



Perception of Foster Care As An Alternative To Institutionalization of Orphans And Vulnerable Children (OVC) By Residents of Oredo Local Government Area, Edo State of Nigeria

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Abstract. This study focused on the perception of foster care, as an alternative to orphanages and institutionalization of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) by residents of Oredo Local Government Area, Edo State. The objectives of the study were to examine the causal factors of the phenomenon of OVC in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State; interrogate the perception of OVC by residents of the study area; explore the determinants of the perceptions of OVC by the residents of Oredo Local Government area; examine the knowledge and perceptions of foster care as an alternative to orphanage and other forms of institutionalization of OVC in the study area. The study adopted mixed methods (quantitative- survey and qualitative – interview). The population was 30,368 and the sample size was 1250. The simple percentage was used to determine the various level of respondents. The study established that out of 1250 research participants in foster care system within the study area, 22.3% agreed foster care exits as against 77.7% of the respondents who disagreed with the term. On welfare regarding homeless children, the analysis shows that 103 respondents representing 8.2% believe that they have been approached by social workers as juxtaposed by 1147 respondents representing 91.8% who believe that they have never been approached by social workers. The study recommended that Community members should aim to raise awareness of the various problems faced by orphans and the vulnerable children in the society.

Keywords: Perception, Foster Care, Institutionalization, Orphans, Vulnerable Children (OVC)

1. Introduction

On daily basis all societies of the world some children were being removed from their folks sometimes for a period of time, but often this may persist enduringly. A lot of circumstances responsible for these ugly incidences amongst other factors like abuse, neglect, death of parents, poverty, harsh economic situation of their situation, HIV/AIDS or other health problems, emotional or behavioural, difficulties and migration amongst others (UNICEF, 2015). On account of the ugly separation of children from their parents, there are more than 183 million children living as orphans and vulnerable (OVC) worldwide and significant numbers of these million children are in institutional care which are all over in Sub-Saharan African countries Nigeria inclusive. The number of children in these homes or 'outright homelessness' are outrageous in Sub-Saharan Africa because of the wide spread of poverty, bad economy and perennial ethno-religious crises, insurgency and other communal conflicts and disasters (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, FMWASD, 2009; Community-Based Support For Orphans and Vulnerable Children, 2009).

Nigeria is noted for having highest number of Orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) in the world (FMWASD), Moreover, about a quarter (17.5 million) of Nigerian children are either orphaned or vulnerable on account of unmet needs of basic necessities of life like food, shelter, education emotional attachment, protection or care (Haba, 2006; UNICEF, 2006). While homeless or institutional centres children passed through soaring rates of short and prolong health problems. This unabated burden and trauma of homelessness poses serious danger on their psychic,

personality evolution, self-esteem including their desires to learn and become a successful adult member of their community (Elliot and Ruiz, 2014); Eliot, 2014; Bassul et al 2013).

Williamson and Greenberg (2010) posited that the causal factors like AIDS together with alternative diseases, armed conflicts, unaffordable situations beyond one's control, forced rearrangement on account of insurgency and extreme poverty are accountable for millions of children being orphaned, removed or on the verge of fairly break-down. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child emphasizes why family is important in the life of a child and emphasizes the active responsibility of governments to protect children from wandering about and vicissitudes of the modern society and encourage family caring and reunifications so as to contribute the right substitute focus for children whom their parents are no longer responsible for (UNICEF, 2015). In spite of the fact that it is endorsed in Nigeria for the extended family and members that belong to the community to care for OVC, the capacity, direness and resources of these persons/families have been over extended and stretched to the limit by the increasing number of vulnerable children and the complexity of their needs. But the perception of OVC by Nigerians may be accountable for the aversion towards taking in an orphan into the family thereby reducing the opportunities of minimising the number of OVC in Nigeria.

In the last few years, scholars, researchers, Social Workers and other professionals in the legal, medical and social sciences have been involved in serious critical and sustained discuss on the advantages and disadvantages of the classification of children and adolescents in the acceptance of the problems of the families, the deficits of the child, monetary and psychological problems or outright absence or loss of both parents.

Orphan and Vulnerable is conceptualized as a child that has lost both parents. Globally, 153 million children lost their mother or father or both or have been abandoned by their parents, (USA Fifth Annual Reports to Congress, 2010). Some variables responsible for resulting in parents being separated from their children are debt, hardship, inconvenience with regards to getting essential amenities, exploitation, disdain, deficit, conflict, illnesses as well as natural calamities (Pintero, 2006). UNICEF documented that no less than 2.2 million children worldwide live in orphanage homes and this population is thought to be significantly underestimated. High numbers of the children do not

get adequate care and best practice care for the children (Faith Action Initiative, 2014). Current researches in Sub-Saharan Africa show a fast-increasing number in the organizations funded by private persons. Information on orphans and vulnerable children in Nigeria shown that they live in deplorable, and appalling conditions and subjected to exploitation, degradation, abuses and dehumanizing conditions which responsible for their social, psychological and physical problems. Other impacts include acute mal-nutrition, Not having access to health care, lack of access to education, child labour, child trafficking and homelessness amongst others (Orphans and Vulnerable children (OVC) fact sheet, 2007: UNICEF, 2006).

The problems faced by the OVC and reducing the antagonistic results of these vulnerable groups is of topmost significant for the government officials both at the national and global level across the world who acknowledge the OVC problem as a matter that comprises of social, economic and fundamental rights dimension (Nyangara, Thurman, Hutchison and Obiero, 2009). According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), there are many fundamental rights every child should have access to. These children have a right to protection and care in a compact family, and the government has an obligation to provide their needs. Some consequences of having these children being catered for in institutions are less than adequate healthcare, not adequately developed physically are more prone to suffer from poor health, physical underdevelopment and mental degeneration, delay in development, brain disorders hence such children show evidence of diminished intelligence, emotional and social dispositions in comparison with children who grew up in an ideal family setting. In the long term, institutionalized children grow up to have mental health disorders, socially isolated and economically unproductive (Brown, 2009; McCall, 2013).

The problem that is common with Nigeria is that not many believe that OVC deserve a better life and the government is expected as a matter of urgency to resolve these problems via policy formulation to dis-institutionalise children in orphanages and centres so that such children via foster care can be raised under the guidance of a stable family in Nigeria society. A lot of studies have been carried out on orphanages and care centers but not much have been written on foster care as alternative care for OVC specifically in Edo State. This study therefore examined the perception of foster care as alternative to orphanages and other forms of institutionalization of OVC in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

- To examine the causal factors of the phenomenon of OVC in Oredo Local government Area of Edo State
- To interrogate the perception of OVC by residents of the study area
- To explore the determinants of the perceptions of OVC by the residents of Oredo Local Government Area
- To examine the perceptions of foster care as alternative to orphanage and other forms of institutionalization of OVC in the study area.

1.2 Research Questions

- What are the causal factors of the phenomenon of Orphans and vulnerable children in Oredo Local Government area of Edo State?
- How are the OVC perceived by the residents of study area.
- What are the determinants of the perceptions of OVC by the residents of study area?
- What is the perception of foster care as alternative to orphanages and institutionalization of OVC in Oredo Local Government Area, Edo State?

1.3 Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design. Population of this study was the entire adult residents in the selected wards of Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State. Oredo Local Government is made up of 12 wards. The sample size of this study was derived using the Taro Yamani formula, the sample size from the total population of the study area is 30368 while the sample size = 1250 calculated from the formula. The selected wards from the total wards of the Oredo local government Areas were Ogbe, Ogba, Ogida, Etete and New Benin wards. In addition to the 50 participants from each selected 5 streets, totaling 250, from each ward and the grand total of 1250 participants. The research instruments (questionnaire and interview guide) were authenticated by my supervisor for validity and reliability. The qualitative and quantitative approaches were utilized in the data collection for this study. The structured questionnaire and the interview guide that administered to selected participants as earlier stated. The quantitate data collected with the use of the questionnaire while the qualitative data were collected with the use of in-depth interview guide. This study utilized two (2) research instruments namely, the structured questionnaire and the semi structures interview guide. The responses from the questionnaire administered were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The descriptive method describes the demographic traits, of respondents using frequency and percentage. The in-depth interviews were first screened, transcribed and thereafter analyzed using the thematic content analysis.

2. Results

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Age	18-25	159	12.7
	26-33	271	21.7
	34-41	256	20.5
	42-49	198	15.8
	50-57	121	9.7
	58-65	118	9.4
	66 and above	127	10.2
	Total	1250	100
Occupational Status	Formal employment	419	33.5
	Self employed	595	47.6
	Unemployed	236	18.9
	Total	1250	100
Marital status	Single	296	23.7
	Married	429	34.3
	Separated	116	9.3
	Widowed	93	7.4
	Divorced	121	9.7
	Never married	79	6.3
	Total	1250	100

Ethnic Group	Igbo	289	23.1
	Yoruba	126	10.1
	Hausa	87	7.0
	Benin	474	37.9
	Others	274	21.9
	Total	1250	100
Sex	Male	457	36.6
	Female	793	63.4
	Total	1250	100
Educational qualifications	WAEC/NECO	479	38.3
	OND/NCE	237	19.0
	HND/BSc	269	21.5
	MSc/PhD	172	13.8
	Others	93	7.4
	Total	1250	100
Religious Affiliations	Christianity	874	69.9
	Islam	221	17.7
	ATR	104	8.3
	Others	51	4.1
	Total	1250	100
Sampled population of selected wards in Oredo	Ogbe	346	27.7
	Ogba	173	13.8
	Ogida	254	20.3
	Etete	156	12.5
	New Benin	321	25.7
	TOTAL		1250

Source: Field Work, 2022

The table revealed that the those that are below 18-25 years of age are 12.7, 26-33 years are 21.7%, 34-41 years are 20.5%, 42-49 years are 15.8%, 50-57 years are 9.7%, 58-65 years are 9.4%. In addition, those who are 66 and above are 10.2%. The above table therefore shows that majority of the research respondents are 34-41 years of age. The occupational status shows that 33.5% of the respondents' states that they are formally employed, 47.6% of the research respondents' states that they were self-employed while 18.9% were unemployed. The marital status revealed that 23.7% of the respondents were single, 34.3% of the respondents were married, 9.3% of the respondents were separated, 7.4% of the respondents were widowed, 9.7% of the respondents were divorced, 6.3% of the respondents were never married. The ethnic group above shows that, 23.1% are Igbo, 10.1% are Yoruba, 7.0% are Hausa, 37.9% are Benin, and 21.9% of the respondents belong to others ethnic groups. The gender above revealed that 36.6% respondents are male, while 63.4% of the respondents are females. Thus, female constituted larger respondents in the study. The educational qualification shows that 38.3% of the respondents had WAEC/NECO, 19.0 % of the respondents had OND/NCE, 21.5% had HND/BSc, 13.8% of the respondents had MSc/PhD and while 7.4% were either without formal education or fell into other categories. The Religion affiliation revealed that out of 1250 respondents, 69.9% stated that they are Christians, 17.7% stated that they are Muslims, 8.3% stated that they practice African traditional religion, while 4.1% stated that they belong to other forms of religious worship. The sample size of the study based on retrieving of the interview schedule shows that 27.7% of the respondents were from Ogbe, 13.8% were from Ogba, 20.3% were from Ogida, 12.5% were from Etete, and 25.7% were from New Benin. This therefore shows that New Benin.

Research Question One: What are the causal factors of Orphans and vulnerable children in Oredo Local Government, Edo State?

Table 2: To examine the causal factors of the phenomenon of OVC in Oredo Local government Area of Edo State

What are the causal factors of Orphans and vulnerable children in Oredo Local Government, Edo State?	Poverty	316	25.3
	Socio-cultural constraints	127	10.2
	Inadequate policies	198	15.8
	High maternal mortality	239	19.1

	Armed conflicts and communal clashes, leading to family dislocation	162	13.0
	Instability in income	208	16.6
Total		1250	100

Source: Field Work, 2022

The table above shows the causal factors that are responsible for orphans and vulnerable children in Oredo local government, Edo State. Out of the 1250 respondents, 136 representing 25.3% stated that poverty is the major causal factor that was responsible for orphans and vulnerable children in Oredo local government, Edo State. 127 respondents representing 10.2% stated that socio-cultural constraint that was responsible for orphans and vulnerable children in Oredo local government, Edo State. Meanwhile, 198 respondents representing 15.8% stated that inadequate policies were the causal factor that was responsible for orphans and vulnerable children in Oredo local government, Edo State. In addition, 239 respondents representing 19.1% stated that high maternal mortality was the causal factor that was responsible for orphans and vulnerable children in Oredo local government, Edo State. 162 respondents representing 13% stated that armed conflicts and communal clashes that result in family dislocation was the causal factor that was responsible for orphans and vulnerable children in Oredo local government, Edo State and 208 respondents representing 16.6% stated that income instability of parents/guardians was the causal factor that is responsible for orphans and vulnerable children in Oredo local government, Edo State. From the foregoing, it can be observed that there were various causal factors that were responsible for orphans and children in Oredo local government, Edo state. The result above corroborates with the study of Ngwu, (2009) who posited that poverty, socio-cultural constraints, inadequate policies, high maternal mortality armed conflicts and communal clashes, leading to family dislocation and instability in income were some of the causal factors of orphans and vulnerable children vulnerability in the society.

Research Question Two: How are the OVC perceived by the residents of study area?

Table 3: To interrogate the perception of OVC by residents of the study area

S/N	Variables	Responses	Numbers	Percentages
	As an adult will you agree to foster an orphan	Yes	521	41.7
		No	729	58.3
		Total	1250	100
	Do you support the idea that foster care is better than orphanages?	Yes	589	47.1
		No	661	52.9
		Total	1250	100
	Have you ever assisted any orphan or street children in the past?	Yes	1148	91.8
		No	102	8.2
		Total	1250	100
		What kind of help did you rendered to them?	Food	379
		Clothing	409	32.7
		Shelter	82	6.6
		Others	278	22.2
		None	102	8.2
Total			1250	100

Source: Field Work, 2022

The table above shows the perception of OVC by residents of the study area. Three research statements were used to elicit response from respondents. The result of the first statement shows that 41.7% stated that as adults they agreed to foster an orphan as against 58.3% who stated that as adults, they will not agree to foster an orphan. Second, another statement was raised to find out if the respondents support the idea that foster care is better than orphanages. The result shows that 41.7% responded positively to the statement as against 52.9% who disagreed that foster care is not better than orphanages. More so, respondents were also asked if they have ever assisted any orphan or street children in the past. Surprisingly, 91.8% stated that they have assisted orphans or street children in the past as against 8.2% who stated that they have never assisted any orphan or street children in the past. Lastly, respondents were asked the kind of help they have rendered to orphans or street children in the past. Out of the 1250 respondents, 30.3% stated that they have assisted by giving orphans or street children food, 32.7% of the respondents stated that they have provided clothing for orphans or street children, 6.6% stated that they have provided shelter for orphans or street children, 22.2% of the respondents stated that they have provided other forms of assistance to orphans or street children in the

past while 8.2% of the respondents stated that they have not provided any form of assistance to orphans or street children in the past. It can therefore be deduced from the result of the analysis in table 4.3 above that there is a positive perception and acceptance of orphans by residence of Oredo Local Government, Edo State.

Research Question Three: What are the determinants of the perceptions of OVC by the residents of study area?

Table 3: To explore the determinants of the perceptions of OVC by the residents of Oredo Local Government Area

Do you agree that being in orphanage or care center like Remand Home is the best option for the child?	Yes	971	77.7
	No	452	36.2
	Total	1250	100
As an adult, do you think or agree that children in orphanages grow up to have psychological problems?	Yes	971	77.7
	No	279	22.3
	Total	1250	100
Do you perceive the process of adoption for foster care in Edo State to be a difficult task or process?	Yes	734	58.7
	No	516	41.3
	Total	1250	100

Source: Field Work, 2022

The table above shows the analysis on the determinant of the perceptions of orphans and vulnerable children by the residents of Oredo local government area, Edo State. Respondents were asked if they agreed that being in the orphanage or care centre like Remand Home is the best option for a child. Out of the 1250 respondents, 36.2% gave a positive response and against the 63.8% of the respondents who gave a negative response to the aforementioned statement. The participants were also asked if children in orphanages grow up to have psychological problems. The result from table 4.4 above shows that 77.7% affirmed that children in orphanages grow up to have psychological problems while 22.3% stated that psychological problems does not manifest in children who grow up in orphanage homes. Responses were also sought to find out if the process of adoption for foster care in Edo State is a difficult task or process. The result from the table shows that 734 respondents representing 58.7% were of the opinion that the adoption process for foster care in Edo State is a difficult task. Meanwhile, 516 respondents representing 41.3% were of the opinion that the adoption process for foster care in Edo State is not a difficult task because they believe that the process is smooth as documents for adoption of a child can easily be processed as far as the foster parent goes through the proper channel.

Research Question Four: What are the perceptions and knowledge of foster care as alternative to orphanages and institutionalization of orphanage and vulnerable children in Oredo Local Government Area, Edo State?

Table 4: To examine the knowledge and perceptions of foster care as alternative to orphanage and other forms of institutionalization of orphanage and vulnerable children in the study area

S/N	Variables	Responses	Numbers	Percentages
	Do you know anything or programme about the foster care system in your area or in Edo State?	Yes	106	8.5
		No	1144	91.5
		Total	1250	100
	Do you know anything about orphans and vulnerable children home in our Society?	Yes	279	22.3
		No	971	77.7
		Total	1250	100
		Yes	103	8.2

Have you ever been approached by welfare/social worker to take in homeless child or an orphan?	No	1147	91.8
Total		1250	100

Source: Field Work, 2022

The above table also shows the knowledge and perceptions of foster care as alternative to orphanage and other forms of institutionalization of orphanage and vulnerable children in the study area. Four research questions were formulated in order to elicit response from respondents. First the respondents were asked if they know anything or programme about the foster care system within their environment in Edo State. The result of the analysis shows that 8.5% of the respondents agreed as against 91.5% of the respondents who stated they do not know anything or programme about foster care system within their community. Second, the analysis on the statement to know if the respondents have any knowledge about orphans and vulnerable children home located within their neighborhood. Out of the 1250 research participants, 22.3% agreed as against 77.7% of the respondents who disagreed. Lastly, the participants were also asked if they have ever been approached by welfare/social worker to take in homeless child or an orphan. The analysis above shows that 103 respondents representing 8.2% were of the opinion that they have been approached by welfare/social worker to take in homeless child or an orphan as juxtaposed by 1147 respondents representing 91.8% who were of the opinion that they have never been approached by welfare/social workers to take care of a homeless child or an orphan. The analysis above therefore shows that there is low perception on foster care as alternative to orphanage and other forms of institutionalization of orphanage and vulnerable children in the study area.

3. Discussion of Findings

The result of the study shows that poverty as well as high maternal mortality rate were the chief causal factors of orphans and vulnerable children in Oredo Local Government, Edo State. This result was in tandem with the study carried out by (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social development, 2006) which posits that root causes for the plight of orphans and vulnerable children include: poverty, socio-cultural constraints, gender inequities, inadequate policies and enabling environment. Immediate causes of orphaning and vulnerability of children in Nigeria include among other things poverty, accidental death, high maternal mortality during child birth, communal conflicts resulting in death of parents in the community.

The study also reveals that there is poor perception in terms of care for orphans and vulnerable children among the residents in the study area as majority of the respondents were receptive to care for the vulnerable children. The study further established that orphanage or care centres are not the best option for a child as there are some problems with parental support which may be seen in the life of a child that is raised in a remand home. The result is in agreement with the report of Horizons (2003), which posits that children nurtured in orphanage and remand homes suffer from social, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being and development. The result also shows that there is poor perception and awareness by residence within the study area on programmes that were put in place to cater for the orphans and vulnerable children. This is corroborated by Olagbuji and Okojie (2015) which posits that the policy for orphans and vulnerable children in Benin City have not been given any form of implementation hence there is very poor perception on orphan and vulnerable children.

4. Conclusion

It is apparent from the discussions in this report that the situation of orphans and vulnerable children is worrisome and the community is concerned about this. Furthermore, the community are convinced that large numbers of children have been affected. This is a serious situation in that it indicates an increasing number of orphans' vulnerability. The study looked at the causal factors of orphan's vulnerability, the problems associated with orphan vulnerability, the perceptions of participants on the issue of orphans and vulnerable children wellbeing within the study area amongst others. The study concludes that community-based homes provide a comparatively safe haven for some OVC compared to previous living arrangements. School psychologists working with OVC should be knowledgeable about factors involved in their enrolling for community-based home living as these would be relevant to the design and implementation of learner support services with them.

5. Recommendations

The following recommendations are therefore made:

- The government and community members should aim to raise awareness of the various problems face by orphans and the vulnerable children in the society.
- Uphold child rights by prohibiting exploitative and harmful labor of orphans and vulnerable children through the community child protection committees.
- Establish that programmes for orphans and vulnerable children integrated into existing services for example, social welfare, agricultural extension and community health services.
- Government should implement supports and also relax some stringent laws and processes in terms of adoption process by individuals who are willing to cater for orphans and vulnerable children within the community as this could provide pathways by which the children could be provided with needed support for resilient health and wellness.

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