

Full Length Research Paper

Knowledge and awareness of the child's rights act among residents of a university town in Enugu State, Nigeria

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The Federal Government of Nigeria, in 2003, adopted the Child's Rights Act. Many state governments have followed suit. This study seeks to find out if residents of Nsukka town in Enugu state are aware of the Child's Rights Acts and also what knowledge they have about the Act. 294 residents of Nsukka town were chosen for the study using systematic and simple random sampling. Findings show that only about 32% of respondents are aware of the existence of Child's Rights Act while 19% have knowledge of the contents of the Act. Also there appears to be a relationship between marital status and knowledge of the contents of the Act; level of education and awareness of the Act. One major implication of the findings is the need for more public enlightenment about the Act since findings indicate that residents of Nsukka town are neither aware of the existence nor the contents of the Act. There is need for policy makers to lay emphasis on educating the people so that the aim of enacting the Act will be realised. Social workers can help in this sensitization because by the nature of their training they are well equipped to do so.

Keywords: Knowledge, awareness, child, rights, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989. The convention affirms children's entitlement to development, protection, participation and non-discrimination. It also acknowledges that the realization of these rights for children can only be accomplished through care and assistance of adults. Nigeria ratified the UN Convention on the Child's Rights in 1991. This implies that thenceforth the country had committed itself to a code of binding obligations towards her children. Among these obligations are the raising of awareness and the involvement of the civil society, including children, in the realization of children's rights. Following the submission of her initial progress report, the Committee on Children's Rights recommended, among other things, that the country should domesticate the Convention in order to facilitate its implementation under Nigerian law (UNICEF, 2007; Jacomy and Stevens, 2005).

The Nigerian Federal Government enacted the Child's Rights Act (CRA) in December 2003. This legislation was

adopted to implement principles enshrined in international instruments, including the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the 1990 African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (CRCW), which Nigeria ratified in 1991 and 2000, respectively. Since the Nigerian Constitution mandates that the legislative jurisdiction on matters affecting children belongs exclusively to states, the federal law was insufficient as a means to extend protection to all Nigerian children and, therefore, needed to be adopted by the states. Today many states in Nigeria have adopted the Child's Rights Act even though some states are yet to adopt the Act.

Olumodeji (2008) is of the view that child welfare matters should be issues of urgent concern in any society. This is because according to him, the total import of the needs of the child is predicated on a holistic treatment modality that will affect education, nutrition, housing, health, and the general well-being of the society. In meeting these basic needs, societies have often tended to regard those of the child as merely secondary.

However, this should not be so because the child is the future of any society. Akwara et al (2010) believe that the rights of the child is being taken for granted in Nigeria. In their study, they examined the dangers posed by taking the rights of children for granted in the society and efforts being made in Nigeria to protect the child for the overall and sustainable development of the society. Based on the outcome of their study, they concluded that not much is being done even though children are the future of any nation. According to Njoku and Oladiji (2009), the challenges facing children in the 21st century are immense and will need to be faced if we are to achieve the goal of the Child's Rights Act.

Scholars have put forward different views as to why children's right are not being protected. In a study Lachman et al (2002) found that one of the challenges facing child protection in Africa is poverty. In other words it will be difficult to protect children's right if there is poverty, because a poor person will use all that is within his/her disposal for survival. One of the instruments for survival that are usually within the disposal of most people is/are their child/children. Therefore Lachman et al (2002) opined that child labour, child prostitution and other child related ills cannot be wished away as long as poverty exist. Sossou and Yogtib (2008) in their study outlined various incidents of child sexual abuse, child trafficking, child marriage, and neglect of disabled children in the African continent and concluded that poverty and traditional cultural practices are the main causes of these phenomena.

Onyango and Lynch (2006) reports that despite various efforts to improve legislation and the policy framework to protect children, the resources needed to make a real difference are inadequate and unpredictable. According to them, there has, for example, been an increase in the number of cases of sexual abuse reported in Kenya, but funds available to prosecute these cases are not available. Funds made available for child welfare during 2005/2006 in Kenya according to them have been primarily directed by donors towards the prevention of human trafficking and alleviation of poverty. Indeed Onyango and Lynch (2006) believe that children issues are affected on a yearly basis as a result of availability of funds which is equally dependent on the interests of donors.

In Nigeria today, although 26 states have ratified, adopted or adapted the Act but the implementation has continued to be a problem. Scholars believe that one of the problems why it is difficult to implement the Act is because people are not aware of the Act nor do they have knowledge of the basic provisions of the Act. The Director General of the Legal Aid Council in Nigeria, Mrs. Joy Bob-Manuel is of the view that the Child's Rights Act has not received sufficient awareness and acceptance since its domestication because of a general but undue apathy as a result of lack of understanding and full appreciation. According to her, the child as a vulnerable

member of the society falls into special needs group and must not be left without proper care and it is this objective that the CRA sets out to achieve (Bamgboye, 2011).

According, to the Society for Children and Youth of British Columbia Canada (2011), knowledge of the UN Conventions on the Rights of the child and children's rights generally is lacking at all levels in most society. They therefore believe that there is need for a public awareness campaign to increase awareness of the child's rights. According to them, public awareness is the foundation on which understanding and empowerment are built. This is because greater public awareness can lead to: increase political will, implementation and monitoring, increased advocacy, positive proactive response to advocacy by adult members of the society, realization of children's rights and improved well being (Society for Children and Youth of British Columbia Canada, 2011).

Akor (2009) reports that in many parts of the Nigerian society, whether children are on holiday or not, they are subjected to dehumanizing conditions through hawking. Some parents claim that their children hawk one item or another so as to raise money for their school fees not knowing that the Child Rights Act (Law) prohibits such. Similarly according to Akor (2009) it is an offence under the CRA for parents to deny their children education but some children are kept at home and used as helpers instead of being given opportunity to exploit their environment for future relevance. In the states where children are hardly immunized against killer diseases, do the parents know that it is the rights of the children to be immunized? Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provides that children have the right to good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food and clean environment (Akor, 2009). Article 27 of the Child Rights Convention says children have right to a standard of living that is good to meet their physical and mental needs while article 28 provides that children have right to education just as primary education should be free. However we know that this is not so in many parts of the country but people are not saying anything about it probably because they are not aware that payment of school fees by children in government owned secondary school is against the law.

There have been various suggestions as to how to go about achieving the goals of the Child's Rights Act. Education has been seen by scholars as the key to achieving these goals. According to Covell and Rowe (1999) educating people on the rights of the child is important not only for legal reasons but also for its potential in increasing rights-respecting attitudes and behaviours. Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, like all signatories, Nigeria is obligated legally to take measures to increase public awareness of children's rights as described in the Convention. According to Article 42 of the Convention, state parties are to make the principles and provisions of

the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to their citizens. Therefore a key to this means that there is need to make people aware of the CRA through education using the media.

Implementing the Child's Rights Act has not been easy. There has been various reason why this is so. According to Reading et al (2009) each country and region has tensions between children's rights and other competing values, all of which have implications for the wellbeing of children. For example, the African charter on the rights and welfare of the child states in article 31 that "children have a responsibility to work for the cohesion of the family, to respect parents and elders at all times, and to assist them in cases of need", indicating the survival needs of communities living in environmentally harsh conditions with scarce resources. This cultural relativism according to Reading et al (2009) has relevance for attitudes towards children's rights. Some countries might still be trying to understand what it means to value a child as an individual no matter what the sex is; others see aspects of physical discipline, such as shaking, to be acceptable. This may be why Akinwumi, (2009) believes that there are various legal impediments in the practical implementation of the Act since it has been legislated in various states of the country as some of the provision do not agree with some cultural values.. He has therefore called for an indepth analysis of its content and other circumstances that could either facilitate or hinder its implementation both nationally and internationally.

It is yet to be known whether these efforts aimed at protecting the rights of children made by the country at both the international and domestic levels have started to have any impact. The study therefore seeks to find answers to the following questions:

- i. Are residents of Nsukka town aware that there is a document specifically dedicated to protecting the rights of the child?
- ii. Do they have knowledge of the basic provision of the Child's Rights Act?

These and other questions related to the implementation of the Child's Rights Act in the country are yet to be answered. In the light of this, this exploratory study was designed to find out the extent to which Nigerians especially those living in Nsukka town of Enugu State, Nigeria are aware of the Child's Rights Act and also have knowledge of the basic provisions of the Act.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Scope of Study

This study was carried out in Nsukka town of Enugu State, which is located in the southeastern part of Nigeria. The choice of Nsukka town was purposive but informed by a major factor which is: Nsukka is a university that has an amalgam of people from different parts of the country.

According to the 2006 Population Census, Nsukka local government has a population of 309633 consisting of 149241 males and 160392 females (National Population Commission, 2007). A study sample of 294 residents of Nsukka town was drawn. A multistage sampling involving stratified and simple random sampling technique was adopted to successively choose the section/area of Nsukka town, streets, households, and finally, the respondents as applicable. The sampling exercise produced a total of 300 respondents though only 294 returned the questionnaire. Questionnaire was employed as the primary instrument of data collection. The questions were developed based on issues relating to knowledge and awareness raised in the literature. Trained research assistants administered the questionnaires.

Sample

The sample was made up of 134 (46%) males and 160(54%) females. The youngest respondent was 18 years old while the oldest was 75years. The mean age was 36years and Standard Deviation was 12.88. 21% of the respondents were students, 29% traders and 32% were civil servants. Looking at their marital status, 38% were single, 55% were married while 7% were either widowed, divorced or separated. 27% were Catholics while 73% were Protestants. 5% had no formal education, 13% had First School Leaving Certificate, 31% had WAEC certificates, 13% had NCE/OND certificates and 37% had university degrees and above.

Measures

Respondents were required to respond yes or no to two questions that show that they are aware or not aware of the Child's Rights Act. The responses to these two questions were added up and based on that we developed two categories: those that are aware and those that are not aware of the Act. Also ten items in a Likert-scale form were used to measure respondent's knowledge of the contents of Child's Rights Act. The responses of each respondent to all the items were added up and based on that we developed two categories: those that have knowledge and those that do not have knowledge. The index of knowledge was thus built.

RESULTS

Relationship between awareness and knowledge of Child's Rights Act and independent variables.

Table 1 presents the bi-variate relationship between

Table 1. Awareness of Child's Rights Act and some socio-demographic variables

Variables	Awareness of Child's Rights Act				Sig. <i>P</i> ≤
	Aware		Not Aware		
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
Gender					
Male	42	45.2	92	45.8	0.5
Female	51	54.8	109	54.4	12
Age					
Younger respondents	63	67.7	129	64.2	0.3
Older respondents	30	32.3	72	35.8	22
Level of education					
Low level education	35	37.6	111	55.2	0.0
High level education	58	62.4	90	44.8	04*
Marital status					
Single	36	38.7	76	37.8	0.4
Ever married	57	61.3	125	62.2	91
Religious affiliation					
Catholic	24	25.8	56	27.9	0.4
Protestant	69	74.2	145	72.1	13

* Statistically Significant

awareness of Child's Rights Act and a set of explanatory variables. Result from the table shows that respondents are not aware of Child's Rights Act. This is because only 93 (31.6%) respondents are aware of the existence of Child's Rights Act. In other words they do not know that such an act exist. From the Table also it does appear as if respondents level of education have affect ones awareness. This is because respondents with high level of education (NCE/OND and BSc and above) have more awareness (62.4%) than those with low level of education (WAEC and below). This finding was also statistically significant ($p \leq 0.004$). Other variables in the Table like sex of respondents, age, marital status and religious affiliation have no statistically significant relationship with awareness of the Child's Rights Act.

Table 2 presents the bivariate relationship between knowledge of the provisions of the Child's Rights Act and the set of explanatory variables under consideration. The table shows that majority of the respondents (80.6%) do not have knowledge of the provisions of the Child's Rights Act. The Table also reveals that only marital status of the respondents appears to have a relationship with knowledge ($p \leq 0.028$). Other variables in the Table such as sex of respondents, age, level of education and religious affiliation have no statistically significant relationship in the determination of how knowledgeable one can be about the provisions of the Child's Rights Act.

Result of Logistic Regression Analysis

Table 3 is used to predict having knowledge and

awareness from a set of predictor variables (age, sex, marital status, educational status and religious affiliation). According to the distribution in Table 3, in model 1, only one variable (marital status) was statistically significant. The odds ratio of the distribution as presented in the table shows that the respondents you were single were 0.45 times less likely to be have knowledge of the provisions of the Child's Rights Act than those who were married. In model 2, only one variable (educational status) was statistically significant. The odds ratio of the distribution shows that respondents with low educational status were 0.49 times less likely to be aware of the Child's Rights Act. Comparing the data from the two models, none of the other variables were consistent in predicting knowledge and awareness of Child's Rights Act.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Findings from the study reveal that residents of Nsukka town have very limited knowledge and awareness of Child's Rights Act. This is surprising considering that Nsukka is a University town. One would have expected that residents will be an enlightened group. If residents of a university town do not have awareness or knowledge of the Act, then who will? The implication therefore is that there is need for Enugu State government to pass the bill on Child's Rights Act. At present in Nigeria, about 26 states have passed the bill. The adoption of this Act by Enugu states may help to create more awareness which will go a long way in ensuring that children at all levels particularly those at the grassroots level would enjoy their

Table 2. Knowledge of Child's Rights Act and some socio-demographic variables

Variables	Knowledge of Child's Rights Act				Sig. P≤
	Knowledgeable		Not knowledgeable		
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
Gender					
Male	26	45.6	108	45.6	0.555
Female	31	54.4	129	54.4	
Age					
Younger respondents	37	64.9	155	82	0.530
Older respondents	20	35.1	82	34.6	
Level of education					
Low level education	29	50.9	117	49.4	0.477
High level education	28	49.1	120	50.6	
Marital status					
Single	15	26.3	97	40.9	0.028 *
Ever married	42	73.7	140	59.1	
Religious affiliation					
Catholic	13	22.8	67	28.3	0.256
Protestant	44	77.2	170	71.7	

* Statistically Significant

Table 3. Binary Logistic Regression Predicting the Influence of Socio-demographic Factors on Knowledge and Awareness of Child's Rights Act.

Socio-demographic factors	Model 1: Knowledge of Child's Rights Act		Model 2: Awareness of Child's Rights Act	
	Odds Ratio	95% CI for OR	Odds Ratio	95% CI for OR
Age				
Younger Respondents	1.372	0.702-2.684	1.136	0.631-2.044
Older Respondents	RC	RC	RC	RC
Sex				
Male	1.044	0.576-1.894	1.056	0.635-1.756
Female	RC	RC	RC	RC
Marital status				
Single	0.456**	0.227-0.917	0.934	0.532-1.639
Ever Married	RC	RC	RC	RC
Educational status				
Low Education	1.028	0.569-1.856	0.489**	0.294-0.812
High Education	RC	RC	RC	RC
Religious affiliation				
Catholic	0.741	0.372-1.476	0.868	0.492-1.534
Protestant	RC	RC	RC	RC

** Statistically Significant

rights as enshrined in the law. The state government has been promising that the state is coming up with a comprehensive Child Rights Act that will be beneficial to children. This however is yet to happen. In a workshop for journalists which has as its main focus the Child Rights Act, it was observed that the only Southeastern state that is yet to adopt or adapt the Act is Enugu (Akor,

2009). Enugu State's delay in passing the law worried participants at the workshop but the issue that was more worrisome was the neglect of children in the zone in spite of the signing of the Act into law in some states. This then calls for more awareness creation.

Findings from the study also show that more respondents have awareness than knowledge of the Act

in Nsukka. This could be that they have heard about the Act but have not really known the contents of the Act. According to the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development (2000) and Ajayi and Torimiro (2004) apart from delay in passing the bill by states, one of the major constraints why people do not have knowledge of the Act, is lack of appreciation of the rights of children by the civil populace, a problem according to the report that is largely attributable to the country's customary traditions and religious values.

Reading, et al (2009) are of the view that issues bothering on children's rights are not abstract and idealistic aspirations, but are grounded firmly and pragmatically in the basic human needs for life, growth, and development. Therefore more serious information dissemination methods about the Act and its contents need to be adopted by relevant authorities. There may be need for it to be multi faceted so that no one agency or method is adopted for information dissemination. Pais and Bissell (2006) opined that development of effective coordinating mechanisms to promote concerted effort by relevant government bodies is very important. They also emphasised the need for greater coordination across ministries and between levels of government if the knowledge and awareness of Child Rights Act is to be achieved at the grass roots. Akinwumi (2009) in support of the above idea said that the failure to create awareness and implement the Child's Rights Act effectively and to curb the violation of child rights can be traced to the failure of Nigeria to educate her citizens on human rights generally and child rights specifically. According to him, Nigeria's signature of the United Nations Child's Rights Convention, puts an obligation on her to disseminate, display, and incorporate child rights issues in the school curriculum at all levels. We know however that this is not so. Result from the present study shows that there is a relationship between level of education and awareness of the Child's Rights Act and that level of education is a good predictor of whether one will be aware of the Act or not. This then underscores the need for the inclusion of child's rights issues into the school curriculum at various levels.

Information dissemination can be better achieved also if funds are allocated to it. Oyango and Lynch (2006) and Pais and Bissell (2006) believe that despite efforts to improve legislation and the policy framework to protect children, the resources needed to make a real difference are inadequate and unpredictable. Therefore there is need to provide funds so that the goals of the CRA will be realised. In support of the need for better funding, ANPPCAN (2010) stated that in many states of the country where the Child's Rights Act has been adopted, the members of the state Child's Rights implementation committee lack the mobilization and capacity to effectively advocate and facilitate the contents of this law. Therefore adequate funding is important. Information dissemination cost money if it is to be done well using

various media in order to achieve the desired results, which is to reach the whole population.

According to Akinwumi (2009), children rights education is for everybody. Children need to know their rights so that they could be aware of their rights and demand them when those rights are neglected or violated. Parents need to know the rights of their children in order to respect those rights. Law enforcement officers or agencies need to understand child rights in order to stop confusing violations of those rights with domestic affairs. Government agencies need to fully comprehend these rights to enable those agencies to differentiate child rights from child privileges and charity. Legislators also need to know these rights in order to give the rights of Nigerian children appropriate respect and priority. Generally, broad, comprehensive child rights education will enable Nigeria to build a culture of universality of human rights, and it will also provide the atmosphere that Nigeria need to promote, protect and enforce child rights.

Scholars have opined that social workers are one of the key professional that are needed in the area of creating awareness about Child's Rights Act. Infact the International Federation of Social Workers has declared that social work is a human rights profession (Healy, 2008). This then makes social workers important contributors to the success of child rights awareness and implementation. According to Sossou and Yogtiba (2008) social workers by their training are equipped with skills and techniques of mass education of citizen on the issues of the rights of the child. Reynaert et al (2010) in supporting this view said that despite the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, children's rights education can only be achieved through an innovative implementation strategy and social action, both of which only social worker can provide. There is therefore the need to incorporate social workers in the implementation process of the CRA so that the objectives of the Act will be realized.

The study also found that married respondents are more likely to have knowledge of the Child's Rights Act than those who are single. The reason for this could be because married people are more likely to have children and so may be more inclined to gain knowledge about issues that might affect their children.

In conclusion, although this is a small-scale study with severe limitations with regard to generalization of the findings, it is nevertheless useful, as starting point in the discourse about the knowledge and awareness of Child's Rights Act. Although awareness and knowledge of children's rights are increasing around the world but still there is much more rhetoric paid to their value than genuine enforcement especially in developing countries like Nigeria. Therefore a lot still needs to be done so that we do not just pay lip service to the implementation of the Act. Currently this appears to be the case because according to reports there appears to be insignificant difference on the lives of the children in the various states

before and after the passage of the bill as against the highly anticipated gains that motivated the introduction of the Act.

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