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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### ACCEPTABILITY OF CHILD ADOPTION AND ADOPTION SERVICES AMONG CIVIL SERVANTS IN IBADAN, NIGERIA

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#### Abstract

Child adoption provides an opportunity for children to have new families and for parents to have children. Its acceptance by the society, however, may affect people's decision to adopt. This study was conducted to determine the attitude and acceptability of child adoption and adoption services among 403 civil servants in Oyo State Secretariat, Ibadan in February and May, 2008. Self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data. Likert scale of score range 1-5 was used to measure respondents' attitudes. Each positive attitude answer was given a score of 5, while each negative attitude answer had a score of 1. Total scores were computed for each respondent. Attitudinal scores within the range of 16-50 and 51-80 were considered negative and positive respectively. The mean age of respondents was  $40.2 \pm 9.7$  years. Sixty five percent had tertiary education. Overall, 45.9% had positive attitude to adoption. A higher proportion of respondents who had tertiary education (56.3%) were supportive of adoption compared to the others. About 65.0% would support or encourage a relation to adopt a child while 68.5% would recommend adoption to a childless couple. Males, (57.2%), were more willing to support a relation who would like to adopt compared with females, (65.6%). The main reason for non-support of adoption by 32.4% of respondents was that they believed that the childless couples would have their biological children. Efforts should be made to improve the acceptability of adoption.

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#### Introduction:-

Fostering, motherless babies' homes, orphanages and SOS children's villages are institutions which cater for children who cannot stay with their biological families. Adoption, however, is a closer alternative to a natural home and has been found to offer an optimal developmental environment which is lacking in fostering by providing permanent care and parenting capabilities (Jarsson et al, 1986).

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Couples may decide to adopt, if infertility treatments fail (Araoye, 2003) or if they feel lonely after their grown-up children leave home, referred to as 'empty nest syndrome'. In developed countries, many infertile couples actually choose to adopt rather than go through the process of infertility treatment (ASRM, 2003).

Unlike adoption, fostering has been a valued traditional practice among many ethnic groups in West Africa. Although fostering has been reported in many parts of the world, no where is it as institutionalized as in parts of West Africa (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985). A review of adoption cases in Lagos State by Odujirin and Lawson (1993) showed a total of 236 adoptions over an 18-year period (1972 – 1990) giving an average of 13 adoptions per year. Also, a study done in Enugu by Aniebue (2008) revealed 61 adoptions in the eleven-year period between January 1991 and December 2001 giving a prevalence of 5.5 adoptions per year. The reason why adoption is not popular in Nigeria is not clear, despite the fact that the prevalence of infertility is as high as in other parts of the world, as well as having serious social implications (Rowe and Vayena, 2007).

The decision to adopt a child would depend on its acceptability to the couple, their families, friends and colleagues. The prevalence of adoption will be low if people have negative feelings about it and stigmatize adopted persons. The strong family ties in African societies would demand that adoptive parents receive support from their extended family members.

A study on the attitude of Americans toward adoption by Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute (2002) showed that 40% of American adults had considered adoption for their own families, 63% had a very favourable opinion about adoption and 64% had experienced adoption within their own families or among close friends. Also, 78% believed that the country should be doing more to encourage adoption and 95% thought adoptive parents should receive the same maternity and paternity benefits from employers as biological parents. Hispanic populations are more likely to consider adoption (54%), than African-American (45%) and White populations (36%), although African-Americans were most likely to consider adopting a child who had been in foster care for a few years. The commonest concern expressed by respondents over adoption was the fear of a birth parent taking back a child. This concern was shared by 82% of respondents. Fifty percent of respondents were concerned about the high cost of adoption. Other concerns were over the health and behavior of an adoptive child, adopting an older child or adopting one of a different race. Income and education were not major factors in considering adopting. Almost half of those between the ages of 35 and 54 indicated they had considered adopting. Females were more likely to consider adoption than males.

In a study by Miall (1987) among 58 infertile white women, 82% of whom had adopted and the rest were in the process of adopting, it was found that attitudes of the extended family, neighbors and close friends were very important to the women interviewed. Half of the women reported that adoptive parenthood was viewed as being different from biological parenthood by family and friends. They believed society at large is negative about adoption.

A study among 264 infertile Nigerian women in Enugu, Nigeria found that 69.3% respondents expressed their unwillingness to adopt a baby. Twelve (4.5%) of them had either adopted or made effort to adopt a child. The major reasons given by the 183 respondents who were unwilling to adopt a child were: adoption not a solution to their infertility 84 (45%); adoption being psychologically unacceptable 42.6%; fear of unknown parental background 75 (41%) and abnormal behaviour in the child 75 (41%) (Ezugwu et al 2002).

All the participants in a focus group discussion in a study done in Ibadan, Nigeria said that adoption was not common in their community. While some were of the opinion that adoption was a bad and only the last resort for childless couples, others felt that it was alright for anyone who had the capacity to do so. Many felt that an adopted child was a bastard and could destroy the home, and would ask for his/her biological parents in future. The belief that adoption could caused the couple to conceive was wildly expressed by the respondents using the Yoruba cultural believe 'ori omo lo npe omo wa 'ye' meaning a child usually attracts yet to be borne children to the physical realm (Oladokun et al, 2009a).

A study in Ibadan, Nigeria showed that 33.1% of respondents think that child adoption as an option to treat infertility is not acceptable in the community. Respondents who will be willing to adopt were 44.2% and 75.6% would support the establishment of adoption agency (Oladokun et al, 2009b).

In the study by Oladokun et al (2010) on attitude to adoption among 396 women seeking treatment for infertility in a tertiary hospital in Ibadan, many of the respondents did not believe that it is culturally acceptable (64%). Only 17%

expressed a willingness to adopt. This willingness to adopt was found not to be significantly associated with their age, level of education, parity, religious affiliation, tribe, number of years they have been in the marriage, or their family setting. Reasons proffered for not being willing to adopt included the fact that they would not have genetically contributed to the child, that the child might have an untraceable genetic disease, that there might have been a mental illness in the biological parents' families and that the child might decide to trace the biological parents in the future.

## Materials And Methods:-

### Study Area

This study area was conducted in the Oyo State Secretariat, Ibadan, Nigeria.

### Study Population

These were civil servants who work in Oyo State Secretariat, Ibadan.

### Study Design

A descriptive cross-sectional study done in February and May, 2008.

### Sample Size Determination

$$n = \frac{z^2pq}{d^2}$$

where

n = minimum sample size

p = proportion of respondents in Enugu who knew the correct meaning of child adoption (Ezugwu et al, 2002) = 0.273

$$q = 1 - p = 0.727$$

d = degree of precision at 5% = 0.05

z = a constant at 95% confidence level = 1.96

(Kish and Leslie, 1965)

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.273 \times 0.727}{0.05^2} = 305$$

### Protocol

1. Approval for the study was given by the Oyo State Ethical Review Committee.
2. Permission to administer questionnaire was obtained from the Oyo state Head of Service.
3. Research participants gave informed verbal consent.

### Sampling technique

Cluster sampling technique. Out of 15 ministries, 4 were selected by balloting. The ministries were Ministry of Youth and Sports (90 staff), Ministry of Water Resources (235 staff), Ministry of Justice (130 staff) and Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Matters (122 staff). The total number of staff in these ministries was 577. Questionnaires were administered, completed and returned by all consenting staff who were available during the period of the study.

### Research instrument

The research instrument was self-administered, semi-structured questionnaire. It was pre-tested in the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community Development and Social Welfare.

### Data Management

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 16.0. Chi square test was used to test for associations between variables at 5% level of significance.

The Likert scale was used to measure respondents' attitudes. Each attitude question had a score of 5 to 1 for positive through negative attitude. Total score was computed for each respondent. Attitudinal scores of 16-50 and 51-80 were considered negative and positive, respectively.

**Results:-**

Respondents' socio-demographic characteristics

Four hundred and twenty staff were approached for the study out of which 403 completed and returned their questionnaires giving a response rate of 96.0%. The mean age of respondents was  $40.2 \pm 9.7$  years. Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristic of the respondents.

**Table 1:-** Respondents' socio-demographic characteristics.

Characteristics (N = 403)	N	%
<b>Age group</b>		
≤ 29	60	14.9
30 – 39	85	21.1
40 – 49	191	47.4
≥50	67	16.6
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	159	39.5
Female	244	60.5
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single (never married)	79	19.6
Married	312	77.4
Separated	2	0.5
Divorced	1	0.2
Widowed	9	2.2
<b>Educational</b>		
Primary	27	6.7
Secondary	113	28.0
Tertiary	263	65.3
<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	291	72.2
Islam	112	27.8
<b>Staff category</b>		
Junior (Grade level ≤ 06)	142	35.2
Senior (Grade level ≥ 07)	261	64.8

The majority of married respondents (97.1%) had children while only a few did not. Forty nine (12.2%) experienced some delays in having children when they desired it. The median duration of delay before having children was 2 years (range 1 – 15).

Attitudes towards child adoption

The majority of respondents (79.4%) believed that adoption was a good option for childless couples (those that agree and strongly agree). Some respondents (43.7%) felt that adoptive parent should be able to return an adopted child to an orphanage if they change their mind and a few (26.1%) are of the opinion that birth parents should have the right to take back their children when they want to. The respondents' attitudes to various aspects of adoption are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:-** Attitudes toward child adoption.

Attitude	Strongly agree n (%)	Agree n (%)	Don't know n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Strongly disagree n (%)
Adoption is a good option for a couple who have no child	168 (41.7)	152 (37.7)	32 (7.9)	37 (9.2)	14 (3.5)
Adopted child should have equal rights with children born in the family	143 (35.5)	171 (42.4)	48 (11.9)	35 (8.7)	6 (1.5)
Adopted child should bear the name of the adoptive family	132 (32.8)	185 (45.9)	36 (8.9)	41 (10.2)	9 (2.2)

If a couple achieve a pregnancy after adopting, the adopted child should retain his/her position	120 (29.8)	185 (45.9)	47 (11.7)	44 (10.9)	7 (1.7)
Adopted child should have the right to inheritance of lands and property	119 (29.5)	185 (45.9)	55 (13.6)	31 (7.7)	13 (3.2)
Only couples who do not have a child should be allowed to adopt	100 (24.8)	128 (31.8)	39 (9.7)	105 (26.1)	31 (7.7)
Adoption should be allowed across states	60 (14.9)	161 (40.0)	70 (17.4)	75 (18.6)	37 (9.2)
A child that is born after a couple have adopted should assume the first position in the family	60 (14.9)	99 (24.6)	81 (20.1)	114 (28.3)	49 (12.2)
Adoptive parent can return the adopted child to an orphanage if they change their mind	41 (10.2)	135 (33.5)	67 (16.6)	102 (25.3)	58 (14.4)
Couples who have children should be allowed to adopt	39 (9.7)	133 (33.0)	36 (8.9)	120 (29.8)	75 (18.6)
Adopted child should be told that he/she is adopted	39 (9.7)	84 (20.8)	55 (13.6)	139 (34.5)	86 (21.3)
Single women should be allowed to adopt	27 (6.7)	83 (20.6)	59 (14.6)	139 (34.5)	95 (23.6)
A foreigner (non-Nigerian) should be allowed to adopt a Nigerian child	26 (6.5)	88 (21.8)	97 (24.1)	113 (28.0)	79 (19.6)
Birth parents should have the right to take back their child when they want to	26 (6.5)	79 (19.6)	83 (20.6)	117 (29.0)	98 (24.3)
Single men should be allowed to adopt	17 (4.2)	32 (7.9)	52 (12.9)	173 (42.9)	129 (32.0)
Single men should be allowed to adopt female children	7 (1.7)	9 (2.2)	47 (11.7)	175 (43.4)	165 (40.9)

Respondents overall attitude towards adoption was assessed using a composite score. Overall, 45.9% respondents had positive attitude score toward adoption while 54.1% had negative attitude score (Table 3).

**Table 3:-** Attitude score on child adoption.

Attitude	N	%
Positive	185	45.9
Negative	218	54.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>100</b>

A higher proportion of respondents who were males, Christians, married, senior civil servants, had tertiary education and experienced some delay in having children had positive attitude towards adoption than respondents who were females, Muslims, not married, junior civil servants, did not have tertiary education and did not experienced any delay in having children. However, the differences were not statistically significant as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4:-** Respondents' socio-demographic characteristics by attitude towards adoption.

Sociodemographic characteristics	Attitude towards adoption		$\chi^2$	p-value
	Negative n (%)	Positive n (%)		
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	83 (52.5)	76 (47.8)	0.379	0.538
Female	135 (55.3)	109 (44.7)		
<b>Religion</b>				
Christianity	151 (51.9)	140 (48.1)	2.049	0.152
Islam	67 (59.8)	45 (40.2)		
<b>Marital status</b>				
Married	164 (52.6)	148 (47.4)	1.303	0.254
Not married	54 (59.3)	37 (40.7)		
<b>Education</b>				

Tertiary	137 (52.1)	126 (47.9)	1.223	0.269
No tertiary	81 (57.9)	59 (42.1)		
<b>Staff category</b>				
Junior	81 (57.0)	61 (43.0)	0.767	0.381
Senior	137 (52.5)	124 (47.5)		
<b>Delayed conception</b>				
Yes	25 (51.0)	24 (49.0)	0.099	0.753
No	147 (53.5)	128 (46.5)		

Many respondents (65.0%) said that they would support a relation who wants to adopt a child and 68.5% said that they would suggest adoption to a childless couple (Table 5).

**Table 5:-** Respondents’ support of child adoption.

	Yes n (%)	No n (%)	No response n (%)	Total
Would support relative to adopt	262 (65.0)	110 (27.3)	31 (7.7)	403 (100.0)
Would suggest adoption to a childless couple	276 (68.5)	94 (23.3)	33 (8.2)	403 (100.0)

Reasons given by the respondents for supporting a relative to adopt are shown in Table 6.

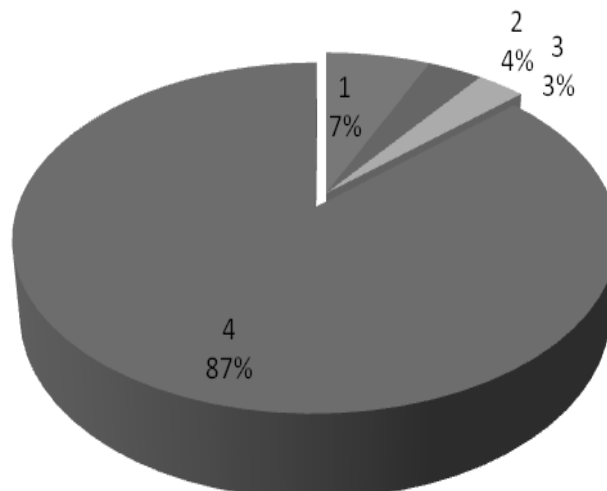
**Table 6:-** Reasons for supporting child adoption.

Reasons (n=262)	n	%
Adoption will bring happiness to a childless couple	153	58.4
Relief for the adopted child	45	17.2
Even distribution of wealth and service to mankind	21	8.0
Adopted child will be a helper and a heir to the couple in their old age	17	6.5
Adoption could attract favour from God and He would bless them with their own children	7	2.7
Good company for a couple whose children are grown up and left home	1	0.4

Respondents’ opinions regarding adoption procedure to be adopted are shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1:-** Methods of contracting adoption as suggested by respondents.

- 1 - Taking in an abandoned child (7%)
- 2 - Arrangement between birth and adoptive parents (4%)
- 3 - Arrangement through agencies/hospitals (3%)
- 4 - Social welfare service/legal procedures (87%)



Reasons given for not supporting adoption are shown in Table 7.

**Table 7:-** Reasons for not supporting child adoption.

Reasons	n	%
God will give them children in His own time	22	32.4
Adopted child can bring confusion in a family	12	17.6
I will leave the couple to their own decision	11	16.2
An adopted child could be abused	9	13.2
I dislike the idea	7	10.3
Adopted child may go back to birth parents	4	5.9
Adopted child is not the same as a child born into the family	3	4.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100.0</b>

A higher proportion of male respondents (57.2%) were more likely to be supportive of relations to adopt children than female respondents (50.0%). The proportion of respondents having one or two children who would support adoption (60.6) was higher than those who had more children (49.8). The differences were, however, not statistically significant as shown in Table 8. Religion, marital status, education, parental status and infertility had no association with attitude.

**Table 8:-** Respondents' characteristics and support of adoption.

Characteristics	Support of adoption		$\chi^2$	p-value
	Yes n (%)	No n (%)		
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	91 (57.2)	68 (42.8)	2.021	0.155
Female	122 (50.0)	122 (50.0)		
<b>Religion</b>				
Christianity	157 (54.0)	134 (46.0)	0.507	0.476
Islam	56 (50.0)	56 (50.0)		
<b>Marital status</b>				
Married	171 (54.8)	141 (45.2)	2.117	0.146
Others	42 (46.2)	49 (53.8)		
<b>Level of education</b>				
Tertiary	148 (56.3)	115 (43.7)	3.554	0.059
No tertiary	65 (46.4)	75 (53.6)		
<b>Delayed conception (n=324)</b>				
Yes	27 (55.1)	22 (44.9)	0.028	0.868
No	148 (53.8)	127 (46.2)		
<b>Parental status</b>				
Have children	169 (53.1)	149 (46.9)	0.051	0.821
Do not have children	44 (51.8)	41 (48.2)		
<b>No of children (n=318)</b>				
1-2	60 (60.6)	39 (39.4)	3.214	0.073
3 and above	109 (49.8)	110 (50.2)		

### Discussion:-

About 46% of respondents had a positive or favourable attitude towards adoption in this study. However, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute (2002) found that a greater proportion of American adults (63%) have a favourable opinion about adoption. In addition, 78% of Americans believe that their country should be doing more to encourage adoption such as by ensuring that adoptive parents receive the same maternity and paternity benefits from employers as biological parents as suggested by 95% of them.

This study showed that some respondents would not support adoption. Some of the reasons given were that God will give children in His own time (32.4%) and adopted children are not the same as children that are born into the family (4.9%). This is similar to the reason given by infertile women who did not want to adopt (Ezugwu et al, 2002). They said that adoption was not a solution for their infertility (45%). Similarly, one of the societal beliefs that

bothered infertile white women studied by Miall (1987) was that adoptive parents are not real parents. These reasons show that in these parts of Nigeria and the world, having one's own child is so highly priced that adoption is not a close or welcomed substitute. Another reason given in this study was that an adopted child can bring confusion in a family (17.6%). This was similarly expressed by the infertile women in Enugu, Nigeria (Ezugwu et al, 2002) and Ibadan (Oladokun et al, 2010) as fear of unknown parental background (41%) and abnormal behaviour in the child (41%). Respondents in a study in Ibadan, Nigeria also expressed similar fears (Oladokun et al, 2009a)

This study also revealed that some people simply dislike the idea of adoption (10.3%). This was also similarly expressed by the infertile women in Enugu, Nigeria as adoption being psychologically unacceptable (42.6%). Some respondents feared that adopted children may go back to birth parents (5.9%). This fear of a birth parent taking back a child was also the commonest concern expressed by 82% of American respondents (Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2002).

Most respondents think that adopted child should have equal rights with children born in the family (77.9%). Similarly, Miall (1987) found that half of the infertile women studied reported that adoptive parenthood was viewed as being different from biological parenthood by family and friends.

A higher proportion of males were supportive of adoption compared to females in this study. This is different from the report by Whatley et al (2003) and by Gibbons et al (2006) where females were more willing to adopt and had more favorable attitudes toward adoption.

### **Conclusion:-**

Respondents' attitude to adoption was fair as less than half of them had a good attitude score. Their concerns about adoption show that adoption is viewed a lot differently as having one's biological children. The opinions and acceptance of relatives and friends is likely to influence prospective adoptive parents' decision. Respondent's with higher educational status had higher attitude scores than those with lower educational attainment. Males were found to be more supportive of adoption than females. No factor was found to significantly associated with supportive attitude to adoption and attitude was found to be generally poor. This means that other factors like societal and cultural values may be a key determinant of respondents' disposition toward adoption.

### **Limitations:**

There might be the tendency for respondents to provide answers to attitudinal questions which they consider more appropriate. Privacy and anonymity was ensured during the filling of the questionnaire.

### **Recommendations:-**

There should be advocacy to opinion leaders to improve attitude towards child adoption.

### **Authors' contribution**

Nwachukwu CC conceived the idea and drafted the proposal. Nwachukwu CC and Adebayo AM supervised the collection of data. Nwachukwu CC, Adebayo AM, Cadmus EO, Nwachukwu AC and Owoaje ET contributed to data analysis, the results and the final manuscript.

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### **Conflict of interest**

There is no conflict of interest.

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