

Assessing Media Coverage of Baby Factory Discovery in Ifo Local Government Area, Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract: *The continuous discovery of baby factories in some states of Nigeria is a growing danger militating against curbing child trafficking in the country. The March 2014 discovery of a baby factory in Ifo Local Government Area of Ogun State marked the third discovery within the state. It is based on this that the study sought to find out the role of the media in sensitization female secondary students of Sadiyyah Model, and Isolog secondary schools in Ifo LGA about the baby factory discovery within their environment, as well as assess the manner of information they received from the media on the discovery. Adopting the survey research design, 235 female students were purposively sampled, while descriptive statistical tools of bar and pie charts were used to discuss the findings. The study found that most of what the students have come to know about baby factory, and the discovery in Ifo LGA was through the media, as majority (51.4%) of them heard about the discovery from the television, radio, newspaper, and internet. However, the media coverage was mostly news reports of the discovery.*

Keywords: *Baby factory, Child Trafficking, Media, Ifo Local Government Area.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Baby factory discoveries have become one of the latest human trafficking concerns in Nigeria. It is the use of teenage girls and young women as a source of income whereby they are impregnated and confined over the period of their pregnancy until they have babies who are eventually put up for sale. It is a criminal activity perpetrated by human traffickers who confine their victims some of which have unwanted pregnancies (under the guise of running a charity organization) at a location until they give birth to babies that are sold or illegally adopted.

Baby factory is also referred to as ‘baby harvesting’ by the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO). The first case of baby factory in Nigeria was reported by UNESCO in 2006 via its policy document on: “Human trafficking in Nigeria: Root Causes and Recommendations”. Since that year the media have reported at least eleven more cases of “baby factories” in Nigeria and revealed new details about this phenomenon providing facts to core elements of human trafficking, and has also taken a more dangerous and complex form involving human trafficking alongside other illegal activities (Huntley, 2013).

Majority of what the masses have come to know about the existence of baby factory in Nigeria have been through the mass media of: newspaper, television and radio. The most recent cases of baby factory discovery in Nigeria was the 2014 discovery of a baby factory in Ifo Local Government Area (LGA) in Ogun State, south west of Nigeria. According to Balogun (2014), the factory was owned by a 29 year old lady who is a native of the eastern region of the country. It was discovered that ladies were held against their wish solely for the purpose of procreation, and the babies sold for at least N300, 000 which is equivalent to \$1500.

The report further revealed that among the pregnant women who were at the factor when the police raided the premises was a teenage girl of 16 years who by the Nigerian standard should be in secondary school. The discovery of the baby factory in Ifo LGA nine years after the first discover in 2006 undoubtedly endangers the Nigerian girl child. It also spurred the interest in this study which essentially sought to find out the level of awareness of baby factories by teenage girls in two select secondary schools of Ifo LGA, namely: Sadiyyah Model and Isolog. The specific objective is to find out the role of the media in sensitization these students about the baby factory discovery within their environment, and the manner of information they received from the media on the discovery.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study sought to investigate the following:

- What is the level of awareness of baby factory, and the discovery in Ifo LGA among female secondary students of Sadiyyah Model and Isolog Schools Ifo Local Government Area, Ogun State?
- In what ways has the media fostered awareness about baby factory, and the discovery in Ifo LGA?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is hinged on agenda-setting propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. According to Miller (2002 p. 258), the theory suggests that the media determines the subject of public discuss. Hence, the society/ media audience pay attention to the particular issues which the media gives prominence in their discourse. Baran and Davis (2003), opine that media audiences do not only learn about given issues, the level of importance attached to such issues by the media often determine the level of significance it would have on the audience.

In the opinion of Shaw, McCombs, et al as cited by LittleJohn and Foss (2008), investigations on agenda-setting theory provide considerable evidence to the fact that news editors and broadcasters play an important role in shaping our social reality as they go about their daily function of news selection and presentation. Therefore, it will not be out of place to states that the agenda-setting function of the media begins at the point where the surveillance function of the media ends. Having surveyed the society, the media presents their finding to the audience based on the level of importance and relevance they consider appropriates, and in their best interest.

This theory is of relevance to this study because the manner in which the media presents its discourse on baby factory and the discoveries of such factories will undoubtedly determine what the audience (in this case female secondary school students in Ifo LGA) knows of it.

4. BABY FACTORY

Baby factory as defined by Okoli (2014), is the practice of commercial dealing on infants: whereby an infant becomes the object of trade or exchange. The business of baby factory is not peculiar to Africa alone. Within the past decade, a number of baby factory discoveries were made in: Bulgaria, Spain, and China. In March 2014, for the Chinese authorities apprehended four baby selling networks, rescuing 382 babies and arresting more than a thousand suspects (Onuoha, 2014).

According to Masako (2012), baby factory entails three aspects which distinguish it from conventional infant trafficking in the past. They are the purpose of trafficking, how babies are trafficked and players involved in trafficking. The purpose of trafficking is to sell babies to childless couples who are to adopt them. The pregnant girls were said to have been kept up in the hospital until their delivery, after which they would be paid off by the doctor or trafficker who retains the babies for sale. The pregnant girls take different forms. One is where desperate teenagers with planned pregnancies, fearing isolation by society get lured to a clinic and are forced to turn over their babies. Another category of young women are driven by deep poverty by leasing out their wombs and volunteer themselves regularly as it's biologically possible, for production of babies for sale. There are at least two factors that make these victims vulnerable: being children (most victims are teenagers) or being pregnant out of wedlock, which carries a social shame in Nigeria.

The first and the principal actor is the proprietor of 'a baby factory' whose role is to harbor and nurture unmarried pregnant girls with a view to obtaining babies for sale. The proprietor usually poses as philanthropic health or social worker; and in some cases a charity or faith disciple. Under the pretext of a dubious Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) or a Faith-Based Organization (FBO), the proprietor creates an affected platform strategically designed to advance his illicit business (Okoli 2014). In a study which sought to unmask the basic economic-oriented factors responsible for baby factory phenomenon in Nigeria, Alfred, Akwara, and Ale (2014), found abject poverty to be the primary motivating/propelling factor for the young ladies who choose to sell their babies as a majority of them come from poor homes, and are often indigenes of mostly very remote communities that came to the cities and towns in search of a better life.

In another study which sought to examine the nature, actors, legal framework and motives behind this emergent dimension of human trafficking in Nigeria, Onuoha (2014) examined the relationship

between the victims of baby factory and the actors who contribute to trafficking of these babies. In findings he explained the factors contributing to the growth of baby factory which include; Escalating poverty, premium placed on having biological child – infertility, cultural practice of ostracising pregnancies out of wedlock, decaying moral and social values in contemporary society, poor regulation of orphanage homes and participation of state actors. In conclusion, its findings proved that it is gradually growing in Nigeria, and may take its root in other countries if it is not given the international attention that it rightly deserves.

5. BABY FACTORY DISCOVERIES IN NIGERIA

The sale of new born babies has been a recent form of child trafficking in Nigeria especially with baby factory discoveries in the West and Eastern regions of the country. This criminal act has remained lucrative for individuals involved in trafficking under the pretense of running business or charity organization/ homes and other forms of disguise. According to Huntley (2013), the first cases of baby factory in Nigeria as reported by the UNESCO in 2006, specifically referred to three Nigerian States: Abia, Ebonyi and Lagos. Investigations on the discoveries revealed that some pregnant teenagers and women with unwanted pregnancies approached doctors, clinics, nurses, or orphanages proposing to put up their baby upon delivery for adoption in exchange for cash. These mothers had to sign a document that relinquished them of all rights over their baby.

The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and other Related Agencies, NAPTIP, has attributed the proliferation of baby making factories to a decrease in the child adoption process. The Head, Media and Communication of NAPTIP, Arinze Orakwue, stated that stigmatization by the society encouraged the increasing rise of baby making factories in the country. He also expressed regret that the child adoption process has been hijacked by criminals, a situation which he said become the popularity of criminal activity in the society (*Premium Times*, 2014).

As new discoveries were made, other patterns of operations were soon discovered. In October 2011, 17 pregnant teenagers were reported to have been freed from custody in a pure water factory which turned out to be a baby-making facility in Anambra state, while 26 victims were rescued from one Ahamefula Motherless Babies home; Umuaka in Njaba Council Area of Imo state, these are but few examples of baby factory discoveries in Nigeria. also, in March of 2009, forty two pregnant girls were discovered at a baby factory in Umunkpeyi Nvosi in Isiala Ngwa Local Government of Abia State, also on October 2012, thirty pregnant girls were rescued from a baby factory named Iheanyi Ezuma Foundation) in Ihiala Local Government of Anambra State (Okoli, 2014).

On August 5, 2013, the Nigerian security forces uncovered a series of so-called baby factories parading as private medical clinics that house pregnant women and offer their children for sale, known as Moonlight Maternity Clinic. The "factories" are usually small facilities. In some cases, young women have allegedly been held against their will and raped, with their newborns sold on the black market, some fear newborns are being sold to witchdoctors for rituals in a country where occult practices still occur or fraudsters in the region who have simply found a reliable way to earn money (Simon, 2013).

On March 22, 2014, the Ogun State Police Command discovered a baby factory in the Akute-Ajuwon community of Ifo where girls have been engaged in delivering babies for sale. According to Onafuye (2014), it was discovered that the factory was a family business run by a woman and her brother in-law who lured the ladies into having these babies, after which they were given pittance in exchange for their babies.

The baby factory discovery in Ifo was one of the numerous discoveries made by the state security forces in Ogun State within 2014. Prior to this discovery, there had been other factors found in Abeokuta (the state capital city), and Iyana Egbado community of Ewekoro Area (Balogun, 2014). The frequency of these discoveries within the state coupled with armed robbery crime which is also rampant in the state has resulted in a notorious reputation for the state.

6. MEDIA COVERAGE OF BABY FACTORY DISCOVERIES IN NIGERIA

The media functions as a watchdog to the society. As much as possible, it is the responsibility of the media to protect the society – from the threats abound daily. As a watchdog, the media monitors societal ills such as the baby factory phenomenon and exposing such acts in order to keep the society informed, as well as set the public agenda. According to (Singh, 2007) the media serves as

influencing factor. It influences the opinion of the readers or listeners. It has a strong influence on the audience because whatever message it reflects to the society, whether negative or positive, there is a tendency of the audience members believing the information, the media is seen as the hub of knowledge.

According to media reports, baby factory was officially reported as another means for Human trafficking. The first media report was reported in May 2008; where police arrested a medical for running a “baby factory” disguised as a maternity and social welfare home. According to Huntley (2013), the doctor forcefully impregnates the teenage girls by restricting them in the facility against their will. Once the babies were born, they are sold to third parties. The girls claimed that the doctor took away their cell-phones and deleted stored numbers to prevent them from contacting their friends and relatives for help. Subsequent baby factory discoveries in Nigeria have been reported especially through the print media such as the newspapers, and online media.

7. METHODOLOGY

Adopting the survey research design, 235 female students were purposively sampled from the female students of Sadiyyah Model, and Isolog secondary schools in Ifo Local Government Area, Ogun State. These students were selected from the Senior Secondary classes of SS 1, 2 and 3 which was made up of a total population of 426 students. The Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) was adopted for data analysis, and the result presented using descriptive statistical tools of bar and pie charts.

8. PRESENTATION OF DATA AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

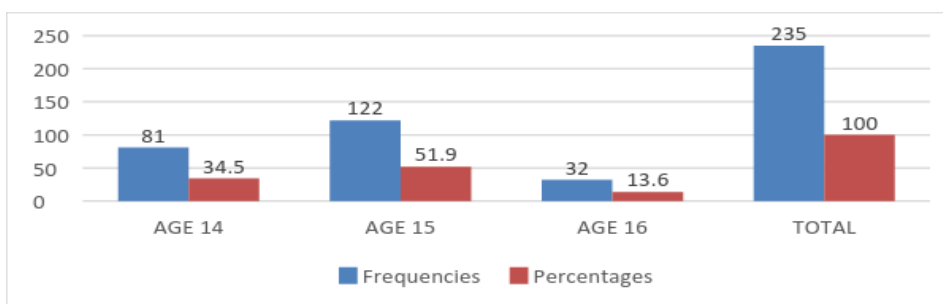


Fig1. Distribution of respondents by age

Analysis

Figure 1 presents the distribution of the sampled students by age. It can therefore be deduced that majority (86.4%) of the students sampled are between 14 and 15 years of age. Also, the table shows that all of the students are teenagers.

Research Question 1: What is the level of awareness of baby factory, and the discovery in Ifo LGA among female secondary students of Sadiyyah Model and Isolog Schools Ifo Local Government Area, Ogun State?

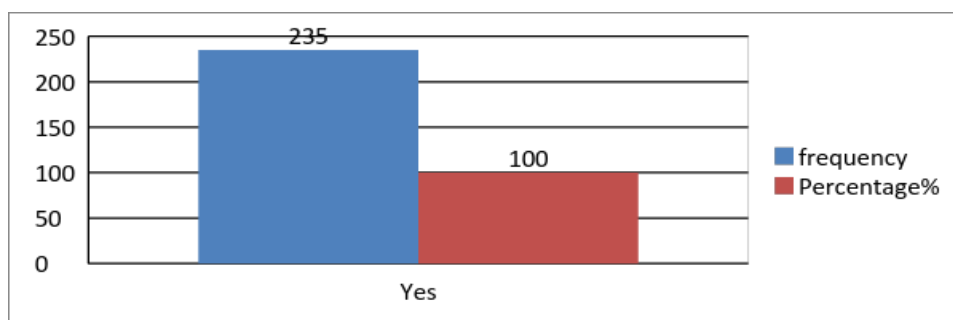


Fig2. Distribution of respondents awareness of the existence of baby factory in Nigeria

Analysis

Figure 2 presents the response of the students to being aware of the existence of baby factory in Nigeria. All (100%) of the students already have prior knowledge of the existence of baby factory in Nigeria.

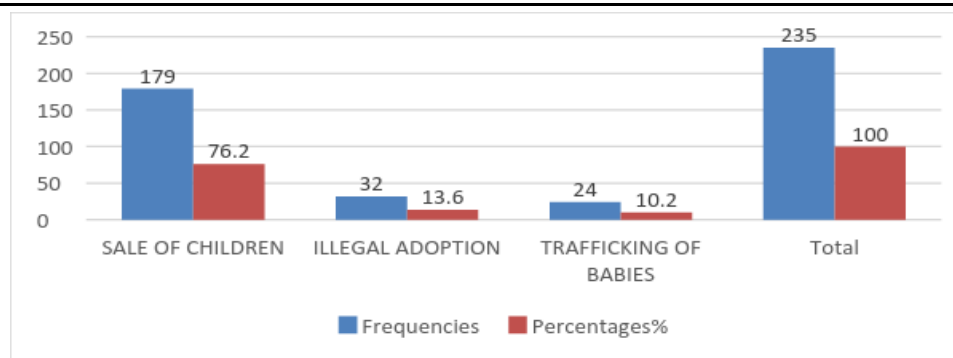


Fig3. Distribution of respondents by their understanding of what baby factory means

Analysis

Figure 3 indicates that majority (76.2%) of the respondents understand baby factory to be sale of children, while 13.6% describe baby factory to be the act of illegal adoption, and 10.2% as the trafficking of babies.

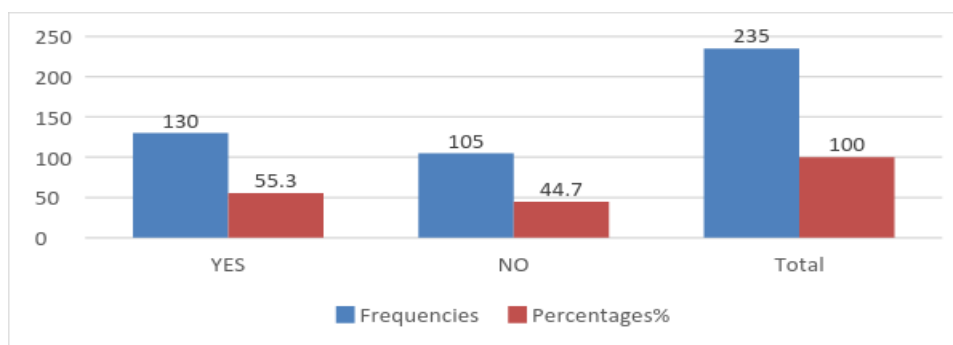


Fig4. Distribution of respondents by their knowledge of a baby factory discovery in Ifo LGA

Analysis

Fig 4 reveals that 55.3% of the respondents are aware that a baby factory was discovered in Ifo LGA, while 44.7% did not know about the baby factory discovery. Although majority of them already had prior knowledge of this discovery, a significant proportion of these students did not have any prior knowledge of the discovery made in Ifo.

Research Question 2: In what ways has the media fostered awareness about baby factory, and the discovery in Ifo LGA?

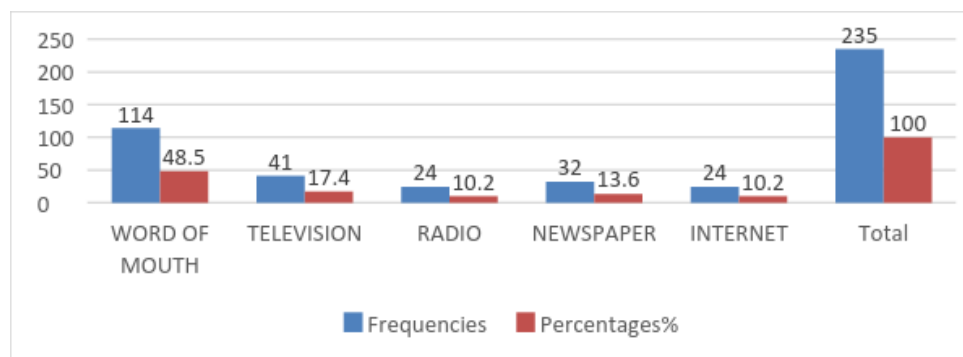


Fig5. Distribution of respondents by the sources through which they heard of the baby factory discovery in Ifo LGA

Analysis

Fig 5 reveals that 51.4% of the respondents know about the baby factory discovery in Ifo LGA through various mass media of: television, radio, newspaper, and the internet, while 48.5% of the respondents heard about the baby factory discovery in Ifo LGA through word of mouth. Also, the television and newspaper media have been the sources of information for most of the respondents who 17.4% and 13.6%.

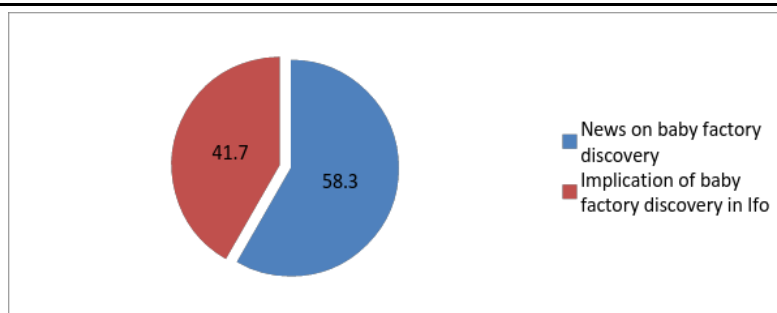


Fig6. Distribution of the specific area of media awareness on baby factory discovery in Ifo LGA

Analysis

Figure 6 reveals category of information on baby factory discovery which the students received from the media. 58.3% of the respondents revealed that the information on baby factory which they received from the media when news about baby factory discovery, while 41.7% received information on the implication of baby factory discovery in Ifo LGA.

9. MAJOR FINDINGS

Below is a summary of the findings made in this study:

- The baby factory phenomenon is not new to the female students of Ifo LGA. All 235 (100%) of the students who participated in this study are aware of baby factory, and the discoveries.
- Majority (76.2%) of the students understand baby factory to mean the sale of children.
- Majority (55.3%) of the students were aware of the baby factory discovery in Ifo LGA. However, a large proportion (44.7%) of the students did not know about the baby factory discover in Ifo LGA.
- Majority (51.4%) of the students heard about the baby factory discoveries through the media of: Television, Radio, Newspaper, and the Internet. This shows that the media has been creating awareness on baby factory, and discoveries in Ifo LGA.
- Most (58.3%) of what the students heard from the media on the baby factory discovery in Ifo LGA were news on the discoveries.

10. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that the media of the baby factory discovery in Ifo Local Government Area of Ogun State was positive. Majority of what the female students of Sadiyyah Model and Isolog Secondary School know about the discovery were gotten through media coverage.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations:

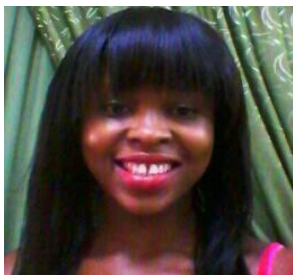
- The media should bring awareness to baby factory phenomenon and its dangers among people who are more likely to become victims of this type of human trafficking by taking measures of educating associate victims about the cruelty acts of the traffickers and deceptive steps used to lure victims.
- The media should develop programs that will clarify and break social stigmas and taboos that will discourage the operation of baby factories and explain the illicitly measures used in operating.
- Topic/issues concerning Baby Factory should not be neglected but instead, greater advocacy by civil society groups should promote public awareness on the menace.

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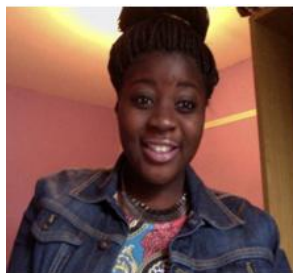
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