily give up his or her child to any

relevant agency without fear of persecution for proper care and adoption. The adoption process should be made easier and free of irregularities.

### Conclusion.

Nigerians, just like most Africans enjoy communal live especially with their immediate families, and so the absence of children in a family is usually not handle with kids- gloves. Infertility therefore is seen as not only the problem of the couple, but that of the extended family and at times the whole community. That is why solutions to these problems most times are sort by relatives. Infertility and poverty are said to be closely related. It is more obvious now than before even with Assisted Reproductive Technology, which has assisted many couples with the problem of infertility yet some others cannot afford the cost. While some people are looking for children, they can call their own, others are selling theirs due to poverty. Despite the number of arrest of beneficiaries of baby factories, still the business is still striving. This goes to explain the handicap of Nigerian government in tackling social vicesalone.

Since the government alone cannot solve these problems, this paper is humbly suggesting that religious organizations should take up these responsibilities, under enabling laws by the government and bring this unholy and wicked act to an end.

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