

PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF FAMILY INVESTMENTS IN FAMILIES WITH BIOLOGICAL AND ADOPTED CHILDREN IN ANAMBRA STATE

Uju P. Egenti, (Ph.D)

*Department of Educational Foundations,
Anambra State,
University,
Uli.*

Abstract

This study investigated parental perception of family investments in families with biological and those with adopted children. The purpose of the study was to ascertain parental perception of family investments in the two types of families. The study was carried out in Anambra State. One research question and one hypothesis guided the study. The descriptive survey design was adopted in the study. The population of the study comprised 1883952 parents in the area. The sample comprised 352 parents selected through purposive sampling technique. A researcher-developed instrument duly validated by experts was used for data collection. The reliability index of the instrument was 0.83 which was determined using Chronbach Alpha and this was considered adequate for the study. The researcher together with 24 research assistants collected the data. Mean ratings and t-test were used in data collection. It was found that parents of biological and adoptive families differed in their mean ratings on their family adjustment. It was among others recommended that biological and adoptive parents should attend regular counselling and family retreats for improved family investments.

A family is a household consisting of father, mother, sisters and brothers. It basically consists of married parents and their children and in some cases, uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces and nephews. The family as a social unit, is the foundation of the society. According to the National Population Commission of Nigeria (2003) the family is a basic and vital institution in Nigerian society. It provides a sense of security and identity for the child and is the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members particularly children. It is within the family unit that one generally learns to walk, talk, and interact with others. Family members teach each other love, forgiveness, kindness, and sacrifice. Fields (2003) noted that families are often the first and frequently the last source of support for individuals.

Families are considered the hub of wellbeing, and how they function is crucial. Family functioning refers to the family's level of competency related to interaction patterns, values, coping strategies, commitment, and resource mobilization (Silburn, Zubrick, De Maio, Shepherd, Griffin & Mitrou, 2006; Xu, 2009). The way a family functions, in a part, depend on family investments. In other words, family is about how members communicate, relate, and maintain relationships, and how they make decisions and solve problems based on the family's financial resources.

Family investment has been a global concern in recent times. The United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2008) noted that inadequate family investment is detrimental to providing quality of life for families. Igbinedion (2006) found that poor family investment is a plight of many families in South-West Nigeria and this fostered a negative trajectory leading to child prostitution, trafficking and other forms of child abuse. Researchers such as Juffer and van Ijzendoorn (2005) and Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2006) have identified family investment as one of the important variables for family functioning. In this regard, family investment means the extent to which family members provide financial resources, meet the family's nutritional, clothing and health needs, spend time for one another's interest and plan for their future.

Family investments are mostly concerned with family involvement and the provision of resources. Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) described it in terms of provision of financial, time and recreational resources needed for family well-being. Freese, Li, and Wade (2003) also discussed investments as the degree of monetary support, financial aid for continued housing, clothing, education, health, nutrition and other matters, toys and accessories for playtime, and out-door activities in families. According to Hopcroft (2005), family investments range from provision of financial help, giving guidance and support, advising, spending time, and the provision of psychological support.

These variables, are central in overall socio-economic development of families and they have a powerful influence over family members' psychological well being. Poor family investment contributes to negative well-being of family members, while an ideally functioning family can protect any family member from many of the psychological risks that he or she might face.

Adoption is understood as the relinquishment of children by biological mothers and/or fathers and the acceptance of children by non-biological mothers and/or fathers (Adamec & Pierce, 1991). Adoption helps to protect abused, neglected, or abandoned children and/or children whose parents or primary caretakers are unable or unwilling to fulfill their parenting obligations due to illness, emotional problems, drug use, or other difficulties. Adoption, as a parenting option separates the biological from the social,

Parents' Perception Of Family Investments In Families With Biological And Adopted Children In Anambra State Uju P. Egenti, (Ph.D)

nurturing part of parenting, thereby challenging notions of parenting as a process of childbearing and childrearing.

An important issue that arises in considering the family investment is the extent to which it operates in biological and adoptive families. Biological families are those in which members are directly linked by birth (United Nations, 1991). In biological families, the children are the direct offsprings of the parents; hence the children are biologically related to the parents through procreation. Adoptive families on the other hand are those where there are placements (often legal) of children within families that are not related to them, which discontinue the relationship between the children and their biological parents (Patterson, 2009). In adoptive families, the parents possess the child or children through transferred parental rights and responsibilities. The view taken in this study is that biological families are those with their own biological children while adoptive families are those with their non-biological children (excluding care-givers/ house-helpers).

Some governmental reports reflect the idea that adoptive families do not function well because they are regarded as inauthentic or nonstandard. The National Population Commission (2003), for example, explicitly excludes adoptive families from the broad category "traditional nuclear family" (a family in which a child lives with two married biological parents and with only full siblings if siblings are present)" (p.71). Adoptive parents also may receive negative feedback from family and friends who question the authenticity of their roles as parents. Consequently, some adoptive parents may lack a sense of entitlement to their children and have lower levels of self-acceptance as parents, thus affecting the levels of their family functioning.

Studies conducted by Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevant, and McRoy (2003) and Zhang (2006) in foreign countries like Britain, Australia, China and United States of America found that adoptive parents differed in their perceptions of family functioning when compared to their biological counterparts. These studies found that adoptive and biological families did not differ significantly in their functioning levels because of the fact that the majority of respondents in their study perceived the adoptive family as sharing the same rewards and facing the same challenges as the biologically formed family. Because biological children feel that they belong and are accepted in their families, their life styles become laden with pride, lack of guilt, and lack of fearful inhibitions, resulting in a decreased responsiveness to punishment and an increased resistance to parental and societal norms.

Studies have also indicated a low level of family functioning in Anambra State (Nwokolo, 2005; Nwabunwanne, 2010). There are increasing cases of spousal abandonment of their families and many children carry with them the trauma of

maltreatment, sadness, anger, and problems of un-acceptance from their family members (Ezeugwu, C., Obi, U., & Onah, F. 2002). Problems of poor communication, interactions, cohesion and material investments in families have increased the number of children who run away from their homes because they have been neglected and abused, physically and/or sexually. Many families have witnessed or experienced family violence, disunity, conflicts, extreme deprivation, and malnutrition.

How these problems of family functioning apply to both biological and adoptive families needs to be further investigated because there is lack of empirical data in Nigeria due to the fact that no studies appear to have been conducted on family investments among families with adopted children and those with biological children. It is against this background that the present study deemed it crucial to ascertain family investments in families with biological children and those with adopted children in terms of their functioning.

Research Question and Hypothesis

One research question and one hypothesis guided the study.

Research Question: What is the extent of family investments in families with biological and adopted children in Anambra State as perceived by both parents?

Method

The research design adopted in this study was a descriptive survey in order to collect information from families with biological and adopted children in Anambra.

The population for this study comprised 1,883,952 parents with children aged 11 to 18 in Anambra State. The sample consisted of 352 participants (176 biological parents and 176 adoptive parents) selected through purposive sampling technique. Condition for eligibility is that a family has two parents that are alive and the target child (referred to as the adolescent; age = 11-18 years and in secondary school). However, only one of the parents (either the father or mother) was expected to respond to the questionnaire.

Study eligibility was limited to families living with a father, mother, and an adopted child aged between 11 and 18. One hundred and seventy-six such families were located. These families have adopted children reading across 88 secondary schools in Anambra State. Hence, these 88 schools were chosen for the study. One hundred and seventy-six eligible biological families were randomly selected from the same 88 secondary schools where adopted children had been identified and selected. This was done to avoid raising suspicions from the adopted children.

Parents' Perception Of Family Investments In Families With Biological And Adopted Children In Anambra State Uju P. Egenti, (Ph.D)

A researcher-developed questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. One of the questionnaires is for parents and is titled "Family Functioning Assessment Scale- Parents (FFAS -P). The instrument is structured on a 5-point response scale of Very High Extent, High Extent, Moderate extent, Low Extent, and Very Low Extent. Five lecturers in the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, validated the instrument. The Cronbach alpha method was used to test for reliability of the instruments in terms of internal consistency. The Cronbach alpha for this FFAS-P was 0.83 indicating high internal consistency of the instrument. The researcher was assisted by twelve social welfare officers and twelve school counsellors to collect data during Parents-Teachers' Association meeting in the selected schools on different dates. To answer the research question, mean ratings were used in analyzing responses to the questionnaire items while t-test was used to test at 0.05 significant level.

Results

Table 1: Mean Ratings of Biological and Adopted Children on the Extent of their Family Adjustment

S/N	Items	Biological Parents N = 176		Adoptive Parents N = 176	
		X	RMKS	X	RMKS
1	We provide relevant school materials for our child	4.21	HE	4.38	HE
2	We attend our child's school during events such as inter-house sports, fundraising, PTA meeting etc	4.04	HE	4.48	HE
3	We try to satisfy all our family daily demands than saving money for the future	3.56	HE	3.53	HE
4	We instantly provide our child with money on request	3.51	HE	3.58	HE
5	We ensure that family members eat balanced meals	3.52	HE	3.93	HE
6	We ensure that our child has adequate clothing	3.38	HE	4.11	HE
7	We monitor our child's school attendance and behaviour	3.56	HE	3.52	HE
8	We hesitate to take our child to the hospital whenever he/she is sick	4.09	HE	4.13	HE
9	We spend money on our child so that our family will benefit from the child in the future	3.88	HE	4.05	HE
Cluster Mean		3.80	HE	3.97	HE

Note *-Reverse scored items; RMKS= Remarks

The entire items in Table 1 obtained mean ratings within the range of 3.51 and 4.48 in the columns for both biological and adoptive parents. The cluster mean scores

for both biological and adoptive parents were also within 3.80 and 3.97. Hence, there was a high extent of family investments in biological and adoptive families as perceived by both parents.

Table 2: t-Test on the Mean Ratings of Parents of Biological and Adoptive Families on their Family Investments

Parents	N	X	Sd	df	Cal-t	Crit-t	P<0.05
Biological	176	3.80	0.80	350	2.09	1.96	Significant
Adoptive	176	3.97	0.69				

Table 2 shows that at 0.05 significant level and 350 df, the calculated t (Values is 2.09 which is greater than the critical t of 1.96. The null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, parents in biological and adoptive families differed significantly in their mean ratings on their family investments.

Summary of the Findings

From the presentation and analysis of data, the following findings were concluded:

1. There was a high extent of family investments in biological and adoptive families as perceived by both parents.
2. Parents of biological and adoptive families differed in their mean ratings on their family investments. Adoptive Parents had higher mean scores than biological parents.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that there was a high extent of family investments in biological and adoptive families as perceived by parents. Surprisingly, it showed that parents of biological and adoptive families differed in their mean ratings on their family investments, with parents of adoptive families rating their family investments higher than biological parents did. In other words, although both biological and adoptive families had high levels of family investments, those in adoptive families had higher levels of family investment than those in biological families.

Notably, these findings do not agree with two prominent theories of family investment—sociological family structure explanations and evolutionary science's Kin selection theory. As Adegoke and Adeji (2007) noted, family structure theory highlights that any deviation from the institutionalized, traditional, two-biological-parent structure may result in lower levels of investment by parents. Kin selection theory states that, in

Parents' Perception Of Family Investments In Families With Biological And Adopted Children In Anambra State Uju P. Egenti, (Ph.D)

general, parents will direct their investments to biological progeny. Consequently, these two theories suggest that adoptive parents as a group will invest at lower rates than will biological parents. The analyses in the present study indicate that, in fact, the reverse is true: adoptive parents invested in their children as much and even more than did biological parents.

Because these findings are restricted to few items on family investments, in a specific context (the contemporary Anambra State), they should not be interpreted as categorically negating the longstanding kin selection theory or denying the potential role that biology may play in family life. Rather, the study suggests that the presence of non-biological parents (or absence of biological parents) alone may not cause less family investment. The role of biology should be understood as powerfully mediated by social context. Because many adoptive parents might be infertile and failed to have conceived, the social context of infertility might cause them to invest in adopted children as if they were biological children.

Conclusions

The findings of this study provide a number of insights into family investments. There were high extents of investments, in biological and adoptive families as perceived by both parents in the families. Biological and adoptive parents differ significantly in their mean ratings on their family investments. For both adoptive parents and biological parents, the most significant area of their family functioning is in family investments.

Recommendations

The findings of this study have formed the basis for the following recommendations:

1. Adoptive parents should make personal efforts to improve their family investments.
2. Churches and counsellors need to sensitize prospective adoptive parents of the possible difficulties to expect and how to handle them through good investment.
3. Adoption agencies should always conduct pre and post adoption counselling for adoptive parents where they would counsel adoptive parents on how to deal with challenges of family investment.
4. Family counsellors, child adoption agencies, social welfare officers and non-governmental organizations should include issues in investments, as a part of their assessment of family functioning.

References

- Adegoke, G & Adeji, D (2007) Family violence variables influencing the psychosocial well-being of children of abused partners in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria. *The Social Sciences* 2 (2), 175-180.
- Ezeugwu, C, Obi, U., & Onah, F. (2002). *Adoption, adolescent development, and the role of the parent-child relationship: A review of the literature. Journal of Applied Economics*, 5, 209-232.
- Hopcroft, R. (2005). Parental status and differential investment in sons and daughters: Trivers-willard revisited. *Social Forces* 83,1111-36.
- Igbinedion, E. (2006). The plight of neglected children in Nigeria. *Child Trafficking Update* 4(1), 16-18.
- Juffer F., & van-Ijzendoorn. M.H. (2005). Behaviour problems and mental health referrals of international adoptees: A meta-analysis. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 293, 2501-251
- Koerner, A. F, & Fitzpatrick, M. A. (2006). *Family communication patterns theory: A social cognitive approach*. New York: Thousand Oaks, CA
- National Population Commission (2003). Family living arrangements and characteristics: March 2003. Current Population Reports. Abuja: Government Printing Office.
- Nwabunwanne, C. O (2010). Families at crossroads: Whither the future of youths? *Catholic Teachers' Newsletter* 1(3) 2&6.
- Nwokolo, C. (2007). Family environmental variables and deviant behaviors among secondary school students in Onitsha Education zone. *Nigerian Journal of Teacher Education and Teaching* 3, (1) 171-179.
- Shonkoff, J., & Phillips, D. (Eds.). (2000). *From neurons to neighbourhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: National Academic Press.
- Silburn, S., Zubrick, S., De Maio, J., Shepherd, C, Griffin, J., & Mitrou, F. (2006). The Western Australian aboriginal child health survey: strengthening the capacity of aboriginal children, families and communities. Perth: Curtin University of Technology and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research.

Parents' Perception Of Family Investments In Families With Biological And Adopted Children In Anambra State Uju P. Egenti, (Ph.D)

- United Nations (1991). *Convention on the rights of the child*. New York: United Nations.
- Wrobel, G.M., Kohler, J. K., Grotevant, H.D., & McRoy, R.G. (2003). The family adoption communication model (FAC): Identifying pathways of adoption-related communication. *Adoption Quarterly*. 7, 53-84.
- Xu, Q. (2009) Father-daughter relationships during girls' adolescence in urban China. *Educate* 9, (1), 12-15.
- Zhang, W. (2006) Child adoption in contemporary rural China. *Journal of Family Issues* 27(3), 301-340.