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'We do not father another man's child': Child adoption among Christians in Enugu-Ezike community

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Authors:
Ndidiamaka V. Ugwu[1,2]
Kanayochukwu M. Okoye[1,2]

Affiliations:
[1]Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

[2]Department of Religion Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Kanayochukwu Okoye,
kanayochukwu.okoye@unn.edu.ng

Child adoption is a concept that provides the legal right for a person or persons to assume the parental role for a child who is not their biological offspring. In the Enugu-Ezike community, child adoption faces many challenges, ranging from the individual search for personal identity to family and community socio-cultural behaviour towards inheritance, even among Christians whose dogma teaches that all may be one. Scholars have written extensively on child adoption, especially regarding the challenges that are involved in the process and the negative treatment of the adopted children; however, the present study tries to unveil the attitude of Christians in Enugu-Ezike towards child adoption. A qualitative phenomenological method was employed in conducting this study.

Contribution: The research illuminates the fact that despite the number of years Christianity has stayed in Enugu-Ezike, the people of that community are still resilient with their culture. Their religious affiliation has not affected their perception of child adoption. The findings underscore the need for more support from the community and religious leaders.

Keywords: child adoption; Christianity; Enugu-Ezike; child care; child rights; attitude.

Introduction

Children are highly treasured in every human society, symbolising continuity, identity and hope. In Igbo culture, particularly in Enugu-Ezike community, they are regarded as divine blessings and a fulfilment of marriage (Okoye & Ugwu 2024; Eaude 2024). Parenthood, especially the begetting of biological children, is deeply rooted in the cultural imagination, tied to lineage preservation, inheritance and ancestral continuity. Child adoption has emerged as both a vital child welfare measure for orphaned children and an alternative path to parenthood for couples facing infertility (Ali 2024; Zurlo, Cattaneo Della Volta & Vallone 2023).

Despite its humanitarian and social benefits, adoption remains fraught with challenges in the Igbo socio-cultural context. These challenges include the adopted person's search for personal identity, persistent social stigma and exclusion from inheritance. Adoptive parents are vulnerable to disparaging perception, while adopted children risk being labelled 'bastards' – a term that carries strong moral and social condemnation (Diver 2023; Jones 2019). These attitudes and behaviours are reinforced by communal norms that privilege bloodline purity over nurtured relationships, thereby restricting the acceptance of adoption as a legitimate form of family-making (Ugwu, Okoye & Agbo 2024).

Globally, adoption is a relatively rare practice. The United Nations Population Division estimates that approximately 260 000 children are adopted annually, fewer than 12 per 1 000 000 under the age of 18 (Davis 2020). A small number of countries account for the majority of cases: in 2001, the United States (US) recorded over 127 000 adoptions, China nearly 46 000 and Russia more than 23 000. Historically, adoption was not primarily for child welfare but for preserving family lines, securing inheritance and forging political and economic alliances – often involving older adoptees (Rossini 2014; Wagner 2024). The modern understanding of adoption as a child-centred practice emerged in the mid-19th century and is now enshrined in the law of over 160 countries, though about 20 still lack legal adoption provisions, preferring alternative forms such as guardian or kinship care, often shaped by religious norms. In many cultures, including some African contexts, informal fostering within extended families remains more acceptable than the finality of Western-style legal adoption.

In Nigeria, adoption is recognised under the *Child Rights Act of 2003* and corresponding state laws, which place the best interest of the child at the core of the process (Giwa 2023). However, legal provisions operate within, and are often constrained by, some cultural frameworks.

In Enugu-Ezike, a predominantly Christian, Igbo community, patrimonial traditions strongly influence attitudes towards adoption. Fatherhood is defined primarily by biological paternity, unbroken ancestry and the protection of inheritance lines. This worldview is encapsulated in the widely cited local saying, 'We don't father another man's child', which conveys a deep-seated fear of introducing an 'outsider' into the lineage, with perceived risks to land ownership, family name and ancestral rites.

This study, therefore, examines the perception and attitude of Enugu-Ezike Christians towards child adoption. The study contributes to African family studies, theology and social policy by illustrating the complex interplay between kinship structures, religious belief and legal institutions in shaping adoption practices. Ultimately, the study aims to inform culturally sensitive strategies for reimagining fatherhood and family in ways that respect tradition while affirming the dignity and worth of every child.

Conceptualising child adoption

Vered (2010) defines adoption as:

> [A] legal act that brings to an end the child-parent relationship – that is all the rights and duties between the birth parents and the child – and instead creates family relation between the adoptee and adoptive parent by endowing the later with all the authority, rights, obligations that usually exist between a parent and a child; blood ties are severed and alternative legal family relationship of adoptive parenthood, which is lasting and almost irreversible, are created. (p. 234)

This definition is exhaustive, as it embodies the nature and essence of child adoption. It could be argued that this definition would be a universal one, but unfortunately, it is not. There are many definitions of child adoption, as there are scholars who are interested in the phenomenon. Avidime et al. (2013) define adoption as a legal process under a state statute in which a child's legal rights and duties towards their birth parents are terminated, and the same rights and duties are transferred to their adoptive parents. In this definition, adoption involves a legal process, backed up by constitutional law, in which the rights and duties of a child are transferred from his or her biological parents to the adoptive parents. Dogan (2011) buttresses that adoption constitutes a process by which a legal link with a new family is established and an existing one destroyed.

Types of adoption

There are different types of adoption (see Figure 1). Sanders (2012) identifies four main types of adoption: domestic adoption, international adoption, interracial adoption and foster care. However, this work conceptualises adoption into three categories based on mode, practice and location. Under the mode, adoption can be formal or informal. Informal adoption significantly involves foster care or fostering by a relative or non-relative. In practice, child adoption could be open or closed. An open child adoption is further divided into two types: semi-open and fully open adoption. In practice, both open and closed adoption could be public or private. Based on the location, adoption can be classified into domestic (local) adoption and international adoption. Domestic adoption can be interstate or intrastate, while international adoption could be transracial. In all the categories of adoption, the processes of adopting a child can also be legal or illegal, depending on the procedures involved.

Adoption practices vary significantly across national and cultural contexts, shaped by differences in legal frameworks, social norms and child welfare priorities. In the US, adoption has evolved towards greater openness and transparency. Open adoption, where birth and adoptive parents maintain some form of contact, has grown in popularity (Grigoropoulos 2022). The US' adoption laws prioritise the 'best interests of the child'. Thus, it enforces strict social, psychological and financial requirements for adoptive parents. International adoption has also been prominent in the US, although it has become more tightly regulated in recent decades following the Hague Adoption Convention (Rotabi et al. 2012). In the UK, adoption is primarily child-centred, deeply embedded within the broader framework of child protection. Reformed by the *Adoption and Children Act 2002*, the system grants adoptive parents equal status as legal parents and streamlines procedures to place children more quickly into permanent families (Ball 2005). Unlike the US and UK model of adoption
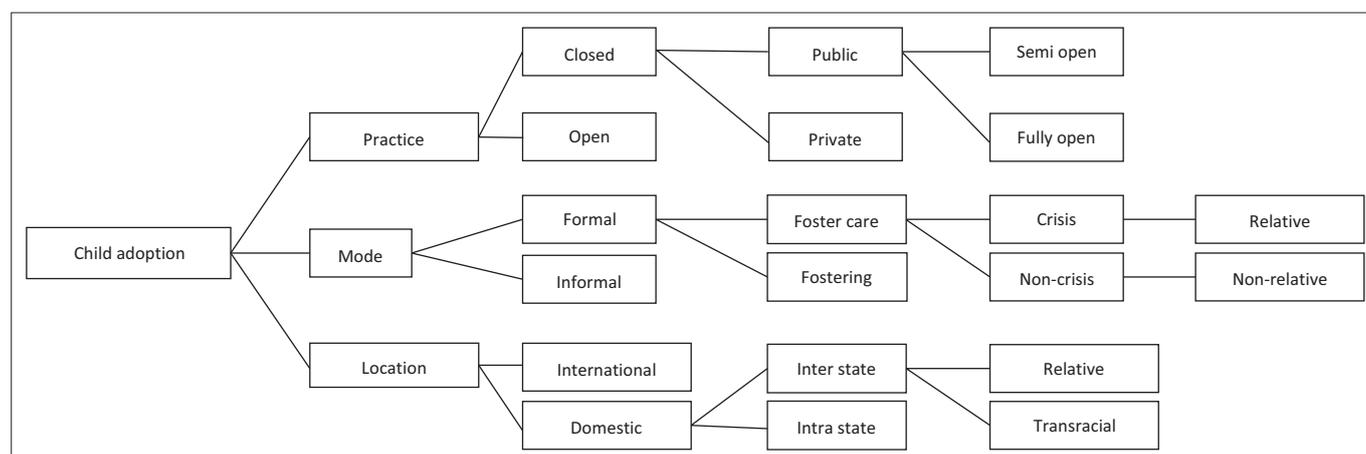

FIGURE 1: Authors' graphic conceptualisation of types of adoption.

practice, which places a stronger emphasis on the state's role in safeguarding vulnerable children, with most adoptions involving children from the public care system rather than voluntary relinquishment by birth parents (Buivydaite et al. 2022).

In India, religion and caste have a strong influence on adoption. Under the *Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act (1956)*, Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs can legally adopt children and gain full parental rights. However, Muslims, Christians and Parsis traditionally had access only to guardianship under the *Guardians and Wards Act (1890)*, which did not provide them with full inheritance rights (Ashokan 2021). The Juvenile Justice *(Care and Protection of Children) Act (2015)* now allows all communities to adopt formally, but cultural and religious beliefs continue to affect adoption rates (Agrawal 2025). Policies regulating population and gender dynamics have affected the practice of adoption in China. For decades, the 'one-child policy' (1979–2015) created a surge in abandoned children, particularly girls, because of a preference for sons (Bao et al. 2023). This resulted in one of the largest waves of international adoptions in history, with thousands of Chinese children adopted by families in North America and Europe (Settles et al. 2012). Recent changes in the law encouraged domestic adoption, but cultural preferences for bloodlines remain strong, limiting its prevalence.

Adoption is legally recognised in South Africa, under the *Children's Act 38 of 2005*, and is shaped by socio-cultural dynamics. There is a strong preference for kinship or informal care over formal adoption, reflecting the communal orientation of African societies (Luyt & Swartz 2022; Buckenberger 2020). Formal adoption is less frequent compared to informal foster caregiving arrangements, but it is increasingly promoted by child welfare agencies to provide permanent homes for orphans. In Kenya, the *Children Act of 2001* made adoption permissible, putting the child's safety and best interests first. However, adoption is still relatively rare in Kenya because of bureaucratic procedures, social stigma and cultural resistance to breaking biological family ties (Wegar 2000). Instead, kinship care continues to be the dominant mode of care for orphaned or abandoned children, a pattern seen in many cultures in sub-Saharan Africa (Stuckenbruck & Roby 2017). In Ethiopia, adoption gained global attention in the early 2000s because of high numbers of international adoptions, particularly to the US. Poverty and the HIV and AIDS crisis made many children vulnerable, making international adoption a widespread practice (Adu 2021). However, amid concerns of child trafficking and exploitation, Ethiopia in 2008 banned international adoptions. Instead, it places emphasis on domestic placements and family-based care (National Council for Adoption 2025).

Poverty exerts a significant impact on child adoption globally, affecting both the supply and demand aspects of the practice. In many low- and middle-income nations, economic hardship remains a major reason parents often relinquish their children. This is because parents who are having trouble with financial insecurity may not be able to meet their children's basic requirements, which makes it more likely that they will go to an institution or be adopted (Fernandez 2019). Poverty also intersects with larger structural inequities, such as limited access to social assistance systems, inadequate healthcare and weak child protection frameworks. These factors increase family vulnerability and pressure them to adopt (Agbeno et al. 2020). On the receiving end, prospective adoptive parents in wealthier nations often see international adoption as a way to give children chances that they wouldn't have in their home countries. This makes the flow of adoptions around the world even more unequal in terms of wealth and power (Harf et al. 2015). Poverty is not just a contextual factor; it is also a structural force that drives the ethical discussions about child adoption around the world.

Adoption practices around the world are shaped by a mix of cultural traditions, religious beliefs and changing laws. In numerous civilisations, informal care arrangements, including kinship fostering, have traditionally superseded formal legal adoption. But adoption habits have slowly changed because of more people moving to cities, families changing and reforms in child welfare. These instances show that adoption is never only a legal act; it is always part of larger cultural, social and historical settings.

Children in Igbo culture

Children are priceless in Igbo culture; they bring happiness and joy to homes. Like in the Chadian proverb, in the Igbo society, 'A woman without children is like a tree without leaves' (Sonko 1994). A marriage relationship without children in the Igbo cultural milieu is perceived as an incomplete institution. In such homes, the relationship is characterised by rancour, bitterness and quarrelling, and is devoid of pleasure and happiness. Every marriage in Igbo society earnestly desires parenthood. In a traditional Igbo society, the number of children in a family is often seen as a measure of the family's wealth. This is because children are the source of support in the areas of farm work and other domestic chores. Ohaeri, Oahimijie and Ingwu (2019) note that the consequences of infertility include economic hardship, social isolation, violence and denial of proper death rites. Any man who has no children has lost access to his family inheritance and, consequently, faces deprivation and poverty (Dyer 2007).

Infertility carries a lot of burden in Igbo society, ranging from social isolation, humiliation and stigmatisation. Olanike, Osamor and Ownmi (2015) observe that after marriage, family members, in-laws and friends wait expectantly for news of pregnancy and childbirth. When such expectations are not met immediately, social stigma, psycho-social pressures and intense pressures follow suit. In extreme cases, women are personally blamed and labelled for the situation. Onuoha (2014) concurs that women in Igbo society are held responsible for virtually all cases of infertility. In the same vein, Nwoga (2013:705) asserts that 'In Igboland, the number of a woman's children in her husband's house determines

her stay there'. Childless women are often less regarded in traditional Igbo society, and in the demise of their husbands, they cannot lay any claim to their husbands' properties. Additionally, Oladokun et al. (2009) observes that infertile couples are also not allowed to lead important family functions and events in Africa.

Children are highly valued in Igbo society. Thus, Igbo idioms postulate that *Uru ka na nwa* [Children hold the significant gain] and *ife adi ka nwa* [Nothing is comparable to children]. Children are of great significance in Igbo society. They secure marital ties, confer social status on the married couple, secure rights of property and inheritance, maintain the family lineage and satisfy emotional needs (Gerrand 2017). Children symbolise the past, present and future. The past, because they are seen as the reincarnated ancestor who has come with fortune and goodwill to their families.

Children without parents and parents without children in Africa

The traditional African society has a way of caring for children without parents and parents without children. Stuckenbruck (2013:8), talking about childcare in African society, stated that there have always been a variety of childcare patterns in African communities. Howel (2009) notes that in some parts of West African culture, many vulnerable children were raised by individuals who were not their biological parents. He argues that this practice, which is not a form of adoption but fostering, is aimed at strengthening family ties. Nnama-Okechukwu, Anazonwu and Okoye (2020) observe that in the Igbo traditional setting, the extended families have to decide how orphans or vulnerable children are given to caregivers. The Igbos believe that the training of a child is not a duty of the biological parent alone. Thus, fostering is a culturally acceptable way of raising a child in Igbo society. According to Kayong-Male and Onyango (1984:10), 'Fostering was traditionally and still is a common feature of the African family'. Children are fostered by their close relatives, mostly those without children. Ele (2018) compares child fostering in Igbo society and child adoption. He noted that 'child fostering is *ihenwa* (family relationship) while child adoption is *igote na ire nwa* (buying and selling of children)'.

In recent times, with the shift from communal living to individualistic living, fostering in Africa is declining. The impact of modernisation and globalisation on the traditional culture of Africans cannot be ruled out. According to Olanike et al. (2015), globalisation, urbanisation and economic and political instability, among others, have made it difficult to sustain the usual communal spirit, which provided support in raising children. People leave the rural areas for urban areas and cities in significant numbers, thereby limiting the human and financial resources available to provide adequate care for children. Wengi (1998) notes that traditional child adoption (fostering) is weakened because of the overwhelming number of destitute children. They are thereby making children who are orphaned or less privileged available for any form of care.

The people of Enugu-Ezike: Their history and culture

Enugu-Ezike is a community situated in Enugu State, Southeast Nigeria. The community, according to Chukwuemeke (2015), has 36 villages with royal stools in addition to some other newly created politically autonomous communities. Enugu-Ezike covers the land area of 29 km^2 with a population of 259 431 (National Population Commission 2006). Enugu-Ezike people are well known for their resilience in their cultural beliefs; notable among them are the laws guiding marital and family life (Sebs-Okolo et al. 2023). The language of the people is Igbo, which is widely spoken among the indigenes. However, some of the people speak the Idoma and Igala languages. The religion of the Enugu-Ezike people is predominantly Christianity, though a good number of them practise traditional African religion and Islam. According to Eya (1993), Christianity entered Enugu-Ezike as far back as 1929. People in this area, just like in all Igbo societies, are well known for their paternal lineage system. Any child whose paternal root is unknown is not given a proper place among 'his people'.

Christianity and child adoption

The concept of adoption is not alien to biblical tradition. It was widely practised among the Jews right from the time of Abraham. Waters (2012) highlights that adoption is not uniquely a Christian practice, but it is a distinctive Christian act that pertains to neighbourly love and familial belonging. The Bible contains several references to adoption, both as a physical practice and a spiritual metaphor. In Exodus 1:15–22, Pharaoh's daughter rescued Moses from the Nile and adopted him as her own. Mordecai adopted his orphaned cousin Esther, who later became queen under his guidance (Esther 2: 7; 15). In Matthew 1:18–25, Joseph accepted Jesus as his legal son, fulfilling his role as a faithful adoptive father in God's redemption plan. Additionally, Romans 8:15 and Ephesians 1:5 describe believers as adopted sons into God's family through Christ, granting them full inheritance rights with Jesus as his children. Despite these biblical precedents, adoption in modern contexts does not align with the traditional lineage practice of Enugu-Ezike people. Among the Christians, though the practice is highly promoted as an act of compassion, they still uphold their cultural norms that prioritise biological kinship over adoptive ties. This tension highlights the ongoing need to reconcile biblical principle with local customs.

Current study

In this present study, we examined the attitude and response of Christians to child adoption. With the increase in the number of children whose paternal lineage is in doubt, and Christian couples without children who have a need for adoption, it is imperative to interrogate this cultural standing and its implications for the people's well-being. This significance is amplified by the fact that most people in the study area are Christians, whose doctrine teaches brotherly love and inclusivity. Understanding the negative treatment of adopted children and the Christ-like life is of paramount importance. To reach this goal, our main research question

was framed as follows. This study will be guided by these research questions: 'What are the attitudes of Christians towards child adoption?' Our inquiry delved into the level of awareness and acceptance of the practice of child adoption, seeking to gain insight into the reasons affecting the attitude of Christians towards adoption, socio-religious implications and the benefits and challenges of child adoption.

Research methods and design
Participants

The study comprised 32 individuals aged 18 years and above, including 14 males and 18 females. Of these, 24 participants were married, while 8 were single. Among the participants, six reported experiencing fertility changes and did not have children at the time of the interview. All participants were Christians and were geographically dispersed across the 33 villages that make up the community.

Research tools

The study adopted a qualitative phenomenological approach to identify and understand phenomena by exploring individuals' perceptions and actions within a given situation. This approach involves investigating and describing phenomena as consciously experienced, keeping them free from preconception and presupposition (Lewis 2006). We conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews using a flexible interview guide (see Box 1) that allows for meaningful self-expression and dialogue in areas where gaps in the literature have been identified. This approach helped us to understand the informant's experiences without making previous assumptions about the objective reality of those experiences (Holloway & Wheeler 1996:117). The interviews were recorded verbatim, allowing the researchers to refer to the original narrative and ensure accuracy.

Research procedure

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure diverse group participation and a broad geographic representation that encompassed all regions in Enugu-Ezike. Participants were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study. Inclusive criteria include being aged 18 and above, and participants must be Christians and natives of Enugu-Ezike. The 32 interviewees were recruited physically from the 33 villages in the community, one from each village. The participants were given a comprehensive explanation of the research aim, and informed consent was obtained.

Data analysis

Data generated from the interviews were systematically organised, compiled and coded. The researchers employed thematic content analysis using the transcribed interview recordings. In the first stage, open coding was conducted to identify key ideas and patterns from the data. In the second stage, these patterns were organised into coherent themes.

The researchers conducted their analysis independently before reviewing and reconciling their selected themes to ensure accuracy and consistency. The findings were presented in detail, with variables categorised into themes (see Table 1) and supported by direct quotes from the respondents to bring out their exact messages, thereby ensuring the approach reflected the realities grounded in specific contexts.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the University of Nigeria Nsukka Research Ethics Committee.

Results
Theme from the assessment of the level of awareness and practice of child adoption

The participants expressed their views on the meaning of child adoption, child adoption practice in the community and the level of the practice. Their views are captured under the following themes.

Inadequate knowledge

The majority of the participants do not have adequate knowledge of child adoption. They perceive child adoption as a transaction involving the buying and selling of children. For instance:

BOX 1: Interview guide.

Questions
• What do you understand by the concept of child adoption?
• Is child adoption practised in your community?
• Could you please tell me about the practice of child adoption in your community?
• Is child adoption part of Igbo culture?
• Can you adopt a child?
• How has your Christian belief affected your choice?
• Is an adopted child accepted among your people?
• Is an adopted child entitled to all rights and privileges of the son of the soil?
• Can you hand over your inheritance to an adopted child?
• What are the implications of the rejection of the practice of child adoption?
• What are the socio-religious factors that discourage people from child adoption in your community?
• Can you give suggestions on how to improve the people's attitude and responses to the practice of child adoption?

TABLE 1: Classification of themes and categories.

Themes	Categories
Inadequate knowledge	• Taking another person's child • Bringing in a child who is not yours
No formal adoption	• Buying a child
We do not father another man's child	• It is not practised • We adopt from our extended family
Other ways of child care	• No, I cannot adopt • It is an abomination to adopt • It is not allowed in our tradition
Fear of the unknown	• I will take one of my brother's children
Preferred option	• I will look for a child and train without altering the person's name • I do not know the child's background • Stigmatisation of the child is my fear • That inner feeling of not my child • I prefer in vitro fertilisation • It is better to marry a second wife

Child adoption is a tradition of buying babies from somewhere … to go and buy a child that is not yours biologically and take him or her as your child.' (Philip, 39-year-old, male, married)

'Child adoption means taking another person's child as if he or she is your own biological child.' (Kenneth, 35-year-old, male, married)

Other participants, such as Fidelis, Chinwe and Ruben, also shared the same view.

No formal adoption practice

Many of the participants attested to the fact that there is no formal child adoption in their community. For instance, when asked whether child adoption is practised in their community:

'No, we do not practice child adoption in our community … it is not part of our culture, and you know we do not father another man's child.' (Boniface, 45-year-old, male, married)

Another participant affirmed this cultural practice of his people, saying:

'We do not father another man's child.' (Kenneth, 35-year-old, male, married)

Other participants, like Lucy, Scholastic, Chekwebe and Esther, reported on the type of adoption practice in their community. According to them, the adoption we practice is one whereby we take a child from our immediate family whose biological parents are known. The child also knows his biological parents and can return to them at will:

'In our community, we do not go outside our immediate family to adopt a child.' (Lucy, 21-year-old, female, single)

Theme from the reasons affecting the attitude of Christians towards child adoption

The participants identified some reasons to be responsible for the attitude against child adoption in Enugu-Ezike.

Child adoption is not part of Igbo culture

This is one of the significant reasons offered by the participants for why they are against child adoption. For instance, when responding to the question, 'Can you adopt a child?' they said:

'No! I cannot adopt because it is not in our tradition. We do not father another man's child. It is an abomination to use money and buy a child or children. Christianity abolished slave trade, which involves buying human beings. Now it is gradually coming back.' (Gloria, 21-year-old, female, single)

In the same vein:

'No, I cannot adopt because the child I will adopt will suffer in the hands of the people in my community. He or she will not have any right to my property. If the chance of becoming the *Igwe* [a king] of my community is thrown to my family, he cannot be the *Igwe*, and the throne of the eldest man in the community cannot also go to him.' (Jerome, 32-year-old, male, married [*author's own translation*])

Anyi anaghi amu nwa onye ozo [We don't father another man's child] is a culture in the Enugu-Ezike community. When we asked the meaning of the expression, the participants said:

'It has been a tradition in Enugu-Ezike even before I was born. Any child born to an Enugu-Ezike man, whether in wedlock or out of wedlock, must be recognised as a member of the man's family and a complete Enugu-Ezike indigene.' (Ruben, 29-year-old, male, single)

'… if an Enugu-Ezike man gets a woman pregnant out of wedlock, the child when born to him must at a certain age come back to his father, if not the child will get sick and die with time.' (Ejike, 27-year-old, male, single)

'… any lady from Enugu-Ezike who gets pregnant out of wedlock and gives birth to a child will not keep the child as her own or for her immediate family. The child must be taken back to the real father, no matter where he is; otherwise, the child may develop an incurable disease or die in the process.' (Chika, 39-year-old, female, married)

Other ways of child care

Participants also attributed the reasons for the rejection of child adoption to the fact that there are other means of caring for vulnerable children and parents without children in the community:

'The kind of child adoption done in my community is different from the western practice. We do not adopt and change the child's name to that of the adoptive parents. What we do is foster parenting. Every child is given birth to; even if the parents are unable to take care of the child, there is always a relative who is ready to do that.' (Chekwube, 33-year-old, female, married)

Fear of the unknown

Fear of the unknown is another reason identified by the participants for the rejection of child adoption. For fear of adopting a child from an unknown parental background and unknown blood lineage and fear of the child being stigmatised, one of the participants said he cannot adopt a child. According to him:

'… not knowing the background of the child that is being adopted is a problem because a child whose mother is a prostitute or father, a thief will have the tendencies of exhibiting the same.' (Fidelis, 41-year-old, male, married)

Another explained that:

'… blood is thicker than water, so it is that feeling that this child is not your blood that discourages people from going for child adoption.' (Veronica, 30-year-old, female, married)

Preferred option

Some of the study participants described how their people preferred other alternatives to getting a child more than adoption:

'Many people prefer this new thing that came … and in vitro fertilisation … to adoption …' (Chekwube, 33-year-old, female, married)

More than five of the study participants said the same thing. The majority of the participants, including women, also said that, instead of going for adoption, when other alternatives fail, the option of getting a second wife is still preferred to child adoption.

Discussion

Findings of the study show that the majority of the respondents do not have adequate knowledge of what child adoption is. This inadequate knowledge of the concept is evident in the comments of the respondents, like Philip, who see child adoption as a transaction involving the buying and selling of a child. This finding corresponds with the findings of other studies (Ezeugwu, Obi & Onah 2002; Oladokun et al. 2009; Olanike et al. 2015; Ohaeri et al. 2019; Omosun & Kofoworola 2011), which reveal a gross lack of understanding of the meaning of child adoption among the study participants. Ohaeri et al. (2019), for instance, stated that only a little over half of their study respondents (59.3%) knew the correct meaning of child adoption. In the Enugu-Ezike community, most of the respondents see adoption as child buying. This understanding about adoption by the Enugu-Ezike people is also held by the people of Obukpa in the Nsukka cultural area (Ele 2018).

This inadequate knowledge can be the result of the prevalence of kinship care in the community. The result found that all the participants reported not being aware of the practice of child adoption in their community. The respondents seemed too sure that no one had adopted an outsider in their community. According to Ejike and Chuka the land would react negatively if an outsider were adopted into the community. Consequently, the child may be sick and die, or he may be afflicted with a protracted, incurable, unknown disease that will eventually lead to death. Nwoga (2013) notes that the Enugu-Ezike tradition does not permit bastards, and there is no place for a child whose father is not from Enugu-Ezike. Ele (2018) observes that this practice is also practised in Obukpa, where child adoption is unfamiliar and unknown, as no child is fatherless or motherless, and no family can go without a child. The reason for this could be the strict nature of the Enugu-Ezike people in upholding their culture even in the face of Christianity and Western civilisation. They also cherish blood lineage and so will not be ready to compromise their kinship care structure and embrace the Western style of adopting an unknown child.

The result of this study uncovered the fact that the people of this community are still in the process of culture deduction. This means that they are in the process of using the information they have about how orphaned children and childless couples are cared for to understand the Western idea of child adoption. Child adoption is still unclear to the Enugu-Ezike people. They perceive adoption as alien to their culture. According to some of the respondents, Child adoption is not an Igbo culture … from time immemorial, Igbo people have not had adoption in their culture. It is a new idea that was learnt from the Western world. The people of Enugu-Ezike and the Igbo people generally had their way of taking care of infertility in marriages or orphaned children. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Nwoga (2013), Ele (2018), Olanike et al. (2015), Rwezaura and Wanitzek (2009), Lalinde (2012), Nachinab, Donkor and Naab (2019), and Adewunmi et al. (2012), who also reported that the Western style of child adoption is different from what the Africans and Igbo people in particular practice, as regards a child's welfare and the comfort of childless couples.

This process of cultural deduction can be connected to the reason why the practice of child adoption is facing a lot of ethnic issues and challenges in Enugu-Ezike.

The findings indicate that the people of Enugu-Ezike outrightly reject the practice of child adoption. They uphold the culture of *Anyi anaghi amu nwa onye ozo* [We do not father another person's child]. Despite the Christian teaching of love for the fatherless and the belief that all are one in Christ, the prevailing cultural mindset of an average Christian in Enugu-Ezike maintains that 'a man must raise his own seed'. This tension between religious doctrine and cultural norms raises critical questions about how faith and tradition intersect to shape family structures, identity and social responsibility.

The culture of Enugu-Ezike seems to overshadow the Christian belief. Hence, the rejection of child adoption in Enugu-Ezike. The responses from the respondents, when asked if they can adopt a child, are as follows: 'I cannot adopt; it is not in our tradition. It is an abomination to bring in another bloodline into our community.' Another respondent from the same community said: 'No, I cannot adopt because the child I adopt will suffer in the hands of people in my community. He or She will not have any right to my property.' The reason for this may be attributed to a strong cultural belief in the kinship care structure, which has become indestructible by Christianity, Western civilisation and urbanisation. Stuckenbruck (2013) says that people find it difficult to resist the informal type of adoption that they are used to. This finding corresponds with the findings of Bharadwaj (2002), who said that adoption remains an undesirable option in India because it is a visible admission of infertility that cannot be subsumed.

Anyi anaghi amu nwa onye ozo is a well-known culture of the Enugu-Ezike people. These people believe strongly that any child who is not the biological offspring of an Enugu-Ezike man cannot be accepted as such, no matter the situation. Nwoga (2013:709) says that '[i]n Enugu-Ezike' there is no recognition for a child whose father is not from Enugu-Ezike. If a lady is impregnated outside marriage by an Enugu-Ezike man, the child must sooner or later go back to the father. If a man impregnates an

Enugu-Ezike lady, the child must go to the father, as he or she (child) will not be accepted in the Enugu-Ezike community. This is why some men from the Nsukka zone, whose wives cannot bear children and who know the tradition of amu gi nwa onye ozo in Enugu-Ezike, employ ladies from Enugu-Ezike as surrogates. They get them pregnant and pay them off when they deliver the baby because they cannot take the baby as their own. Rejection of adopted children and adoption in Enugu-Ezike is in their culture and difficult to abolish.

The study also revealed that many people fear engaging in child adoption as a result of unknown blood/lineage, unknown parental background and fear of the child being stigmatised. Some people believe that an adopted child could be a child of a prostitute, drug addict, mentally retarded person, criminal convict and the like (Olanike et al. 2015). They have fear that if such a child is adopted, there is a tendency that the child will exhibit the same character. According to Nachinab, Donkor and Naab (2018), familiarity with a child's parent reduces the risk of adopting a child with unknown inherited diseases and bad behaviour. The reason for these fears could be ascribed to the strong belief in blood relationships by the Enugu-Ezike people. Stigmatisation is another problem that scares people away from adopting a child. The stigma of adoption refers to the biased, judgemental attitudes towards adoption and adoption-related concerns (Baden 2016). The attitude people show towards adopted children discourages other childless couples from adopting a child (Agbo 2014). This perception has made people treat adoption and adopted children with disdain. They are treated as second-class citizens, stigmatised and denied their inheritance rights. This study buttressed Nwoga's (2013) position that adopted children are regarded as bastards and as such have no right of inheritance. For instance, in the Enugu-Ezike community, children who are not connected to them patriarchally or by marriage are not regarded as members of the family. The reason for this may be the value placed on legitimacy in Igboland. According to Nwoga (2013), heredity in Igboland is limited to only the lawful and true-born sons of the father of the family. Again, the culture of *iju ese* (asking a question) before getting married to ascertain any genetic problem, like madness or blindness, among others, must have influenced the people. This is because there is no one to ask questions about the family of the child they want to adopt. This simply makes people reluctant to adopt children. Bell (2019) says that adoption is a social problem that is respected, yet stigmatised.

Participants indicated that instead of going for adoption, they prefer in vitro fertilisation (IVF). According to Bell (2019:16), 'adoption is now considered second best, a last resort while medical treatments prevail and are now that naturalised solution'. Moreover, Bharadwaj (2002) asserts that childless couples, who, prior to the advent of high-tech conception possibilities, turned to adoption, are now seeing adoption as the last resort if 'all else fail' (like the IVF) or because they are not financially buoyant, as these artificial reproductive technologies (ART) are for high-profile citizens. In vitro fertilisation involves the fertilisation of eggs outside the body in a laboratory, and once an embryo or embryos are formed, they are then placed in the uterus, where they develop and grow (Rani & Paliwal 2014). In this case, the woman carries the pregnancy and gives birth to the child or children. With this, the parents, especially the mothers, have a sense of kinship with the baby. Bharadwaj (2002) says that couples choose this option in the hope of restoring the (visible) social trait and to create an illusion of culturally unproblematic visuality of fertility. People mostly prefer to seek medical help to induce conception when it becomes hard to get pregnant naturally after cohabiting for a few months of marriage. But the problem with IVF is that it is expensive, and most of the time, the babies do not survive in the womb. However, it is mostly preferred to adoption by many.

Another preferred option is marrying a second wife, especially when the problem of infertility is not from the man. This had been a common practice in Igboland, particularly Enugu-Ezike, before the development and advancement of ART. According to Ikwubuzo (2007), adoption is not a feature of Igbo traditional society. An Igbo Christian, even in contemporary times, seldom considers the option of adopting a child into his home, not minding whether a case of impotence or infertility has been established as responsible for his childlessness. He argues that marrying a second wife is the preferred option for Igbo men with fertility challenges. Even with the length of years Christianity has stayed in Igboland, many indigenes, especially those of Enugu-Ezike, prefer marrying a second wife to adopting a child. Even the women in the community give their consent to their husbands marrying a second wife instead of adopting a child.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the resilient nature of Enugu-Ezike culture in the midst of Christianity, globalisation and the pressure of modernity. The findings revealed that despite the number of years Christianity has stayed in Enugu-Ezike, it has not influenced community's attitude and response to child adoption. Child adoption in the Enugu-Ezike community faces many challenges, ranging from the individual's search for personal identity to family and community socio-cultural behaviour towards inheritance, even among Christians whose dogma teaches that all are one. This holds significant implications for Christians and Christianity itself. The church, particularly the leaders and the government, should increase the campaign for the acceptability of the practice and the safety of the adopted children. The study recommends that further research delve into some emerging themes and the gender dynamics of adoption in Enugu-Ezike. The study suggested that the implementation of the *Child Rights Act*, along with increased public education, proper regulatory oversight and involvement of religious and traditional institutions, can improve the adoption process in Nigeria.

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