

## **THE PROLIFERATION OF BABY FACTORIES IN NIGERIA: AN ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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### **Abstract**

*The proliferation of baby factories in Nigeria speaks volume about the cultural erosions that have taken some negative turns among her tribes. Nigeria's constituent ethnic nationalities of ancient past have cultural values that distinguish them as peoples not just by the well-crafted tribal marks and tongues but rather by their eminent and excellent distinctions in the respect they had for the dignity of the human person. Life was sacred and material possession was secondary. Wealth was only relevant when placed at the service of the human person. They were rich and contented in the measures and qualifications of the traditional models. However, today money and material possessions are primary and human persons are sold in order to acquire them. Babies are now commodities for sale and the trend is growing and gaining strength with multiplicity of presence in many parts of the country as if it is legitimate and ordained by gods. This paper discusses this phenomenon from an ethical perspective with the view to finding out whether it is a moral burden or a moral blessing in Nigeria and in the entire society of humanity. The knowledge of the anthropological worth of man and the ethical value of the baby trade are necessary in order to understand the morality and legitimacy of the human act or the immoral contents and illicit characteristics of baby factories as a rational activity of a moral person. The findings of this paper would facilitate the fight against this social menace that cloaks the human person in indignity and has distorted the social image of Nigeria with gross disrepute. The methodology employed in this study is historico-descriptive. This means that baby factories syndrome as a social question in Nigerian society is described and interpreted in the context of the people's socio-cultural values.*

**Keywords:** *Proliferation. Baby factories, Nigeria, Ethics and Ethical perspective.*

### **Introduction**

The proliferation of baby factories in Nigeria is one more evidence too many which showcases the vast ethical deprivation in her moral standards, the erosion of her socio-cultural values, the huge lacuna in her legal system and the negative influence of acculturation from alien cultures especially the occidental west. The culture of most Nigerian tribes, if not all, places much premium on human life, procreation and lineage continuity. The sociology of the family is patrilineal without prejudice to dots of matrilineal exceptions.

Reproductive health is seen as virility, vitality, fertility and generative powers. As pregnancy and gestation are celebrated actively or passively, publically or privately,

infertility and sterility on the other hand are understood as abhorrent and loathsome in both grave and significant proportions. In more families than one, infertility has led to the breakdown of peace, turned sweet love of darlings into sour grape of hatred and in some extreme cases, bred divorce.

The explanation of these painted situations is found in the suffocating space which these Nigerian peoples and their cultures give to barrenness in their societies. These same ancient cultures have gender discriminatory dimensions in their enthronement of a male child as an heir-necessity. In other words, any marital union that generates only a girl child or only females is perceived as one without an heir.

In typical African traditional societies such as the Igbo specimen, the family membership begins in the remote past of the ancestors, includes all the living in the present and stretches elastically to the infinite future of the yet unborn. So, impotence is understood as an adversity that exhibits the unwanted package of possible lineage obliteration. In the light of the obsolete culture-based problematics highlighted above, the emergence of the phenomenon of baby factories and its proliferation on the historic stage of the contemporary times, in the perception of some individuals and groups are veritable and credible solutions from multi-variant perspectives. However, for a great number too, baby factories are illegitimate, unacceptable and consequently should be understood in itself as a complicated and hydra-headed social question.

Baby factories in their proliferated plural have been identified to exist across the length and breadth of Nigeria with more prevalence in the south east and south west geopolitical zones where the constituent tribes take the seriousness and sacredness of social immortality to a religious level. The obnoxious reasons behind the multiplication of baby factories go beyond the family continuity to include a cluster of ungodly ends. As piglets are multiplied in the piggeries and chicks are hatched in the poultry, so are babies produced massively in the baby factories for materialistic satisfactions as if the human person belongs to the domains of things as commodities and of vegetative and sensitive lives only as lower animals do. The human being is more than the tangible, visible and physical quantities that he/she has in the biological self. He/she is *Imago Dei* (the image of God. Gen. 1:26-27, 2:7). Opinions on the positive and negative outcomes of baby factories are multiple and divergent especially from economic, religious, anthropological, political, socio-cultural and legal standpoints, among others. This paper strives, therefore, to discuss the proliferation of baby factories from an ethical perspective. It asks questions such as: Is the existence of baby factories a moral burden or a moral blessing to our Nigerian society and by extension, the entire human race? Are baby factories credible answers and profitable solutions to socio-cultural and extra-cultural problematics as briefly pointed out above? Or do they constitute more complicated and hydra-headed social problems?

The baby factories' operators and stakeholders in the persons of buyers and sellers, patronizes and sympathizers, losers and profiteers, accomplices and syndicates, impregnators and the impregnated, traffickers and ritualists are all human beings. The actions of rational human beings (*ens rationalis*) in their status as *homo qua homo* (man as man) are called human acts. Human acts either as right or wrong have ethical and moral values. These human acts, characteristically and specifically, proceed from a person's cognition (intellect) and volition (will) expressed respectively as knowledge and voluntariness or freedom. Another important factor considered in Ethics with reference to the human act is the nature of the human act *qua tale* (as such) as either good or bad *per se* (by itself).

To achieve the objective of this paper, the work discusses the concept of baby factories, the motivating factors behind their establishments and the phenomenon from an ethical perspective. It also offers some recommendations that would help curb the ills of baby factories syndrome in the Nigerian society. Finally, it draws some concluding insights from the entire work.

### **The concept of baby factories**

The concept of baby factories is a coinage by users of the social media platforms especially the journalists to explain the “criminal activities in Nigeria involving restrictions of persons’ movement against such person’s will, forced impregnations, sale of babies and illegal adoptions” (Huntley, S.S, 2013:10; Okunade and Shehu, 2015:48). According to Mba (2012) cited in Onuoha, F.C (2014), baby factories are “locations where young ladies or girls, some teenagers or little above that, are haboured and deliberately encouraged or forced to become pregnant and subsequently give up their babies for sale”. In the words of Eseadi, et al (2015:2) and Ombelet and Johnson (2016: 4-5), baby factories are

Institutions where young people give birth to children who are then placed for sale on the illegal adoption market. The term refers to any place where pregnant women and young teenage girls are voluntarily or forcefully impregnated and kept illegally until their babies are born and then sold for monetary gains. In practice they are usually disguised as hospitals, maternity homes, social welfare homes and orphanages.

Those deceived and exploited teenage girls and women who were admitted into the factories without pregnancies are impregnated by male unscrupulous sex maniacs who are employed specially for putting them in the family way. Afterwards, some of these victims are one more time or severally impregnated thereby exposing them to further dangers and greater risks.

The activities of baby factories in Nigeria have many faces. At one activity, it has the face of commercial surrogacy, where wombs are rented to help childless couples get babies which they could call their own. At another, it breeds children as new wares for sale for the purpose of trafficking, monetary gains, illegal adoptions, black magic and rituals. Yet at another instance, it is a hiding place for unwanted pregnancies in order to protect the expectant mothers from social ridicule, stigma and psychological trauma. Baby factories have other names such as baby farms, a semblance of baby farming of the late Victorian era in Britain. This was a practice where the baby farmers accepted the custody of an infant child for periodic or lump sum payments. In the case where the infant was very young, the practices included wet nursing, that is, breast feeding by a woman who was not the biological mother (*Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/child\\_harvesting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/child_harvesting), P.1*). Other nomenclatures used synonymously as baby factories include child harvesting, illegal adoption market, baby trade racket, human trafficking house and commercial surrogate enterprises. As observed by Nzemeke (2014:1): “It is like a fairy tale on everybody’s lips, in the last few months, the story has been the same ... the story is the emergency of the baby factories in different parts of the country where young girls are being used as surrogate members”.

Since 2006 when the first cases of baby factories was discovered by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in Nigeria through the recent investigation of Terese Christiansson, a Swedish journalist with a hidden camera, up till today, a lot of raids and discoveries have been made by law enforcement agents, journalists and even angry youths who razed down such centres thereby bringing the operator's nefarious activities to limelight. However, the factories have continued to proliferate. Huntley (2013:11) articulated the media reports on police raids thus:

The "baby factory" industry flourishes in Nigeria as confirmed by media report of police raids on such facilities. For example, in May 2008, Police rescued about 25 teenage girls from a hospital in Enugu. In June, 2011 police freed 32 teenage girls from a "baby factory" located in Aba, Abia state. In October, 2011, 17 pregnant girls were saved from an orphanage in Lagos. In May 2013, police rescued 6 teenage girls in Umuaka village, Imo state. In June 2013, police freed 16 pregnant young women from a clinic in Aba city, Abia state. In July, 2013, police arrested an owner of illegal home "Moonlight Maternity Home" and a nurse working for him for selling babies from unwanted pregnancies. In August and September 2013, police unveiled two more cases of baby factories in Imo state. Several baby factories were also reported in Anambra state.

In the same vein, Nzemke (2014:1-5) wrote that "one of the latest of such factories was discovered in Abeokuta, Ogun state on Thursday, April 3. The bubble burst when one of the inmates of the illegal settlement escaped from a building in the ancient town and raised an alarm that people should save her. The police has since searched the building where three other pregnant women and five children were rescued. About two weeks earlier, eight pregnant women and teenage girls were rescued by the police at another suspected baby factory at Akute, Ifo Local Government Area of Ogun state. According to the police Chief, Chigozie was the one responsible for selling of the babies, which she confirmed when she told the press, "if they give birth, I will sell the child for N300,000. I sell it to women who cannot give birth". The Ogun news was still fresh in the minds of the people when police officers smashed the baby factory in the outskirt of Asaba, Delta state capital. The baby factory was located in a large compound and a 40 year old woman who was running it was arrested. 10 pregnant girls were found in the building. The girls revealed that the woman promised to buy their babies after delivery for some undisclosed amounts of money. On February 21 by 4.00am, Akwa Ibom state Police command arrested one Grace Akpan, a prophetess and owner of Jubilant Garden Ministries for allegedly running a baby factory. 5 young ladies and 4 men who supposed to be the impregnators were arrested too. She runs it as a religious organization, hence Jubilant Garden Ministries.

Most of the baby factories are put under cover right from the sign posts and names and thus disguised as Herbal Clinics, Pure Water Factory, Non-Governmental Organisation, Hospital and Maternity, Motherless Babies Homes and even Social Welfare Homes, orphanages and Faith Based Organisations. It is vivid that baby factories in Nigeria

are networks of commercial concerns locally, nationally and internationally transacted daily in the neighbourhood and around the homes and work places of the unsuspecting public.

To infiltrate the dark regions of this illegitimate business, a Swedish journalist, Terese Cristiansson investigated some of them in Abia state with a hidden camera. Her reports were shocking and dreadful. According to her, she and her entourage who posed to be buying the babies were asked, “Do you want the baby with or without the placenta?” Do you want a girl or a boy? Twins perhaps? The business according to the operator could be conducted in dollars where 4000 dollars and 4400 dollars were the prices for a baby girl and a baby boy respectively. The old woman operator called “Mama” told them that she had 5 pregnant women in Aba and had 35 in another house in Umuahia and promised to offer them “fresh babies”. The existence of baby factories in Nigeria is a social fact and its proliferation as seen in many parts of the country has concrete, over whelming evidences found in police crime dairies, social media reports, uncovered network tracks of participants, non-participants’ findings and victims shocking stories.

Baby factories venture is an organized business in Nigeria. It is an illegal commercial network of activities by nature. It thrives as a resilient force against every wish that it ceases to exist because it has motivating factors that fan the flame of its existence, sustenance and proliferation. In the next section, we shall be occupied with the causes of baby factories. To this, we now turn.

### **The motivating causes of baby factories in Nigeria**

The booming popularity of baby factories in Nigeria has multiple underpinning factors as causes that motivate their existence, thrive their sustenance and rapidly proliferate their presence. These motivating indices are in plural and are hereby discussed below:

#### **i. Socio-cultural factors:**

There is an incurable and unbridled quest for fertility and procreation among Nigerian tribes. The socio-cultural milieu put much stress on generation of children, family continuity and social immortality. In the wake of this social demand, baby factories exploit the situation to exist, thrive and proliferate. Barrenness or childlessness goes with social stigma and psychological trauma. As a consequence, a lot of barren couples patronize the baby farms in order to address these needs. Even though much value is placed on births, unwanted pregnancies in the forms of teenage pregnancies or pregnancies out of wedlock are frowned at in most social circles. They too go with social opprobrium. To cover the shame therefrom, increases the popularity of baby factories among teenagers. According to Makinde, et al (2015) cited in Ombelet and Johnson (2016:4);

Baby factories are thought to have arisen to meet two needs. First the social stigma attached to desperate teenagers with unwanted pregnancies, who are convinced to give up their babies for a financial benefit. Second, the high demand for babies by infertile couples with a desire to complete their family and thereby fulfil a crucial social obligation. Thus, the high burden and stigmatization of infertility in Nigeria and unwillingness of infertile couples to associate publically with adoption

or surrogacy, contributes to the increased patronage of baby factories.

Earlier on, Nzemeke, V. (2014:5) wrote that:

...one of the reasons of the boom in the illicit trade is the desperate quest by many married couples to have their own biological children. Many cultures in Nigeria place heavy premium on biological children and as such when couples have difficulties in producing children, they resort to buying from some of the factories and nursing them as their own. Unwanted pregnancies among teenage girls is yet another reason why baby factories have continued to spring up. Findings reveal that some of the baby factories are usually non-governmental organizations where teenage girls who get pregnant run to. Once there, they are catered for until they deliver the babies, paid a token by the owners of the organization and allowed to move on with their lives.

However, even fertile couples patronize baby factories in their search for a particular gender as they buy the needed sex, male or female. The one that is rampant is the purchase of the male child in order to satisfy the patrilineal formula with an heir without whom the lineage cannot move on. This informs the high demand for the male sex and why it is supplied more often with a higher price than that of the baby girl. Strictly speaking, this arrangement satisfies the psychological angle of the problem more than its cultural dimension. This is because the baby boy so bought to be the heir with prejudice to gestational surrogacy has no blood tie with the family. Baby factories syndrome among Nigeria ethnic nationalities looked at from the perspective of socio-cultural value reveals two dimensions; namely: One, the conscious effort to satisfy the cultural needs lead to the aberration of getting a strange blood into the family line. Two, in order to uphold the cultural ideal of family continuity, a very precious cultural value is destroyed which is the sale of the babies as things and items. The trend of the sale of babies as new wares and commodities contradicts the cultural value of Nigerian tribes especially the Igbo who say “*nwa ka ego*” – The child/baby is more precious than money/wealth, “*Mmadu ka (aku)*” – The human person is supreme (more than wealth), “*Nwa azughi n’ahia* – “babies are not for sale, “*Uzu akpu nwa* –The blacksmith does not produce children”. This is because it is God who creates and gives children (*Chinenyenwa, Chinyere, Nkechinyere*), “*Nwa bu onyinye chukwu*’ (babies are God’s gift) and many other names like those mentioned above that express the same sacredness, dignity and divine origin of the baby / human person. One wonders aloud what the Nigerian culture like the Igbo culture would say about the test tube babies produced by modern “black smith” in that sense. The truth is that production of babies by scientific technological means has serious moral questions and ethical complications. The undue stress of cultural emphasis on fertility on one hand and the erosion of those socio-cultural values that emphasizes the dignity of the human person on the other hand add forces to the proliferation of baby factories in our society.

## **ii. Economic reasons**

Nigeria’s economic history has been punctuated by austerity, inflation, recession, depression and poverty. Nigeria that is blessed with abundant human capital and enormous

natural resources is populated with majority of her citizens wallowing in penury and poverty living below the poverty line of one dollar per day. Presently, Nigeria is in economic recession and cannot feed her citizens; there is high unemployment, others are losing their jobs in hundreds prompted by down-sizing or right sizing and there are frequent industrial strikes in the oil and gas, education and medical sectors to mention but three. The diversification of economy to embrace agriculture and food production is punctuated and eclipsed by Fulani herdsmen who destroy farms and fortunes with their cattle, rape the women in the farm and kill their husbands. They occupy the farm settlements of many local producers of food who are now scared and afraid of going to farms. The result is hunger in the land.

So, in Nigeria many sell their babies or produce babies and sell due to poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and low level of education, greed and materialism. Some sell their babies because they cannot afford to rear them, others sell babies to raise money to feed their other children. The situation is as bad as a 16 year old Maria strained under the anguish of labour in south eastern Nigeria whose face was repeatedly slapped across by a midwife. Her real ordeal started minutes after birth. She said that the nurse took her child away to be washed and never brought her back again. She learnt later that her new born baby girl has been given up for adoption for which she received a token of 20,000 naira (\$65.79) which under the present economic hardship in Nigeria can only buy a 50 kilogram of bag of rice (Anamesere Igboeroteonun and Tom Esselement, 2016:1). The phenomenon of baby factories as a growing commercial crime in Nigeria has strong links with the economy. However, lack of moral upbringing is yet another factor.

### **iii. Lack of moral upbringing and sundry corrupt practices**

Moral depravity in the Nigerian society has led to the collapse of ethical values among her citizens. The formation of conscience from the cradle has been sacrificed at the altar of varieties and frivolities. Social institutions such as the family, schools and social media have failed to mould the young in the way of morality. Some parents at home and some teachers in the school lead the children astray by bad examples while the social media have multiple platforms that advertise materialism and corrupt practices to the vulnerable public and the young with fragile minds. Moral instructions in the schools and proper teaching of moral values in churches and mosques have been compromised in various places and times. The effects of the little or total lack of parental care and supervision, absence of proper religious catechesis, inability to allow religious knowledge permeate societal structures and systems, bad influence from the corruptly affluent, peer groups and the social media are seen too in the picture and adversity of baby factories.

Related to the above reality is the loss of professional ethics. Some medical doctors, nurses and midwives are at the center of this crime which stand to contradict all that their profession upholds. The same is true about pastors, prophets and prophetesses whose items of trade are babies. It is alleged too in some quarters that the Police and judicial personnel for the sake of financial benefits help cover the operators of baby factories and syndicates of child trafficking.

### **iv. Ritual Purposes**

Huntley, S (2013:11) wrote that ‘though babies are mostly sold for the purpose of adoption, they are also allegedly used for sacrifices in black magic rituals, the sex trade and manual labour upon their sale to third parties’. Most of the operators of baby factories on confessing their crimes would always uncover their unholy relationships with ritualists. As cows, goats, fowls and other sacrificial animals like dogs are bought from markets by

native doctors, worshippers of deities and cultists, so do ritualists buy babies from baby farms for ritual purposes.

**v. No adequate legal framework**

It is a sad commentary on Nigeria legal system that there are no laws prohibiting the illicit affairs of baby factories. The proliferation of baby factories which is spreading unabated shows that “either legal framework aimed at fighting human trafficking in Nigeria are ineffective and too weak to confront this problem including the baby factory phenomenon or there is lack of their effective implementation by law enforcement” (Huntley, S. 2013:18). In line with Huntley, Umeora, et al (2014:2) wrote:

Nigeria is yet to acknowledge legally, and thus provide policy guidelines and legislation to formalize and regulate surrogacy in the country. It means also there is no law proscribing of surrogacy in the country. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the topic has not come up for detailed discussion in any legislative chambers in Nigeria. This has created a void, which is being and can be exploited further by illegal commercial operators with the news of baby factories, baby sale, baby swap rife in the country.

The areas where our laws would help fight this crime include proper laws guiding the adoption of babies, supervision and control of motherless babies’ homes and fight against human trafficking. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) should have a legal force to bark at and bite offenders. Nigerians want to see baby factories’ operators and offenders serve jail terms and not to hear of raided facilities and arrested suspects released by politicians and the influential people.

**4. An ethical perspective**

A discourse on baby factories from the perspective of ethics naturally begins with the human person as the actor and item of trade. Any business such as baby factories that violates the dignity of the human person is ethically wrong. It is ethically wrong for the human person to be sold either in parts or as a whole. The commercialization of the uterus, that is, “womb for rent” in commercial surrogacy tells a lie about parenthood. The baby lives in a home with a lie about his or her biological roots. Promiscuity, fornication and adultery are encouraged in baby factories. Men and boys are hired to impregnate girls and women in order to raise babies for sale. Sometimes, the girls are raped and forced into accepting sex. They lose their freedoms as their movements are curtailed and limited till they deliver their babies. Since unwanted pregnancies have false securities under baby factories, caution is thrown to the winds by some teenagers who now see little or no meaning in virginity, chastity, abstinence and self-discipline in sexual matters.

There is an ethical maxim which says that “the end does not justify the means”. Therefore, the fact that baby factories promise food on the table, babies in the home or money in the pocket and indeed have enriched some people, does not make it a wholesome business. It is an illegal commercial enterprise and should be understood as ethically unjustifiable. Baby factories encourage stealing of babies from their mothers, who most often are not part of the adoption bargains. Their babies are taken away from them and sold



to the third party without their consent. Stealing has a negative ethical value. Baby factories are source of murder and modern slavery. Those who are not killed in ritual murder are sold into slave labour. These human acts have unethical contents and ends. It is also morally wrong for mothers to sell or give their consent to the sale of their babies for it amounts to moral depravity by the mother or parent. Having highlighted the ethical complications in baby factories, the next section answers what next to be done to curb this social evil by way of recommendations.

### **Recommendations**

From the above discussion, the following recommendations are proffered to help sanitize our society from the menace of baby factories.

- i. There is need to revisit and review the ageless but obnoxious tradition that torture the barren in order to guarantee the happiness of childless couples.
- ii. The equal rights of both male and female children should be encouraged.
- iii. Families and the society should not reproach unwanted pregnancies in such a manner that their expectant mothers run away from homes only to embrace the false securities of baby factories
- iv. The role of guidance and counselors for the teenagers who get pregnancies while in school or skill acquisition centres to help re-direct their future should be engaged. Counseling should be both preventive so that it does not occur and curative for rehabilitation should it occur.
- v. Moral instructions and upbringing should be given its pride of place in the home, in the schools, through the social media and the good examples of the older generation.
- vi. Adequate legal framework ought to be kept in place and urgently too in order to prescribe the rules for social welfare providers and define rules to deal with offenders decisively.
- vii. Government should provide the structures that would alleviate poverty so that citizens would channel their energies towards positive ends rather than crimes due to hunger and idleness.
- viii. All forms of black magic and human sacrifice should be banned with zero tolerance and death penalty hanging on the neck of perpetrators.
- ix. Baby factories facilities are to be destroyed totally and premises confiscated by government as a deterrent to others.
- x. Any illegally adopted baby should be traced and sent back to his or her bio-social families so that legal adoptions would be encouraged.
- xi. Government should help provide help to parents blessed with sets of twins to discourage them from selling some or all to feed themselves or their other children.
- xii. No further establishment of Non-governmental agencies or those social infrastructures that form guises of baby factories should be opened without certification from the competent civil and traditional authorities. The former representing the government while the latter protect the interest of the local community where it is established.
- xiii. Any traditional ruler in whose community is discovered any baby factories should be prosecuted and dethroned.

- xiv. Professional bodies like those of doctors, nurses, midwives, judiciary, etc. should withdraw the certificates of their members who get involved in illegal sell of babies.

## **Conclusion**

Nigeria is on the global picture for one more negative reason, namely: the phenomenon of baby factories. Nigerian babies are sold domestically and trafficked into other countries, continents and cultures on daily basis. The Nigerian government should muster enough political will to fight and stamp out this crime permanently from her society. We believe in strong terms that a total crusade against this illegal selling of innocent babies for any reasons shall make the ideas of baby factories exist only in the dust bin of history. All hands should be on deck to kill this ugly monster that robes Nigerian babies in the cloak of indignity. Furthermore, the government should make provisions for better living for her citizens through her poverty alleviation programs and sundry developmental strides that promote the human persons' integrity, his securities and opportunities. Finally, culture is dynamic and can change with time. It is high time all cultural barriers to family happiness like the torture of childless couples and the indignity meted out to the girl child be stopped. When these indices that promote baby factories are addressed, then the illegal baby trade would die a natural death.

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