

Experiences of Mothers of Children with Hearing Disability in Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract: The plights of mothers of children with hearing disability in Southwest Nigeria are usually more than contending with the trauma accompanying the discovery of their children's disabilities. They indeed include encountering some cultural practices which consider such mothers and their children as culprits for defying some sociocultural orders. As result, they should not be empathized with rather they should be penalized. This study therefore, sought to examine the experiences of some mothers parenting children with hearing disability in Oyo State, southwest of Nigeria. The study raised 2 research questions to ascertain the psychological trauma and caring difficulties which the concerned mothers often weather through. Fifty mothers of children with hearing disability were purposively selected and engaged in the study. A self-developed questionnaire was the instrument administered on the participants to generate the necessary data. Findings showed that some psychological problems encountered by such mothers include anger, isolation and depression while the caring problems for parenting such children involve time and financial constraints. It was therefore, recommended that some erroneous cultural practices concerning persons with disabilities and their parents should be corrected through means such as disability education and counselling while some support measures should be put in place to lessen some childcare difficulties often encountered by mothers of children with disabilities.

Key words: Experiences, mothers, children with hearing disability, Oyo State

INTRODUCTION

Couples among the Yoruba speaking people of Oyo state, southwest Nigeria, perhaps have nothing to be more anxious about than conceiving and delivering normal children. Indeed, the months between conception and delivery are usually spent observing certain rituals required for guaranteeing safe pregnancy, safe delivery and more importantly for having an able-bodied child (Awoniyi, 1979). Expectant mothers are usually requested to heed without fail certain warnings needful for avoiding the wraths of gods or for escaping the antics of the evildoers (Jegede, 1997). Expectant fathers too have their own cultural regulations they should strictly adhere. Disregarding them could spell doom for the pregnancy or their baby when eventually delivered (Adima, 1991).

Tradition indeed requests that every expectant mother should be under a close monitoring of a native doctor or some elders who will ensure that she religiously observe the cultural provisions pertaining to childbearing (Daramola and Jeje, 1980). One common watchword with which elderly Yorubas usually instruct young parents is let us do it as it ought to be done so that it will be as it

suppose to be. What this communicates is that if expectant parents disregard the cultural regulations they would definitely face the consequences. If an expectant mother therefore gives birth to a child with deformity the common explanation for this is that something must have gone wrong with the pregnancy. Possibly the mother must have defied some taboos or the pregnancy must have been bewitched or worse still, the child himself or herself must have earned such an unfortunate fate as a retribution for evils he or she has committed in the previous life.

Regardless of culture or location, mankind everywhere owes a new child the best care and precautions it can give (Osanyin, 2004). The worries which Yorubas' often have about childbearing could therefore be justified to some extent. Nevertheless, the Yorubas appear to be much more cautious about childbearing than some other tribes elsewhere in the world. Marriages are usually contracted among the Yorubas with the sole aim of raising children (Ojo, 1966). If couples experience delay in conceiving, have repeated cases of miscarriage or give birth to children with disabilities, the shame and pain which such couples

would experience could be better imagined than experienced (Onwuegbu, 1978). Consequently, many marriages among Yorubas have been disengaged for failing to produce children or for producing children with deformities. Ikotun (1995) remarked that Yorubas often ask two questions whenever a child is born. They ask if the child is a boy or girl, (because they are also particular about the baby's sex). They also ask if the child is alright. Morethanoften male child would incite more applause from well-wishers than a female child. If the child has disability and that disability is detected at birth the parents might wish that the child is dead than being alive (Abang, 1988).

A child with congenital hearing disability (born with the disability) might have his or her disability concealed for months after birth (Mba, 1991). However, whenever this disability is discovered the shock and disappointment with which parents, (mothers especially) would receive this unusual happening would be very overwhelming Yoruba's culture regards children with hearing disability as accursed while their parents are also considered as sinful individuals penalized by the gods for their evil deeds (Alake, 1988). As a result, such parents often wish two things could happen to them. One is that they could wish they are better off without children than to have children with deformities. They could also prefer having still born babies than having ones with disabilities. The last wish is often illustrated by a Yoruba saying which runs to die is far better than to live with an unending experience of shame. Definitely, parents of children with hearing disability would be victims of a double tragedy. They encounter shock and disbelief for having children with disability (Moores, 1987). They also experience disappointment from relations, friends and the society who would disassociate from them and their children (Mba, 1995). These two problems typify some psychosocial difficulties which parents of children with hearing disability do experience in various Yoruba communities of Nigeria.

Consequently, one would hope that in recent times when the public is better informed about disabilities and persons with disabilities than in the past, there should be a better understanding and more positive attitude towards parents and children with disabilities in nearly all human societies. However, Meadow-Orlans and Erting (2000) noted that in many communities, there seems to have been not much change to suggest a significant shift from what used to obtain in the past and now. For instance, education for persons with hearing disability in Nigeria began about thirty years ago. Not only that an education which spans only three decades could still be too nascent to remarkably reverse some long standing cultural practices which are unfavorable to persons with hearing

disability (Odedeji, 1992) but more sadly is the reality that the same education is described as one which could only offer the most rudimentary educational opportunities for persons with hearing disability. This fact partly suggests why majority of such persons in various third world countries are often found at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, living in appalling conditions (Meadow-Orlans and Erting, 2000). This fact is also indicative of how disturbing and unfortunate parenting children with hearing impairment could still be now in some African societies such as those in Southwest Nigeria.

Besides some psychosocial problems, mothers of children with hearing disability in southwest Nigeria also encounter some caring difficulties characterized by a demand for additional time and finance much more than required for raising and caring for the normally hearing children. Simply put, it usually requires thrice the attention and expenses needed for raising a child with hearing disability than required for raising a hearing child (Neely, 1982). Time and money spent on diagnosing the child's disability, visiting medical practitioners, counselors, therapists and special teachers are not only exhausting and upsetting, they do also disrupt relationships at home especially when other siblings feel neglected or less attended to by the concerned mothers (Olawale, 2000).

Arrival of a child with disability in a home could initiate the breaking up of his parents' marriage. For instance, it is not uncommon among the Yorubas for a husband to blame his wife for their child's disability. Consequently, a husband nursing resentment against his wife can therefore decide to disengage with the same wife if it appears too that the wife devotes more attention and care to the child than to him. This is usually the practice especially in polygamous homes where husbands can outrightly send away the concerned wife and her child or ignore them and continue life with other wives.

This study therefore, attempted to asses some psychological and caring problems which mothers of children with hearing disability usually experience. These problems were considered in reference to the Yoruba culture of Oyo State in southwest Nigeria.

Research questions: The study sought to provide answers to the following two research questions:

- Will mothers of children with hearing impairment experience some psychological trauma for giving birth to such children?
- Will mothers of children with hearing impairment experience some unusual childcare difficulties?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants: Hundred mothers of children with hearing disability constituted the population for this study. They were purposively selected as mothers of schoolchildren and students attending 1 primary and 2 secondary schools in Oyo State. Fifty mothers were finally selected as the study sample. This sample was arrived at using the following selection criteria:

- Only mothers who are Yorubas since the study, among other things focused on Yoruba cultural practices pertaining to disabilities and persons with disabilities.
- Accessibility or availability of such mothers for research activities.
- Onset of hearing disability in such children which must be before birth (congenital hearing disability). This is because reactions of Yorubas to persons with disabilities and their relations are more profound when the disabilities are noticed early in life than later.
- Degree of hearing disability in such children must be 70 Decibel Hearing Loss (70 dBHL) and above. The term deaf and dumb among Yorubas refer to persons with severe hearing loss. They are people considered as those who cannot hear and talk. As a result, they and their relations often experience intense stigmatization from their community member.

Causes of hearing disability in most of the children whose mothers were engaged in the study could not be ascertained. This made mothers and those around them to attribute the disability to witchcraft or breaking of taboos. As a result, the socio-cultural and psychological problems which such mothers often encounter could be very traumatic.

All mothers engaged in this study were born and reared in the Yorubaland. A condition which makes them well informed of the Yoruba culture. They are also all illiterates. As a result, their travails while parenting their children could not be helped much by formal education.

Instrument: A self-developed questionnaire was the major instrument used for this study. The questionnaire was designed to ascertain some psychological and caring problems usually encountered by mothers of children with hearing disability. It has three sections- A, B and C. Section A was designed to obtain the biodata of the participants. Section B has 10 items generated for obtaining information bordering on psychosocial upsets

involved in parenting children with hearing disability. There are 10 questions asked on psychosocial factors. Items on sociocultural antics include the experiences of disassociation, snubbing, rejection, verbalized and demonstrated insults, banning of mothers and their disabled children from participating in some sociocultural activities since Yoruba culture regard people with disabilities as persons dedicated to gods (Daramola and Jeje, 1980). They are therefore often restricted from coming out. Items based on emotional issues indicate what sort of psychological discomforts mothers do experience as consequences for giving birth to such children. These include shock, grief, guilt, depression, separation and so on (Moores, 1987).

Section C also has 10 questions which were developed to determine some childcare needs for raising a child with hearing disability. Caring needs were classified as financial and time factors involved for parenting a child with hearing disability. Again 5 questions apiece were asked on financial and time factors respectively. Items on financial needs include extra monies spent on consulting medical experts, undertaking audiological tests, engaging speech therapists and paying hospital bills for treating ailments accompanying or resulting from hearing impairment.

All items were scored on the 3- scale likert format in form of: agree (3), neutral (2) and disagree (1). Circled numerical figures are marks attached to the stated options. Participants were requested to tick options which best describe their experiences. The reliability value of this instrument using crumbach alpha is $r = 0.79$.

RESULTS

Results are presented according to the two research questions which this study sought to answer.

Research questions 1: Will mothers of children with hearing disability experienced psychological trauma for giving birth to such children?

Findings in relation to this research question are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 show that more mothers agreed that they do encounter some sociocultural antics (58.8%) than those who disagreed (29.4%). The mean score is 2.30. On the other hand, less mothers (43.1%) agreed that they encounter some emotional problems than those who disagreed (47.1%). Mean score is 1.96. The weighted average is 2.13 which gives 71% proportionally. This implies that 71% of the mothers agreed that giving birth to children with hearing disability implies that concerned mothers would encounter some unpleasant psychosocial reactions from spouses, relations, friends and community members.

Table 1: Psychosocial problems experienced by mothers of children with hearing impairment

Statements on psychosocial variables	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	-X	S.D
(1) Do mothers of children with hearing disability experience some sociocultural antics?	30 (58.8%)	5 (9.8%)	15 (29.4%)	2.30	0.91
(2) Do mothers of children with hearing disability experience some emotional upsets?	22 (43.1%)	4 (7.8%)	24 (47.1%)	1.96	0.97
Weighted average	2.13 (71%)				

Table 2: Childcare problems (financial and time needs) encountered by mothers of children with hearing disability

Statements on unusual childcare problems for parenting children with hearing disability	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	-X	S.D
(1) Do mothers of children with hearing disability experience more financial needs than required for providing for hearing children?	40 (78.4%)	2 (3.9%)	8 (15.7%)	2.64	0.75
(2) Do mothers of children with hearing disability experience more time-related problems than required for attending to hearing children?	34 (66.7%)	1 (2.0%)	15 (29.4%)	2.38	0.92
Weighted average	2.54 (84.7%)				

Research question 2: Will mothers of children with hearing disability experience some unusual childcare difficulties?

Findings in relation to this research questions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 indicates that majority of the mothers agreed that they do encounter more financial needs to provide care for their children than required for raising the normally hearing children. However, some (15.7) disagreed. The mean score is 2.64. Furthermore, more mothers (66.7%) agreed that they do encounter some difficulties in finding enough time to cater for their children and to attend to the needs of other family members. Conversely, some mothers disagreed (29.4%). The mean score is 2.38, weight average is 2.54 (84.7%).

DISCUSSION

Psychosocial problems encountered by mothers of children with hearing disability: As indicated in Table 1, mothers raising children with hearing disability do often experience some psychosocial problems which often unsettle their psychological wellbeing. Such problems as stated by the mothers who participated in this study include experiencing disassociation from husbands, relations, friends and community members (Adima, 1991). Some also receive verbalized insults and are also stigmatized (Talent, 1978; Lucas, 2001). For instance, parents of hearing children do restrict their children from interacting with the non-hearing children. In addition, children or adults could tease the deaf children by placing leaves in their mouths. What this practice implies is that such children are subhuman comparable to animals which eat leaves. Such experiences would definitely arouse anger and frustration from the mothers. A mother whose child is compared to a grass eating animal would definitely have her emotions greatly

assaulted. They as a result do experience grief, disappointments, low self concept and depression almost on daily basis.

Childcare problems encountered by mothers of children with hearing disability: Findings resulting from the second research question also revealed that mothers of children with hearing disability do encounter the problems of spending more time and money to provide necessary care of their children. These findings corroborate some earlier submissions made by Neely (1982), Mba (1995) and Olawale (2000) which indicated that parents of children with disabilities would require much more monies and time to provide care and necessary interventions (medical and educational) for their children. Finding more time and monies to meet these needs could be very unsettling. For instance, marriages and relationships at home would be threatened if it appears that the child with disability takes more attention and care than given to husbands, siblings and other family members especially among the Yoruba's where the practice of extended families is very rampant (Daramola and Jeje, 1980). Again, in such a community where poverty holds sway, getting sufficient money to properly take care of such a child would be a very disturbing experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As findings have indicated, some Yoruba communities are still neckdeep in some cultural norms which so much count against the wellbeing of mothers and children with disabilities. This simply implies that such norms should be eliminated through some concerted efforts which include enlightening the public properly about disabilities and their causes. Yorubas' should be enlightened to know that disabilities are not necessarily a result of witchcraft or offences committed to some gods,

neither are persons with disabilities demonized. They are human beings whose conditions are just due to some unfortunate incidences that could be realistically or scientifically determined rather than mystifying them. This could be done by initiating the disability education in formal and informal centres. As school going children and youths are informed so also the adults through adult education programmes. Religious bodies and nongovernmental organisations can also be involved in this public enlightenment programme.

There should also be some support programmes for parents having children with disabilities. There should be counselling centres for such parents where they can access information on such children and their care needs. Such centres will also provide emotional support and adjustment services to the concerned parents. Community members can be motivated to be caring and supporting to the concerned parents and children. Some non-government organisations can take up the provision of care and advocacy for the same parents and children as their pet projects.

Furthermore, government (local, state and federal) can also support such parents and their children in form paying them special allowances to assuage the financial burdens involved in providing care for the children. They can also subsidized healthcare services for the children. Government can also offer the same children scholarship to enable them attend schools, complete their education and become worthy members of their communities. This will go a long way to initiate and promote necessary attitude change to persons with disabilities and their parents in Yoruba areas.

CONCLUSION

Mothers of children with hearing disability in Yorubaland do encounter some damaging experiences as a result of giving birth to such children. Among other things, they contend with some hostile cultural practices which often render them victims of social abuse and emotional assaults. In addition, they often find it extremely difficult to cope with some increasing demands on their time and money in order to provide necessary childcare for such children. These are some findings this study has discovered. It is therefore advised that there should be some attitude changing measures first to properly enlighten the Yorubas about disabilities and to mobilize them so that they can offer support for parents and children with hearing disability. There are also needs to provide counselling and financial supports particularly for parents of such children.

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