

Socio-Psychological Factors and Parents' Attitudes toward Fostering Children in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study was carried out to determine the extent to which socio-psychological factors predict parents' attitude toward fostering children in Akwalbom State, Nigeria. To achieve the purpose of the study, two research questions and two null hypotheses were raised and formulated, respectively to guide the study. This study adopted a correlational research design. The correlational design was considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to examine the statistical relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable. The population of the study comprised all parents across selected communities in Akwalbom State, while the sample was drawn using a multistage sampling technique involving stratified and simple random procedures to ensure fair representation of urban and rural areas. A structured questionnaire titled "Socio-Psychological Factors and Fostering Attitude Questionnaire (SPFAQ)" was developed and validated for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was established using the Cronbach Alpha method, yielding a reliability coefficient above 0.70, indicating high internal consistency. Data collected were analyzed using simple linear regression to answer research questions and to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that family communication pattern and disciplinary beliefs significantly predict parents' attitude toward fostering children in Akwalbom State, Nigeria. Based on the findings, it was concluded that both family communication pattern and disciplinary beliefs significantly influence parents' willingness and disposition towards fostering. Parents who maintain open, respectful, and supportive communication within their families tend to show a more positive attitude toward accepting and nurturing foster children. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that government agencies and social welfare organizations should organize regular sensitization workshops and seminars to educate parents on the importance of effective family communication pattern and disciplinary beliefs.

Key words: Attitudes, Children, Factors, Fostering, Socio-Psychological,

Introduction

Ideally, every child deserves to grow up in a safe, nurturing, and emotionally supportive environment where their basic needs for love, education, healthcare, and protection are adequately met. In such settings, families and communities take collective responsibility for children, ensuring that no child is left without proper care, regardless of their biological parentage. Fostering, whether formal or informal, is recognized as a humane, child-centered practice where individuals or families willingly take in vulnerable children as a social responsibility, driven by compassion, empathy, and communal values. In societies

where socio-psychological structures are healthy, fostering is embraced as a way to secure a better future for children who have been orphaned, neglected, or abandoned.

However, the current situation in Akwa Ibom State presents a sharp contrast to this ideal. While fostering is not a new concept in the state, the prevailing socio-psychological realities have created a complex attitude toward the practice. The rise in the number of vulnerable children due to poverty, parental death, child abuse, and accusations of witchcraft has placed additional pressure on families and social systems. Unfortunately, many parents and guardians exhibit reluctance or negative attitudes towards fostering, especially when it involves non-relatives. This attitude is influenced by a combination of factors such as cultural beliefs, fear of social stigma, low emotional intelligence, financial constraints, poor family communication, and rigid parenting styles. As a result, many children are left to survive in orphanages, on the streets, or in unstable living conditions, without the warmth and care of a family environment. Given the above, it becomes necessary to investigate the socio-psychological factors such as family communication pattern and disciplinary beliefs that influence parents' attitudes toward fostering children in Akwa Ibom State.

One of the variables in this study is family communication pattern. Family communication pattern refers to the manner in which parents and other family members exchange information, express feelings, and engage in decision-making within the household. It encompasses both the openness of conversations and the emotional climate that allows or restricts expression of thoughts and emotions. Family communication is categorized into patterns such as *open*, *closed*, *protective*, or *laissez-faire*, each influencing how supportive or restrictive a family environment is. An open communication pattern is characterized by dialogue, emotional warmth, and mutual respect, which may foster positive attitudes toward accepting foster children. Conversely, a restrictive or authoritarian pattern may hinder willingness to foster, as it limits emotional bonding and adaptability. For the purpose of this study, family communication pattern will be measured based on parents' self-reported interaction style, emotional openness, and frequency of communication with children and other family members (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2021).

Another importance variable is disciplinary beliefs. Disciplinary beliefs refer to the convictions, values, and attitudes held by parents regarding the appropriate methods for correcting and guiding children's behavior. These beliefs influence the choice of disciplinary strategies, ranging from physical punishment to reasoning, withdrawal of privileges, or positive reinforcement. Disciplinary beliefs are shaped by cultural norms, religious teachings, upbringing, and personal experiences. Parents who hold punitive or authoritarian disciplinary beliefs may rely more on physical punishment and obedience-driven control, potentially exhibiting less empathy toward fostering children. On the other hand, parents with democratic or nurturing disciplinary beliefs are more likely to employ non-violent, communicative, and corrective approaches, thereby creating a more accepting and inclusive environment for foster care. In this study, disciplinary beliefs will be assessed based on parents' preferred methods of discipline, their justification for such methods, and their perceived effectiveness (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016).

Research has shown that attitudes toward fostering are significantly linked to the socio-psychological environment of the caregiver. Positive parenting approaches, open family communication, and an inclusive worldview often result in favorable attitudes toward child fostering. Conversely, authoritarian parenting, low income, emotional stress, and rigid cultural beliefs can discourage parents from accepting foster responsibilities. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the socio-psychological factors that influence parents' attitudes toward fostering children in Akwalbom State.

Statement of the Problem

In an ideal family setting, parents play a critical role in shaping the emotional, social, and psychological development of children, including those who are not biologically theirs but are taken in through fostering. Ideally, strong family communication patterns and positive disciplinary beliefs should influence a warm and accepting parental attitude toward fostering children. In such settings, parents openly communicate values, show empathy, and provide a structured yet nurturing environment. This supportive atmosphere not only facilitates the integration of foster children but also promotes their holistic well-being, contributing to the success of child welfare programmes and reducing the number of vulnerable children in society.

However, the current reality in many communities, including Akwalbom State, presents a deviation from this ideal. Despite increasing awareness and the need for foster parenting due to factors such as poverty, orphanhood, displacement, and social breakdown, the willingness of parents to embrace fostering remains limited. Many families display negative attitudes or indifference towards fostering, often rooted in poor communication dynamics within the family and rigid or authoritarian disciplinary beliefs. These issues have led to misunderstandings, lack of cohesion, and ultimately, rejection or poor treatment of foster children.

This gap between the ideal and the current situation raises concern about the underlying factors influencing parents' attitudes toward fostering. Could the way families communicate and the disciplinary ideologies they uphold be significantly responsible for the attitude parents exhibit toward fostering children? There is a need to investigate whether socio-psychological factors predict parents' attitudes toward fostering children in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

This study is designed to determine the extent to which socio-psychological factors predict parents' attitude towards fostering children in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the extent to which family communication pattern predicts parents' attitude towards fostering children in Akwa Ibom State.
2. Determine the extent to which disciplinary beliefs predict parents' attitude towards fostering children in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

The following research questions are raised to guide the study:

1. How does family communication pattern predict parents' attitude towards fostering children in Akwa Ibom State?
2. How do disciplinary beliefs predict parents' attitude towards fostering children in Akwa Ibom State?

Null Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are formulated to guide the study:

1. Family communication pattern does not significantly predict parents' attitude towards fostering children in Akwa Ibom State.
2. Disciplinary beliefs do not significantly predict parents' attitude towards fostering children in Akwa Ibom State.

Family Communication Pattern and Parents Attitude

In a study, Effiong and Usoroh (2020) examined the relationship between family communication patterns and parent-adolescent cohesion among senior secondary school students in Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and drew a sample of 368 Senior Secondary II students from a population of 4,608. A proportionate random sampling technique was used to ensure fair representation across schools. Two researcher-developed instruments were employed: the Family Communication Pattern Questionnaire (FCPQ) and the Cohesion between Adolescents and Parents Questionnaire (CAPQ), which was adapted from Olson's Circumplex Model. The reliability coefficients for FCPQ and CAPQ were 0.62 and 0.85 respectively, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The findings revealed that pluralistic and consensual family communication patterns were positively associated with high levels of emotional bonding and cohesion between parents and adolescents, while protective and laissez-faire patterns were associated with weak cohesion and emotional distance.

In another study, Umennuihe *et al* (2024) explored the influence of family communication patterns on the mental health and aspirations of post-secondary adolescents living in slum communities in Ibadan, Nigeria. The study was motivated by concerns over the psychological well-being and future outlook of adolescents growing up in socioeconomically deprived areas. Utilizing a descriptive survey design, the researchers focused on a sample of 44 adolescents residing in Akinyele Local Government Area, selected through a snowball sampling technique due to the informal and difficult-to-reach nature of the population. A semi-structured questionnaire was employed to gather data on family communication styles (classified as pluralistic, consensual, protective, and laissez-faire), mental health indicators (such as anxiety, emotional distress, and self-esteem), and aspirational variables (including career goals and motivation). The findings indicated that adolescents raised in households with consensual or protective communication patterns were more likely to exhibit symptoms

of poor mental health and demonstrated reduced educational and career aspirations. This was attributed to the lack of openness and emotional support in their family interactions.

More so, Adeyemi (2015) investigated the relationship between parenting styles and the social-emotional competence of preschool children in Abuja, Nigeria. The research was situated in the context of early childhood development and the need to understand how parental behaviors influence young children's emotional regulation, social skills, and behavioral adjustment. The study employed a correlational survey research design involving 100 parent-child pairs from five randomly selected preschools in Abuja. The parents were selected purposively, and corresponding classroom teachers were asked to assess each child's behavior. Two major instruments were used in the study: the Parenting Style Dimension Questionnaire (completed by parents) and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), which was filled by teachers to assess the children's emotional and behavioral functioning. The results showed that the authoritative parenting style was the most commonly practiced among the sampled parents, followed by authoritarian and permissive styles. It was also found that parents' occupational status influenced the type of parenting style adopted, with those in higher occupational categories tending toward more authoritative styles. Most significantly, the study found a strong correlation between parenting style and children's social-emotional competence. Children of authoritative parents showed better emotional balance, peer relationships, and adaptability, whereas children raised under authoritarian styles displayed signs of hyperactivity and peer relationship problems.

Disciplinary Beliefs Pattern and Parents Attitude

In a study, Taiwo and Adejuwon (2020) explored the influence of self-esteem, locus of control, and gender on attitudes toward child adoption and adoptive parents in Ibadan metropolis. Using an ex post facto, survey-based design, they sampled 300 adults (150 male, 150 female) from Ibadan through random selection. Their instrumentation included a demographic questionnaire, an established self-esteem scale adapted from Adanijo and Oyefeso (1986), a locus of control scale based on Craig *et al.* (1981), and an attitude-towards-child-adoption questionnaire developed by the researchers. All measures demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties. The results revealed that self-esteem was the strongest psychological predictor of a positive attitude toward adoption and adoptive parents; individuals with higher self-esteem scored significantly more favorably ($t = -3.5$, $p < .001$). Moreover, the interaction between locus of control and self-esteem further influenced attitudes ($F = 5.4$, $p < .02$), suggesting that individuals with internal locus orientation combined with high self-esteem were more disposed to adoptive openness. Although disciplinary beliefs were not measured directly, the psychological orientation linked to attitude implies that those with higher emotional stability and internal control may also hold more adaptive disciplinary beliefs preferring reasoning and structure over strict punitive methods.

In the same vein, Omosun and Kofoworola (2021) performed a descriptive cross-sectional survey at infertility clinics in Lagos State to assess knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to child adoption an analog often used when exploring fostering behaviors.

They invited 350 infertile women attending Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) and Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH) over a set period to participate, and all consenting patients were included. Data were gathered via structured interviewer-administered questionnaires covering awareness, attitudes, willingness to adopt, and socio-cultural perceptions. Findings showed high awareness (85.7%) of adoption and moderate comprehension (59.3%), yet only 33.7% expressed willingness to adopt and just 13.9% had done so. Major reasons for reluctance included a desire for biological children (82.6%) and fear of psychological discomfort or social judgment. The results reflect deeper cultural and disciplinary beliefs around lineage, child obedience, and preserving family authority suggesting that parents who uphold strict, traditional disciplinary norms may perceive fostering or adoption as disruptive or undermining their control.

Also, Ocheho (2015) compared attitudes toward disciplinary styles among students and teachers in Nigeria and England in a study that indirectly highlights how disciplinary beliefs shape broader caregiving attitudes. Employing a descriptive survey design, the researcher sampled 285 high school students and 41 teachers across Nigeria and England using convenience sampling. Participants completed disciplinary style questionnaires assessing preferences for intervention methods ranging from authoritarian to democratic approaches. Outcomes revealed significant differences by nationality and gender: Nigerian participants tended to favor more authoritarian or traditional disciplinary strategies compared to their English counterparts. The study concluded that cultural context heavily influences beliefs about discipline and control, impacting how authority and caregiving roles are perceived. Although the focus was classroom behavior, the findings imply that parents steeped in authoritarian disciplinary ideals may show resistance to fostering, viewing non-biological children as a potential threat to established norms of obedience and authority.

Methodology

This study adopted a correlational research design. The correlational design was considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to examine the statistical relationship between independent variables (family communication pattern and disciplinary beliefs) and the dependent variable (parents' attitude towards fostering). The population of the study comprised all parents across selected communities in Akwa Ibom State, while 200 sample size was drawn using a multistage sampling procedure. A structured questionnaire titled "Socio-Psychological Factors and Fostering Attitude Questionnaire (SPFAQ)" was developed and validated for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was established using the Cronbach Alpha method, yielding a reliability coefficient above 0.70, indicating high internal consistency. Data collected were analyzed using simple linear regression to answer research questions and to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Result

Research Question 1: How does family communication pattern predict parents' attitude towards fostering children in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 4.1: Result of Simple Linear Regression of Family Communication Pattern and Parents' Attitude toward Fostering Children (n=200)

| Variables | R | R ² | Adjusted R ² |
|--|-------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Family Communication Patterns | | | |
| | 0.522 | 0.273 | 0.271 |
| Parents' attitude towards fostering children | | | |

The result of Table 1 shows that family communication pattern positively predicts parents' attitude toward fostering children in Akwa Ibom State. The correlation coefficient of 0.522 indicates a moderate positive relationship between the two variables, suggesting that parents who maintain open and effective communication within the family are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward fostering children. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.273$) shows that 27.3 percent of the variation in parents' attitude toward fostering children is explained by their family communication pattern, while the adjusted R^2 of 0.271 confirms the stability of this prediction. This implies that the way families communicate plays a meaningful role in shaping parents' willingness and disposition toward fostering children.

Research Question 2: How do disciplinary beliefs predict parents' attitude towards fostering children in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 2: Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Disciplinary Beliefs and Parents' Attitude Towards Fostering Children (200)

| Variables | R | R ² | Adjusted R ² |
|--|-------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Disciplinary Beliefs | | | |
| | 0.817 | 0.668 | 0.667 |
| Parents' attitude towards fostering children | | | |

The result of Table 2 shows that disciplinary beliefs strongly predict parents' attitude toward fostering children in Akwa Ibom State. The correlation coefficient of 0.817 indicates a very strong positive relationship between disciplinary beliefs and parents' willingness to foster children, meaning that parents with constructive and positive disciplinary beliefs are more likely to demonstrate favourable attitudes toward fostering. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.668$) reveals that 66.8 percent of the variation in parents' attitude toward fostering children is explained by their disciplinary beliefs, while the adjusted R^2

value of 0.667 confirms the reliability of this prediction. This implies that disciplinary beliefs play a major and influential role in shaping how parents perceive and respond to fostering children in the state

Null Hypothesis 1: Family communication pattern does not significantly predict parents' attitude towards fostering children in Akwalbom State.

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Family Communication Pattern and Parents' Attitude toward Fostering Children

| Model | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. (p-value) | R | R ² | Decision |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|----------------|-------|----------------|----------|
| Regression | 1523.45 | 1 | 1523.45 | 24.67 | 0.000* | 0.512 | 0.262 | Sig. |
| Residual | 4283.90 | 198 | 21.63 | | | | | |
| Total | 5807.35 | 199 | | | | | | |

Finding from Table 3 showed a statistically significant relationship between family communication pattern and parents' attitude towards fostering, as evidenced by an F-value of 24.67 and a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Additionally, the correlation coefficient (R) was 0.512, and the coefficient of determination (R²) was 0.262, indicating that family communication pattern accounted for approximately (26.2%) of the variance in parents' attitude towards fostering children. Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that family communication pattern does not significantly predict parents' attitude towards fostering children is rejected. This implies that better family communication patterns are associated with more positive parental attitudes toward fostering children.

Null Hypothesis 2: Disciplinary beliefs do not significantly predict parents' attitude towards fostering children in Akwalbom State

Table 4: Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Disciplinary Beliefs and Parents' Attitude Toward Fostering Children

| Model | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. (p-value) | R | R ² | Decision |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|----------------|-------|----------------|----------|
| Regression | 1302.76 | 1 | 1302.76 | 18.41 | 0.000* | 0.476 | 0.227 | Sig. |
| Residual | 4504.59 | 198 | 22.75 | | | | | |
| Total | 5807.35 | 199 | | | | | | |

Finding from Table 4 revealed that beliefs significantly predict parents' attitude towards fostering children in Akwalbom State. The simple linear regression analysis

produced an F-value of 18.41 with a corresponding p-value of 0.000, which is also less than 0.05, indicating statistical significance. The correlation coefficient (R) was 0.476, and the R^2 value was 0.227, which means that disciplinary beliefs explained about (22.7%) of the variance in parents' attitude towards fostering. Consequently, the null hypothesis which stated that disciplinary beliefs do not significantly predict parents' attitude towards fostering children is rejected. This suggests that parents' disciplinary orientations and beliefs are important predictors of their willingness and attitude towards fostering children.

Discussion of Findings

Family communication pattern and parents' attitude towards fostering children in Akwa Ibom State

Finding from hypothesis one found that family communication pattern significantly predicted parents' attitude towards fostering children in Akwa Ibom State. The regression result revealed a moderate positive correlation and a significant level of prediction ($R = 0.512$, $R^2 = 0.262$, $p < 0.05$). This implies that families with effective, open, and supportive communication patterns are more likely to adopt positive attitudes towards fostering children. This finding aligns with those of Effiong and Usoroh (2020) whose findings revealed that pluralistic and consensual family communication patterns were positively associated with high levels of emotional bonding and cohesion between parents and adolescents, while protective and laissez-faire patterns were associated with weak cohesion and emotional distance.

Disciplinary beliefs and parents' attitude towards fostering children in Akwa Ibom State

Findings revealed that disciplinary beliefs significantly predict parents' attitude towards fostering children in Akwa Ibom State. The regression analysis showed a moderate positive relationship and significant prediction ($R = 0.476$, $R^2 = 0.227$, $p < 0.05$). Parents with positive, non-violent, and developmentally appropriate disciplinary approaches are more likely to have favorable attitudes towards fostering. This is consistent with the findings of Taiwo and Adejuwon (2020) whose results revealed that self-esteem was the strongest psychological predictor of a positive attitude toward adoption and adoptive parents; individuals with higher self-esteem scored significantly more favorably ($t = -3.5$, $p < .001$). Moreover, the interaction between locus of control and self-esteem further influenced attitudes ($F = 5.4$, $p < .02$), suggesting that individuals with internal locus orientation combined with high self-esteem were more disposed to adoptive openness.

Conclusion

The study investigated the extent to which socio-psychological factors specifically family communication pattern and disciplinary beliefs predict parents' attitude towards fostering children in Akwa Ibom State. Based on the findings, it was concluded that both family communication pattern and disciplinary beliefs significantly influence parents' willingness and disposition towards fostering. Parents who maintain open, respectful, and supportive communication within their families tend to show a more positive attitude toward accepting and nurturing foster children. Likewise, parents who uphold positive and non-

violent disciplinary practices are more likely to embrace fostering as a viable and humane responsibility.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government agencies and social welfare organizations should organize regular sensitization workshops and seminars to educate parents on the importance of effective family communication. Encouraging open dialogue, empathy, and active listening within households will foster more inclusive attitudes towards caring for non-biological children
2. Parents should be encouraged to adopt non-violent and psychologically constructive disciplinary methods. This can be achieved through parenting programs offered in community centers, schools, and religious institutions, with support from child welfare experts and counselors.

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