

Endurance of Conviction and the Reservation towards Child- Adoption in Family Preservation among Igbo Christians

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the fundamental reasons behind the reservation towards child adoption in family preservation among Igbo Christians. The survey was conducted in three main cities of Anambra state; Awka, Onitsha, and Ihiala. It made use of a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative instruments in analyzing the data. The four point-Likert scale was used to obtain qualitative data from the field and was further converted to quantitative data using descriptive-analytical and inferential statistics. The finds traced the persistent reservation towards child -adoption among Igbo Christians to the endurance of conviction in Igbo traditional religion and worldview. The result indicated three major dynamics of this conviction; the non- indigenous nature of the practice (adoption), the bridge of the ancestral lineage by the practice, and social stigma that goes with the practice. These tripartite socio-religious factors continue to influence the choice of an average Igbo Christian toward child adoption. The paper argues that while the traditions (Christian and Igbo) have the right to propagate their different worldviews and beliefs on marriage and child -adoption, the choice of the individual couples on the subject matter remains primal. Provision and enforcement of a functional supportive legal framework that protects the adopted and adoptive parents from every form of societal stigmatization cannot be relegated to the background.

KEYWORDS: Child adoption, endurance of conviction, family preservation, Igbo Christians, marriage, reservation

1. INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the fundamental reasons behind the reservation towards child adoption in family preservation among Igbo Christians. Even though the marital institution remains a universal social institution in every culture and tradition, the major goal of the institution remains contestable across traditions. Virtually all the Christian denominations views marriage as a sacrament or sacred bond/ covenant, with greater emphasis on the procreation and companionship role of the institution; “He created them male and female, blessed them and said, have many children and ... it is not good for a man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him” (Gen. 1:27ff; Gen. 2:18ff). While recognizing childlessness as capable of distorting this goal of the marital union, the Church tries to dislodge in her adherents the notion that procreation remains the ultimate aim of the union. As a remedial measures to childless marriages, while the Main- line Churches admonishes Christian couples who cannot cope with their childless status to go in for legal adoption, the Pentecostals and Evangelicals places more emphases on prayers and deliverance from the spirit of barrenness. Unfortunately, experience has shown that both approaches from the Church are not sustainable among the Igbo. There has been strong reservation towards child-adoption among average Igbo Christian. Instead of adopting as a solution to childless marriage, the Igbo would opt for traditional measures of having a biological child even with serious cost to the professed Christian faith.

While previous studies observed the challenges faced by child- adoption in Africa, in Nigeria and in Igboland and the cost on affected couples respectively, none have gone farther into investigating the fundamental reasons that informed such attitudes of reservations, reluctance and resistance towards child-adoption in family preservation among the Igbos (including the Christian population). It is this lacuna that the present study sets out to unveil.

2. MARRIAGE AND PRO-CREATION IN IGBO WORLDVIEW

In the African and Igbo worldview the procreation role remains not only the central but the overriding aim of marriage. Children are seen by Igbo people as a big blessing from the gods. The primary function of marriage for them is for procreation and not really companionship. Therefore, at the heart of every marriage union among the Igbo people of Nigeria is the desire to have one's children, preferably male ones who will perpetuate for generations. Hence, no stone is left unturned to make sure that this aim is achieved in marriage.[1] The value placed on Children can be seen in popular Igbo names, such as; Nwakaego (child is greater than

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money), Akuakanwa (wealth is not worthier than a child), or Nwabugwu (child is the greatest honor). Also, the priority on procreation by Igbo people can be seen clearly in the *Ikpalu Chukwu Ugbo* (shaking sacrificial boat for God), which is often offered for the success of an impending marriage by the father of the bride on the advice of the Divine. The sacrificial prayer goes like this: God, who created man, behold this fowl. God who created man behold Ugwuaku (the prospective bride), my child, protect her for me. Offspring is the main thing in the world. God, who acts according to his designs, gives her children. [2]

In Anambra areas, the *ofu* (prayer) takes this pattern; “we want you *ofu ofu* (one by one); 7 boys and 4 daughters to make Eke, Oye, Afor, Nkwo (the four Igbo market days) or *afia n' ano, umu n'ano*, but *ofu ofu* (4 markets, 4 children, but one by one)”. In Mbaise areas, the emphasis on the number of children is eleven. In some other traditions, more emphasis is placed on male children. For example, in Umuofia, as can be seen during the *Uri* marriage rites of Obierika’s daughter Akueke in *Things Fall Apart*, the eldest member of the family prays that their daughter bears 9 sons for her husband.[3] In many parts of Igbo land, women who successfully deliver ten children are rewarded with a special celebration and rites to honour their hips.[4]

Thus, having one's child is a source of respect to the couples in Igbo society. It enhances the social status of such couples. Generally, in Igbo land a woman's status is measured in terms of her ability to procreate and this is the reason why a childless woman can go to any length to get a child, since having a child gives her 90% rights to stay in her husband's house. No woman in Igbo land will like to be called a barren woman. In a situation where she fails to leave up to this task, she is often been cajoled and subjected to different forms of punishment in society. For instance, such a woman in most cases is denied a share of her husband's assets. In some other severe instances, to demonstrate disappointment and contempt for childless women at death, the corpse or remains of the childless woman is often mutilated by slitting her abdomen across before her burial, as an indication that she has failed to fulfil her function in life; her name is therefore blotted out forever.[5] Though with education and civilization, such inhuman treatments are greatly challenged today by civil rights groups, yet it is still in practice in some remote cultures.

The reason behind this utmost regard for children among Igbo people is not far-fetched. It is a general belief among the traditional Igbo and Africans that all those who died namelessly cannot attain the status of ancestor hood. To qualify as an ancestor, one has to marry and have children and live a mature, noble, holy, and exemplary stainless life of a very high moral tone. [6] As such, for Igbo, just like in many other African societies, childlessness is generally perceived as a great threat and a curse on the family and the society at large, barrenness and infertility are considered harsh misfortunes and as a punishment from the spirit, which entails extinction of a lineage. Life is highly valued over and above other things in Igbo society, and its preservation and continuity could only be maintained through offspring. This is why the death of one who has no offspring is considered the end of the continuity of life, the discontinuance of the family tree, and the quenching of the flame of life of the pedigree. [7]

Among the Igbo people of South East Nigeria, the problem of infertility and childlessness is endemic and as Africans, the culture of the people provides that polygamy that enhances consanguinity must guide any remedial action poised towards solving childlessness or the lack of a particular gender of the child. [8] It must be resisted by marrying a second wife, allowing the woman (wife) to cohabit with another man.[9] Unfortunately, while almost all the methods employed by the Igbo to make sure that no man died childless are condemned by the Church, child-adoption as a remedy to childlessness as admonished by the Church has not gained enough ground in Igbo land. This is clear in the reservation often exhibited by Igbo Christians towards child- adoption in family preservation.

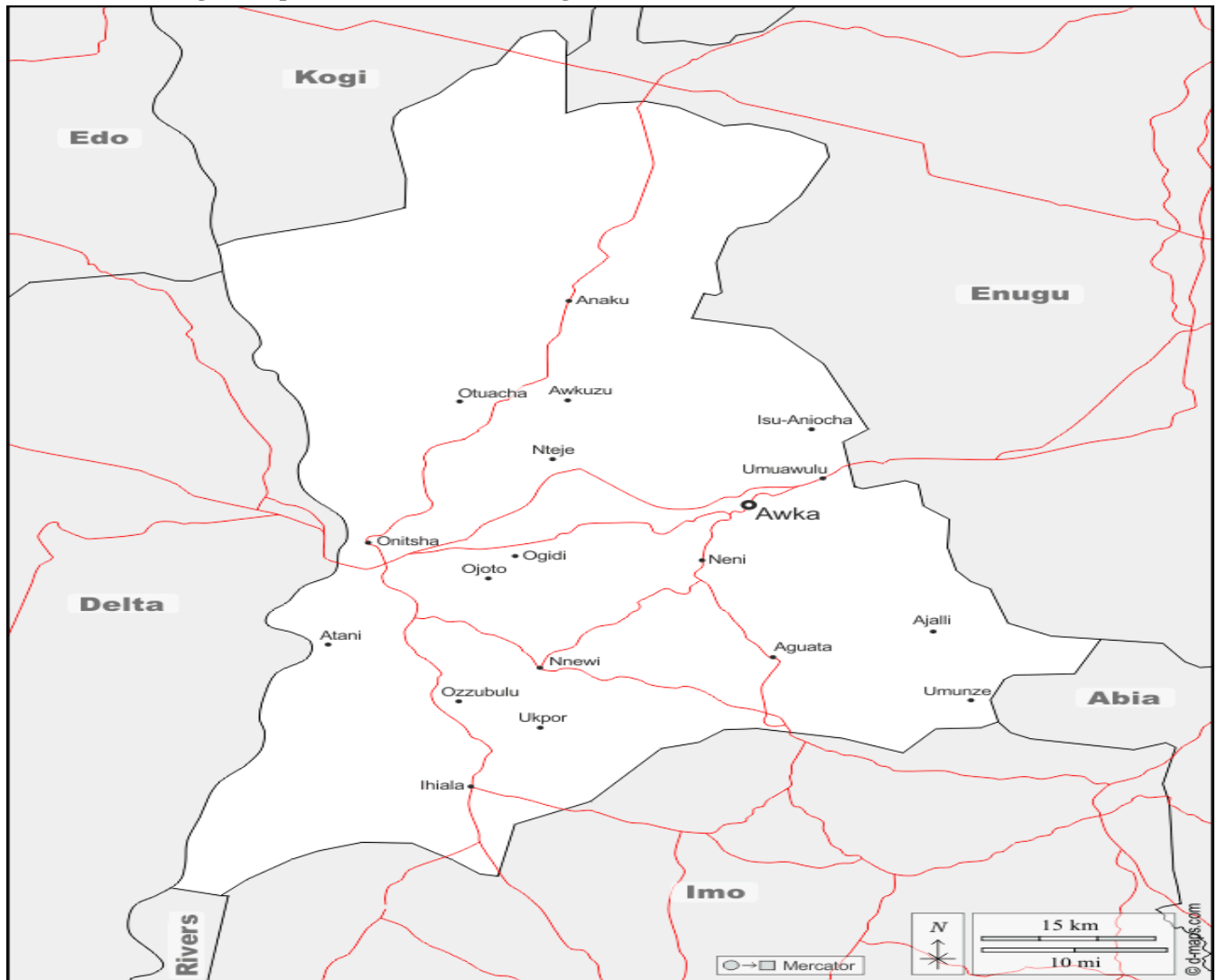
3. METHODS

Study Area

Anambra is a state in Southeastern Nigeria. The state shares boundaries with Delta State to the west, Imo State to the south, Enugu State to the east and Kogi State to the north. According to the 2006 population figures, Anambra state had a population of 4,177,828 (Male:2,117,984; Female: 2,059,844), with a 2022 population projection of 5,953,500, and it covers an area of approximately 4,844Km² and a population density of 1,264/ Km² with annual population change (2006 to 2022) of 2.2%. [10] The Indigenous ethnic group in Anambra state is the Igbo (98% of the population) and a small population of Igala (2% of the population) live in the western part of the state.[11] Politically, the state is made up of twenty-one (21) Local Government Areas (LGAs), thirty (30) States Constituencies, and eleven (11) Federal Constituencies, three (3) Senatorial Districts. The three sample towns of Awka, Onitsha, and Ihiala fall within the main cities of the state, with Awka as the State capital.

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Fig. 1. Map of Anambra State showing the boundaries, main cities, roads, and names



Source: 2007-2023 <https://d-maps.com>

Method of Data Collection

Data for the study were obtained through key informant interviews (KIIs), informal discussions, questionnaire surveys, and field observation. The KIIs comprises of thirteen participants; 7 males and 6 females. Open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires were administered to the management of orphanage homes, Child welfare Centres, Orphan and Vulnerable (OVC unit) of the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Orientation (MWASO), Non- governmental Organizations (NGOs), and stakeholders. The consent of the participants were fully sought and granted. The survey sampling was carried in Awka, Onitsha and Ihiala respectively. Data collection for the study was guided by three research questions; (1)What are the reasons for Child - adoption in Igbo Land?(2) How can you describe the attitudes of Igbo Christians towards child adoption? and, (3) What are the consequences of child- adoption in family preservation in Igbo land?

Table 1. Showing the socio-demographic information of participants at the KII

S/N	Name of Participant	Sex	Age	Educational Qualification	Denomination	Location/ Place of Interview
1	Paulinus	M	57	M.Ed	Anglican	Umuokpu, Awka
2	Syvester	M	46	HND	Methodist	Enugu
3	Nteke	M	43	BSC	Adventist	Enugu
4	Tobias	M	50	HND	Anglican	Nise, Awka South
5	Chioma	F	45	BSC	Catholic	Onitsha
6	Neola	F	51	OND	Baptist	Ihiala
7	Salomi	F	48	OND	Later day Saint	Ihiala
8	Amara	F	52	BSC	Redemption	Onitsha
9	Paul	M	47	MSC	Catholic	Awka

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10	Jecinta	F	55	HND	Catholic	Awka
11	Paschaline	F	53	BSC	Anglican	Awka
12	Frednard	M	58	BSC	Catholic(Night)	Awka
13	Christopher	M	55	BSC	Catholic	Awka

Note: Names used in the table are pseudonyms

Method of Data Analysis

At the end of the data collection process, all the codes and their corresponding data were entered into the collection sheet according to the three towns within the study area. The items in the questionnaire were scored using the four-point- Likert scales of 4, 3, 2, and 1 for strongly agreed (SA), agreed (A), disagreed (D), and strongly disagreed (SD) respectively. These were further converted to quantitative data using weighted mean. This enabled further analysis of the generated data. The methods used to analyze the data obtained from the field are descriptive analytical statistics and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as simple percentages, standard deviations and mean were used. Qualitative responses were converted to quantitative data using coding for the four-point- Likert question items. Weight (code) was attached to each answer, such as SA (4), A (3), D (2), and SD (1). This was used for item-by-item analysis. Weighted mean was used to determine the average of responses by the respondents. A weighted mean of 2.5 and above is accepted (as the majority position on the item on the questionnaire) for the study bearing the decision tag (A- for agree), while a mean below 2.5 is rejected for the study with the decision tag (D- for disagree).

Sampling Frame and Techniques

This study adopted a sample survey. This is because owing to the population of the state and its geographical spread, it is not economically feasible to study the entire state. On this premise, survey sampling which involves the selection of some respondents for a study in such a way that they represent the larger population (the whole) from which they were selected becomes the most suitable method for the study. Of the different types of sampling methods, the study adopted simple random and purposive sampling techniques in determining the sample areas and size. A total of two hundred and sixty (260) structured questionnaires were distributed at the ratio of one hundred (100) copies each in Onitsha and Awka and sixty (60) copies in Ihiala. Out of these numbers, one hundred and ninety-six (196) copies were retrieved and used for data analysis.

Table 2. Showing the Socio-demographic information of Participants at the Survey Sampling

Gender			Marital Status			Educational Qualification		
Male	113	58%	Married	118	60.0%	OND	78	40.0%
Female	83	42%	Single	49	25.0%	BSC	61	31.0%
			Separated	29	15.0%	PG Degrees	25	13.0%
						Others	32	16.0%
Total	196	100.00		196	100.00		196	100.00

4. RESULTS

Table 3. Showing reasons for child- adoption in Igbo land

S/n	Items	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Decision
1	Childlessness is the major reason for child- adoption	77 (39%)	60 (31%)	31 (16%)	28 (14%)	3.0	A
2	Infertility is another reason people adopt in Igbo land	78 (40%)	57 (29%)	33 (17%)	28 (14%)	3.0	A
3	Absence of a male child can lead to child- adoption	61 (31%)	67 (34%)	37 (19%)	31 (16%)	2.8	A
4	Child trafficking and rituals are other reasons people adopts	62 (32%)	64 (33%)	38 (19%)	32 (16%)	2.8	A

The results in Table 3 above show that the respondents agree that childlessness, infertility, and absence of a male child are the major reasons people adopt in Igbo land with a weighted mean of 3.0, 3.0, and 2.8 respectively, and others adopt for the reasons of child-trafficking and rituals with a mean of 2.8.

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Table 4. Showing the attitudes of Igbo Christians toward child –adoption

S/n	Items	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Decision
1	Quite a number of Igbo Christian couples would prefer to marry a second wife to adoption in the face of childlessness	32 (16%)	89 (45%)	56 (29%)	19 (10%)	2.7	A
2	Igbo Christian couples adopt as a last resort	69(35%)	56(29%)	37 (19%)	34 (17%)	2.8	A
3	Some Igbo Christian couples adopt secretly because of stigmatization	59 (30%)	66 (34%)	18 (19%)	33 (17%)	2.8	A

The result in Table 4 showcased three dominant attitudes often exhibited by Igbo Christians toward child -adoption. The results indicate that quite many Igbo Christian couples would prefer to marry a second wife to adoption in the face of childlessness with a weighted mean of 2.7. When they eventually subscribe to adoption, it was seen as a last resort after they might have exhausted other medical measures of having a biological child with a weighted mean of 2.8 and even at that, the adoption is often carried out secretly due to stigmatization with a weighted mean of 2.8.

Table 5. Showing the consequences of child adoption in Igbo land

S/n	Items	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Decision
1	Adoption to create a family is not indigenous in Igbo land	84 (43%)	46 (23%)	29 (15%)	37 (19%)	2.9	A
2	Adopted children are less well-adjusted, more prone to medical challenges, and predisposed to drug and alcohol problems	34 (17%)	41 (21%)	69 (35%)	52 (27%)	2.3	D
3	Adopted children are not stigmatized in Igbo land	41 (21%)	35 (18%)	56 (28%)	64 (33%)	2.3	D
4	An adopted child enjoys the same rights and opportunities as the biological child in Igbo land	35 (18%)	56 (28%)	59 (30%)	48 (24%)	2.4	D
5	Adopted children hold sensitive positions in Igbo land, such as; Eze, Prince, Igwe, Obi, heads of clan, etc	39 (20%)	40 (20%)	53 (27%)	64 (33%)	2.3	D
6	Adoption bridges the Igbo ancestral lineage	45 (23%)	52 (27%)	61 (31%)	38 (19%)	2.5	A

In Table 5, six commonly held positions on the consequences of child-adoption among Igbo people were tested. The respondents agree with items number 1 and 6 with a weighted mean of 2.9 and 2.5 but disagree with items number 2, 3, 4, and 5 with a weighted mean of 2.3, 2.3, 2.4, and 2.3 respectively.

5. DISCUSSION

The results of the sample as presented in Table 5 point to the fact that the reservation toward child- adoption in family preservation among Igbo Christians is tied to the perceived negative consequences of adoption by an average Igbo. A critical appraisal of the six items in the table indicates three major outstanding consequences of child -adoption as upheld by Igbo people and in Igbo society. These include claims to the non-indigenous or foreign nature of the practice, the bridge of the ancestral lineage, and finally, the social stigma associated with child-adoption. The discussion shall be anchored on these three dimensions.

1. Non-indigenous / foreign nature of child-adoption

The result in Table 5 reveals that the practice of adoption, especially as a solution to childless marriages is an entirely new practice among Igbo people. Before the colonial era, child adoption, as meant to understand, has never been part of Igbo culture. As such, adopting an unknown child in Igbo land is generally not acceptable. It is seen as foreign practice forced on the people. Child-adoption, according to Eke (2018) is seen by the Igbo as a Western scheme that is deficient by encouraging the introduction of strange blood in the family and kindred.[12] Nevertheless, Tobias believes that there is a practice in Igbo land very close to the modern concept of adoption. According to him, there used to be a market known as Afo Osukwu in Owelle Nta, Isiala-Ngwa local government area where human beings are sold. Wealthy men in Igbo land go there to buy human beings. Strong ones are kept in the house as domestic slaves (*ohu*) while the weak ones are used for rituals and burials of reputable persons in the. He further observes that with the coming of Christianity, human beings are no longer used for rituals, instead animals are used today. The major fact remains that adopting to create a family or to preserve a family from extinction is not indigenous to Igbo people. The concept that seems to be closer to adoption found in the traditional Igbo society is the concept of *ohu* (cult or domestic slaves). In

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traditional Igbo society, even though masters seem to be humane to the *ohu* that is not to say that he can take the position of a biological child. Adoption, according to Amara became more rampant in the 1980s. Because of the patrilineal nature of the Igbo family, the remedy to childlessness, as conceived by the Igbo, must enhance consanguinity (blood relationship). This explains the reasons for the preference of the traditionally approved remedies to childlessness than child-adoption by the Igbo. These remedies include marrying a second wife, allowing a woman to cohabit with another man, encouraging marriage between fellow women (matrifocal), and adopting a female child of the family to procreate for her father (mostly done in a situation of absence of a male child). Thus, the non-indigenous nature of child-adoption remains a strong barrier to the acceptability of the practice in Igbo land and of course, as a strong factor beneath the reservations expressed among Igbo Christians towards child-adoption in family preservation.

2. Child-adoption bridges the Igbo ancestral lineage

The result of the sample as seen in item number 6 of table 5 also indicates that one of the strongest reasons why the Igbo people (Christians and non Christians) withdraws from child-adoption is the popular notion by the Igbos that the practice bridges a tie to a common ancestor. Child-adoption, according to Igbo worldview, entails the introduction into the family and community of foreign blood, which removes a child from her own family and removes all the ancestors from a child. A thorough review of the Igbo worldview indicates that Igbo have a strong reverence for their ancestral link. The reason is quite understandable. The Igbo community as meant to understand consists of both visible and invisible beings. A community for the Igbo denotes first and foremost an ontological, moral, religious, and effective quality of human relations. It is ontological in so far as all the members of the community are believed to have descended from a common ancestor.[5] Outside the belief that the ancestors bring blessings and serve as a watchdog over their families, Igbo revered their ancestors much because of the belief in *Ino-Uwa* (Reincarnation).[13] In Awka area of Anambra state, an average Awka man, according to Christopher, does have a special regard for any of his children believed to have been endowed with the personality traits of the departed members of his family. This is why names like *Nnanna* (my father's father), *Nnenne* (my mother's mother), and *Nnenna* (my mother's father) were household names in Igbo land. Interestingly, in the Igbo worldview it is believed that this coming back to life of the departed in the form of *Ino-Uwa* can only occur in the biological offspring of the immediate family or clan. This provides another strong reason for the unacceptability of child-adoption in Igbo land and why adopted children are not seen as real sons or daughters of the family and community in Igbo land.

3. Social stigmatization associated with child-adoption

Another strong reason behind the reservations expressed among Igbo Christians towards child-adoption in family preservation can be seen in items 2, 3, 4, and 5 of Table 5 above. The results indicate that adopted children do not enjoy equal rights and opportunities when compared to biological children in Igbo society. The findings align with previous research studies which observe social stigma as the major reason why childless couples in Igbo land were discouraged from adopting. Adopted children are greatly stigmatized in Igbo society. The stigmatization could come in various forms; which include; discrimination, denial of inheritance, and the right to occupy traditional leadership positions in society.[14] In Onitsha native law as Chioma observes, anybody adopted or assimilated can never become the *Diokpa* (the head of the family or clan) and if she is a female, she can never become *Isiada* or *Isiokpu* (head of the daughters). It must be the family pedigree. However, there exist in Onitsha a ritual ceremony that admits the adopted or assimilated into the community called *Inyusa nwamiri n'isi* (literally means urinating over the child). With this ritual ceremony, as Nteke notes, any child adopted or assimilated becomes a member of that family or clan, even though such a person cannot stay in *ukpo* (stool of the head of the clan). A similar experience is witnessed in Awka. Adopted children are not allowed to take the *Ozo* title (The highest title) in Awka. This is because of the shared notion of the two categories of indigenes; *Nwa-amuru n'ulo* (child born at home or biological child) and *Nwa-amuru n'ezi* (child born outside the home or adopted child). *Ozo* title observes Paul is reserved solely for the former category (the biological male child) of the clan. As Ferdinand rightly observes, though the adopted could be said to be regarded in Awka, they are not truly regarded by their immediate families or clans as true blood members of the family or clan. In situations of serious family matters, they are not allowed to join in the deliberations and no matter how highly placed, wealthy, and educated the adopted may prove to be, their rights and privileges are limited as compared to the biological children in Awka. They are, observe Jacinta often reminded of their historical background whenever they prove stubborn. Such derogatory words such as *ekwe rakaria onu agwa ya ifve eji tuoya* (that is, if one makes much noise, the historical background will be unveiled to him), or *ogbozu n' ekwu, idina ana ekwu* (meaning that the son of the soil cannot be talking and a stranger talks at the same time) are used against the adopted children in Awka and in most Igbo land.

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6. CONCLUSION

This study has successfully unveiled the major factors that inform the expressed reservations towards child- adoption by Igbo Christians. As the findings reveal, the reason behind the reservations towards child- adoption is associated with the manifestations of endurance of conviction in both African traditional religion and worldview. The non-indigenous nature of child- adoption and the preference for traditional remedies to childlessness, which enhances consanguinity (blood relationship) of the Igbo family; the belief that child- adoption bridges the Igbo ancestral lineage; and the justified social inequality and discrimination meted out on the adopted in Igbo society, continue to influence the decision on child- adoption by Igbo Christians. These attitudes are not without some implications. As can be seen in item 3 of Table 4, most people adopt secretly in Igbo land simply because of the social stigma that is associated with child-adoption. Existing findings have it that Igbo women fake pregnancy when planning to adopt a baby, which might result in illegal adoption practices, such as the purchase of babies from baby factories. The reason for this fraudulent practice is simply to create the impression that the woman in question is not barren and as such capable of bearing a child. The second reason is to secure the new baby's cultural acceptability, and remove from the child the stigma associated with adopted children. Unfortunately, the social inequality faced by the adopted in Igbo community is generally not regarded as immoral in so far as the Igbo sense of justice remains community oriented. Igbo community as noted earlier placed utmost consideration on the ontological tie to a common ancestor. It is ontological in so far as all the members of the community are believed to have descended from common ancestors. So by implication, to be an authentic member of Igbo society and to have full inheritance rights, one must have a tie to a common ancestor as with the rest members of the family. This explains the fate of adopted children and adoptive parents in Igbo land. It must be noted that findings as presented above remains the result from the survey carried out in Anambra state, even though there may be little experiences from other parts of Igbo land.

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