



## The Need for Effective Laws and Policies to Prevent Illegal Child Adoption in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Illegal child adoption has become a pervasive issue in Enugu State, Nigeria, with devastating consequences for all parties involved. This study investigated the need for effective laws and policies to prevent illegal child adoption in Nigeria. The study design is legal research design. Legal practitioners and policymakers in Nigeria were the study population. The sample size is 79 participants, comprising 51 opinion leaders, 28 individuals from welfare agencies, adoption intenders, adopters, and traditional rulers using snowball as the sampling technique. The data were collected through in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focused group discussions (FGDs). Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyse the data. We found that poverty, cumbersome adoption processes, corruption, impatience, and high costs drive illegal child adoption. The study revealed alarming consequences, including mortality, psychological stress, economic waste, moral depreciation, and emotional imbalance. Our findings also highlighted the gendered pressures of childlessness, cultural practices, and the need for policy reforms. We recommend increased awareness, adoption policy reviews, subsidized adoption costs, and empowerment programs. This study underscores the urgent need for social work intervention in reforming adoption policies, enforcement of laws and policy implementation to address the scourge of illegal child adoption in Enugu State.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Illegal child adoption has become a pervasive and devastating issue in Enugu State, Nigeria, with far-reaching consequences for all parties involved (Okeoma, 2019; Nwokolo, 2020). The legal framework on child adoption in Nigeria needs improvement to prevent illegal child adoption (Tajudeen, 2013). While the Child's Rights Act (2003) and the Adoption Act (2019) provide some protection for children, there are still loopholes and inconsistencies in the laws (Cantwell, 2014). Effective implementation and enforcement of laws and policies are crucial in preventing illegal child adoption (Onyiriuka, 2018).

The illegal adoption of children has led to modern-day slavery, child trafficking, and exploitation, with many adoptees facing psychological distress, emotional imbalance, and even death (Huntley, 2013). Despite the existence of legal frameworks and child protection agencies, illegal child adoption persists, driven by factors such as poverty, corruption, and cultural norms (Doughty et al., 2017; Omeire et al., 2015). As social work professionals play a critical role in combating this issue (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014), this study aims to investigate the need for effective laws and policies to prevent illegal child adoption in Nigeria. By exploring the complexities of illegal child adoption and the role of social work in addressing this issue, this research seeks to contribute to the development of effective strategies and policies that prioritize the best interests of the child and ensure their safety and well-being (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016; Lonne et al., 2016).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The lead scholar married in 2013, the same year she was admitted to start a doctoral program. She prayed to become pregnant as soon as possible after the wedding, but after two months, she started to worry that she had not. Her husband reassured her that she should not worry about having children and that he was unsure whether he could actually impregnate a woman. He emphasized that if they were unable to have their own children, they would adopt. The most crucial thing, according to him, was not necessarily having a biological child but rather one can adopt someone who will follow in your footsteps. The statement was challenging, and having considered how some people go out of their way to have their biological children rather than adopt, was what led to this study. Many people who plan to adopt would prefer to adopt illegally rather than use the legal system.

Adoption seekers should have followed the legitimate procedure where the futures of both parties are safeguarded by the law. Unfortunately, they engage in unlawful child adoption that puts their health and well-being at risk. Alarming, the number of unlawful child adoptions is rising, and these practices have negative repercussions for those who engage in them. For instance, a young woman whose husband resided elsewhere went and illegally adopted twins (two boys) without the husband's knowledge while claiming she delivered twins in an effort to maintain her marriage. She was unfortunate because two weeks after the lavish dedication of those kids in the church, the teenager's parents found out, tracked down the two boys legally, and took the kids back.

Statistics have also shown that illegal child adoption is a global crime with different records and evidence of the buying and selling of babies all over the globe (Ojedokun & Atoi, 2016). It was recorded that in Spain, more than 300,000 babies were stolen from their birth parents and illegally adopted. The kids were trafficked by secret networks of corrupt doctors, nurses, priests, and nuns (Ojedokun & Atoi 2016). The incidence is also growing rapidly in the United States of America, as more than 100 Romanian and Bulgarian babies have been sold in Greece for between €20,000 and €30,000 (Nanou, 2011). In Kenya, police arrested seven people on trafficking charges and exposed a thriving black-market trade where babies were sold by frustrated teenagers (Gunter, 2020). In Nigeria, Ojedoku and Atoi (2016) tabulated several incidents of illegal baby adoptions. Thus, in Abia State, Dr. Orikara Hyacinth of Cross Foundation Investment, Aba, was arrested with 32 pregnant ladies by Aba Area Command, Nigeria Police for using his hospital for baby factory on May 6, 2011. In Imo State, 17 teenage girls between the ages of 14 and 17 were found at a fake motherless baby home used as a baby factory by “Madam one thousand” on May 19, 2013. In Ondo, 11 women and eight men were rescued, where they were said to be living together and producing children for the owner of the factory on June 27, 2014, and Enugu State was not left behind. In 2011, the police raided two hospitals and dismantled two baby factories in Enugu State. On July 28, 2021, one-year-old Chisom Adumike was reported sold by his aunt, Chinaza Okoh, to her boyfriend in Amankwu Olikwu in Awgu L.G.A of Enugu State (Omojuyigbe, 2021). Haslon (2023) seven baby factory dealers were arrested, where 17 teenage girls and two babies were rescued at Adamawa State at the border of Nigeria and Cameroon.

Many families and adoptees have experienced major losses as a result of illegal child adoption, including physical, financial, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and other damages (Virgiel, 2014). Illegal child adoption has led to baby-selling, which has subjected many women to trauma, violence, and abuse. Paternity tests are now revealing the complications around illegal child adoption among couples who do not tell themselves the truth (Lake, 2013).

Studies have been carried out by some scholars on child adoption. Some of these studies include that of Omeire et al. (2015), who looked at the challenges of child adoption and the emergence of the baby factory in southeastern Nigeria. Titilola (2015) also looked at adoption as an aspect of family law, contemporary adoption issues, the process of adoption, as well as parties to an adoption process, while Alabi (2018) researched socioeconomic dynamism and the growth of baby factories in Nigeria. Onyiriuka (2018) investigated child adoption, posttraumatic stress disorder, and the role of a pediatrician in the adoption procedure. Makinde (2015) looked at infant trafficking and baby factories: a new tale of child abuse in Nigeria. Adebowale and Gafar (2019) explored the intricacies of illegal child adoption in Lagos and the role of social work as a panacea. Therefore, scholars above looked at various aspects of adoption but have not looked at illegal child adoption and social work intervention in Enugu State, Nigeria, which is the gap this work wants to fill.

## **Study Objectives**

The following specific objectives guided the study.

1. To examine the current legal framework governing child adoption in Nigeria and identify gaps and weaknesses that contribute to illegal child adoption.
2. To explore the need for public awareness campaigns to educate the public on the illegal child adoption consequences.
3. To examine the need for collaboration between government agencies, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to prevent illegal child adoption.
4. To investigate the need for a child adoption database to track and monitor adoption processes in Nigeria.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Previous studies have highlighted the challenges of child adoption and the emergence of baby factories in Nigeria (Omeire et al., 2015). The issue of illegal child adoption is not limited to Nigeria, as it is a global crime with records of buying and selling babies worldwide (Ojedokun & Atoi, 2016). In Nigeria, several cases of illegal child adoption and baby factories have been reported (Makinde, 2015; Onyiriuka, 2018).

Statistics have also shown that illegal child adoption is a global crime with different records and evidence of the buying and selling of babies all over the globe (Ojedokun & Atoi, 2016). It was recorded that in Spain, more than 300,000 babies were stolen from their birth parents and illegally adopted. The kids were trafficked by secret networks of corrupt doctors, nurses, priests, and nuns (Ojedokun & Atoi 2016). The incidence is also growing rapidly in the United States of America, as more than 100 Romanian and Bulgarian babies have been sold in Greece for between €20,000 and €30,000 (Nanou, 2011). In Kenya, police arrested seven people on trafficking charges and exposed a thriving black-market trade where babies were sold by frustrated teenagers (Gunter, 2020). In Nigeria, Ojedoku and Atoi (2016) tabulated several incidents of illegal baby adoptions. Thus, in Abia State, Dr. Oriokara Hyacinth of Cross Foundation Investment, Aba, was arrested with 32 pregnant ladies by Aba Area Command, Nigeria Police for using his hospital for baby factory on May 6, 2011. In Imo State, 17 teenage girls between the ages of 14 and 17 were found at a fake motherless baby home used as a baby factory by "Madam one thousand" on May 19, 2013. In Ondo, 11 women and eight men were rescued, who were reportedly living together and producing children for the factory owner. A similar incident occurred in Enugu State on June 27, 2014. In 2011, the police raided two hospitals and dismantled two baby factories in Enugu State. On July 28, 2021, one-year-old Chisom Adumike was reported to have been sold by his aunt, Chinaza Okoh, to her boyfriend in Amankwu Olikwu, Awgu L.G.A., Enugu State (Omojuyigbe, 2021). Haslon (2023) seven baby factory dealers were arrested, where 17 teenage girls and two babies were rescued in Adamawa State at the border of Nigeria and Cameroon.

Many families and adoptees have experienced major losses as a result of illegal child adoption, including physical, financial, psychological, emotional,

spiritual, and other damages (Virgiel, 2014). Illegal child adoption has led to baby-selling, which has subjected many women to trauma, violence, and abuse. Paternity tests are now revealing the complications around illegal child adoption among couples who do not tell themselves the truth (Lake, 2013).

This study is guided by the ecological and neutralization theories, which provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing illegal child adoption in Enugu State, Nigeria.

1. Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979): This theory explains how different environmental systems (micro, meso, exo, and macro) influence individuals' decisions and behaviors. In the context of illegal child adoption, the ecological theory suggests that the social and cultural norms, values, and beliefs of the community (microsystem) and society at large (macrosystem) shape individuals' attitudes and decisions regarding adoption (Ojedokun & Atoi, 2016). The theory also highlights the importance of the interplay between different environmental systems, such as the family, community, and society, in influencing individuals' choices and behaviors.
2. Neutralization Theory (Sykes & Matza, 1957): This theory explains how individuals rationalize and justify their deviant behavior, including illegal child adoption. The neutralization theory suggests that individuals who engage in illegal child adoption may use techniques of neutralization, such as denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of victim, and justification, to rationalize their behavior. In the context of illegal child adoption, the neutralization theory suggests that individuals may justify their behavior by blaming others, such as the birth parents or the adoption system, or by rationalizing that they are providing a better life for the child (Chukwuma, 2019).

The combination of these two theories provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing illegal child adoption in Enugu State, Nigeria. The ecological theory highlights the importance of environmental factors, while the neutralization theory explains how individuals rationalize and justify their deviant behavior.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative study employed a legal research design using snowballing. The study area was purposively selected due to the prevalence of illegal child adoption and baby factories in the state.

The study population consisted of adopters, adoption seekers, welfare officers, and opinion leaders in Enugu State. A total of 79 participants were selected using multi-stage sampling and convenience sampling techniques. The sample comprised 10 adopters, 10 adoption seekers, 8 welfare officers, and 51 opinion leaders (24 traditional rulers and 27 women leaders).

In-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD) were used to collect data. The IDI and FGD guides contained open-ended questions with probes to gather detailed information on participants' perspectives on illegal

child adoption and its consequences. The data collection period lasted from June 6th, 2022, to May 6th, 2023.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, with a storyline approach to utilize participants' personal experiences to address the research issues. The data was coded using deductive coding, and triangulation was used to compare responses.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Strategic Contacts Ethics and Publications (STRACEP) of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka Campus, Enugu State (ethical code number: UNN/EC/012-SC/4004/MAY 01). Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were ensured, and informed consent was obtained before the commencement of the study.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

This study engaged 79 participants, comprising 51 opinion leaders, 28 individuals from welfare agencies, adoption intenders, adopters, and traditional rulers. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Tables 1-9.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Welfare Agencies' Participants (WAPs)

S/N	Pseudo Name	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Highest Qualification	Monthly Income	Religious Affiliation	Occupation	Place of Residence	Agency
1.	Oko	M	41	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	P.S.	Urban	MGA-WU
2.	Chi	M	31	Single	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	P.S.	Urban	MGA-AU
3.	Nky	F	35	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	P.S.	Urban	MGA-SHU
4.	Oge	F	42	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	P.S.	Urban	MGA-SHU
5.	Oby	F	35	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	P.S.	Urban	NAP TIP
6.	Ugo	M	48	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	P.S.	Urban	NAP TIP
7.	Udo	F	32	Marr.	Secondary	< 30,000	C.	Volunteer	Rural	FBF-DDL
8.	Jide	M	37	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	P.S.	Rural	FBF-DDL

Source: Field Survey 2022

Table 1 shows that the participants consisted of four males and four females, aged between 31 and 48 years, with a mean age of 37.5 years. All participants were married, had a tertiary education, and earned above the minimum wage.

### Adoption Intenders (AIPs)

Table 2. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Adoption Intender Participants (AIPs)

S/N	Pseudo Name	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Highest Qualification	Monthly Income	Religious Affiliation	Occupation	Place of Residence
1.	Afam	M	58	Marr.	Primary	> 30,000	C.	Farmer	Rural
2.	Ikem	M	54	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	Farmer	Rural
3.	Aku	F	56	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	P.S.	Urban
4.	Afunwa	M	60	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	P.S.	Rural
5.	Njide	F	50	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	P.S.	Urban
6.	Onyedi	M	52	Marr.	Secondary	> 30,000	C.	Trader	Urban
7.	Chidindu	F	30	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	P.S.	Urban
8.	Ojo	F	52	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	P.S.	Urban
9.	Nkechi	F	50	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	Trader	Rural
10.	Mark	M	65	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	P.S.	Urban

Source: Field Survey 2022

The socio-demographic characteristics of the adoption intenders are presented in Table 2. The participants consisted of five males and five females, aged between 30 and 60 years, with a mean age of 52 years. All participants were married, had a tertiary education, and earned above the minimum wage.

### Adopters (APs)

Table 3. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Adopter Participants (APs)

S/N	Pseudo Name	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Highest Qualification	Monthly Income	Religious Affiliation	Occupation	Place of Residence
1.	Nwa	F	62	S.P.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban
2.	Mmadu	M	58	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Rural
3.	Okeoma	F	60	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban
4.	Philo	F	51	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Rural
5.	Jane	F	64	S.P.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban
6.	Okeadi	M	58	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban
7.	Ejike	M	60	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban
8.	Emeka	M	58	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	P.S.	Urban
9.	Obiageli	F	60	Separ.	No formal	< 30,000	C.	Trader	Rural
10.	James	M	64	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	P.S.	Urban

Source: Field Survey 2022

The socio-demographic characteristics of the adopters are shown in Table 4.3. The participants consisted of five males and five females, aged between 51 and 64 years, with a mean age of 58 years. Seven participants were married, two were single parents, and one had separated from their spouse. All participants had a tertiary education, and nine earned above the minimum wage.

**Traditional Rulers**

Table 4. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Traditional Rulers from Enugu East

S/ N	Pseudo Name	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Highest Qualification	Monthly Income	Religious Affiliation	Occupation	Place of Residence
1.	Igwe Nike	M	60	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Rural
2.	Igwe West	M	53	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Urban
3.	Igwe Utazi	M	50	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Rural
4.	Igwe North	M	56	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Rural
5.	Igwe Isi	M	65	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Urban
6.	Igwe Uzo	M	56	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Rural
7.	Igwe Nkan	M	56	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Urban
8.	Igwe East	M	63	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Urban

Source: Field Survey 2022

Table 5. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Traditional Rulers from Enugu North

S/ N	Pseudo Name	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Highest Qualification	Monthly Income	Religious Affiliation	Occupation	Place of Residence
1.	Igwe Nsuka	M	64	Marr.	Secondary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Rural
2.	Igwe Udenu	M	67	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Urban
3.	Igwe Igbo	M	58	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Urban
4.	Igwe Eze	M	66	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Urban
5.	Igwe Ndu	M	60	Separ.	Secondary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Rural
6.	Igwe Etit	M	69	Marr.	Secondary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Rural
7.	Igwe Ani	M	68	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Rural
8.	Igwe Amuji	M	70	Marr.	Secondary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Rural

Source: Field Survey 2022

Table 6. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Traditional Rulers from Enugu West

S/ N	Pseudo Name	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Highest Qualification	Monthly Income	Religious Affiliation	Occupation	Place of Residence
1.	Igwe Awgu	M	57	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Rural
2.	Igwe Udi	M	55	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Rural
3.	Igwe Aninri	M	66	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Urban
4.	Igwe Oji	M	59	Marr.	Secondary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Rural
5.	Igwe Ezagu	M	55	Marr.	Secondary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Rural
6.	Igwe Mako	M	63	Marr.	Secondary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Urban

7.	Igwe Ode	M	68	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Urban
8.	Igwe Obi	M	64	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	Trad. R.	Urban

Source: Field Survey 2022

The socio-demographic characteristics of the traditional rulers from Enugu East, Enugu North, and Enugu West are presented in Tables 4-6, respectively. The participants consisted of males, aged between 50 and 70 years, with a mean age of 60 years. All participants were married, had a tertiary education, and earned above the minimum wage.

### Women Opinion Leaders

Table 7. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Enugu East Women FGD Participants

S/N	Pseudo Name	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Highest Qualification	Monthly Income	Religious Affiliation	Occupation	Place of Residence
1.	Mrs. Ude	F	58	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban
2.	Mrs. Ola	F	52	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban
3.	Ms. Nky	F	62	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban
4.	Ms. Njide	F	45	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban
5.	Mrs. Ofo	F	52	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban
6.	Mrs. Oby	F	50	Separ.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban
7.	Mrs. Uche	F	58	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban
8.	Mrs. Chi	F	47	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban

Source: Field Survey 2022

Table 8. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Enugu North Women FGD Participants

S/N	Pseudo Name	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Highest Qualification	Monthly Income	Religious Affiliation	Occupation	Place of Residence
1.	Mrs. Obi	F	50	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Rural
2.	Mrs. Atta	F	52	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban
3.	Ms. Ezike	F	40	Widow	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban
4.	Ms. Onah	F	54	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban
5.	Mrs. Ozok	F	55	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban
6.	Mrs. Ogara	F	54	Widow	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban
7.	Mrs. Oke	F	60	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban
8.	Mrs. Nnedi	F	52	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban
9.	Mrs. Ada	F	63	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	C.S.	Urban

Source: Field Survey 2022

Table 9. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Enugu West Women FGD Participants

S/N	Pseudo Name	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Highest Qualification	Monthly Income	Religious Affiliation	Occupation	Place of Residence
1.	Mrs. Agu	F	52	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	S.E.	Urban
2.	Mrs. Etta	F	50	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	S.E.	Rural
3.	Ms. Joy	F	46	S.P.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	S.E.	Urban
4.	Ms. Ude	F	45	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	S.E.	Rural
5.	Mrs. Oga	F	50	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	S.E.	Urban
6.	Mrs. Nkeji	F	51	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	S.E.	Urban
7.	Mrs. Ngwo	F	41	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	S.E.	Rural
8.	Mrs. Eke	F	46	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	S.E.	Rural
9.	Mrs. Aji	F	53	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	S.E.	Urban
10.	Mrs. Oko	F	48	Marr.	Tertiary	> 30,000	C.	S.E.	Rural

Source: Field Survey 2022

The socio-demographic characteristics of the women opinion leaders from Enugu East, Enugu North, and Enugu West are presented in Tables 7-9, respectively. The participants consisted of females, aged between 40 and 63 years, with a mean age of 53 years. Most participants were married, had a tertiary education, and earned above the minimum wage.

#### People’s Perception of Illegal Child Adoption in Enugu State

The study found that all participants were aware of illegal child adoption and perceived it as a serious issue. They identified various types of illegal child adoption, including baby selling, child trafficking, and surrogacy without consent. The participants noted that illegal child adoption was driven by greed and financial gain, with some individuals and organizations selling children for large sums of money. The study also revealed that some government agencies, NGOs, and faith-based organizations were complicit in illegal child adoption.

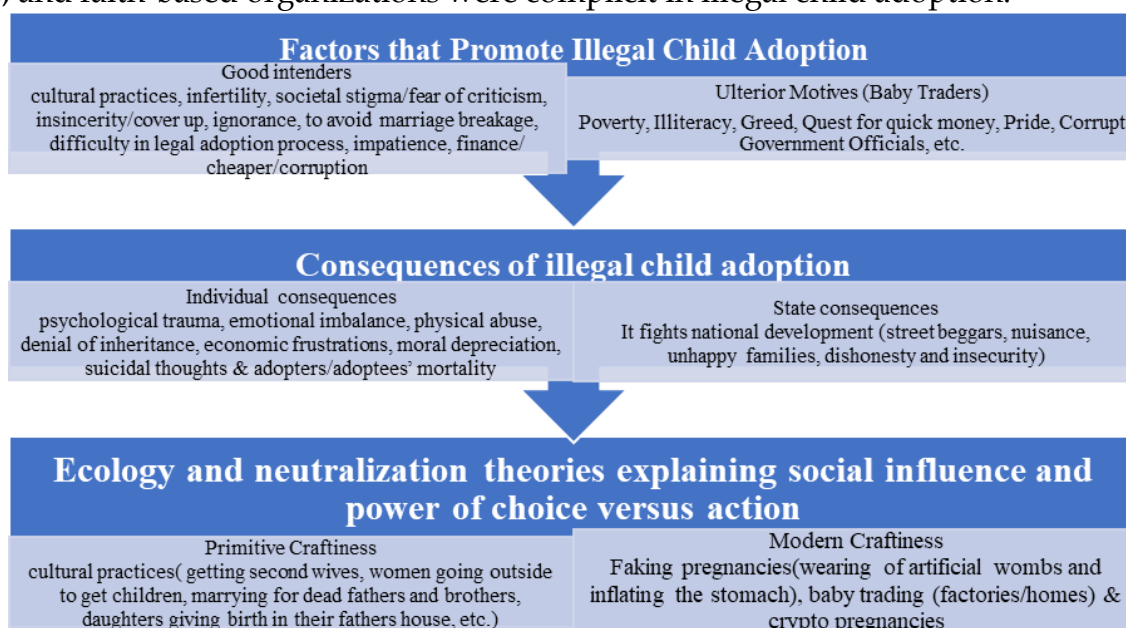


Figure 1. Cause and Effect of Illegal Child Adoption

Source: Field Findings 2022

The findings of this current study are summarized in Figure 1 above. The diagram shows that illegal child adoption has causes and effects. The factors were divided into two blocks: those that are good adoption intenders but with bad choices of actions, and the evil intenders/baby traders with their compelling factors. Their wrong choices of adopting children through illegal means have their corresponding consequences. The second category is two different categories of people – the baby traders and baby buyers. The buyers are the traffickers who use the babies for their selfish purposes, either for rituals or traffickers who expose the children to slavery, sex hawks, organ harvesting, and hard labor. The baby traders are the teenagers, young girls, and mothers who choose to sell their babies as a result of poverty or to sell off their babies to continue with their education or with their lives. Some baby sellers were attracted by money, not just because they had unwanted pregnancies. Factors propelling those who want children but act illegally are cultural practices, infertility, women bearing the pressure of childlessness than men, societal stigma/fear of criticism, insincerity, and cover-up. Ignorance, avoiding marriage breakage, difficulty in the legal child adoption process, impatience, and finance/cheaper/corruption are also factors. For baby traders, poverty, illiteracy, the quest for money/get-rich-quick syndrome, pride, greed, and corruption are their driving forces.

The above factors are not without consequences, and they are psychological trauma, emotional imbalance, accusation, physical abuse, denial of inheritance, economic frustrations, moral depreciation, and adopters/adoptees' mortality for the good intenders. Prosecution, public shame, and imprisonment are specifically attached to the evil intenders, though the good intenders may still suffer those consequences as the case may be.

The act of Illegal child adoption resulted in secrecy, like faking pregnancies, baby trading (factories and homes), and the advent of crypto pregnancies with their adverse effects. All these actions are explained on the basis of the theories anchoring this work. Ecology and neutralization theories anchored the work. They were explaining how social influence and the power of choice versus action influence people's choices. How people weigh their gain over their loss informs their choices and actions. It is the actions that produced the outcome, which is the consequences of illegal child adoption, which are perceived as a social menace that needs social work intervention for a sustainable future.

During the course of this study, some issues emerged. Worthy to note include the issues of indigent cultural practices, partiality of Igbo culture on the women, crypto pregnancy, baby trading privileges of legal adoptees, challenges of single-parent adopters, accusation, paternity tests, trending/imitation syndrome, culture of secrecy, and suicidal tendencies.

### **Indigent Cultural Practices that Contradict Legal Adoption**

Participants revealed that there is a conflict in the people's culture that strengthens illegal child adoption in the State. One major discovery is that cultural practices conflict with the state-specified rules guiding adoptions. Almost all the traditional rulers concurred with that. They disclosed that the

government's failure to incorporate their culture into its laws is the basis of lawlessness. They agreed that adoption is not in their culture, showing that adoption was forced on them by the government through Western culture.

The male opinion leaders bemoaned the fact that our people attended school and studied the histories of the white race, but would not learn about their own. They maintained that there are ways they get children, which many do not know, and were done secretly and not publicly. You learn them unconsciously. They suggested learning about our culture and retaining the positive aspects while eliminating the negative ones. They believed that this is why the government is standing alone, and the people are doing what they like. The two blocks (western and Igbo cultures) are clashing, and it disorganizes the system, making the process of adoption difficult and inaccessible.

Though the female FGDPs from Enugu East who were lawyers indicated that some of our cultures are backed up in the customary court. For instance, in the case of a family that asked their female daughter to get pregnant in search of a male child who would perpetuate the father's name. They opined that in their culture, there are rites they will perform for the child to be accepted as a member of that family, and once that is done, nobody can claim the child again. The child will belong to them. They said that the acceptance is respected in the customary court, which is different from a daughter getting an unwanted pregnant, which requires that for the family to adopt the child, they must go through the legal adoption process. This needed to be clarified for better understanding and for the traditional rulers to understand and be able to uphold legal adoption without any conflict. Some of the indigenous cultures discovered include: arranging for a woman to bear children for a man who cannot impregnate his wife. Marrying a pregnant woman because you know you are not able to impregnate a woman. Another one is marrying a wife for the dead to raise 'onochie', meaning to have a male child that will continue bearing the family name. Sometimes women pretend that their husbands are maltreating them in disguise to go out and get pregnant when they know that their husbands are impotent. Some families who do not have a male child may decide that one of their girls, preferably the first, called 'Ada', will stay back in the house to give birth to the family. This concurs with the findings of Ohachenu (2020) that show that Igbo people adopt through kinship, daughter husband - a situation where the family agrees that one of their daughters assumes the role of a son and gets married to a wife to raise children for their family, especially where they were not able to give birth to a male child.

Furthermore, male AIP1, aged 58, said that traditionally, if your child gives birth in your house and no one identifies themselves as the biological father for him to pay her dowry, the child automatically belongs to the family. In Awgu, if a man marries a woman who has given birth and wishes, those children delivered by the wife will become his. From the findings, the kinsmen prefer fostering while the adopters prefer adoption, which will be 100% their own. In fostering, the child knows their biological parents, and there is hope that after training, the child will go back to their parents. Adoption gives the

adopter a futuristic hope of having someone who will take care of them in their old age, but fostering, they may remember or may not care.

Looking at the different cultural practices, they contradict the government-stipulated rules guiding adoption. For instance, the former Governor of Ebonyi State has to go through the legal process to obtain a certificate of adoption for the child that was delivered by his daughter to become his legal child, which is contrary to the practices of a typical Igbo man. Considering the issue of children wanting to know who their father is and the confirmation test of DNA to decide who the legal father becomes, violates the traditional practices that promote illegal child adoption in Enugu State.

In the contemporary period, paternity court judgments are in total opposition to what our people are practicing. We will not say who cares in this part of the world because many parents are now questioning whether the children delivered in their houses are actually their children. If you watch paternity court rulings and incidents, you will discover that many are married but are sleeping with several others (Lake, 2013). In Igbo cultural practices, people are aware of who is responsible for pregnancies, since they usually arrange secretly who they think are good persons in their society to avoid blood from wicked people.

The discovered elements of selfishness in the culture kick against adoption and promote illegal child adoption. This is because childless couples, knowing the standards of their people's culture, would not want anybody to know that they were adopting their children. During the FGDs, it was discovered that people hate adoption because they want to take over their brother's properties. They asked the researcher whether she knew how communal land or 'ani oha' were gotten. They responded that they got it from a brother who could not produce his own children or that do not have a male child. They concurred that it is wickedness that makes some people go and get a strange blood and call it adoption to dispossess them of their brother's inheritance. For them, trying to adopt is hatred without considering that many of them may not even care to take care of the person at their old age if they did not get theirs.

It has been discovered that many relations hardly care for their own who spent their youth taking care of them. Some of them will turn against them and call them a witch because they could not raise their own children, who will actually take care of their old age (Male AIP10, 65 years). The female FGDPs from Enugu East noted that people who follow the wishes of their people in regards to avoiding adoption die in anguish. This also explains why some kinsmen maltreat the wife of their late brother and strip her of her husband's properties. In a bid to escape all these, some engage in illegal child adoption to hide it from them.

## Partiality of Igbo Culture on the Women

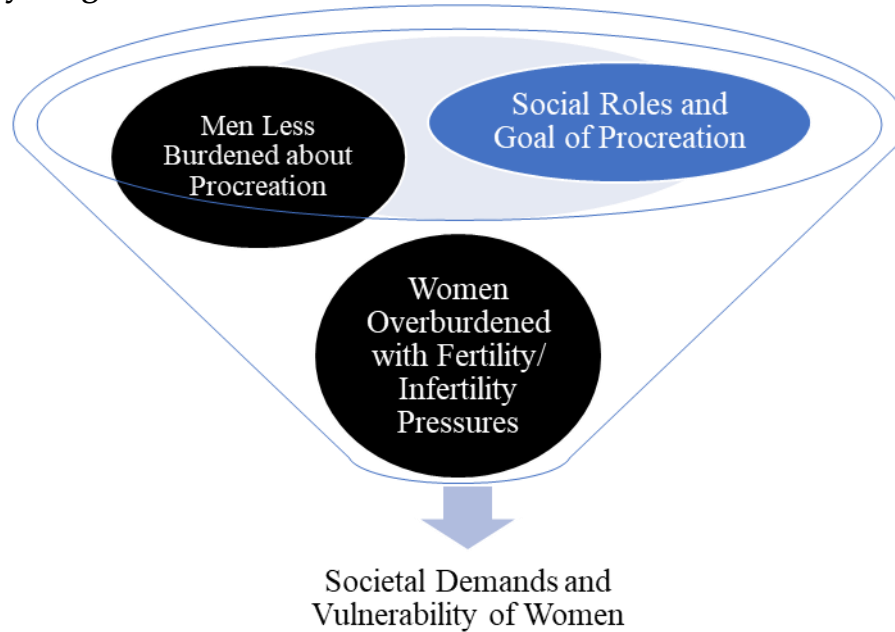


Figure 2. Women at the Center of Infertility Challenges  
Field survey 2022

Figure 2 shows how women are at the center of infertility crises and are shouldered with procreation responsibility. The society and the culture of the people placed a heavy burden on the women to deliver the next generation with little or no support from the menfolk. The female FGDPs lamented how women bear the pressure of childlessness that pushes them to do illegal child adoption. They agreed that men can start homes any time, but it is not the same with women. If a woman does not give birth, the man will go out to take a second wife. But if the man is infertile, the woman will secretly go outside to bear children for the man from another source. The woman does everything to cover for the man and save the marriage. When the problem comes from the woman, the in-laws will fall on the woman and will call her names. The culture seems to have left women vulnerable. For the woman to save her face, she will go to native doctors, herbalists, and prayer houses. Some will demand to sleep with you, if their own did not work, she will be taken to the river for the Water Spirit to sleep with her, provided she gets the child. Some will follow their friends to the reigning doctor/midwife, who will help them have children. Female IDIP4 aged 51 said that when she was invited by a friend to go to Owerri, she told her husband, but he refused to go with her. Most men believe that it is the woman's problem, while in some cases it is theirs.

The female FGDPs from Enugu North stated that some women will tell you that, even if it is from the devil, they will carry, provided it is a baby. Many were afraid of being thrown out of the marriage, and that was why they went for illegal child adoption, where they would hide. So, faking pregnancy is even safer, especially when it is an artificial womb. Though inflating the stomach may have side effects, it may be harmful. The female FGDPs from Enugu East maintained that society sees childless women as irresponsible. While the female

FGDPs from Enugu West lamented that 99% of the problem of infertility comes from the men, and yet women bear the blame.

### **Cryptic Versus Crypto Pregnancy**

Cryptic pregnancy happens rarely during pregnancy. It is a situation where someone will be pregnant but will not be aware until a certain age of the baby or until the time of delivery. Unfortunately, corrupt Nigerian doctors and herbalists have twisted it to mean a magical pregnancy where a woman will be made to believe that she is pregnant, while there is nothing inside the womb. They call it crypto pregnancy, which is not the same as cryptic pregnancy. Many desperate women have used the technique to deceive their husbands. The following stories are evidence of an experienced participant who attested to the happenings around crypto pregnancy. Female AP4, aged 51, narrated her experiences at Owerri when she was desperately looking for a child. Thus:

A friend, who got babies in Owerri through what I called glorified adoption, invited me to where she got hers. I wanted to go with my husband, but he refused. But what I saw along the line made me doubt, and I began to ask lots of questions. When it was my turn, I was asked to get a clean pot that had never been used before, which I would use to mix the drug. They said that when I get home, I will mix the drug and drink it. I must sleep with my husband that night. They asked me to pay N50,000.00 for the drug.

I requested triplets, but they said no; that I can only have two. They told me that the baby won't be in my womb and I should not go for a scan because the baby will not be seen. I asked them will the babies' DNA would be traced to mine. When I asked this question, the woman asked me out. She got annoyed. She said I should wait outside, and they will call me in when they are through with others. The reason, I was with other women who came for a check-up. I have been pregnant severally times and I know when a woman is pregnant. I saw how their stomach would be wobbling and I suspected them. That was why I began to ask so many questions.

At this point, they felt that this woman wanted to expose their tricks. She continued her stories.

When I got back to the room, she told me that if I want twins, I will pay two million naira. And I was like, what type of push will cost me two million naira because they said that I must push on that day of delivery. I told them that I want to give birth abroad. They said that I must give birth there. Ironically, the person that supposed to deliver that month couldn't deliver that month because the money was not complete. You can carry your baby as long as your money is complete, even if it is two years. Because of the numerous questions I asked, she asked me to leave, saying that I don't belong there. Moreover, since I don't have a problem in my womb that I should go. That was how I left the place.

This is another revelation of how one can die because of desperation and trying to hide. A male AP2 aged 58 testified that:

After nine months of a bogus pregnancy caused by someone inflating her stomach, she visited the hospital, where plans had been made for four children. She allegedly gave birth to quadruplets. After six months of such a false

delivery, she became ill and, after suffering for a while, passed on, leaving behind the four children she had illegally adopted.

Who will look after the infants that were left behind? Should one live to please others or oneself? This is self-destruction, and it needs to be handled. Hence, social work intervention is necessary to enable a sustainable future by ensuring that individuals are living healthy lives.

### **Privileges of Legal Adopters**

Many people are unaware of the fascinating rights that lawfully adopted children can make use of. According to male WAP8, aged 37, adoptees are taken into consideration while recruiting workers into public offices once their adoption certificates are included in their applications. The participant said: When the child grows up to 18 years and the adopter is not able to train the adoptee, they can run to the ministry for support. The ministry can provide such an adoptee with a skill and place the person on a salary. Again, as long as such attaches the adoption certificate is attached to his application while applying for a job, the employers (government) give the adoptees jobs before others. Many people are not aware of this privilege. Moreover, legal adoption of a child gives the parties certainty and confidence (Male WAP8 aged 37).

The majority of participants concurred that when you adopt lawfully, you would not have to worry about someone knocking at your door to shame you for adopting illegally. These are the factors social workers should take into account while developing a self-reliance package so that the general public is properly informed about adoption to prevent unlawful adoption and its damaging effects.

### **Challenges of Single-Parent Adopters**

Single parents are faced with challenges that need counseling. There are threats single parents who want to raise their own family have, which include: shame and thoughts of how to face a society who do not regard unmarried women. Female FGDPs from Enugu East lamented that society sees an unmarried woman as irresponsible, likewise a married but childless. The children also face the societal challenge where their fellow children ask them Where is your father. Such people will feel depressed if not properly handled. One of the single parents that were interviewed has expressed her dismay seeing her child go through such embarrassment of asking about her father. This calls for early counseling of young ladies to marry early to avoid such stigma of being a single parent if possible. Many choices lead to single parenthood, which can be addressed beforehand. However, finding ways to accommodate and encourage those who have already fallen victim to such is important (Female AP5 aged 64).

In human behavior, society sets the pace for everyone, stipulating what is required of every individual, and deviation from the norms attracts grave consequences. Socialization is a very good tool for that, and social workers should make use of it to save many from deviating from the norms.

### **Paternity Tests**

Many people underwent DNA testing and learned that the children they had been supporting were not their biological offspring, which had terrible consequences. Paternity testing and court cases have recently come into the

spotlight, and it is important to take precautions to prevent illicit child adoption. Sincerity can rescue a marriage and a person's life. Many people who engage in unlawful child adoption are unaware of the potential consequences. In truth, these situations occur frequently in Enugu State's villages. This was confirmed by the traditional leaders, who were FGDPs from Enugu East. Some from Enugu North claimed that such incidents, where the young people were required by their ancestors to return to their biological parents after showing them their roots in dreams, happen. Some will say that in their dreams their late father appeared to them and told them to return to their ancestral home or to their biological parents. They have to enquire, and when they find out that it is true, they will have to go back, leaving the adoptive parents childless. Many, as soon as they discover that they do not belong to where they are being adopted, will threaten the adopter to show them their father/mother. Female FGDPs attested to that, too.

### **Suicidal Tendencies Resulting in Psychological Trauma**

It was shown from all the participants that all these anomalies might cause irritation, guilt, depression, and thoughts of suicide. Though uncommon, some of the participants believed that unlawful child adoption could motivate someone to commit suicide. Only those who have experienced such disgrace can accurately describe the profound sense of emptiness that results from leading a false life and trying to make up for wrongdoings. A very major humiliation that should be avoided is being accused of stealing someone's child or kidnapping. Social workers ought to go above and beyond to comprehend the profound oppression that many individuals experience when they are unable to have children of their own. Especially young ladies whose options to do away with unwanted pregnancies are either abortion or to sell the baby. There should be a healing process applied to this group of people. If possible, there should be a victim rehabilitation program where the wound will be made to heal. This calls for intervention, given that the profession of social work is also concerned with the mental health of both the people and society as a whole.

### **Culture of Secrecy**

Analysis of the study's findings led to the conclusion that the people of Enugu State have a culture of concealment. This situation encourages crime and illicit child adoption in the state. Many individuals are passing away silently, and even when they do speak up, it will be with people in a similar situation, which will keep them in that circle. It was found during FGDs that the traditional leaders were aware of certain locations where they engage in illegal baby trade, but would prefer not to disclose them. They were concerned about being identified as the person who broke the story. The majority of them concurred during the conversation that there are numerous locations where illegal child adoption occurs, but they said, "o bu ka asi na o bu m kwuru," which means, 'you want others to say that I said'. According to a proverb, "okenye adighi ano n'ulo ewu muo no ogbiri,"; meaning that a wise man or elderly person will not watch a goat give birth without removing the rope tied around its neck. But due to the corruption of adoption parties and fear, which

have engulfed the people, they are finding it difficult to call to order a straying child. The findings showed that both IDIPs and FGDPs agreed that all activities around illegal adoption are done in secret. Those who are aware are unwilling to disclose the happenings. A woman whose husband is unable to impregnate, for instance, will claim that her husband is torturing her and she will go to her father's house until she gets pregnant by another man. It is then that the husband will come looking for her, and they will claim reconciliation. Some will marry a lady who is already pregnant to have the baby in their home.

People are now committing suicide in their thoughts, lives, as a result of the frustration brought by the extreme secrecy surrounding people's activities. Many take wrong decisions that can damage them and dehumanize others. This culture of concealment leads many to people who will give them wrong advice. This informs the decision of the female FGDPs from Enugu East that advocated for the social workers to investigate/facilitate, and report where there are illegal adoptions going on. They also lamented that many people are not speaking up, while others say it is not their business and it does not concern them. But the society is like a circle where all of us, in one way or another other partake in the effect of wrongdoings directly or indirectly.

#### **Factors that Promote Illegal Child Adoption**

The study demonstrated that there are a variety of factors that encourage illegal child adoption, including culture, infertility, women bearing the pressure of childlessness than men, and avoiding social stigma or fear of criticism. In addition, lying about one's past lives, ignorance of its consequences, the desire to stay in marriage, difficulties with the legal adoption process, impatience, cost-effectiveness, and corruption. This is consistent with the finding of Doughty et al. (2017) that factors such as social, economic, political, religious, and cultural norms/inclinations, particularly societal values that place a high value on biological children as the genuine ones. Moreover, corruption, greed, unplanned pregnancy, and ignorance, the administrative bottleneck of the adoption process by the legal unit responsible for adoption promotes illegal child adoption. According to Eke et al (2014), stigma and societal attitudes around adoption encourage the adoption of children illegally.

This research showed that, in contrast to earlier research, more people are now actively looking to adopt, though the majority of them adopt illegally. The result of this research work showed that sometimes some of the staff enter into unofficial deals with the adoption seekers. This secret business between them will fetch them a huge amount of money. It is discovered that the government does not pay for the expenses incurred from the children's conception, which adopters are made to pay for. Someone has to pay up to two million naira for a baby because of the huge cost to keep the child alive. Since the government does not pay for those bills, the adopters are made to pay, thereby making adoption costly instead of free as proposed. This supports Onayemi and Aderinto's (2019) assertion that the rise in adoption applications is one of the factors contributing to unlawful child adoption. The increase in adoption demand, according to Bokaie et al. (2012), has enhanced unlawful child adoption. According to Cantwell (2017), one of the variables that

encourages unlawful child adoption is official corruption. Ijewereme (2015) talked about the public officers' accepting bribes, soliciting bribes, and extorting potential adopters, in addition to the bureaucratic bottleneck involved in legal adoption, as factors.

### **Why Baby Trading/Factories Thrive**

The result shows that there are lots of reasons that make baby trading thrive. Those factors include poverty, greed, and the government's inability to prosecute most offenders due to a lack of clarity in what constitutes a crime against babies. Some government officials also shield those businesses. Evidential is the story of an adoption staff that was mandated to raid a discovered baby factory, but before they could finish the bureaucratic processes involved, they relocated. Someone among them leaked the information to them. The results also showed that some adopters have bad intentions and that some baby traders have special justifications for engaging in such illicit activity. These include girls with unwanted pregnancies, poor teenagers, students who wish to sell off their babies to continue with their education, and child traffickers. Some corrupt doctors and nurses, who use the vulnerability of childless women to make money, and ritualists in disguise, who were serving their clients. These factors also include destitution, the desire to become wealthy quickly, pride, and official corruption. The results support those of Omeire et al. (2015), who found that lack of education, age, religion, and poverty may all influence people's decision to baby.

This study also found that legal ambiguities made prosecution challenging. For instance, the inability to specify or support the occurrence of child exploitation in the legislation allows the criminals to escape prosecution. The NAPTIP staff stated that they have already filed a bill in the House of Assembly to address the legal terms that make it difficult for the offenders to be prosecuted. This supports the argument made by Okoli and Eze (2021) that the lack of a clear legal framework and surrogacy system makes it difficult to prosecute the owners of baby factories. Especially for health workers who claim to be serving their clients, and many of whom may have influential government allies who defend their illegal activities.

Additionally, the study discovered that some officials were corrupt and greedy. The Adoption Unit Staff disclosed how he was tasked with looking into a certain baby factory, but before he could reach the place, the factory had relocated. This indicated that some of the officials had leaked the information to them. The loopholes discovered in the legal process of adoption and implementation of laid-down rules promote illegal child adoption. Also, that pressure from potential adopters on the government officials has given them room to negotiate with them and perpetuate illegal adoptions.

Poor salaries of the workers also induce them to sell babies, which shows corruption in the legal process, which has also aided some to patronize baby traders. Some of them work with those social homes that were registered under them to cover up those deals. In this current study, not only the medical practitioners' unethical conduct and gluttony, but also that of the welfare/government officials. This confirmed the view of Eseadi et al. (2015)

that the lack of ethical behavior on the part of medical practitioners and gluttony encourage baby factories. The issue of prosecution is also vital to deter others who may want to do such illegal business. It was discovered that the law is not clear on how to victimize the victims. The participants were of the view that they had heard that the government had raided baby factories, but they would not hear about their prosecution. Some confusions give the victims room to dodge prosecution, which was attested, even police advise the victims on what to do to escape the judgment with all the settlements involved. Ijewere (2015), Baglietto, et al. (2016), and other scholars lamented that public officers accept bribes, and it encourages illegalities. This conclusion aligns with Ogbече (2016), who expressed shock when Mrs. Eke and three other people who appeared in court for allegedly selling babies were cleared because they were unable to show evidence to support their claims.

### **Consequences of Illegal Child Adoption in Enugu State**

The result of the analysis of this work showed that there are many consequences associated with illegal child adoption. They include: tracing back the baby, accusation, emotional heartbreak, death, inheritance denial, abnormal behavior, perpetual emotional bondage, child abuse, child trafficking, slave trade, organ harvesting, and child labour. Other consequences are: health challenges, the adopter may not be able to take care of the adoptee, suicide, character confusion, increased crime like baby trading, stigmatizing the adopter and the adoptee, home breakage, guilt, affection truncated, jailing the offender, fear of being exposed, and continuous lying to cover up. These findings support the assertion of Nwaka and Odoemene (2019), who disclosed that the secrecy around baby business is causing paternity problems. Lake (2013) concurred that the disputes over who is the biological parent of some children are now common in Nigeria.

Almost all the participants agreed that they had seen children who were later traced back by their biological parents, leaving the adopters helpless and in denial of their inheritance. This corroborates with Wojciak et al. (2018), who noted that children who have been separated from their birth parents have always experienced mistreatment and traumatic events. Separation from a sibling or parent can exacerbate feelings of worry and uncertainty. Loss of identity, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging were also the consequences of illegal child adoption. The Child Welfare Information Gateway (2016) affirmed the case of property distribution difficulties that might occur after the demise of an adopter without leaving a legal document on how his property will be shared. Many scholars attested to the issue of some people's culture that does not permit an adoptee to be part of their inheritance.

The result of this study showed that many illegally adopted children may have inherited wrongdoings and sicknesses from their biological parents. Children adopted illegally are not examined to know their health status, which led to the discovery of many health issues later that have crippled the adopters financially. Some babies were abandoned, while others were dead. This is in line with Child Welfare Information Gateway (2017), which stated that a child who had an insecure upbringing may struggle with emotional and behavioural

challenges. It is also in accordance with that of Heather (2012), who opines that because the health status of the illegally adopted was not examined, the children may have sicknesses that will put the adopters under stress. They will be frequenting the hospital, as in the case of those who unknowingly adopt sickle cell anemia and HIV patients. Tajudeen (2013) supported that poor health outcomes, such as higher rates of mental illness and behavioural issues that trouble some of the illegally adopted kids.

This study discovered that the hormone drugs they use to inflate the stomach are cancerous. The result also showed that women without children are not regarded, which led most of them to cover-ups to ensure that they are not seen as irresponsible in society. The consequences affect both individuals and the state at large. The result also showed that the government has no comprehensive data on those adopted, or those adopted illegally, which makes planning difficult. Tajudeen (2013) attested that an illegally adopted child may be abused. The result showed how many illegally adopted children were trafficked, sexually abused, and placed under hard labour, beaten, among other harmful experiences. Virgiel (2014) agreed that Igbos believe that women who cannot give birth have failed in their duty, and this has led to many women faking pregnancy, which has health implications. It is also in line with that of Ebiringa (2016), who said that the NAPTIP agency does not have data on the number of domestic adoptions in the country. This is significant because a nation cannot plan without data.

The six female FGDPs expressed their dissatisfaction with the way the government handles the issue of illegal child adoption. They said that most times they will hear that baby factories were raided, but they will not hear that they were prosecuted. In fact, they commented that no one is safe now in this country and that the issue of corruption has eaten deep into the system. To talk about Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), you must talk about how individuals are developed. When someone has applied for legal adoption for over ten years, they will be telling such person to keep checking, which will demoralize such person. Childless couples go through lots of challenges, and if not addressed, they will not be happy. When individuals are not happy, it will affect society. These corroborate the findings of Ijewereme (2015) and Chukwuma (2019) that the government's unwillingness to prosecute victims of illicit adoption for political reasons, poverty, and consumerism are factors that engender unlawful adoption.

Furthermore, the issue of planning and promoting child welfare entails accurate data on the number of adoptions taking place daily. This will aid planning and making provision on how to follow them up and ensure their safety. Moreover, if the government employs social workers in the field to investigate/facilitate, and report illegal adoptions going on, that will help to address the issue. The image of the State is being damaged, and that shows insecurity on the part of children. The female FGDPs from Enugu East revealed that many children are being thrown, people are picking them and some are trafficked. Also, they showed how boys who were abandoned sleep at the IMT bus stop. Most of them are picking pockets and from there graduate to

criminals, and yet it seems as though the government is not seeing them. Most of the baby sellers or those who want to sell do that as a result of poverty and poor guidance, and for development to occur, the issue of poverty must be handled. The menace of illegal child adoption leads to economic frustrations that affect the individuals and the state. When there are lots of abandoned children, they will form a public nuisance to the state. When the Child Rights Act is in shambles, the foundation of the state is cracked. When lots of childless families are living in pretence, when the truth is discovered, there will be lots of divorces and separations, which will affect the children and society at large. Mortality of both adopters and the adoptees is our great loss to the state, and it reduces productivity and national income. The moral decay caused by illegal child adoption has shown that the social values and the moral standards of the state are in shambles. The findings support that of Lake (2013), who noted that disputes over who is the biological parent of some children are becoming more common in Nigeria, and it is increasing distrust among couples.

### **Government Interventions for Curbing Illegal Child Adoption in Enugu State**

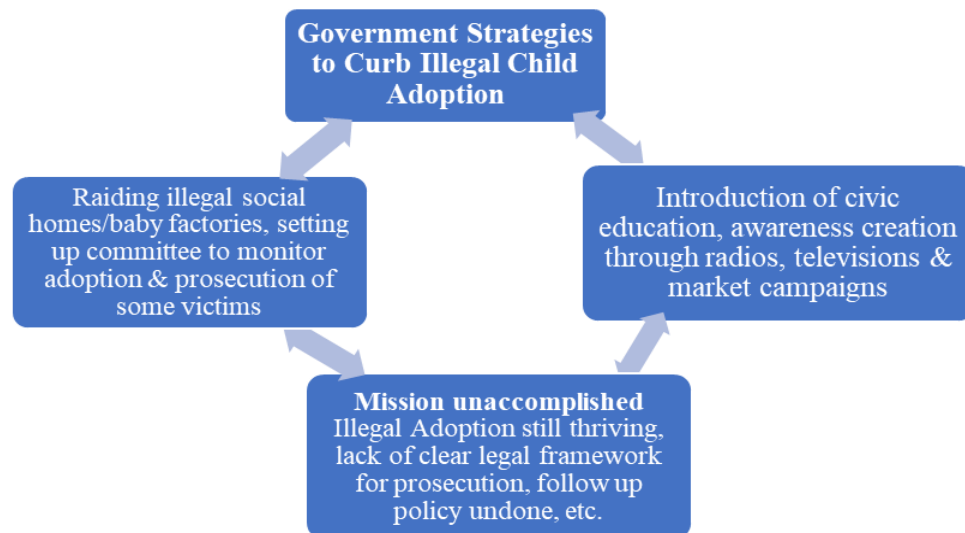


Figure 3. Government Strategies Against Illegal Child Adoption  
Field Survey 2022

Figure 3 shows that the government has performed some activities to curb illegal child adoption in Enugu State. The study discovered that the government had put in some efforts to ameliorate the menace of illegal child adoption practices. Such efforts are raids on baby factories and even people's houses that were used to harbor young girls, returning illegally adopted to their biological parents when discovered. The government has also instituted a committee that was made in charge of adoption. They have also made jingles on radio and television, creating awareness in the marketplaces about the adoption and dangers of doing it illegally. Child rights law has been included in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools by introducing civic education. These are in agreement with the findings that are already in the literature, except for the inclusion of the child rights law in the primary and secondary school curricula in the form of civic education. Also, the issue of returning babies to their biological parents was not obvious in the literature.

Here, NAPTIP expressed how they joyfully return babies to their biological parents whenever illegal adoption is discovered. Some of the scholars who attested to some of these points are Uzor (2014), who showed that in South South-Eastern States of Nigeria that about 2,500 teens were recovered from baby factories in one year. Oladeye et al (2016) affirmed the growth of baby trading. Omeire et al. (2015) showed that doctors, health workers were part of the business, and some of them were paraded. In Enugu State, Omojuyigbe (2021) showed how police raided two hospitals and dismantled two baby factories in Enugu State. Following up on the adoptee is on paper but not in practice. It was discovered that the people who are responsible for the follow-up do not get the allocation for it, and they cannot use their low salaries to do that. Implementation of policies by the government without corrupt interruption is a serious concern. The result showed that the government does not have the interest of the adopters at heart, thereby making the policy on adoption one-sided.

### Roles of Social Workers in Addressing Illegal Child Adoption

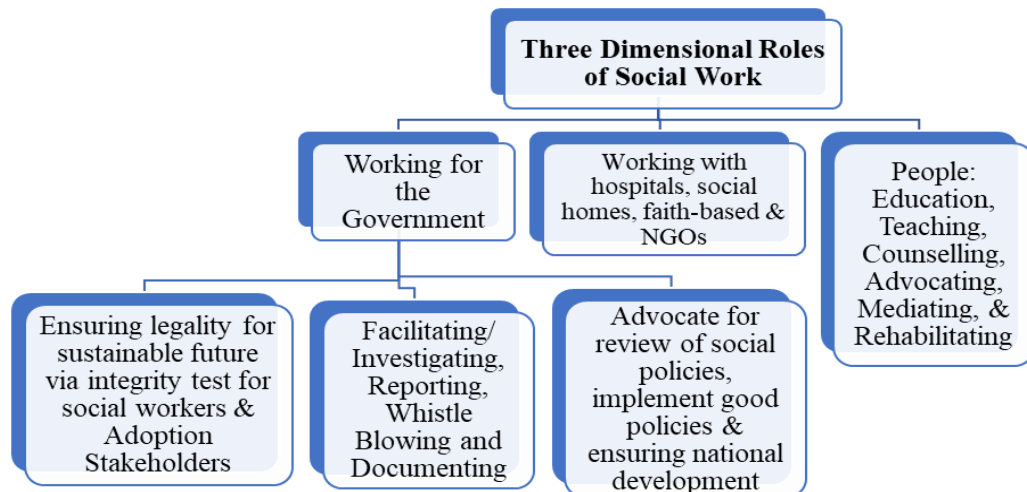


Figure 4. Social Work Roles in Curbing Illegal Child Adoption for a Sustainable Future  
 Field Survey 2022

Figure 4 above shows how valuable the social work profession is to the development of humanity. Social work plays three-dimensional roles, including their roles to be employed and work for the government. Social workers also work in hospitals, NGOs, and faith-based organizations, where they play an intermediary role between the agencies, their clients, and the government. Lastly, to the public: social workers do lots of awareness creation, education, and sensitization to ensure that the people are aware of the consequences of whatever choices they are making. This ensures individual development and the nation at large. The current study discovered a good number of roles that social workers can play to address the problems of illegal child adoption. They include: educating/teaching the people, working with the government to ensure justice, and equity. Also, mediating, facilitating/investigating, reporting and whistle-blowing, follow-up and monitoring services, counseling, and

taking note of cases handled in the court for encouragement purposes. Liaising and collaborating with adoption parties to fill the information gap among them. Some of the participants also advocated that parents and the young ones should be taught about adoption/illegal adoption in the classroom before they reach adulthood. These are in accordance with the positions of IFSW (2014), which indicated that social workers should do public awareness campaigns on the consequences of illegal adoption; advocacy/probation, provision of child protection, and influencing policy that discourages illegal child adoption. Ojo and Udenkor (2012) talked about conscientization, while Virgiel (2014) said that the unjust situation of many adoptees needed counseling and urgent intervention by social workers.

The study suggested that integrity tests should be used by social workers in recruiting and educating social welfare workers. It was discovered that many working in both government and non-governmental agencies compromise the legal process of adoption. It was also clear that building people's lives on a faulty foundation will crack/damage their future. This integrity test should be used to examine those who are qualified to handle the legal adoption process. Eseadi et al. (2015), who looked at the prevalence of baby factory in Nigeria: an emergent form of child abuse, trafficking and molestation of women, came up with counselling as a tool, which social workers can employ. Udechukwu (2019) said that social workers should make adoption attractive through training, work to discourage bureaucratic bottlenecks in adoption processes that lead couples to engage in illegal child adoption. Igbineweka and Aghenta (2015) suggested that empowerment skills should be used. Okoli and Udechukwu (2019) argued that social workers should be involved in providing support to victims, do proper documentation, and control the process of adoption to reduce irregularities in the adoption process. Child Welfare Information Gateway (2016) viewed that social workers should do a proper investigation and ensure that follow-up services are provided, together with meeting the psychological and social needs of the adoption parties. Most of the scholars consulted, including this current study, show that the role of social workers in curbing the menace of illegal child adoption cannot be overemphasized.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The government should also review the policy that denies the average businessman adoption. If they are healthy, young, and hardworking, they should be allowed to adopt.
2. There should be a way of disclosing the outcome of the assessment to the affected ones to avoid the issue of frequenting the agency without hope of getting children.
3. The government and social workers should ensure that all the adoptees are followed up with until they can speak for themselves. The government should ensure that the allocation meant for follow-up reaches the hands of the workers who are meant to do the follow-up services. They should also be monitored to ensure that the follow-up service is done as and when due.

4. The social workers should liaise with the Ministry of Gender Affairs, which is the agency in charge of adoption, to organize consistent seminars with the adoption parties, where questions and problems raised will be addressed from time to time to ensure confidence among the adoption parties. Those seeking adoption should also be kept posted on the steps and developments for them to boost their confidence in the agency in charge of adoption. It is when they do not see hope that they go to patronize baby traders.

In conclusion, illegal child adoption is prevalent with a need for social work intervention in Enugu State. The majority of people who adopted children did so illegally. It is promoted by several factors that include: unnecessary difficulties in the adoption process, impatience, infertility, women bearing more pressures of childlessness than men, and kinsmen's eye on their childless brothers. Age, social stigma, cover-up of past mistakes, poverty, quest for quick wealth, and the corrupt mindset of the people involved in adoption also promote illegal child adoption. The act of illegal child adoption, which amounts to modern slavery, has many damaging consequences that require social work intervention to achieve a sustainable future for society. These consequences are psychological, emotional, economic, political, social, spiritual, mental, mortal, and suicidal. Therefore, social work intervention is crucial and should use an integrity test tube to check and monitor all parties. This is to ensure the implementation of justice and equity as they discharge their duties regarding adoptions. This will guarantee the safety and healthy living of both parties. To ameliorate the illegal child adoption menace, social workers must mediate, collaborate, monitor, facilitate, and report discovered illegalities. They should also educate, counsel, and create awareness among the public on its consequences. And then make public the benefits of legal child adoption, which many are not aware of, for people to be attracted to legal child adoption. There should also be empowerment programmes that will improve the self-worth of women, since they bear the burden of childlessness more than their male counterparts.

#### **FURTHER STUDY**

This research still has limitations, so further research on this topic is still needed.

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