

Counseling Needs of Parents for Increased Awareness of Child's Rights Act in Nigeria

Eucharia Nchedo Nwosu, Immaculata Nwakaego Akaneme, Chiedu Eseadi, Ashofor H. Arinola, Jude I Abah, Daniel E Asogwa

Abstract

The study investigated the counseling needs of parents for increased awareness of Child's Rights Act in Nigeria. Three-hundred and seventy parents from Nsukka Urban in Enugu State of Nigeria were purposively selected for the survey study. The reliability coefficient of the 21-item instrument used for data collection was 0.91alpha. Results showed that parents needed counseling services that would enable them learn to appreciate and uphold their children's right to free education, the right to develop their abilities, the right to special care and attention amongst others. It was also found that parents needed counseling on child rights issues to guard against street hawking and school child drop-out, child discrimination, sexual exploitation of children, child marriage and pregnancy among others. Results further showed that there was no statistically significant difference in the mean responses of male and female parents on their counseling needs for increased awareness of child's rights act. The limitations of the study are discussed in the context of these findings.

Key words: Counseling Needs, Child's Rights Act, Parents, Increased Awareness, Nsukka Urban, Enugu State, Nigeria

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Introduction

A child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier [1]. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child considers a 'child' as a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger. This policy has made nations of the world to acknowledge that all children have the same rights and all rights are interconnected and of equal importance. The Convention on the Rights of the Child brings together the children's human rights articulated in other international instruments such as Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure, and Optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography amongst others. The Convention also articulates the rights of children more completely, and provides a set of guiding principles that fundamentally shapes the way in which children are viewed [2]. The United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child also recognizes that parents have the most important role in the bringing up children. It encourages parents to deal with rights issues with their children "in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child" (article 5). Parents, who are intuitively aware of their child's level of development, will do this naturally. The issues they discuss, the way in which they answer questions, or the discipline methods they use will differ depending on whether the child is 3, 9 or 16 years of age. The Convention also stresses the responsibility of children to respect the rights of others, especially their parents. By the same token, children's understanding of the issues raised in the Convention will vary depending on the age of the child. Helping children to understand their right does not mean parents should push them to make choices with consequences they are too young to handle [2]. Over the past few decades, several efforts have been made for all, including parents to become well informed about the rights of children so as to improve their welfare and guard against any form of discriminatory and inhumane practices on them. Internationally, for instance, the [1] adopted by the UN General Assembly, and UNICEF World summit for children (1990) held at New York are some of such efforts. In Africa, the African Union (AU) adoption of the Rights and Welfare of the African Child at its Heads of States Summit (1990) at Addis Ababa has been a way to further stress the importance of recognizing the rights of children and the welfare of the African child. The African Union in 1991 also proclaimed in Abuja Nigeria – the 1990s as the "Decade of the African Child" and set June 16 of every year for its commemoration. The African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (CRWC) was ratified by the Nigerian Government in 2000 [3, 4, 5]. Although, Nigeria ratified the UN Convention on Rights of Children in 1991 and enacted the Child Rights Act in 2003 to domesticate the UN Convention, its implementation is being thwarted because the Nigerian Constitution mandates that the legislative jurisdiction on matters affecting children belongs exclusively to state governments. As such, the federal law has been insufficient as a means to extend protection to all Nigerian children and, thus, needed to be adopted by the states. In other words, there exists no provision of national force that truly protects children against abusive conditions. Only about 26 of the country's 36 States have ratified the Child Rights Act [4]. This explains that this landmark legislative achievement has not yet translated into improved legal protection throughout the Federation [5]. It is obvious that Nigeria is a multicultural nation. The law regarding the child's rights appears to have differing levels of acceptance and implementation among the states due to cultural relativism or traditional cultural practices [6,7,8], poverty [9,6], and inadequate funds for child's welfare [10]. According to [8], the implementation of Child Rights Act has been made challenging as Nigerian state and local governments represent a diverse range of ethnic groups and customs. Similarly, [9] opined that child labor, child prostitution and other child related ills cannot

be wished away as long as poverty exists. [6] in their study outlined various incidents of child sexual abuse, child trafficking, child marriage, and neglect of disabled children in the African continent and concluded that poverty and traditional cultural practices are the main causes of these phenomena. Accordingly, [10] reported that despite various efforts to improve legislation and the policy framework to protect children, the resources (funds) needed to make a real difference are inadequate and unpredictable. Due to the aforementioned problems, Nigeria has been unable to deal with several issues hindering the protection rights of children such as children living on the streets, children affected by communal conflict, drug abuse, human trafficking and the weaknesses of the juvenile justice system amongst others [11]. In short, [12] pointed out that the rights of the child are being taken for granted in Nigeria. In their study, they examined the dangers posed by taking the rights of children for granted in the society and efforts being made in Nigeria to protect the child for the overall and sustainable development of the society. Based on the outcome of their study, they concluded that not much is being done in this regard. Thus, [13] stated that the challenges facing children in the 21st century are immense and will need to be faced if we are to achieve the goal of the Child's Rights Act. There have been various suggestions as to how to go about achieving the goals of the Child's Rights Act in different countries. The goals of the Child's Rights Act derived from the United Nations Convention on Rights of Children include freedom from violence, abuse, hazardous employment, exploitation, abduction or sale; adequate nutrition; free compulsory primary education; adequate health care; equal treatment regardless of gender, race, or cultural background; the right to express opinions and freedom of thought in matters affecting them; and safe exposure/access to leisure, play, culture, and art. Recognizing the special vulnerability of children, all of these goals are expressed with respect to a child's age and evolving capacities - the child's best interests are always the paramount concern. The Convention repeatedly emphasizes the primacy and importance of the role, authority and responsibility of parents and family; it is neutral on abortion; and is consistent with the principles contained in the Bill of Rights. However, two "environmental" factors have created obstacles to moving the Convention on Rights of the Child ahead expeditiously, that is, the widespread misconceptions about the Convention's intent and provisions, and a lack of public understanding about how this type of agreement is implemented by the government. Until a more favorable political environment can be achieved and greater public support can be attained, further movement on ratification will be difficult [14]. In this regard, [5] observed that the Child Rights Act will be fully effective if all State Assemblies also enact it. Furthermore, [5] is also of the view that increased participation of children in issues affecting their lives can have positive and far reaching effects on their health and socio-economic conditions. When children participate in decision making, they tend to be more creative, positive and energetic, offering ideas devoid of prejudices and stereotypes. As a result, the Federal Government of Nigeria inaugurated the Children's Parliament in 2003 to enhance children's participation. Since then, 26 States have inaugurated children's parliaments. There is also an increased participation of children in the media and their opinion at the public domain is now sought and publicized to give them some measure of participation and responsibility. However, the main challenge is how to make these Parliaments truly representative of the broad categories of Nigerian children, including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. According to [15], greater public awareness of Child's Rights Act can lead to increased political will, implementation and monitoring, increased advocacy, positive proactive response to advocacy by adult members of the society, realization of children's rights and improved well being. [16] stated that for a greater awareness of children's rights, parents should be educated and counseled on child rights issues that guard against child labor as well as those that promote the child's participation, survival, education and development. [4] emphasized the need for more public enlightenment about the Child's Rights Act and for policy makers to lay emphasis on educating the people so that the aim of enacting the Act will be realized. Education is seen as the key to achieving the goals of Child Rights Act. [17] believed that educating people on the rights of the child is important not only for legal reasons but also for its potential in increasing rights-respecting attitudes and behaviors. Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, like all signatories, Nigeria is obligated legally to take measures to increase public awareness of children's rights as described in the Convention. According to Article 42 of the Convention, state parties are to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to their citizens [4]. Thus, a key to this implies that there is need to make people aware of the Child's Right Act through education. Since counseling is an educational service [18] the researchers are motivated to investigate the counseling needs of parents for increased awareness of Child's Rights Act. Counseling is designed to help people to understand and clarify their views, and learn how to reach their self-determined goals through meaningful, well-informed choices, and through the resolution of emotional or interpersonal problems. The goal of counseling is to make it possible for a client to see and explore his or her unlimited endowed options [19]. To reinforce the place of counseling in the school system and Nigerian society, the [20] stated that government shall continue to make provision for the training of teachers in counseling; establish and equip counseling clinics, career resource centers, and information centers; and proprietors of schools shall provide adequate number of counselors for their institutions. Thus, counselors are required to play active role in issues affecting children both at school, community, local, state and national levels. In recent times, counseling services are gaining widespread recognition across the schools in Enugu State and the State government employs counselors in secondary schools. Yet, a study found that most parents in Enugu State are unaware of the Child's Rights Act which protects children against any form of abuse, neglect and discrimination [4]. As such, the Nigerian child in this State may be suffering under the machinations of caregivers and guardians who are expected to protect them. Most parents because of the necessity to survive unduly subject their children to child labor, cruel neglect, and outright abandonment. To worsen the situation, children are forced to work late night, carry heavy loads, and hawk. [21] reported that in many parts of the Nigerian society, whether children are on holiday or not, they are subjected to dehumanizing conditions through hawking. Some parents do most of these as a result of ignorance, behavioral deficit or sheer wickedness. Some parents claim that their children hawk one item or another so as to raise money for their school fees not knowing that the

Child Rights Act prohibits such. According to [21], it is an offence under the Child's Rights Act for parents to deny their children education but some children are kept at home and used as helpers instead of being given opportunity to exploit their environment for future relevance. Besides in the states where children are hardly immunized against killer diseases, do the parents know that it is the rights of the children to be immunized? Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provides that children have the right to good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food and clean environment. Article 27 of the Child Rights Convention says children have right to a standard of living that is good to meet their physical and mental needs while article 28 provides that children have right to education just as primary education should be free. Although, this is not so in many parts of Nigeria but people are not saying anything about it probably because they are not aware that payment of school fees by children in government owned schools is against the law. One of the research findings by [4] specifically indicated that residents of Nsukka town in Enugu state of Nigeria are neither aware of the existence nor the contents of the Child's Rights Act. However, counselors in Nsukka, a University town and its environs could help to create this awareness since by the nature of their training they are practically and professionally equipped to do so. The first step to facilitating a proactive counseling program in this direction is to identify the counseling needs of parents for increased awareness of Child's Rights Act. In Nigeria, [22] did observe significant differences between male and female participants on perceived counseling needs. It is in the light of these expositions that the study seeks to provide answers to the following questions: What are the rights of children that parents need to be aware of to help them promote child's rights in Nsukka Urban?; What are the counseling needs of parents for increased awareness of child's rights acts?. One null hypothesis is stated thus; there is no significant difference in the overall mean responses of male and female parents on their counseling needs for increased awareness of child's rights act.

Method

Area of Study

The study was carried out in Nsukka Urban of Enugu State. Nsukka is the headquarters of Nsukka Local Government Area and also a University Town. Based on the 2006 Population Census, Nsukka local government area has a population of 309,448 consisting of 149,418 males and 160,030 females [23]. Previous research suggests that residents of Nsukka town in Enugu state of Nigeria are neither aware of the existence nor the contents of the Child's Rights Act [4] and this may invariably account for the observed increase in child right abuse issues in the State.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A study sample of 370 parents residing in Nsukka Urban was purposively drawn. It consisted of 237 male and 133 female parents. A multistage sampling involving stratified and simple random sampling techniques was also used to successively choose the area of Nsukka town, streets, households, and finally, the respondents as applicable. Questionnaire was employed as the primary instrument of data collection. The questions were developed based on issues relating to those raised in the literature. Trained research assistants administered the questionnaires.

Instrument

Counseling Needs of Parents for Increased Awareness of Child's Rights Act Questionnaire. The questionnaire for data collection was design by the researchers. It was a 20-items questionnaire with two sections – A and B. Section A sought information regarding the respondents' sex. Section B sought information on counseling needs of parents for increased awareness of child's right acts. Section B which has two clusters was design on a four point rating scale of Agree Strongly (4, AS), Agree Mildly (3, AM), Disagree Mildly (2, DM), and Disagree Strongly (0, DS). The reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.91alpha.

Results

Research Question 1

The result of data analysis in Table 1 that answered research question one shows that both male and female parents agree to all the item statements as the rights of children that they needed to be aware of to help them promote child's rights. This is so because the mean scores of both male and female adult residents on each item statement achieved the bench mark of 2.5 and above. Items 1 (Male Parents, 1= 3.42, SD1=.77; Female Parents, 2= 3.17, SD2=.69); item 7 (Male Parents, 1= 3.42, SD1=.75; Female Parents, 2= 3.39, SD2=.72); item 2(Male Parents, 1= 3.34, SD1=.77; Female Parents, 2= 3.39, SD2=.72) and item 8 (Male Parents, 1= 3.34, SD1=.77; Female Parents, 2= 3.31, SD2=.75) that, is the right to free education, the right to protection against abuse and torture, the right to develop his abilities, and right to participate in issues concerning them were item statements with the highest means scores for both parents.

Table 1. Rights of children that Parents need to be aware of to help them promote Child's Rights

S/N	Rights of Children	Male Parents, n=237			Female Parents, n=133		
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	Dec ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	Dec ₂
1	The right to free education	3.42	.77	A	3.17	.69	A
2	The right to develop his abilities	3.34	.75	A	3.39	.72	A
3	The right to special care and attention	3.22	.77	A	3.31	.75	A
4	The right to free expression	3.30	.82	A	3.26	.85	A
5	The right to dignity of human person	3.30	.87	A	3.34	.79	A
6	The right to life and development	3.19	.83	A	3.25	.86	A
7	The right to protection against abuse and torture	3.42	.75	A	3.39	.72	A
8	Right to participate in issues concerning them	3.34	.77	A	3.31	.75	A
9	The right to freedom from discrimination	3.22	.82	A	3.26	.85	A
10	The right to protection from economic exploitation or hazardous work	3.30	.87	A	3.34	.79	A

A=Agree

Research Question 2

The result of data analysis in Table 2 that answered research question two showed that both male and female parents agree to all the item statements regarding their counseling needs for increased awareness of child's rights acts ($p > .05$). Some of the item statements (items 3, 2, 6, 4 and 1) with high mean scores shows that both male and female adult residents acknowledges that parents need counseling on child rights issues to guard against sexual exploitation of children (Male Parents, 1= 3.26, SD1=.85; Female Parents, 2= 3.24, SD2=.82), child discrimination (Male Parents, 1= 3.26, SD1=.86; Female Parents, 2= 3.21, SD2=.83), child prostitution (Male Parents, 1= 3.26, SD1=.85; Female Parents, 2= 3.24, SD2=.82), child marriage and pregnancy (Male Parents, 1= 3.21, SD1=.79; Female Parents, 2= 3.32, SD2=.77), and street hawking and school child's drop-out (Male Parents, 1= 3.19, SD1=.83; Female Parents, 2= 3.25, SD2=.86).

Table 2. Counseling needs of Parents for increased awareness of Child's Rights Acts

S/N	Parents needs counseling on child rights issues to guard against:	Male Parents, n=237			Female Parents, n=133		
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	Dec ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	Dec ₂
1	Child street hawking and school child's drop-out.	3.19	.83	A	3.25	.86	A
2	Child discrimination	3.26	.86	A	3.21	.83	A
3	Sexual exploitation of children	3.29	.79	A	3.34	.75	A
4	Child marriage and pregnancy	3.21	.79	A	3.32	.77	A
5	Child abandonment	3.13	1.01	A	3.41	.78	A
6	Child prostitution	3.26	.85	A	3.24	.82	A
7	Child malnourishment	3.11	.79	A	3.14	.74	A
8	Child trafficking	3.08	.93	A	3.09	.89	A
9	Female genital mutilation	3.17	.79	A	3.24	.78	A
10	Child battery and child soldier	3.14	.83	A	3.25	.79	A

A=Agree

Hypothesis

As a guide to the study, the researchers were also interested in finding out if there is significant difference in the overall mean responses of male and female parents on their counseling needs for increased awareness of child's rights act. The result of hypothesis testing in Table 3 shows that the p-value reported ($p = .65$) is greater than 0.05 level of significance. This imply that there is no significant difference in the overall mean responses of both male and female parents on their counseling needs for increased awareness of child's rights act, $t(368) = -.456$, $p = .65$.

Table 3. T-test showing the Overall Mean responses of Male parents and Female parents on the Counseling needs of Parents for increased awareness of Child's Rights Act

Group	n	\bar{X}	SD	df	t	Sig.	Dec.
Male Parents	237	3.28	.50				
				368	-.456	.65	NS
Female Parents	133	3.30	.51				

Discussion

One of the main thrusts of this study was to investigate the rights of children that parents need to be aware of to help them promote child's rights. The study found that the rights of children that parents needed to be aware of to help them promote child's rights include but not limited to the right to free education, the right to develop his abilities, the right to special care and attention, the right to free expression, the right to dignity of human person, the right to life and development, the right to protection against abuse and torture, right to participate in issues concerning them, the right to freedom from discrimination, and the right to protection from economic exploitation or hazardous work. This goes to suggest that both male and female adult residents in the area are beginning to be aware of the Child's Right Act as against [4] finding that residents of Nsukka town in Enugu state are neither aware of the existence nor the contents of the Child's Rights Act. The findings on the other hand, supports [4] emphasis on the need for more public enlightenment about the Child's Rights Act and for policy makers to lay emphasis on educating the people so that the aim of enacting the Act will be realized. The implication is that counselors need to provide parents with counseling services to help increase their awareness of contents of the Child's Right Acts. This could be achievable if counselors intensify their involvement in promoting the rights of children through school-based and community counseling interventions. Further, State governments need to acknowledge, adopt and to implement evidence-based strategies for achieving the goals of Child Rights Act, and target at increasing parents' awareness of rights of children in the State. Another focus of the study was on the counseling needs of parents for increased awareness of Child's Rights Act. The study found that the counseling needs of parents for increased awareness of Child's Rights Act include counseling on child rights issues to guard against street hawking and school child's drop-out, child discrimination, sexual exploitation of children, child marriage and pregnancy, child abandonment, child prostitution, child malnourishment, child trafficking, female genital mutilation, and child battery and child soldier. These findings is further supported by the hypothesis' result that there is no significant difference in the overall mean responses of male and female adult residents on the counseling needs of parents for increased awareness of Child's Rights Act. The finding in part, supports those of [16], that for a greater awareness of children's rights, parents should be educated

and counseled on child rights issues that guard against child labor as well as those that promote the child's participation, survival, education and development. However, in terms of sex differences in mean responses, this finding contradicts that of [22] in whose study significant differences were observed between both genders on perceived counseling needs. Although, the observed differences may be due to the fact the participants in Obi's study were those with disease-conditions. It appears then that individuals' health status may go a long way to determine their counseling needs and is also influenced by sex differences. This notwithstanding, meeting the counseling needs of parents for increased awareness of Child Rights Act has become apparently necessary since according to the [15] greater public awareness of Child's Rights Act can lead to increase political will, implementation and monitoring, increased advocacy, positive proactive response to advocacy by adult members of the society, realization of children's rights and improved well being.

Limitations

These results are based on self – reports of parents with various backgrounds and from different walks of life. The results may also be affected by some bias attitude that parents might take toward the variables.

6. Conclusion
The study adds to the growing body of research on children's right. The researchers wish to point out that, although there are certain dangers confronting the rights of children in the Nigerian society and efforts are being made in Nigeria to protect the child for the overall and sustainable development of the society but such efforts seem to be inadequate enough to cushion the effects of the prevailing child right abuses. Therefore, it is suggested that counselors should intensify efforts at organizing community counseling programs and out-reach interventions to help meet the counseling needs of parents with regards to awareness of Child's Right Acts in the Area.

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Eucharia Nchedo Nwosu, Immaculata Nwakaego Akaneme, Chiedu Eseadi, Ashofor H. Arinola, Jude I Abah, Daniel E Asogwa, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria.
FCT College of Education, Zuba, Abuja, Nigeria.

