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CHILD REARING PRACTICES IN EASTERN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK IN THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT:

This qualitative study describes the childrearing practices among the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria, and offers implications for social work and educational services for African immigrants raising families in the United States. First objective for the study was to ascertain how rural Igbos of Eastern Nigeria raise their children from birth to age eight years of age. Second objective was to determine parent's concept of reward and punishment, how gender role is communicated, and what constitutes parental expectations from successful parenting. Method: Focus group discussions with 400 men and women in 20 villages from five rural Local Government Areas (counties) of Eastern Nigeria between July 1994-August 1995. Results: Four major themes emerged from interview analysis as follows: Nurturance practices; child rearing concerns; control practices; and desirable qualities in a child. Proper feeding was used to convey affection and love, but mothers do not praise their children in public. Control practices were scolding, calling of names in anger, and facial expressions. Spanking/caning is used when the child is older. Parents believe that spanking causes no harm; rather, it prevents the child from losing focus in life. Parenting is viewed as a responsibility of the extended family group, and not for the immediate biological parents. Children are taught to be obedient, respectful and to abide by the mode of the culture. Conclusion: Parenting style of new African immigrants may create family tension and conflict in a Western society where group parenting is not practiced, and where children are raised to be assertive and independent, and where caning and spanking might be defined as child abuse.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation, with a population estimate of 127 million, (equal to almost half the U.S. population), but all sandwiched in an area little more than twice the size of California (Karen Wiles, 2002). The country is made up of more

than 250 ethnic groups, and Igbos of Eastern Nigeria make up 18 percent of the population.

In recent years, there has been a sharp increase in the number of Nigerians migrating to the United States. Wiles (2002) in quoting the New York City Planning Department gave an estimate of 2,148 Nigerian immigrants into New York City alone during the first half of the 1990s, and that number escalated to 4,896 by 1996. Factors responsible for this rapid increase in Nigerian immigrants to the United States include the worsening economy in the whole of Africa, including Nigeria, and the Diversity Immigration Lottery program of the U.S. State Department, which has in recent years made it possible for many Nigerians to ballot for, and possibly win, a visa lottery to migrate to the U.S.

The majority of the people who won this visa lottery are young people in their reproductive years, and they come to the United States ill prepared to face the cultural changes and adjustments which they need to function in American society. Most importantly, they enter into the parenting role in North America, but with the cultural expectations of a Nigerian society, which is based on group parenting. Nigeria is a microcosm of Africa, as one in every four Africans is said to be a Nigerian (Association of Nigerian Physicians in the Americas, 2003). Therefore, lessons learned and methodologies developed in the study of child rearing practices of Nigerians can easily be adapted and extended to other Africans. Many other African groups are also migrating to the United States, and similar issues in parenting will apply to them. Thus, the aim of this study was to determine, through qualitative research, the child rearing practices of the Igbos in Eastern Nigeria. Specific objectives were:

- To determine the child rearing practices of men and women in the rural Igbo villages of Eastern Nigeria. Parents with children aged birth to eight years old will be studied.
- To determine the concept of reward and punishment as used by the Igbos in their child rearing practices.
- To assess how gender role is communicated through the child rearing practices of the Igbos.
- To identify parental expectations from successful parenting, and values/behavior that are deemed unacceptable outcomes of parenting.
- This study was carried out in Eastern Nigeria between July 1994 and August 1995, and was limited to men and women who have had two children within the age range of birth to eight. This was done to reduce the effect of memory loss on details, and create homogeneity in the focus groups.

Although this study was done in Nigeria, and among indigenous rural Nigerians, findings from it will assist nurses, school teachers and social workers in the U.S. to better understand the context of parenting problems likely to be experienced by African immigrants. Umez (2003) cited the Houston Punch of February 1995 where it was reported that 26 out of the 30 divorce cases reported in the paper were Nigerian immigrants. Victims, and at times root causes, of this high divorce rate are children, as parents battle over, among other things, the proper way (Nigerian or American) to raise the child, thus children become victims caught up in the middle of parental conflict.

In Nigeria, children are regarded as very precious gifts from God, and therefore seen as a link to both the ancestors of the past and a means of group survival in the future. The birth of a child is highly celebrated in all Nigerian cultures, and children are held in high esteem.

The birth of a new baby is hardly left in the hands of young couples, rather, the care and management of newest members of the group is taken over by grandmothers and aunts, leaving the mother with the only responsibility of breast feeding the baby. Unfortunately, these traditional practices which guaranteed that new parents are given much needed assistance and support at the time they need it most are not available to immigrant Nigerian parents in the United States, and for the few who manage to bring their mothers to the U.S., they soon discover that their mothers are too overwhelmed by their own adjustment into a life style that is totally different from what they were used to in Nigeria, therefore they are not able to be effective in childrearing.

Child rearing is a process by which parents transmit, and the child acquires, prior existing competence required by the culture to assume valued future tasks in the society (Ogbu, 1981). Parenting is a major role for which society requires no credentials and no training, but at the same time raising children from infancy to adulthood represents a complex and difficult task aimed at making the most valuable contribution to society (Larsen and Juhasz, 1985) According to Armstrong (1974):

"Countless thousands of little babies are carried into homes where exists the naïve assumption that all the knowledge and understanding necessary for the care and training of children has come to exist automatically by virtue of the arrival of the infant. Many mechanics are grown-up boys who began "tinkering" with machines and automobiles...learning by trial and error...taking them apart and seeing how they were put together again. This, sad to say, is the identical type of training course pursued by most parents in the art of child training." (p.1)

Competent parenthood is looked upon generally as a magic skill that comes automatically with the baby, in many instances, parents have no vision of the great responsibilities in child rearing, and on some occasions, there is really no special desire for the baby, just a "lucky and beautiful accident" (Armstrong, 1974). The early childhood years represent a period in child development when experiences and interactions with parents and family members influence the way a child's brain develops. This interaction is as important as other significant factors of nutrition, good health and clean water (UNICEF, State of the World's Children, 2001).

Conceptual framework.

The developmental process represents a constant interplay between the structure of the child's knowledge and the structure of the infant child's world (Bremner, 1988). Arms (2003) believes that child-rearing practices arise from a combination of three interacting levels of influence: (1) child-rearing environment; (2) temperament of adults in child rearing role; and (3) temperament of the child being reared. This conceptual model builds on the three factors, but adds a fourth element of cultural values. Figure one illustrates how the four factors in this model interact to influence the child rearing practice selected in any situation.

Figure 1.   Levels of Influence in Child Rearing.
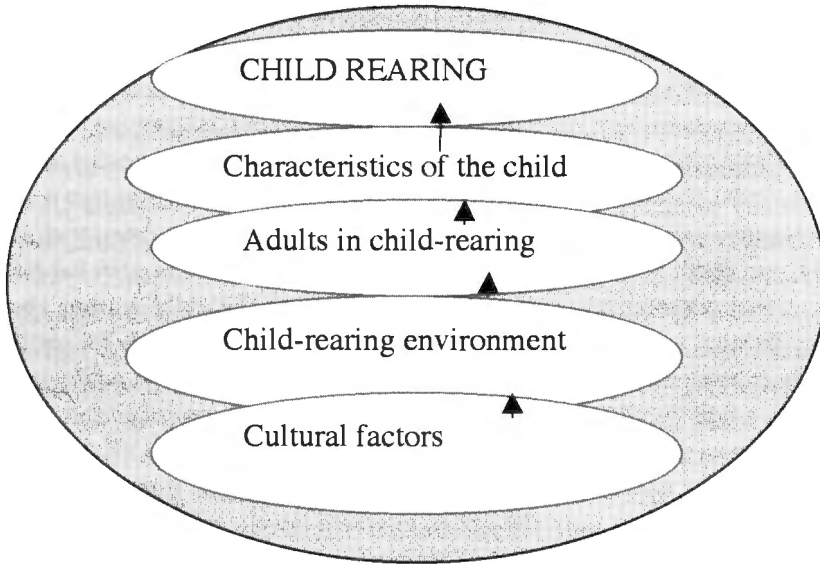
Cultural factors: The term "culture" is generally used to refer to the entire body of socially inherited past human accomplishments that serve as the resource for current life of a social group ordinarily thought of as the inhabitants of a country or region (Cole, 2002). Long -term survival of a culture requires that each generation successfully transmit its traditions to future generations, and this transmission can occur only if actual cultural values and skills are learned by successive generations. The culture of a group influences the child-rearing practice in many ways. In all cultures, beliefs about the nature of children influence child-rearing practices adopted, and these beliefs are rooted in the culture and values held precious by the group. It is the requirements of life in a particular society that influence the child rearing practices favored and adopted. (Apanpa, 2002)

McElroy (1997) described the work of anthropologist Margaret Mead (1956) who studied the relationship between the child rearing practices of two ethnic groups in New Guinea. She established a relationship between the child rearing practices of each group with the aggressive or non-aggressive behavior of the clan. She found that the child who received a great deal of attention, whose every need was promptly met, as among the New Guinea Mountain Arapesh, became a gentle, cooperative and non-aggressive adult. On the other hand, the child who received perfunctory, intermittent attention, as among the New Guinea Mundugomor, became a selfish, uncooperative aggressive adult. Japanese parents, for example, place a great emphasis on training their children to be considerate, sociable, to have good manners and to respect authority. American parents, on the other hand, emphasize independence, assertiveness and individual achievements (Befu, 1986; Caudill and Schooler, 1973). In a study by Ron Shor (1999) to determine inappropriate child rearing practices as perceived by Jewish immigrant parents from the former Soviet Union, he found that these immigrants were influenced by their cultural background in child rearing practices even after living in the United States for several

years. The culture of a group provides a cognitive blue print that governs the actions of its members, and the transmission of this blueprint is the essence of childrearing faced by parents the world over, but more so by immigrants in a new culture that parents themselves do not clearly understand. (Whiting and Whiting, 1994)

The Child Rearing Environment: Includes both the physical, social and psychological environment where the child rearing takes place. Children live what they learn, and a child's first institution of learning is the home. Home environment of a place influences the extent to which values and culture are effectively communicated to the child. A child rearing approach that is not supported by the home environment may confuse the child, and result in an unsatisfactory outcome. Home environment has both physical and emotional components, and collectively influence the child rearing approach and outcome. In rural Africa, the physical environment makes it possible for children to play in the village squares under the moonlight, and to be reared by all adults in the village. The African adage "it takes a village to raise a child" was borne out of this concept of the whole village as a playground for the growing child. Nsamenang (1992) said that:

"A common conceptual shortcoming in developmental research is the separation of the developing person from the milieu in which development takes place into person and environment entities. This kind of divergent thinking ignores the fact that a human person is never concretely encountered independent of the encountering individual." (p. 6)

The author recommends the development of a context-sensitive developmental perspective that is based on actual and not generalized parenting orientations and conceptions of childhood. A restrictive, harsh or hostile physical environment will not promote the group approach to child rearing. Social and psychological environment of both a place and the family influence the child-rearing approach as well. The social environment of an African village promotes and values sharing of skills and possessions, consequently, sharing your food with a neighbor's child, or correcting your neighbors child for a wrong behavior is seen as the responsibility of all adults in the village. A family where there is constant conflict, aggressive behavior, confusion and inconsistencies will be most likely to produce a child with poor social skills, and aggressive tendencies than a family with a social environment of love, appreciation and consistent adult behavior. Normal babies (without brain-damage) are born with a powerful need for love, affection and acceptance. (Peace, Harmony Un-Ltd, 2003) As a result of these needs, a child will strongly prefer cooperation over confrontation, praise over criticism, reward over punishment, peace over dispute and harmony over dissent. Consequently, maintaining peace and harmony in the home is a vital imperative in childrearing.

Characteristics of adults in child-rearing role: Children live what they see and learn, and a child's first institution of learning is the home, with examples set by adults in the home. What the child learns may be affected by a number of adult factors including their self-efficacy, past experience and personal up-bringing history, degree of existing stress and tension and the expectation they have from their children. For example, self-efficacy determines adult understanding of the nature of children, and the nature of growth and development. The confidence to be consistent, to adopt an appropriate communication style with children and set positive examples are all influenced by self-efficacy. Self-effica-

cy is influenced by the adult's own experience in childhood and expectations from the child. An adult who was brought up in an abusive and restrictive home environment, and by parents with poor parenting skills, will most likely not have appropriate self–efficacy in childrearing.

Characteristics of the child: This includes the temperament of the child, gender and birth order in the family. Temperament of the child may be influenced by such factors as birth trauma/defects and genetic factors, including inherited disorders. Certain genetic abnormalities create behavior disorders that may be difficult to diagnose early, but which pose a difficult challenge for adults in the child-rearing role. A condition like Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) may create a child-rearing challenge that many parents will not be able to handle. In many countries of the world, male children are brought up differently from female children. Shor (1999) observed that among Jewish immigrants of the former Soviet Union, consideration of the gender of the child might be a factor in the approach towards corporal punishment. Hill and Sprague (1999), on the other hand, argued against the claim on a rigid gender distinctions in the African American society, stating that gender neutrality does, in fact, exist in black families' child rearing practices. Where female children are brought up in many cultures to be subservient and good with domestic work, male children are raised to be aggressive and not interested in domestic chores. The first son in an African family is expected to take on the family responsibility, inherit the father's property and take care of the siblings. More attention is given to his upbringing and socialization for the expected responsible role than would be given to the last son of the family who is allowed more carefree years and less expectation of responsibility.

METHODS

The study was descriptive and utilized focus group methods to interview 400 men and women drawn from 20 villages in five Local Government areas (LGA) of rural Eastern Nigeria between July 1994 – August 1995 (Table 1). An LGA in Nigeria is the equivalence of a county in the United States, and all the participants were of the Igbos ethnic group. These focus group discussions were held to gain a better understanding of the child rearing practices of men and women in rural LGAs in Eastern Nigeria. Focus group discussions can provide insight into issues which cannot be covered on a survey, and are useful to get people involved in the decision making process, such as the decision to change or modify child rearing practices. (Krueger et al., 2002) They provide opportunities for those who will use the end product of information to have input on the topic. An additional reason for using the qualitative method was to capture the true meaning of the various approaches, which would be difficult to get from a rural population in Africa using quantitative methods.

Interviews were conducted at a convenient village location by trained social scientists from the University of Nigeria in partnership with trained female members from local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the area. Two focus group discussions (FGDs) were held in each of the 20 villages (male and female), with 10 participants in each group. Interview sessions were taped and extensive field notes taken.

TABLE 1. STUDY AREAS

State	LGA (County)	# of Villages	# of Groups	# of Participants
Abia	Bende	4	8	80
Anambara	Aniocha	4	8	80
Enugu	Nsukka	4	8	80
Isi-	Uzo	4	8	80
Imo	Okpuala-Ngor	4	8	80
TOTAL		20 villages	40 groups	400 participants

Selection of project villages:

There are 32 states that make up the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and people of Igbos ethnicity make up the entire population of five states and a portion of a sixth one. Five of the six Igbo states were selected by purposive method for this study, and one LGA was selected from each state except Enugu state where two LGAs were selected (Table 1). Four villages were selected from each county, and two focus groups (one male and one female) were held per village for a total of eight groups in a county, with 10 participants in each group for a total of 400 participants. Study villages are predominantly rural, with the majority of women in the sample either illiterate or semi-illiterate. The men in the sample are generally peasant farmers and traders. The women are also peasant farmers and petty traders, often trading on perishable food items, such as vegetables, from their farm. The predominant religion is Christianity, though a few people practice traditional religion. Participating villages were selected based on the criteria of rural area, ethnic Igbos, and willingness to participate in the study. The population from which the sample was drawn consisted of those parents (men and women) who have had two children aged birth to eight years, and have been the primary person(s) in the child-rearing role. This selection approach was used to guarantee that focus groups were homogenous in terms of child rearing variables, and that memory on details was current and valid. Interviews were conducted in the Igbo language, although interviewees were free to respond in English if they felt more comfortable doing so. The research team was comprised of two researchers/professors recruited as consultants from the University of Nigeria at Enugu, and four members of a collective of NGOs in the five study states who were trained in focus group methodology. The Principal Investigator (PI) who was at that time a professor of Nursing at the University of Nigeria, Enugu had developed an interview guide which was pilot tested and validated for appropriateness of vocabulary and terminology in a similar – but different – population. The review and trainings also ensured consistency in the style of questioning. All members of the research team speak Igbo, and did not need an interpreter to interview the group. At the completion of each

session, audio-tapes and field notes were reviewed by the research team to obtain a general view of the flow of the discussion. In addition, the purpose of the review was to gain a general sense of the flow of questioning style and participant's responses with emphasis on: the diversity of responses to each variable in the study, identifying possible difficulties and confusion/clarity of questions evaluating how well the responses address the core of the research questions.

TABLE 2. PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS (N = 400).

Category	Number	Percentage
Age (years)		
<20	88	22
20-25	78	19.5
26-30	98	24.5
31-35	59	14.75
36-40	48	12
40>	29	7.25
Distribution by Sex		
Male	200	50
Female	200	50
Distribution by LGA		
Bende	80	20
Aniocha	80	20
Nsukka	80	20
Isi-Uzo	80	20
Okpuala-Ngor	80	20
Distribution by Educational Qualification		
College Degree	20	5
National Certificate of Education (NCE)	48	12
Teacher Grade 1 Certificate	30	7.5
West African School Certificate/Technical	84	21
Full Elementary School Education	103	25.75
Below Full Elementary Education	115	28.75

RESULTS

Interviewees were 400 participants from five Igbo speaking areas of Eastern Nigeria (Table 2). They were evenly distributed between males and females, and each focus group was homogenous in terms of sex and age. This resulted in 200 male and 200

female participants, all within the age range of 20-40 years old. To interpret data, the six interviewers read the transcripts individually, to identify sentences that may be indicative of avoidance or confusion; such questions were re-phrased and used for future groups. Four major themes emerged from the group analysis of overall interview as follows: (1) nurturance practices, which was broken down as, (a) communication of love and approval, (b) feeding practices, and c) communication of anger and displeasure; (2) greatest child rearing concerns from birth to eight years of age; (3) control measures used at this age in terms of (a) punishment and rewards (b) responsibility for discipline; and (4) desirable qualities in a good child.

Nurturance practices

Mothers communicate love and approval for children birth to eight years old mostly through proper feeding, cuddling and singing of happy lullaby songs, praying for the baby's safety and good health, and calling them "fun names." Every child has a "fun name" which parents use when they are pleased with the child, and a "nasty name" used for bad behavior. All the women interviewed breast-fed their babies, and they believe that breast-feeding conveys love and affection more than anything else. Breast-feeding shows that the mother has continued to share her body with her baby. Other ways include buying toys and new dresses. The majority of the women (70 percent) do not kiss their children because they believe that would spoil the baby. Mothers avoid praising their children in the presence of strangers for a number of reasons, including fear of harm to the child as a result of jealousy from other women who would regard such an open show of affection as arrogance. Mothers also believe that a good child is a gift from God, so that appreciation should be to God who gave the child, and so do not kiss the child publicly. As the child gets older, proper feeding continues to be the most important method to show love, followed by buying new clothes, and taking the child to school and church, and praying for the child's safety and success.

Fathers, on the other hand, see their role at this early stage in terms of provision of financial support for both mother and child, and praying for the good health of both the mother and new child. One of the fathers said to us, "What do you expect me to say to a child who is too young to talk? My duty is to provide for them (mother and child), while I leave the singing and dancing to their mother and grandmothers." Fathers buy new clothes and toys, especially at Christmas and other special occasions.

Feeding practices

Most mothers (90 percent) breast-feed on demand, and only those who have additional income through paid employment (10 percent) time the baby's feeding. They also sleep with the baby at night, and breast-feed the baby throughout the night; the more educated mothers however, keep their babies on a separate cot. Weaning diet is introduced in the third month in the form of corn pudding or mashed food. Fathers do not participate in feeding practices.

Communication of pleasure and displeasure

Mothers communicate pleasure by the tone of their voice, and by using the "fun

name" of the child, which only the mother uses. They communicate displeasure through the tone of their voice, or through their facial expression. As the child gets older, minor offenses begin to attract spanking by hand, or minor use of the cane, and grandparents and other elders in the village have the right to spank any child in the village for bad behavior. Fathers communicate displeasure through the tone of their voice or facial expression. They occasionally spank the child, but only for offenses like disobedience, stubbornness, telling lies or refusing to carry out instructions given by teachers or elders in the village. The father will spank sons more than daughters, while the mother will spank daughters more than sons.

Child rearing concerns

Parents were asked to describe their greatest concern in rearing children from birth to eight years of age. Mothers gave their greatest concern as the survival of the child. Most mothers in the rural areas are afraid of losing the child at this age from a number of factors, including witchcraft, malaria, diarrhea diseases or "Ogbanje syndrome". Ogbanje syndrome describes the belief among some Nigerians that some children are capable of choosing to die and be born again in a cycle. Some experts (Nwokolo, 2003) have linked the origin of this belief to the sickle cell disease, which leads to multiple infant deaths in a family. The folk belief is that it is the same child that continues to be born and die in various forms from the same parents. Sickle cell disease is still not properly understood among the rural illiterate Nigerians, hence the strong belief in this syndrome which has a local equivalence among the Yoruba of Nigeria. Fathers share the concern for the survival of the child, but are equally concerned with the cultural and academic competence of the child. As the child gets older and prepares to get into the school system, obedience, respect for elders, intelligence expressed in scholarship and obedience to older people become very important. Children are taught to respect the values and beliefs transmitted from their ancestors. In Nigeria, the family is the most fundamental and important unit of society. Family is the extension of nature, and considered the backbone for each family member, especially for children. Children feel secure in the family, and extended family get involved in child rearing at this stage. Men also get involved in childrearing at this stage, particularly in the care of male children, who are gradually initiated into the cultural institutions and practices of the town. Female children are initiated into female roles by the mother and grandmothers. Parents at this stage wish to see a child who exhibits Igbo mannerisms, attitudes and respect for traditional values. Most Igbos are Christians, and want to see certain traditional practices that pertain to idol worship abolished, but at the same time they want core cultural values transmitted to the young. All parents in the sample expressed concern over the erosion of traditional values by foreign media and culture.

Control measures

Among the Igbos in the rural areas of Eastern Nigeria, the old adage "the child should be seen, but not heard" is still a valid mantra in child rearing. Children should not look older people straight in the eye, and should only speak when they are spoken to. Parents are embarrassed when their child answers back to a teacher or to an older person

unless such a response was requested. Parents use several forms of punishment to enforce this behavior in the child, other forms of punishment used include spanking, denial of playtime, or as stated by some men and women, denial of food until the child atones for the bad behavior. Some of the men told us that they had resolved not to use the type of punishment their own parents used on them, but when they began to have difficulties with the control aspect of reaching their children, they resorted to spanking and use of the cane. Reward for good behavior, particularly in public was indirect, parents - particularly fathers - will thank God or their ancestors for a well-behaved child, but not praise the child directly, mothers on the other hand will reward the child with a favorite dish. Control and discipline of male children would normally be the responsibility of the father, grandfathers and other men in the family. The discipline of female children was the responsibility of the mother, grandmothers and other older women in the family. Both male and female respondents in this interview held the view that failure in child upbringing brings shame to the extended family, and not to the immediate parents alone, therefore the extended family is regarded as stakeholders in proper upbringing of all the children in the family.

Qualities of a good child

Parents in rural Nigeria want their children to grow up with good manners, to be obedient and respectful to adults and God fearing. Expectations for boys and girls are different; boys were expected to be strong, brave and hard working, serve as future providers for their family and to be tolerant and intelligent. Girls, on the other hand, were expected to be obedient, submissive and very proficient with domestic chores. Parents value academic ability, but a respectful child with good cultural competence is adored by the whole family and appreciated in the community. Parents in this interview were conflicted by the erosion of traditional culture by technological and urban influences in their lives. Parents were concerned that their children are acquiring wrong influences from television and other aspects of urban life. Such influences include an individualistic attitude and lack of respect for elders and teachers in school. Most of the mothers in the study (72 percent) told us that by age six, they expect their children to be helping with domestic chores, such as sweeping the compound, washing dishes and tending to their siblings. By the age of eight years, mothers expect their children to be helping out with family income by hawking goods after school hours on market days (every four days in the week). Using little children to hawk and sell goods along the street is a practice found in most urban areas of Nigeria, and many organizations have been trying to stop the practice with little effect due to the financial benefit of the practice in families with very limited financial income. However, buying and selling in rural Nigeria takes place only in the market place and street selling is not practiced. Consequently, children in rural Nigeria do not hawk goods like their urban counterparts.

CONCLUSIONS

In a proposal for the study of migrant experience through research on child rearing practices, Harwood (2001) said that:

" ...it becomes increasingly imperative for teachers, health care providers, and other professionals to understand the parenting within this population....in order to be

successful, primary prevention efforts such as school-based social competence promotion and parenting programs must be grounded on a solid knowledge of a variety of minority groups." (p. 2)

Parents in rural Nigeria view parenting as a responsibility of both the immediate and the extended family group, and all the elders in the extended family participate in the training of the child to fit into the group culture. Children are taught to be obedient, respectful and to obey instructions given by elders without questioning the reason or rationale. Traditional Nigerian practices are inimical for proper social functioning in the school system of the United States, and may create problems both for the child and the parents. Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) said about immigrant children in the United States:

"Children from immigrant families may find that their adaptation has a chameleon quality. They may assimilate more quickly than their parents into Western culture, thanks to the school system and peers. If their parents are still rooted in their past patterns, the children may get caught in the middle – where their "new" behavior may look like rebellion. They may find themselves unwilling to do things the old way and this can include their parents' notion of "obedience." (p. 1)

Many African immigrants into the United States were brought up under the Nigerian cultural worldview, and this is the only parenting style that they know. However, this parenting style does not fit into the American culture where children are taught to be assertive, curious and independent. Spanking and caning are seen as effective ways to instill discipline and control on the child, and all the parents in the interview admitted that they spank their children. This may be in opposition to practices in the United States. Men generally do not get involved in childrearing until around age five, rather they see their role as providing for the mother and child. Passing on cultural values and mode of behavior is important to Nigerian parents, and this is more so for male children whose responsibility it is to maintain the family traditions.

Similar differences in parental expectations were found among Japanese parents (Benesse Educational Research Center, 1999), among Balinese mothers (Williams et al., 2000) and among Jewish immigrant parents from former Soviet Union (Shor, 1999). This contradiction has been found in other studies of other ethnic groups in the United States.

Collier, et al, (1999) studied the culture-specific views of child maltreatment and parenting styles in a Pacific-island community. They found that what is regarded as normal parenting style among this group could be interpreted as child abuse in the American culture. Sharon et al., (1999) found similar contradictions between the culture of parenting environment of the home, and school environment among the Caribbean immigrant population in the United States. Based on their findings, teachers recommended interventions only for more severe forms of child abuse.

As a result of these cultural contradictions, children raised by African immigrant parents may enter the United States school system with traditional cultural behaviors, such as not looking at the teacher straight in the eyes as a sign of respect, a behavior that might be misinterpreted by some teachers as disrespect. The tension over choice of child rearing practice may create conflict between husband and wife, and contribute to marital tensions in a culture where the group support of the African village does not exist.

The intention of this paper is that social workers and school teachers will develop cultural competence to enable them to evaluate children from African immigrant families against the background of their cultural orientation, and not strictly against the background of a Western frame work. According to Abu Baker and Dwairy (2002) culturally sensitive intervention that exploits the power of the family for the benefit of the victim of child abuse prior to enforcement of the law, stands a chance of achieving required legal and welfare objectives without threatening the reputation and stability of the family. In an age of expanded global interdependence and accelerated mobility, the possibility of encountering first generation immigrant families and their children in a variety of personal and professional contexts multiplies for all people and institutions, thereby underscoring the value of cultural competence in all areas of public practice.

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