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SOCIETAL AWARENESS OF THE CHILD'S RIGHTS ACT AMONG RURAL AND URBAN DWELLERS OF OGUN STATE

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ABSTRACT

Protecting the rights of children has become important to local and international agencies of government and non-governmental organizations. This led to the formulation of laws that provided for and protected the rights of the child. Such laws include the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Nigeria's Child's Rights Act (CRA) and the Child's Rights Law of Ogun State. However, the provisions of these documents seem to be inefficient in curbing the violation of child's rights due to the high prevalence of street hawking, raping, corporal punishment, etc among children in Nigeria and Ogun State in particular. Hence, this study sought the societal awareness of CRA in rural and urban areas of Ogun State. About 243 rural and urban residents were interviewed through multistage sampling techniques with the aid of questionnaires and interview schedules administered on the different groups of respondents. The result showed that 69.14% of Ogun State residents were aware of the CRA. It further revealed that awareness of CRA was higher in urban than rural areas. Awareness of CRA was primarily sourced through the radio (42.86%) and television (42.86%). Radio and awareness campaigns were the most common sources of awareness among rural (51.76%) and urban (65.06%) residents respectively. The study recommended that government agencies and non-governmental organizations should sponsor more programmes that will be specifically directed to raising residents' awareness of CRA in rural areas of the state.

Keywords: Children, CRA 2003, CRC, Residents, Societal awareness, Stakeholders

INTRODUCTION

Children are the precious gifts from God in order to ensure the continuity of man's existence. They are highly regarded by mankind to the extent that made many scholars to regard them as the future leaders and hence the hope of any Nation's social, political and economic development. Despite

this, the society does not believe that children should have special rights because they assume that naturally adults serve the best interest of the child. However, with the prevalence of abuses and maltreatment of children, several human rights activists fought for the protection of children through several (international and local) chil-

dren's rights documents.

The rights of the child was first legally recognized and protected through the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which came into existence on 20th November, 1989 after it was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNICEF, 2007; Ejieh & Akinola, 2009). The CRC was ratified by 191 out of 193 member States (with the exception of United States of America and Somalia) (Tang, 2003; UNICEF, 2006).

Before the existence of the CRC, rights of children were left to be traditionally protected by parents, guardians and other older persons in the society with the assumption that the adult would by nature serve the best interest of the child and thereby cater for his/her needs (Owasanoye & Adekunle, 1996). Thus, according to Augie (1998) cited in the work of Akwara, Adekunle & Agba (2010), there was no need to think in terms of children's rights. This assumption became inadequate with the emergence of series of child abuse incidences such as sexual abuse, child exploitation through child labour and child trafficking to mention but a few. The nullification of this assumption led to the emergence of several movements and declarations which finally culminated into the Convention on the Rights of the Child that came into force in 1990.

To strengthen child's rights protection at the Continental level, the African Union (then Organization of African Unity) domesticated the content of the CRC into what is now proclaimed as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) in 1990 (UNICEF, 2007; Awosola & Omoera, 2008). The essence of the domestication was to integrate peculiar

African culture into the document thus protecting African children against all forms of violence. As a result, the ACRWC was intended to suit the African society (Awosola & Omoera, 2008).

Nigeria ratified the UNCRC and the ACRWC in 1991 and 2000 respectively implying that the country committed itself to codes of binding obligations toward her children (Ejieh & Akinola, 2009; Adimula, 2005). Among these obligations is the raising of awareness in the realization of children's rights. The two international instruments on the protection of child's rights were further domesticated via the enactment of the Child's Rights Act by the National Assembly in 2003 (The African Child Policy Forum, 2012). It must be noted that the Child's Rights Act did not become automatically applicable in the domestic jurisdiction by virtue of its ratification by the National Assembly because Nigeria is a dualist state (Brownlie, 1990 cited by the African Child Policy Forum, 2012) that operates a federal system of government which means that all states of the federation are semi-autonomous. The implication is that the Act only becomes automatically and immediately operational at the federal level but not in any of the 36 states of the federation (Federal Government of Nigeria- FGN, 1999) and hence, the need for the domestication of the Act by the different states of the federation.

However, the CRA therefore received a varied degree of acceptability across the states of the federation and almost all the southern states in Nigeria with the exception of Enugu and less than half of the northern states domesticated the Act. As at now, the Child's Rights Act, 2003 has been promulgated into law by the state assembly and assented to by the state governors in 24 states: Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Benue,

Cross-River, Delta, Ebonyi, Edo, Ekiti, Imo, Jigawa, Kogi, Kwara, Lagos, Nassarawa, Niger, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo, Plateau, Rivers and Taraba states while the remaining 12 states are yet to have a law conforming to the CRA (UNICEF, 2011).

Despite the fact that Ogun State was one of the first states to domesticate the Act into the Child's Rights Law, many studies (including Ojebiyi, 2010; Agbonlahor, *et al.* 2007; Ojo, 2013) have reported the prevalence of violations of child's rights in rural and urban areas of the state. Reasons adduced by scholars to the prevalence of these child abuse practices include that people are not aware of the existence of the Act (Okoye, 2011). According to Bamgboye (2011), even the Director General (then) of the Legal Aid Council in Nigeria, Mrs Joy Bob-Mannuel was of the view that the CRA has not received sufficient awareness and acceptance since its domestication. The knowledge of CRC and children's rights generally was reported to be lacking at all levels in most societies (the Society for Children and Youth of British Columbia, Canada, 2011 cited in Okoye, 2011).

It is believed that the menace of child abuse practices cannot be resolved when the people who are supposed to protect the rights of the children are not aware of the fact that children has some rights and that violations of these rights are punishable under the law. If the menace of child's rights violation continues, then the future is blurred for the state since children are the building blocks of any meaningful development in any area. Furthermore, the violation of children's rights through child labour, child marriage, abuse, neglect and trafficking will negatively affect child development since most children will be deprived quality education that

is meant to prepare them morally, mentally and physically. Child labour, may also prevent the children from getting better jobs or becoming self-employed which could worsen their chances of escaping from the cycle of poverty.

In order to ensure sustainable development of the nation's economy, the development of children is of utmost importance. This is why Gbadamosi (2003) attributed child development to be fundamental for productive adulthood and according to Omotor (2002), children who grow in an enabling environment, well cultured, self-reliance, dignity, integrity and honesty are inculcated into them would become responsible adults equipped to overcome challenges and contribute positively to the Nation's economy. A veritable tool that can provide such an enabling environment towards proper development and survival of the child is the Child's Rights Act which serves the best interest of the child. It is in this direction that this study assessed the societal awareness of the CRA in rural and urban areas of Ogun State, Nigeria with a view to comparing the level of awareness of the Act in rural and urban areas of the state. The objectives of the study were to determine the extent to which Ogun State residents were aware of CRA; identify the sources of awareness of CRA available to residents of Ogun State; ascertain the agencies which sponsored CRA awareness programmes; determine the frequency with which Ogun State residents heard of CRA; and to ascertain the extent to which residents of Ogun State were in contact with the CRA. The study hypothesis, stated in the null form, is that there is no significant association between the respondents' area of residence and their awareness of CRA.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Ogun State. Ogun State located in South-western Nigeria was created from the old Western State on February 3, 1976 by the then regime of General Murtala Mohammed. It shares boundaries with Lagos State to the South, Oyo and Osun states to the North, Ondo State to the east and the Republic of Benin to the west. It lies between longitudes 2° 45' and 3° 55'; and latitudes 7° 01' and 7° and characterized by 1,000mm to 2,599mm annual rainfall in the northern and southern parts respectively (Olaoye, 2010). Abeokuta is the State capital and largest city in the state. Other towns and cities in the State include Ijebu-ode, Sagamu, Ijebu Igbo, Ilaro, Ayetoro, Mowe, Ibafo and Otta among others. Ogun State covers 16,762 square kilometres with a population of 3,728,098 and with more males than females (NPC, 2007). Ogun State is made up of six ethnic groups viz, the Egba, the Ijebu, the Remo, the Yewa, the Awori and the Egun people. The state has three (3) Senatorial Districts viz: Ogun Central Senatorial District, Ogun East Senatorial District and Ogun West Senatorial District and twenty (20) Local Government Areas.

The populations for this study consisted of children, parents, teachers and social workers in Ogun State, Nigeria. Data were obtained from parents and children with the aid of different copies of interview guide while different copies of structured questionnaires were administered to the teachers and social workers. A total of 243 rural and urban dwellers of Ogun State comprising of 90 children, 65 parents, 60 teachers and 28 social workers were surveyed through the multistage sampling technique described below:

Stage 1 involves the purposive selection of Abeokuta South local government area since it is the only local government area that is purely urban in Ogun State. The second stage involves the random selection of two (2) out of the remaining nineteen (19) local government areas in the state to serve as the rural component of the study. The other selected LGAs were Obafemi Owode and Sagamu LGAs. This was followed by the random selection of one public secondary school from each of the selected local government areas. Schools serve as the core area for sampling the respondents since both teachers and children can be interviewed simultaneously. Secondary schools were used because students from secondary schools are older, more matured and expected to give better responses than their younger ones in primary schools. The final stage involves the random selection of 50% of teachers and 30% of children (from two classes – one junior class and one senior class) which resulted into 60 teachers and 100 children from the selected schools. Only 90% of the responses obtained from children were useful for this study. Seventy parents were conveniently sampled from the host communities of the schools since no sampling frame of parents was available for this study. Of these parents, only 92.9% (65) responded to all questions while the remaining 5 failed to make complete responses due to time constraints and their busy schedule. Thirty (30) social workers that attended the meetings of Child Protection Network (CPN) and Coalition of Non-Governmental Organizations in Ogun State (CONGOS) held on 28th February and 27th March, 2013 were interviewed but only 93.3% of them returned the questionnaires with useful responses while the remaining two did not return the questionnaires.

Table 1 indicated that 37 percent of the respondents were children, 26.7% and 24.7% were parents and teachers respectively while just 11.5% represented the social workers. More children than any other stakeholder categories were sampled because they are the primary stakeholders whose rights are

being violated on a daily basis and whose participation is highly essential in order to ensure effective CRA implementation. Table 1 further reveals that 58.8 percent of the respondents were sampled from rural areas while the remaining 41.2% came from urban areas.

Table 1: Selection of stakeholder categories from rural and urban areas of Ogun State

| Stakeholder categories | Rural | Urban | Total |
|------------------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Children | 63 (70.0)* | 27 (33.3) | 90 (37.0) |
| Parents | 40 (61.5) | 25 (38.5) | 65 (26.7) |
| Teachers | 40 (66.7) | 20 (33.3) | 60 (24.7) |
| Social workers | - | 28 (100.0) | 28 (11.5) |
| All | 143 (58.8) | 100 (41.2) | 243 (100.0) |

***Figures in parentheses were expressed in percentages**

The reliability of the instruments used in this study was ascertained through the split half technique by dividing the items in each instrument into two halves and then correlating the relationships between the two halves in each instrument using the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation analysis. The correlation coefficients for the different instruments ranged from 0.75 to 0.86.

Measurement of variables

Awareness of CRA was measured nominally as Aware and Not aware. Those that were aware of the Act were further required to indicate their source(s) of awareness and their agencies that sponsored the awareness programmes. The frequency of awareness of CRA was determined as very often, often and once in a while the extent to which the respondents had contact with the CRA was measured as whether they have seen the Act or not and whether they possess the Act or not.

Analytical technique

Data obtained from the data collection instruments were subjected to descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. The descriptive statistics such as percentage, mean and frequency distribution were used to present the data in charts and tables. Chi-square value was calculated and compared with χ^2_{tab} in order to test for the validity of the null hypothesis of this study at 5% level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal and social characteristics of respondents

As indicated in Table 2, more than half (56.79%) of the sampled residents of Ogun State were females (either girls or women), approximately two out of every three of the respondents were Christians by faith while about 30% and less than 3% practiced Islam and traditional religion respectively. This confirms that the two major religions in Ogun State, like other Nigerian states, are

Christianity and Islam. Aside from the children, 17.65% of the respondents were never married and close to 70% of the adult respondents were married while others (divorced, widowed and separated) constituted about 13.07%. This shows that the marriage institution is cherished in the Ogun State, like other states of the federation. About 88.48 percent of the respondents were indigenes of Ogun State while 11.52 percent were non-indigenes from other ethnic groups such as Ibo and Hausa. This implies that Ogun State accommodates people from other states and ethnic groups

within the country. More than three-quarter of the respondents came from the monogamous family structure implying that higher proportion of Ogun State residents were no longer practicing the polygynous family type. Close to two-thirds (62.90%) of the respondents also had post-secondary education while only about 6.40% had no formal education. This is an indication residents in the selected areas of Ogun State had high level of education. Also, more than half (53.50%) of the residents had family sizes of 1-5 while 44.44% had 6-10 persons per household. This is an indication that sampled residents

Table 2: Personal and social characteristics of respondents

| Personal and social characteristics | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Sex | | |
| Male | 105 | 43.21 |
| Female | 138 | 56.79 |
| Religion | | |
| Islam | 74 | 30.45 |
| Christianity | 163 | 67.08 |
| Traditional | 6 | 2.47 |
| Marital status* | | |
| Never married | 27 | 17.65 |
| Married | 106 | 69.28 |
| Divorced | 9 | 5.88 |
| Widowed | 7 | 4.58 |
| Separated | 4 | 2.61 |
| Nativity | | |
| Indigene | 215 | 88.48 |
| Non-indigene | 28 | 11.52 |
| Family structure | | |
| Monogamy | 184 | 75.72 |
| Polygamy | 59 | 24.28 |
| Level of educational attainment* | | |
| Completed primary education | 22 | 14.38 |
| Completed secondary education | 26 | 16.99 |
| Post-secondary education | 95 | 62.09 |
| No formal education | 10 | 6.54 |
| Family size | | |
| 1-5 | 130 | 53.50 |
| 6-10 | 108 | 44.44 |
| 11-15 | 5 | 2.06 |

*Children were exempted from the calculations.

Source: Field survey (2013)

Awareness of CRA

Figure 1 reveals that majority (69.14%) of the respondents was aware of the CRA and this is because different groups of stakeholders were involved in the study. It is also because most respondents (especially teachers, social workers and children) had more than primary level of education (Table 2) since education is an essential element in the promotion of any awareness programme. The finding of this study is in disagreement with that of Okoye (2011) which reported only about 32% of Nsukka residents being aware of the Act. A reason for

this is the non-domestication of the CRA in Enugu state where Okoye conducted his study (Akor, 2009). Hence, it can be inferred that domesticating the Act is the first most important step to be taken by any state government in raising the awareness of the Act in order to protect children rights. As also depicted in Figure 1, many (83%) of the urban residents were aware of the CRA than those in rural areas with only 59.44% being aware of the Act. This implies that awareness of the CRA increases as we move from rural areas to urban cities, thus, awareness of CRA is a function of residents' area of residence.

Awareness of CRA by area of residence

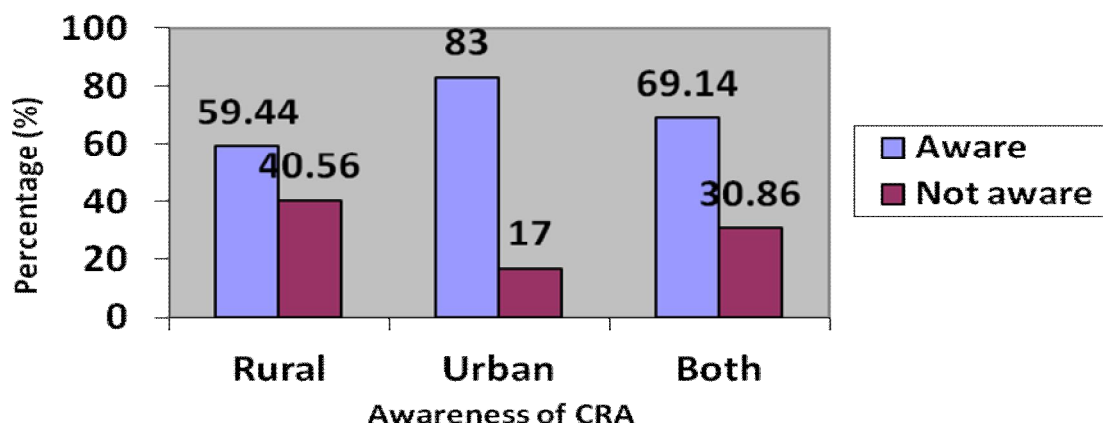


Figure 1: Percentage distribution of Ogun State residents in rural and urban areas by their awareness of CRA
 Source: Field survey (2013)

Sources of awareness

Table 3 shows that radio (42.86%) and television (42.86%) were the most common sources of awareness of CRA by the residents of Ogun State. These were followed by awareness rally (39.29%), newspapers (36.31%) and handbills (14.88%) respectively. Table 3 further shows that while awareness rallies seem to be the most com-

mon source in urban areas, rural dwellers depended most on radio. This is partly because most social organizations that carried out awareness campaign programmes on CRA were closer to the urban cities than the rural areas and partly because most of the rural dwellers depended on the use of transistor radios as their source of information. Furthermore, Table 3 reveals that television,

newspaper and handbills/pamphlets were more common sources of awareness of CRA among the urban residents than the rural residents. This is because these sources of awareness of CRA are more available to and/or accessible to the urban residents than the rural dwellers.

Table 3: Percentage distribution of respondents in rural and urban areas of Ogun State by sources of awareness of CRA

| Sources of awareness | Rural (n= 85) | Urban (n=83) | All (n=168) |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------|-------------|
| Radio | 44 (51.76)* | 28 (33.73) | 72 (42.86) |
| Television | 32 (37.65) | 40 (48.19) | 72 (42.86) |
| Newspaper | 18 (21.18) | 43 (51.81) | 61 (36.31) |
| Handbills/pamphlets | 5 (5.88) | 20 (24.10) | 25 (14.88) |
| Awareness campaigns | 12 (14.12) | 54 (65.06) | 66 (39.29) |

*Figures in parentheses were expresses in percentages. Multiple responses also occurred.

Source: Field survey (2013)

Sponsorship of awareness programmes

Figure 2 reveals that residents of Ogun State became aware of the CRA through programmes that were mainly sponsored by government agencies only (56.55%). As also depicted in figure 2, more of the rural residents (65.88%) than their urban counterparts (46.99%) became aware of CRA through government sponsored programmes only while more of the urban resi-

dents (27.71%) than their rural counterparts (8.24%) became aware of the CRA through both government agencies- and non-governmental organizations- sponsored programmes. This implies that urban residents had more access to programmes sponsored by both organizations either through the television, radio, awareness campaigns and newspapers than their rural counterparts.

Sponsorship of CRA awareness programmes in rural and urban areas of Ogun state

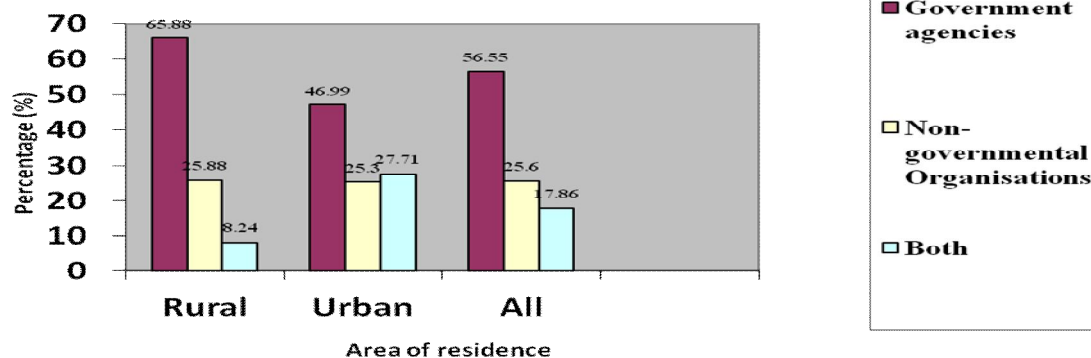


Figure 2: Percentage distribution of Ogun State residents in rural and urban areas by their sources of awareness of CRA

Source: Field survey (2013)

Contact with CRA

Table 4 reveals that 40.48% and 20.24% of Ogun State residents had seen and possessed at least a copy of the CRA respectively. This implies that a reasonable proportion of those who were aware of the CRA had never seen it with their own eyes not to talk of having the document in their possession. Hence, their knowledge and understanding of the Act is likely to be less and hence, the reason for the prevalence of the different forms of acts that violates the child's rights. These data also show that exactly half of those who had seen the Act possessed at least a copy of it. Furthermore, Table 4 shows that more of the urban residents in Ogun State (44.58% and 24.10%) than their rural counterparts (36.47% and 16.47%) had seen and possessed at least a copy of the CRA before. This portrays that more of the urban residents were in contact with the Act than their rural counterparts and also explains why more urban than ru-

ral residents were aware of the CRA in Ogun State.

Frequency with which the Act was heard

As illustrated in Table 5, only 30.36% of those who were aware of the Act have heard it once in a while, while 35.12% and 34.54% have heard of the CRA frequently and very frequently respectively. The mean values in Table 5 further shows that urban residents (mean frequency = 2.18) have heard of CRA more frequently than their rural counterparts (mean frequency = 1.91).

Association between residents' area of residence and the awareness of CRA in Ogun State

As indicated in Table 6, a significant association exists between the respondents' area of residence and their awareness of CRA at 5% level of significance since χ^2_{cal} (15.2985) > χ^2_{tab} (3.841). This further supports the fact that urban residents were significantly more aware of CRA than their rural counterparts.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents by the frequency with which they heard about the Act

| Frequency | Rural (n=85) | Urban (n=83) | Both (n=168) |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Very frequently | 22 (25.88)* | 36 (43.37) | 58 (34.52) |
| Frequently | 33 (38.82) | 26 (31.33) | 59 (35.12) |
| Once in a while | 30 (35.29) | 21 (25.30) | 51 (30.36) |
| Mean | 1.91 | 2.18 | 2.04 |

*Figures in parentheses were expresses in percentages

Source: Field survey (2013)

Table 6: Result of Chi-square analysis showing the association between the awareness of CRA by residents and their area of residence

| Variables | df | χ^2_{cal} | χ^2_{tab} (p = 0.05) | Decision |
|---|----|----------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Awareness of CRA versus area of residence | 1 | 15.2985 | 3.841 | Significant association exists |

Source: Field survey (2013)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It can be concluded from the findings of this study that:

- Majority of Ogun State's residents were aware of the CRA and that awareness of CRA is higher in urban cities than in rural areas.
- Radio and television were the two most common means through which the residents became aware of CRA. The most common means peculiar to the rural and urban residents were radio and awareness campaigns respectively.
- Sponsorship of awareness programmes is more common with government agencies than non-governmental organizations in both rural and urban areas of the state.
- Less than half of those who claimed to be aware of the CRA had seen at least a copy of the CRA and exactly half of those who had seen a copy of the Act had at least a copy of it in possession. Hence, as regards contact with the CRA, urban residents had been in contact with the CRA than their rural counterparts.

Based on the aforementioned, this study recommends that:

- States that are yet to domesticate the Act should do so in order to raise the awareness of children's rights in all the States of the Federation and hence, protecting all the Nigerian children;
- Awareness programmes in Ogun

State should be intensified especially in the rural areas in order to give children equal opportunities to develop in both rural and urban areas.

- Copies of the Child's Rights Act should be made available to all residents of Ogun State in forms that can be easily understood by them to improve their contact with the CRA and also raise its awareness among residents.
- Both the government agencies and non-governmental organizations should sponsor more programmes that will be specifically directed to raising residents' awareness of CRA in rural areas of the state.

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