

**THE BABY DUMPING PHENOMENON IN NIGERIA:
A STUDY ON THE PERCEPTION OF MARKET WOMEN IN IBADAN**

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Abstract: Baby dumping is one of the most common forms of child abuse in Nigeria. Although this practice is not new, its current frequent occurrence and the negative implications it has on the babies concerned, however, makes it a serious social problem that requires urgent attention. Against this background, this paper examines the patterns, causes, and consequences of the baby-dumping phenomenon in Nigeria. One hundred (100) market women involved in the study were selected through a quota sampling technique. In-depth interview and focus group discussion were the methods employed for data collection. Data interpretation was done through content analysis and ethnographic summaries. Findings showed that the phenomenon of baby dumping is complex in nature: Multiple factors were identified as responsible for its occurrence and it was recognized to have a wide range of social and health implications on the dumped babies. This study advocates for an urgent shift from the current reactive approach to more proactive planning to effectively curtail the problem.

Keywords: baby dumping, Nigeria, social problem, causes, implications, market women

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Baby dumping¹ is one of the most common forms of child abuse in Nigeria (Adesiyun et al., 2010; Adewale, 1988; Akani & Erhabor, 2006; Okeahialam, 1984). Although this problem is a worldwide phenomenon (Cesario, 2003; Gheorghe, Banner, Hansen, Stolberg, & Lynnerup, 2008), its current frequent occurrence in Nigeria and the negative consequences it has on the babies concerned makes it a serious social problem that requires urgent attention. The worrisome nature of this social problem is exemplified by the large array of media reports of cases of dumped babies recorded in different parts of the country (Okwuofu, 2012; Olonilua, 2011; Ajewole, 2011).

Despite the fact that the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the Child of 1976, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, the UNESCO World Declaration and Plan of Action on the Child of 1990, and the UNICEF's annual reports on *The State of the World's Children* have all advocated the right of every child to a fulfilling and enriching life, children still suffer from different forms of abuse in Nigeria (Aderinto, 2007); baby dumping is one of the most serious forms of child abuse that has, over time, remained pervasive in the country.

Although, there are no available national statistics on the recorded cases of dumped or abandoned babies in Nigeria, occasional State reports from different parts of the country indicate the alarming rate at which this criminal act is being perpetrated. For instance, the register of the Child Care unit of the Oyo State Ministry of Women Affairs, Community Development and Social Welfare in Ibadan indicates that a total of 114 cases of dumped and/or abandoned babies were recorded between January 2009 and February 2012, compared to 84 cases that were recorded between January 2006 and December 2008. Similarly, in a related development, the Special Adviser to the Lagos State Government on Youth and Social Development recently revealed that Lagos State in 2011 recorded 497 cases of abandoned babies dumped in different streets of the state (Okoje, 2012). Also, the Kebbi State Committee on *Hisba* (Social Welfare) recently claimed that it recorded over 50 cases of abandoned babies in various locations across the State, between October and December 2011 (Kabara & Gulma, 2012).

The current upsurge in the incidence of baby dumping in Nigeria is a clear departure from Nigerian or African traditional socio-cultural values that attach great importance to child bearing and child rearing, where childbirth is normatively expected of every family, and where a child is considered a treasure that is passionately desired. Nigerians believe that it is very important for a man and for a woman to have children because they represent a symbol of wealth and ensure the continuity of the family's descent (Zeitlin, 1996). Oyewumi (2003, as cited in Frimpong-Nnuroh, 2004) argues that motherhood occupies a special place in African cultures and societies, because it serves as the essential building block of social relationships, identities, and society as a whole. The birth of a baby was, and is still not only a family event but a celebration of the whole community (Maposa & Rusinga, 2012).

¹ This is a criminal act which involves the discarding or throwing away of babies by their parents.

Baby dumping becomes problematic because it is unethical and grossly violates the dignity and sanctity of life of the most vulnerable members of the society. This act contravenes the Nigerian Child Right Act of 2003 which stipulates that no child should be subject to torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment and it equally contravenes section 34(1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which states: “Every individual is entitled to the respect of the dignity of their person, and accordingly, no person shall be subject to torture or to inhuman degrading treatment”. Despite the perennial occurrence of incidents of baby dumping in Nigeria and the attendant public outcry it usually generates, this social problem, however, has yet to command sufficient scholarly attention in Nigeria. This study was therefore conceived to increase the state of knowledge on this problem.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to examine the perception of market women on the patterns, causes, and consequences of baby dumping in Nigeria.

Literature Review

The practice of abandoning a baby shortly after birth has always existed and its motives depend upon the social norms of a specific geographic region at a given point in time (Cesario, 2003). Sherr, Mueller, and Fox (2009) consider the intriguing phenomenon of abandoned babies as one that has widespread social ramifications and one which is often subject to social change and circumstances as a result of cultural variation and social conditions. Baby dumping, according to Modie-Moroka (2011), involves leaving a child where they may or may not be found by others. The practice is amongst the most heinous and inhumane of crimes in any jurisdiction in this world (Abdul Rahim, Zainudin, & Mohd. Sheriff, 2012). Ssendi (2012) contends that baby dumping breaches all fundamental parental roles of providing nurturance, protection, and guidance to one’s offspring during the most vulnerable stages of their lives.

Philpot (2006) opines that babies abandoned at birth will face the problem of lifetime uncertainty about their identity and genetic heritage; the act is a demonstration of the reality of domestic violence and poverty which women experience. Philpot further faults the stereotypic perception that it is only women that abandon their children because men also do abandon their children. Marks and Kumar (1996), however, observe that whereas both mothers and fathers may be guilty of these acts, in the majority of cases women are the likely perpetrators. Drescher-Burke, Krall, and Penick (2004) described women involved in baby dumping as generally lacking in emotional maturity, problem-solving abilities, and adequate coping skills. Bradley (2003) identifies reasons for killing and/or discarding infants to include extramarital paternity, rape, illegitimacy, incestuous relationships, and perceiving the child as an obstacle to personal achievements. Mohamed, Ali, S. Baig, and F. Baig (2010) attribute the causes of rampant incidents of baby dumping in Malaysia to unwanted pregnancies, rapid urbanization, poor parenting control, and peer influence. Hubbard (2008) observes that young mothers may abandon their babies because they may feel overwhelmed by the idea of parenthood or may have difficulty coping with the drastic physical and emotional changes associated with giving birth.

In a study on urbanization and related socio-economic problems conducted in Ibadan by the Central Bank of Nigeria in 1999, baby and/or child abandonment was reported to have featured appreciably among the crimes being committed in the Ibadan area. Odunsi (2003) attributes the problem of baby dumping in Nigeria to the fallout of the country's strict abortion laws, which criminalize the act of terminating pregnancy. Thus, people faced with the problem of unwanted pregnancies abandon their newborn babies in various unimaginable places. Adedoyin and Adegoke (1995) similarly observed that traditional African values emphasizing chastity have been eroded and the adoption of "permissive" western cultural attitudes to sexual issues is leading to teenage pregnancies and the eventual abandonment of babies after delivery.

Akani and Erhabor's (2006) study conducted between 1999 and 2003 on 140 abandoned babies in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, indicates a strong relationship between infectious diseases and baby abandonment. The study revealed a high prevalence of HIV infections among rescued babies; the overall prevalence of HIV was 13.6%. They further assert that many of the abandoned babies are thought to be babies of HIV seropositive mothers who, for fear of stigmatisation, discrimination, and the burden of caring for an HIV-positive child, abandon their babies.

Famuyiwa's (1997) study on abandoned babies in Lagos, Nigeria, indicates that there was no significant monthly variation or sex difference in abandoned babies, and the classification of sites of abandonment based on perceived chances of the victim being rescued revealed that the high-risk sites, which included refuse dumping grounds or beneath bridges, bushes, and railway lines, accounted for 16.8%, while the low-risk sites, which were mainly bus-stops, houses, police posts, and public toilets accounted for 83.2%. Famuyiwa further opined that his data suggests that the intention of the majority of parents in the cases considered was not to put their child's life in serious danger.

Methodology

The study is purely exploratory and qualitative methodology was principally adopted for the purpose of data collection. In-depth interview and focus group discussion methods were employed for the collection of primary data, while secondary data was obtained through the review of textbooks, journals, Nigerian newspapers, and relevant Internet materials. A random sampling technique was adopted for the selection of three (3) popular markets within the Ibadan metropolis, while a quota sampling technique was adopted for the selection of one hundred (100) market women. The women were chosen based on the previously established quota, which considers marital status, religious affiliation, and ethnic group. Both single and married market women, who were adherents of Islam and Christianity, were involved, and a conscious effort was made to include respondents from different ethnic backgrounds to help make the study representative.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 market women, while 10 different sessions of focus group discussion of seven participants were conducted with the market women. At the analysis stage, tape-recorded data was transcribed and interpreted through content analysis and ethnographic summaries. Content analysis was used to explore and interpret the emerging patterns in the collected data and ethnographic summary was employed to further enhance data interpretation.

Research Setting and Study Population

The study was conducted among market women in three selected popular markets in Ibadan. The markets include the Bodija, Oja-Oba, and Sango markets. Ibadan is located approximately on longitude $3^{\circ}51'$ east of the Greenwich Meridian and latitude $7^{\circ}23'$ north of the Equator at a distance of about 145 kilometres northeast of Lagos (Tomori, 2008). The population size of Ibadan rose to 1,829,300 in 1999 at a growth rate of 1.65% from 1963, and increased to 2,550,593 in 2006 at a growth rate of 3.4% (National Population Commission of Nigeria, 2007). Ibadan was used for this study because it is one of the Nigerian cities where the problem of baby dumping is rampant (Central Bank of Nigeria, 1999). Market women constituted the study population because they are a group of people from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds; hence, their overall perceptions facilitated a significant insight into the phenomenon of baby dumping. Their selection also stems from the fact that an open-market place is one of the known locations where babies are frequently dumped in Nigeria.

Results and Discussions

Patterns of Baby Dumping in Nigeria

Findings revealed that nearly all the respondents agreed that there was no clear-cut difference as to which sex (male or female babies) is more at the risk of being dumped. The general consensus was that babies of either sex could be dumped by unwilling and/or frustrated parent(s). Similarly, the perception of the market women as to which of the parents is more culpable for perpetrating baby dumping shows that most of the market women agreed that either of the parents could perpetrate the act, and that such action could sometimes be jointly taken by both parents. The majority of the interviewees and participants in the focus group discussion, however, perceived mothers as more culpable. They claimed that since the act of baby dumping is often more perpetrated by commercial sex workers and young unmarried ladies in the society, the fathers of such abandoned babies may be unaware that such women were pregnant, and consequently may be unaware of their acts of baby dumping. Although, this finding seems to corroborate Marks and Kumar's (1996) submission that mothers may be more culpable for baby dumping, the opinion of the market women is, however, subject to debate because in Nigeria, individuals who perpetrate the act of baby dumping are not often discovered. This opinion of the market women may have been strongly influenced by the stereotypic patriarchal ideology that, from time immemorial, permeates Nigerian society, and which has consistently labeled the womenfolk as a "weaker sex", lacking the strong capability to withstand difficult and demanding challenges. Women are often blamed for the ills of society because their male counterparts are viewed to be stronger and more courageous.

With regard to preferred locations where babies are often dumped, respondents identified locations including: riverbanks, refuse sites, pit toilets, open-market places, roadsides, mosque or church premises, and bush paths. It was also observed by Adesiyun et al. (2010) that abandoned babies in Nigeria are often sighted in gutters, by the side of rivers, on debris, or in pit latrines. Most of the market women, however, claimed that the choice of location depends on the intention of the baby dumper. It was mentioned that baby dumpers (i.e., parents involved in the

act of baby dumping) who desire the survival of their babies always dump them at relatively safe locations where they can easily be found and rescued, while those who have the intention to kill frequently dump their babies at unsafe and dangerous locations where chances of survival are very slim. This was clearly reflected in the following statement by one of the discussants in a focus group discussion (FGD) session:

Those babies thrown inside pit toilets and near riverbanks are usually dumped there to die, while those dumped at roadside, trade fair centre, hospital premises and religious centres are usually dumped in these locations so as to be rescued by nearby people. It all depends on the intention of the dumper.

Buttressing the above, another discussant said:

There is this river called Odo Agadagbudu in Beere-Mapo area of Ibadan, where pigs are reared. Heartless mothers usually abandon their babies in this location so that pigs could feed on them. (FGD, Market Women, Oja-Oba Market)

This finding clearly established a strong connection between locations where babies are dumped and the intention of baby dumpers towards the survival of the abandoned babies. The majority of the market women asserted that babies are more often dumped by their parents out of frustration rather than out of the desire to get them killed. This is why, according to them, dumped babies are more frequently found in relatively safe locations such as hospital premises, open-market places, roadsides, and church or mosque premises, where they can be easily discovered by people nearby. This corroborates Famuyiwa's (1997) study, where he observed that the intention of the majority of the baby dumpers in the cases considered was not to put the child's life in serious danger.

Another unique revelation that emerged in the study is the practice of some baby dumpers to migrate from their city or town of residence to another part of the country where they are unknown, for the purpose of perpetrating the act. A large proportion of the participants submitted that some baby dumpers usually migrate from their immediate environment to another town or city during their gestation period, while others often travel with their babies to neighbouring towns with the intention of leaving them behind. Worthy of mention is the case of a teenager narrated by one of the respondents:

Sometimes ago, a teenager came all the way from Oyo town to Ibadan to dump her baby at the market junction in Ojoo area of Ibadan metropolis. The child was, however, rescued by some good Nigerians, who took her to the Oyo State Ministry of Social Welfare. A week later, the lady was forced back to Ibadan by her parents to retrieve the baby. On getting to the area, she was taken to the police station by people in the neighborhood from whom she requested information on her daughter. (IDI, Market Woman, Sango Market)

Since some baby dumpers prefer to commit the crime far away from their town or city of residence to avoid detection, it therefore means that foundlings² may not necessarily come from the immediate environment, where they are discovered. The study further established that the act of baby dumping is most often committed late at night or in the wee hours of the morning, when chances of detection of perpetrators are very low. This clearly indicates that baby dumpers always try to evade detections when engaging in the act because they are aware of the unethical or criminal nature of their action and the subsequent punishments it will attract from other members of the society.

Causes of Baby Dumping in Nigeria

Multiple factors were perceived by the market women as responsible for the problem of baby dumping. Factors identified in various comments and responses of the participants include: poverty, gender inequality, modernization, prostitution, infidelity, and physical disability. Poverty resulting from the current unfavourable economic condition being experienced by Nigerians was identified by nearly all respondents and discussants as a very strong factor responsible for the incidence of baby dumping in the country. They argued that in any nation where the majority of the citizenry are poverty-ridden, as is the case in Nigeria, criminal acts like baby dumping remain inevitable. A common response given by the majority of the participants is this:

What do you expect in a country where government is insensitive to the plight of the common man on the street? Parents, who can hardly afford one square meal daily may be desperate enough to abandon their offspring out of frustration. (FGD, Market Women, Bodija Market)

According to Omotola (2008), about 70% of the Nigerian population lives in abject poverty. The scourge of poverty in Nigeria is an incontrovertible fact, which results in hunger, ignorance, malnutrition, disease, unemployment, poor access to credit facilities, and low life expectancy, as well as a general level of human hopelessness (Abiola & Olaopa, 2008). Although Nigeria is the largest oil producer in Africa, it is a politically unstable and an economically underdeveloped country with about 67 million Nigerians in poverty out of an estimated population of about 100 million (Alayande & Alayande, 2004). For instance, at least four out of every 10 Nigerians live in absolute poverty of less than ₦320 per month (the value of \$2.50) (Okunmadewa, 2002). This clearly shows that the high level of impoverishment being experienced by the majority of Nigerians plays a significant role in the problem of baby dumping in Nigeria.

Another contributory factor to the occurrence of baby dumping in Nigeria perceived by the market women is the pervasive problem of gender inequality generally being experienced by Nigerian women. The majority of the participants in the focus group asserted that Nigerian cultural practices, which institutionalize gender inequality by socializing wives to be economically dependent on their husbands, make men hold domineering power over womenfolk. They perceived this type of cultural arrangement to be unhealthy for women, because some wives and their offspring routinely suffer total neglect from their husbands, especially in such

² This is another term for dumped or abandoned babies.

situations where the husbands have more than one wife. The neglect which some wives suffer may lead to their impoverishment, which may be so severe to the extent that many consider the dumping of their babies as part of the solution to their problem. A participant in one of the focus groups asserted:

Some unfortunate women whose husbands have more than one wife are routinely neglected with 3-4 children by their husbands. How do you think such women will cope without any substantial means of livelihood? Women in this kind of situation may be compelled to dump their babies. (FGD, Market Women, Oja-Oba Market)

The above response is typical of the respondents. The perception of the market women that gender inequality plays a strong role in the problem of baby dumping in Nigeria shows that the actions of some husbands also forces some wives to perpetrate the crime, and it further supports the view that the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society places some Nigerian women in a precarious position. This is consistent with Philpot's (2006) claim that child abandonment says much about the realities of domestic violence and poverty which women experience. The patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society enables men to dominate women (Aina, 1998).

Modernization was also perceived by the market women as causing baby dumping in Nigeria. The market women claimed that the high level of modernization currently being experienced in Nigeria is fast eroding the power of family as an institution to effectively socialize the younger members of the society into conforming adults. The respondents believed that due to modernization, Nigerian youths now shamelessly engage in some behaviours that were considered deviant in the traditional Nigerian society. They attributed the rise in the incidence of baby dumping in Nigeria to the large-scale involvement of Nigerian youths in premarital sex, which usually results in unwanted pregnancies. Consequently, youths who are not psychologically and emotionally prepared for the demands of parenthood may resort to dumping their babies. The age of sexual debut in Nigeria is decreasing as more young people engage in premarital sex and have multiple sex partners (Olayinka & Osho, 1997; Adedoyin & Adegoke, 1995).

Similarly, the transformation of Nigerian society from a predominantly traditional setting to a modern one was also viewed as playing a significant role in the lifestyle of Nigerians. A large proportion of the respondents claimed that the advent of foreign religions (Christianity and Islam) has regrettably led to the massive erosion in the importance and respect attached to values and ethics of African traditional religion, which was once an effective informal social control mechanism. They argued that unlike the scenario that plays out today, the occurrence of antisocial conduct like baby dumping was at the remotest level of possibility in traditional Nigerian society, because of the potency and swiftness with which oracular institution and ancestral spirits punish non-conforming members of the society. A respondent explained:

The act is very rampant today, because people now believe that redemption from any sinful act could be done through prayer and penance. (IDI, Market Woman, Bodija Market)

The above submission indicates that market women believed that baby dumpers hide under the virtues of God's love and mercy for sinners as emphasized in both Christianity and Islam to perpetrate the act of baby dumping, while hoping that the God of love and mercy will forgive them when they ask for forgiveness. However, the God (Olodumare or Chukwu) emphasized in African Traditional Religion, together with his theocratic ministers such as Sango and Ogun among the Yoruba or Amadioha, and Agbala among the Igbo, are presented to the people as supernatural entities that will punish anyone who engages in antisocial conduct. Thus, due to the effectiveness of the informal social control mechanisms in the traditional Nigerian society, people are always conscious of their actions.

Further, modernization has introduced significant social change to Nigerian society, and this is widely experienced in the family, as well as economic, political, and religious institutions. The transformation of Nigeria from a predominantly traditional society to a modern one has contributed both positively and negatively to the development of the country. The negative effects of modernization on Nigerian society have also been noted by Nwabuisi (2000), where it was observed that the core traditional values in Nigeria have been debased in the modern era.

Prostitution is another key factor given as promoting the phenomenon of baby dumping in Nigeria. It was categorically stated by the majority of the interviewees and discussants that commercial sex workers are responsible for the incidence of baby dumping in Nigeria. They claimed that commercial sex workers, by virtue of their kind of business, stand the risk of unwanted pregnancy and that they could find it difficult to procure abortions due to the fact that the Nigerian Abortion Law criminalizes it. This is in line with Odunsi's (2003) observation that baby dumping in Nigeria is fallout of the strict abortion law being practiced in the country. They opined, however, that where illegal abortion is possible, perceived potential medical complications envisaged by medical practitioners could compel pregnant commercial sex workers to carry such pregnancies to term, but with the intention of throwing away the resultant offspring after birth. This point is clearly reflected in one of the FGD sessions, where a discussant claimed that:

Prostitutes are guilty of baby dumping in our society; because of their sinful way of life they are usually pregnant without knowing the individuals responsible for it. Since they lack the fear of God, they throw away their God-given babies.

The above statement was corroborated by another discussant:

Prostitutes who have the intention to abort but were warned by medical practitioners that it could lead to severe complications are forced to keep their pregnancy. Thereafter, they throw away such babies, because it will disturb their business. (FGD, Market Women, Bodija Market)

Another major factor closely linked to prostitution by some of the discussants is the act of infidelity on the part of some married women, which sometimes results in unwanted pregnancy. Consequently, this often prompts them to engage in the act of baby dumping as a way of keeping their secret, and thereby safeguarding their marriage. This practice was claimed to be especially common among housewives whose husbands are always away from home as a

result of the nature of their job. This observation was beautifully captured by one of the discussants at one of the FGD sessions:

Where I live in the Barrack, most military personnel usually go on official missions abroad; whenever they are away, some of their wives usually engage in extra-marital affairs, which sometimes lead to unwanted pregnancy. Some of them give birth and throw the babies away to cover their secret. (FGD, Market Women, Sango Market)

The above finding corroborates the submissions of Mohammed et al. (2010) and Bradley (2003) that unwanted pregnancy, infidelity, and illegitimacy are among the causes of baby dumping.

A very unique factor highlighted as contributing to the incidents of baby dumping in Nigeria by some of the interviewees is the issue of physical disability in children. Various comments and discussions with interviewees revealed that children born with noticeable physical disabilities are sometimes dumped and/or abandoned by their parents as a way of avoiding “perceived shame and mockery” such babies could attract to their family. In one of the interviews conducted, a respondent has this to say:

In my village, do not ask me where, because I will not tell you, people with physical disabilities are very hard to come by because, it is more or less a customary practice that if you give birth to a baby with an incurable disease, you throw such away. (IDI, Market Women, Sango Market)

The above comment shows that children living with perceived “incurable” ailments or illness are at the risk of being dumped and/or abandoned by some short-sighted parents, who consider individuals with special needs as lacking in prospects. This discrimination of individuals with special needs was equally stated in a report of the Centre for Law Enforcement Education of Nigeria (CLEEN) (2004), where it was observed that people with disabilities are the least cared for, and they experience widespread discrimination from their families and the Nigerian society in general. This finding supports Akani and Erharbor’s (2006) study that established a connection between HIV infection and incidents of baby dumping in Port Harcourt City in Nigeria.

The observation of this study that multiple factors contribute to the problem of baby dumping in Nigeria contrasts the stereotypic and generalized view of Drescher-Burke et al. (2004) which suggests that women involved in baby dumping are generally lacking in emotional maturity, problem-solving abilities, and adequate coping skills. This study revealed that baby dumping is a problem that cannot be adduced to a single causal factor or to a particular parent, because fathers also do perpetrate the act.

Perceived Consequences of Baby Dumping

All participants involved in the study agreed that the phenomenon of baby dumping has a wide range of socio-ethical, health, and psychological consequences on Nigerian society. This act is believed to have negative implications on the dumped babies, the perpetrators, and the society at large. Baby dumping was viewed as one of the worst cases of child abuse. It was

described by all the participants as disrespect for the sanctity of human life. Interviews held and FGDs conducted revealed that dumped babies often endure life-threatening conditions as they are in most cases subject to harsh weather conditions, dumped in dangerous unhygienic environments, and are exposed to the attacks of predatory animals and insects, such as pigs and soldier-ants. A market woman in one of the FGD sessions explained thus:

By the time those babies are kept at the riverbank or in refuse dumps, they are exposed to attack of pigs and soldier-ants, who will feed on them; those thrown inside pit toilets do not usually survive.

Another discussant interjected:

A child abandoned at night has a slim chance of survival because of the cold weather condition he or she may have been exposed to throughout the night. (FGD, Market Women, Bodija Market)

These responses, which are typical of the respondents, indicate that treatment meted out to dumped babies and the degrading conditions that they are subject to usually have severe health implications. Baby dumping frequently results in death or severe bodily injury to the children concerned. This negative health implication of baby dumping on the abandoned baby is clearly demonstrated in a case reported by Adesiyun et al. (2010), where an abandoned baby girl was found in a polythene bag already infested with maggots in the city of Ilorin in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Another negative effect of baby dumping mentioned by the majority of respondents is that the act deprives babies of genuine motherly love and strong parental affections, which are necessary requirements for their psychological well-being and emotional stability. There was an agreement among the discussants that the rejection suffered at a very tender age by the dumped babies will negatively affect them later in life. A respondent put it this way:

This is sheer wickedness meted out to helpless babies. They are denied access to motherly care and parental affection. (IDI, Market Woman, Oja-Oba Market)

This is in consonance with Ssendi's (2012) observation that child abandonment breaches all fundamental parental roles of providing nurturance, protection, and guidance to one's offspring during the most vulnerable stage of their lives. Additionally, the market women believed that dumped babies will most likely suffer social stigma and discrimination as a result of the rejection they are made to suffer at the earliest stage of their lives. Nearly all the market women interviewed suggested that dumped babies stand the risk of being subjected to ridicule by members of their immediate environment, who may have access to information on their past. This likely social stigma or discrimination was believed to be a strong contributor to developing low self-esteem and an inferiority complex on the part of the dumped babies. This submission of the market women is a reflection of the African culture that places strong emphasis on the ancestry or lineage of individual members of the society. This observation was also made by Philpot (2006), that a baby abandoned at birth faces a lifetime of uncertainty about their identity

and genetic make-up. There is no gainsaying in the fact that baby dumping has negative impacts on the physical, mental, emotional, and psychological well-being of the babies involved.

Findings also revealed that the market women unanimously agreed that baby dumpers will be punished for their misdeed. While some of the market women viewed parents who dumped their babies as attracting the natural anger of God, because their action constitutes a gross violation of his moral laws and ethical codes, others claimed that several unimaginable curses rained on perpetrators of this act by members of the public go a long way in negatively impacting on their lives. As one respondent explained:

Those involved in such practice will never go unpunished; they will definitely be punished by God. Even if God did not punish them, nemesis will catch up with them. By the time such women get married and desire children, they will be unable to conceive. (IDI, Market Woman, Bodija Market)

It was noted by another market woman that:

Several curses rained on the perpetrators with emotional laden voice by members of the public will no doubt shatter their lives. (IDI, Market Woman, Sango Market)

Some of the likely punishments to be suffered by the culprits were identified to include barrenness, lifelong spinsterhood, affliction with smallpox, and mental illness. What informed the above responses of the market women is the strong influence their cultural norms and values have on them. In Africa, it is a generally held belief that no criminal act goes unpunished. This is noted in the work of Awolalu and Dopamu (1979), where they submitted that the gods of the African belief system are gods of justice; whoever contravenes the moral values of the society receives instant punishment.

Also, a large proportion of the participants claimed that Nigerian society also suffers the negative effects of baby dumping, because the act continuously leads to the loss of potential human resources that could otherwise contribute significantly to societal growth and development in the nearest future. Furthermore, members of the society who witness incidents of dumped babies, were believed to directly or indirectly suffer psychological and emotional anguish from the episode. A discussant in one of the FGD sessions captures this view in her statement:

Such an act definitely has a negative impact on the society because one is psychologically traumatized when one stumbles on pigs and soldier-ants feeding on a dumped baby. (FGD, Market Women, Oja-Oba Market)

This psychological and emotional anguish pointed out by the market women as being experienced at the sight of an abandoned baby was believed to be mostly suffered by those members of the society who have desired a child for a very long time, but have not been able to conceive.

Recommendations

The perception of the market women in this study on the phenomenon of baby dumping in Nigeria shows that the problem is complex: Multiple factors were identified as contributory to its occurrence and it was equally believed that any desperate parent can commit the act, regardless of marital status, or the gender of the concerned child. Besides, not all parents who dump their babies commit the act willingly; some actually perpetrate it out of frustration and/or their inability to cope with the circumstances in which they find themselves. Factors identified as responsible for the incidence of baby dumping include: poverty, gender inequality, modernization, infidelity, prostitution, and physical disability. Some of its perceived consequences on the dumped babies are: (a) It frequently results in untimely death and severe bodily harm on the babies involved; and (b) the act also tends to cause emotional or psychological distress to the dumped babies in the form of social stigma and discrimination that they may experience as a result of their unknown family ancestry.

In Nigeria, it is the government agencies, particularly the Ministry of Social Welfare and Community Development, in collaboration with recognized homes for motherless babies that have over time been at the forefront of providing care and protection for dumped babies. However, their effort is basically reactive in nature; this is because their approach does not in any way prevent the incidence of baby dumping, but rather only provides care for dumped babies rescued alive. Hence, to effectively curtail this problem in Nigeria, some fundamental issues need to be taken into consideration:

1. The Nigerian government must demonstrate more commitment towards poverty alleviation in the country because the current unfavourable economic condition being experienced by Nigerians forces some desperate parents to dump their babies as a result of their inability to care for them. Hence, a significant improvement in the standard of living of the citizenry will go a long way in combating this problem.
2. Similarly, the current state of abject poverty suffered by the majority of Nigerians can be alleviated through the resuscitation of the once-cherished Nigerian cultural norm that encourages social solidarity among members of the society, particularly the extended family and kinship system, in the form of communalism and collectivism, which have been debased by neocolonialism and capitalist economy ideologies that promote individualism. Through this cultural practice, distressed members of the society, who may wish to engage in the act of baby dumping as a result of their impoverished condition, will desist from it.
3. Nigerian women need to be more empowered by the government as way of addressing the problem of gender inequality currently being experienced by them. The patriarchal ideology that currently permeates the Nigerian society must be revisited. Married couples should be more enlightened on the advantages of family planning and the use of contraceptives. Also, inter-spousal communication should be encouraged and womenfolk should be given more opportunity to express themselves on issues relating to their family size and other reproductive matters. This will go a long way in reducing the occurrence of unwanted pregnancy, which sometimes leads to the act of baby dumping.
4. The Nigerian Abortion Law should be re-examined. Sections 228-230 of the criminal code that criminalize abortion in Nigeria should be repealed. This is to give women carrying unwanted pregnancies the opportunity to procure legal abortions. This will no doubt help to

- reduce the problem of baby dumping, because unwanted pregnancy is better terminated, rather than keeping it and thereafter discarding the resultant baby after birth.
5. There is also a need for more sex education of youths and teenagers on their need to abstain from premarital sex. Since the age of modernization is gradually reducing the age of sexual debut in Nigeria, teenagers and youths must be carefully and consistently enlightened on the dangers of premarital sex; this will help safeguard them from engaging in risky behaviour that may lead to unwanted pregnancy. This may consequently help to reduce the occurrence of baby dumping.
 6. Unwilling mothers, most especially pregnant teenagers, should be provided with emotional and moral supports, so as to encourage them to be physically and mentally prepared for the responsibility of motherhood. This will encourage them to accept their babies, rather than trying to get rid of them through the dumping act.
 7. Parents and caregivers of physically challenged babies must be encouraged on the need to accept and care for their children, rather than view them as a source of shame or mockery that need to be discarded. Similarly, HIV/AIDS-infected mothers and their babies should be loved and supported rather than being stigmatized and discriminated against; this is because HIV/AIDS-infected babies are sometimes dumped by their mothers out of frustration and discrimination suffered from other members of the society.
 8. Members of the general public should be continuously sensitized on the consequences of baby dumping and the need to desist from it. This value reorientation should be championed by the print and electronic media houses, relevant non-governmental organizations, and religious leaders. This may help discourage prospective baby dumpers from perpetrating the act.
 9. Government should establish more foster and motherless babies' homes, where unwilling mothers, especially commercial sex workers, can anonymously give up their babies for adoption without resorting to dumping them in unhygienic and dangerous locations.
 10. Stiffer punishment should be meted out to any offending parents caught in the act of baby dumping. This will no doubt serve as a deterrent to others who may wish to do the same.
 11. This study has clearly established that the baby dumping phenomenon in Nigeria is considered by the market women to be a serious problem with multiple causes and is perceived to have severe negative consequences on Nigerian society in general and the dumped babies in particular. It is therefore proposed that the problem of baby dumping in Nigeria needs to be holistically addressed to ensure its effective control in the society. The Nigerian government and other concerned stakeholders should be more committed towards combating it, by making an urgent move from the current reactive approach to more proactive planning to address the fundamental issues responsible for its continued occurrence in the society.

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