

## **Institutionalized Approach to Decision Making in the Administration of Child Welfare in Rivers State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

The study examined the link between administrative decisions and child welfare policies focusing on the family welfare unit of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation in Rivers State, Nigeria. The aim of the study was to provide empirical insight into how administrative decisions in child welfare policies are implemented by the family welfare unit. To achieve this, a sample of 400 respondents with a history of child welfare cases as well as 10 staff members of the family welfare unit in Rivers State was used and respondents were selected using the simple random and convenience sampling techniques. The 400 sample was determined using the Taro Yamane formula, while the 10 staff were sampled purposively. Data collected from the field survey, were analysed using percentages and descriptive models, chi-square as well as thematic approach. The simple percentages and frequency distribution were used to analyze the socio-demographic information, the descriptive models involving the use of charts was used to analyze the research questions, while the chi-square was used to analyse the hypotheses. The qualitative data derived through the focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic approach. The findings revealed among others, out of the many categories of child welfare problems handled by the family welfare unit, child maintenance/upkeep was the most common and that administrative decisions are mostly implemented through the help of the police and courts. It was recommended among others that government should scale up funding for the family welfare unit in order to improve its capacity to implement administrative decisions on child welfare policies in the state.

**Keywords:** *Family welfare unit, Institution, Child welfare, Administration, Rivers State*

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### **Background to the Study**

Administrators around the world are faced with a common goal of ensuring that policies, strategies and visions of organizations or institutions are coordinated in such a way that they are effectively realized. However, in doing this, other contingent factors such as the social and physical environments where such institutions operate are taken into consideration. Makinde (2016) makes the argument a lot easier by pointing out that administrators drive decision processes for the purpose of providing direction to policies, goals and objectives of an organization.

However, those who find themselves in the administration of family welfare institutions tend to be confronted with peculiar problems that require specialized skills to address. This is because multiple issues play out when it comes to family welfare administration. Ayeni (2015, 33) alludes to a comprehensive picture of the complexity of family welfare administration by pointing out that “more than any other institution in society, the family is attractive to mind blowing issues that require specific set of skills to manage, especially when it involves welfare of children, divorce, family upkeep, infidelity and so on”. Ayeni's point rests on the argument that in carrying out their duties, family welfare administrators are often confronted with managing emotional concerns that are usually displayed by their clients especially on child welfare matters.

The family institution is perceived as a very crucial one in terms of its role in socialization and nurturing children. As a result, children are first and foremost born into a family where they learn the customs, beliefs, norms, and values of society. Mosley (2015) agrees with many other scholars (Ayeni, 2015; John, 2016) before him that the family is second to none when it comes to socialisation and child development in general. This strongly justifies the understanding that the family is a foundational social institution that forms the bedrock upon which other institutions thrive in the business of inculcating societal values in children.

While there is a widespread understanding and even consensus among scholars concerning the role and place of the family in relation to other social institutions in the society, there is a strong academic disparity with regard to whether the family is really fulfilling this role or not (Ayeni, 2015; John, 2016). This is because, evidence suggests that many children exhibit characters that point to weak socialization and the family has been strongly indicted for this (Courtney, 2016). In a bid to understand why most children exhibit anti-social behaviours in society, the family institution has come under severe attack with research pointing to some sociological indicators as causal or contributory factors to the problem. Some believe that divorce (Mosley, 2015), single parenting (Ayeni, 2015), parental abuse of psychoactive substance (John, 2016), domestic violence (Makinde, 2016), among others, are responsible for the seeming failure of the family institution in meeting its fundamental task of child upbringing and welfare.

However, there are many socio-psychological challenges facing the family which undermine its optimal capacity to function effectively with regard to the welfare of children. This necessitated the establishment of a family welfare institution in society. As Bradley (2015), puts it, the family welfare institution was designed to respond to the socio-psychological

anomalies plaguing the family. These socio-psychological setbacks tend to generate adverse and hydra-headed consequences that all-together affect the family's capacity to function effectively with adverse impact on children's upbringing and their general welfare.

Although there were no formal legal or legislative provisions for child welfare and protection in pre-colonial Nigeria, the family, traditionally maintained a force of gravity in addressing such issues. With the communal nature of social welfare, children experienced little problems. This is why Ekpe (1983) opines that in Nigeria, prior to the advent of colonialism, the family institution provided almost all the welfare support systems for its members, especially children. This was done through kinship ties, foster care and communal networks (Kwabena, 2014). So social welfare services were nested in the communal structure of the pre-colonial era where the family was the basic driver of these services.

However, with the dawn of colonialism, the shift from communal to individual way of life brought about by the new industrial system greatly undermined the role of the family as the principal provider of child welfare and protection services. The family as the centre of welfare provision changed significantly as most men and women had to go to cities in search of new jobs. This new socio-economic scenario provided the necessary impetus for an equally new medium of addressing social welfare issues in the country in the colonial period.

As a result, child related problems increased during the colonial era as the welfare role of the family became almost antiquated. As Kwabena (2014) observes, the advent of colonial rule saw the beginning of modern cities and industrialization with people migrating to the cities in search of jobs in the construction sites and industries. The rural-urban drift weakened the extended family system. Men who migrated to the urban centres often did so without their wives and children, contributing to a breakdown of families (Manful & Badu-Nyarko, 2011). Hence, the tendency for social vices involving children became high. In addition, the rise in child labour triggered the need for a formalized legislative framework for social welfare services.

One of the earliest social welfare legislations of the colonial administration was the Guardian of Infants Act of 1886 which identified the centrality of children in social welfare administration. This was followed by numerous acts and ordinances meant to address the welfare needs of people in the country. It is important to note that a significant number of these welfare frameworks especially those pertaining to children, were focused on addressing the establishment of children's clubs, child welfare and free services for children in the emerging cities.

Following the welfare footsteps of the colonial administrators, the post-colonial government in Nigeria, especially immediately after independence created specialist agencies to address welfare related issues. For instance, the Ministry of Social Welfare (traceable to Decree No. 12, also known as the Social Development Decree of 1974) was created with specialised sub-units such as the children's home, approved schools and children's remand homes to administer specific issues such as rehabilitation adoption and foster services.

Following the establishment of the different children's correctional institutions, the stage was set for the formation of the family welfare system to address the general needs of the family (Makinde, 2016). In this regard, the family welfare system became the umbrella institution that mediates between the family and the demands of other child correctional facilities. This is why Ayeni (2015), opines that family welfare units provide general services that reduce the duties of other correctional institutions such as the borstal and remand homes. In this sense, the family welfare system became a major institution with the important task of managing family strains that almost always affect children negatively.

Sadly, successive post-colonial Nigeria governments did not move to mitigate some of the problems brought about by the colonial system, especially those that affected juveniles. This meant more social problems of which children were victims. However, the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Children in 1991 by Nigeria and the road-map to the establishment of the Child Rights Act of 2003 clearly ushered in some level of hope for the welfare and protection of children in the country.

However, a careful observation shows that children continue to face harsh situations that threaten their wellbeing in the country. Even worse, families face adverse socio-economic realities that undermine their capacity to provide for their children, thereby increasing the number of vulnerable and extremely poor children in the country. This is further exacerbated by the severe inadequacy of financial resources allocated to the protection and promotion of children's rights in the country. The situation is not different in Rivers State where widespread insecurity and violent conflicts over the years have reinforced the myriad of problems facing children.

Today, resting on the Social Development Decree of 1974, each State in Nigeria now maintains a specific ministry in charge of welfare administration. Rivers State for instance runs the Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation with the mandate of providing social services to families, juveniles, children, orphans, the physically challenged and indigent poor. However, since the establishment of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation in 2007, as a response by government to the years of neglect of social welfare services in the State, it has been a subject of very little empirical inquiry. While it can be said that the family welfare unit of the Rivers State Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation is doing its best to manage the numerous problems (such as child abuse maltreatment and neglect among others) associated with child protection policies, the challenge of implementing some of its administrative decisions concerning child welfare policies continue to reduce the potentials of real progress towards child protection in the state. This concern and most importantly, the seeming weakness of the various welfare institutions to implement most of its administrative decisions, necessitated this study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Like most Third World countries, Nigeria is known for her weakness in terms of effective implementation of welfare policies. As it has been observed, the problem is not that there are no welfare policies in the country, but often times, the administrative will to fully implement such policies have been the bane of welfare service delivery either for children, women or

elderly people. Nevertheless, the need for child protection has always occupied a central place in Nigeria since children are known to be the leaders of tomorrow. In the pre-colonial days, children were the most precious of one's possessions (Gyekye, 1996). This is why the need to protect children and cater for their welfare are important issues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Few studies have been done on the family institution and welfare of children in Nigeria (Mosley, 2015; Ayeni, 2015; Makinde; 2016), but none of have addressed the administrative concerns of family welfare institutions and child welfare policy implementation. For instance, Mosley's (2015) study examined the link between divorce and child protection in Lagos and came to the conclusion that divorce renders the family weak in terms of inability to protect children. Similarly, Ayeni's (2015) study of single parenting extends Mosley's worries on divorce by providing new insights into single parent families and their shortcomings in terms of child welfare. However, a more recent and slightly different study by Makinde (2016) exposed how children from homes experiencing domestic violence are more often subjected to neglect and violations. As a result, he found that domestic violence in families generates adverse conditions that undermine child protection and wellbeing in general.

Clearly, it can be argued that the above scholars have made valuable contributions to the understanding of the family and child welfare or protection in Nigeria. This notwithstanding, little is still known about the link between administrative decisions by the family welfare units of the Ministries of Social Welfare and child welfare policy implementation in Nigeria. This presents an obvious gap in the empirical literature on administration of child welfare in the country. It is in light of the foregoing, that this study examined the issue of administrative decisions and the implementation of child welfare policies using the family welfare unit of the Rivers State Ministry of Welfare and Rehabilitation as the research focus. Hence, there are two questions that this study will provide answers to. These are; What are the types and categories of child welfare problems that the family welfare institution has addressed in Rivers State? What are the approaches adopted by the family welfare institution in the administration of child welfare policy issues in River's State?

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were tested in this study:

1. There is no significant difference between types of child welfare protection problems and the nature of the administrative approach used by the family welfare unit in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference in the administrative approach adopted by the family welfare unit and the degree of protection that a child can get from the administrative decision reached.

### **Literature Review**

Before going into the definition of concept, it will be wise to first conceptualise child welfare. As a result, a good number of definitions have been proffered for child welfare. Omuriyi (2014) for instance, conceptualised it to mean all legal and institutional frameworks put in place by government as well as the actual use of these to ensure that the welfare of children is protected in society. In the same vein, Save the Children (2007) define child welfare as measures and

structures to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence affecting children. Child welfare means safeguarding children from harm that includes violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect. This clearly according to Darlington Iwarimie-Jaja (2002), mirrors the concern shown by society and government with regard to the problems of child abuse, neglect and maltreatment due to the many problems they pose for the welfare of the child. Osuntuwade (2015) on the other hand, provided a more social definition of the concept by seeing it as the society's attempt at promoting all behaviours that ensures that children are not abused and maltreated in any way.

For the purpose of this study, the concept child welfare is defined in line with Save Our Children (2007) to mean all those measures whether legal, social or economic, put in place by society to prevent situations that undermine the wellbeing of children in order to remove them from all kinds of maltreatment, exploitation for economic reasons, abuse, neglect, violence among others. Having defined child welfare, the concept implementation of child welfare policies is unique to this study, and it is defined here to mean, the process of ensuring that child welfare policies are adhered to within the ambit of the law by parties involved in the particular case in question with or without sanctions.

The literature on family welfare especially in Africa tactically but not erroneously excludes the implications of family welfare units or institutions for children. This is simply because of the fact that very slim empirical research works have been carried out in this regard. So, the focus here is more on the literature that have examined the implications of some key family welfare indicators and how these indicators influence the welfare and or protection of children. A few of these literatures have focused on the defective structure of the family and their adverse impact on children. As indicated in the statement of the problem in Chapter One, the most recent studies that have led the argument on dysfunctional family structure and adverse impacts on children are those by Mosley (2015); Ayeni (2015) and Makinde (2016). However, in addition to these, the works of other scholars were reviewed as a way of contributing to the understanding of the subject matter.

The understanding of the relationship between the family as an institution and the welfare of children is very central to researchers. Before the work of Mosley (2015) on divorce and child welfare, other studies done outside Nigeria have suggested that divorce has the capacity to undermine the wellbeing of the family itself, especially with regard to child upbringing. For instance, Wollny, Apps and Henricson (2010) in a study on government and the measurement of wellbeing of the family, showed that, divorce across the world undermines even the most fundamental government attempt at ensuring the wellbeing of the family. In the study, Wollny et al. (2010) drew a random sample of over 1200 families from ten (10) countries in Europe, America, Africa and Asia. The study made use of surveys and secondary data available from each of the countries in the sample.

The study among other things found that a significant number of families are faced with divorce cases in court which goes a long way to threaten their wellbeing as well as their protective function when it comes to the welfare of children. However, the study also showed that Europe and America have the highest rates of divorce but this does not undermine child

protection due to existence of government support systems for families. Also, the study found that child protection and welfare in Europe and America is further supported by high level viability and effectiveness of family welfare institutions in such areas.

In contrast, the study showed that divorce rates are lower in Asia and Africa but child welfare in some Asian countries and in most African countries is very pathetic (UNICEF, 2007). Hence, in a reverse order, the researchers established that government policies on family welfare and child protection are rather weak in these regions and to make matters worse, institutional capacity to manage the welfare of families such as social welfare Ministries is lacking. In more specific terms, family welfare institutions are either non-existent or where they exist, they are almost redundant in terms of meeting the requisite standard for addressing needs of family welfare and child protection.

Mosley's (2015) work extends the understanding of the study discussed above. However, his research was done specifically in Lagos, Nigeria. In his study, Mosley surveyed a sample of 350 families drawn from over 2,422 families' resident in Agage, Lagos State. His focus was to find out whether divorce is negatively related to child welfare and protection. In the course of the study, Mosley found that most of the children in the street of Lagos came from homes that have been rocked by divorce. Furthermore, and corroborating the findings of Wollny, Apps and Henricson (2010), Mosley came to the sad conclusion that the social welfare system in Lagos State which includes family and child welfare is not sufficiently disposed to providing necessary help to families in need, let alone address the problems of children.

Another recent study on family welfare and child protection in Nigeria is the one done by Ayeni (2015) which focused on single parent families and their adverse effects on children's welfare even though it narrowly contributes to the divorce literature. Just like Mosley's (2015) study, a few researches have been done on single parenthood and children in Nigeria but not really focusing on child welfare and protection in the social welfare system. The study that came close to Ayeni's work was done by Omoruyi (2014). The study measured the extent of inequality in Nigeria and found that low income and social support systems were major causal factors for poor child wellbeing. Omoruyi's study was done in Lagos metropolis using a survey of 200 households. The researcher came to the conclusion that households with low income and weak social support systems especially those run by single parents face significant challenges with child upbringing.

However, in a different study, Omoruyi's study, Ayeni's (2015) work made use of two samples drawing from households and social welfare workers resident in cities. The sample size for the study was 350 households and over 100 social welfare workers from different Ministries of Social Welfare in the country. Ayeni's findings were quite intriguing. It touched on several structural anomalies of the family as an institution but with clear stochastic indicators from government and social welfare units. Ayeni's (2015) study proved that single parents worked hard but tend to face the problem of time and money which undermine their capacity to provide care for their children. The study showed that out of the 350 households surveyed, none of them had social welfare links and as such no support from either the family welfare institutions or the social welfare ministries in general. This, Ayeni (2015) concludes, further

exacerbates the challenges faced by single parents and the adverse consequences associated with child welfare/protection became high within such families.

Makinde's (2016), study on the other hand examined the relationship between domestic violence and child protection in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study was done using a sample size of 420 households that have reported issues of domestic violence to the State's Social Welfare Department. In addition to establishing the link between domestic violence and child protection, the study exposed the fact that children from families experiencing such violence end up abused and become violent themselves. Makinde, in his study revealed that 78% of the respondents had violated and abused their children as a result of domestic violence. He also stressed that more of the respondents had some level of drug-related problems which further exacerbates the degree of domestic violence associated with such families and the magnitude of negative consequences that children from such homes encounter.

Like the earlier studies highlighted above, Makinde also argued that the social welfare system in the State is not living up to its expectation with regard to family and child welfare and protection issues. According to him, only 5% of his respondents in the study have some form of support from the family welfare unit of the Ministry making it difficult for a large number of the households facing domestic violence to adjust especially in terms of rehabilitation. Thus, Makinde (2016) went further to argue that this inadequate social welfare scenario further pushes families to ignore the welfare of their children, thereby exposing them to all forms of abuses in society.

### **Theoretical Framework (Family Welfare Conferencing Theory)**

The theoretical perspective referred to as Family Welfare Conferencing (FWC) is known to be relatively novel but quite innovative in terms of family welfare and child protection issues especially for social welfare administrators. According to Devaney and Byrne (2015), the Family Welfare Conferencing perspective is a theory that believes in the principle of a decision-making meeting where the families are the primary decision-makers on the issue of child welfare and protection. It, therefore, rests on the assumption that when families are allowed to make or take decisions concerning their children, they are more likely to adhere to such decisions than when decisions are foisted on them by third party stakeholders such as family welfare administrators.

One very outstanding point is clear when the FWC is taken into consideration and that is the fact that the family plan is the regulatory document by which the FWC is managed and this is what guides whatever decision that is eventually reached at the meeting. It must be noted that the FWC model represents a considerable shift in attitude towards how families are perceived and thus challenges the traditional role played by professionals as decision-makers (Brown, 2003) involved in child welfare and protection. Working within the area of child welfare and protection is a challenging and complex task for social work practitioners. Families can be viewed as the cause of and solution to child protection concerns, a dichotomy that is not easily remedied. Increasingly, within child welfare and protection services there are pressures on practitioners to be accountable, responsive and also inclusive of families with particular attention to the rights of the child (Munro, 2011).



The Family Welfare Conference perspective acknowledges that decisions on child welfare and protection follow a process. Hence, proponents identify five processes involved in the FWC perspective. These five processes are: 1) the referral stage, 2) preparation stage, 3) information sharing stage, 4) private family time, and 5) agreeing with the family time. According to Devaney and Byrne (2015), family welfare and child protection is a voluntary process where families consent to needing help.

According to Frost, Abram and Burgess (2012), the theoretical perspective of the Family Welfare Conference (FWC) has been shown to be very effective and highly valued by families and social work practitioners alike. In light of the above, the theory is the most appropriate for this study and it is adopted here as the theoretical framework. The theory does not only expose issues concerning family welfare, ecological and resource domains, but also provides a step-by-step guide to show how family welfare problems can be managed in favour of the family with significant concerns for the welfare and protection of the child or children as the case may be.

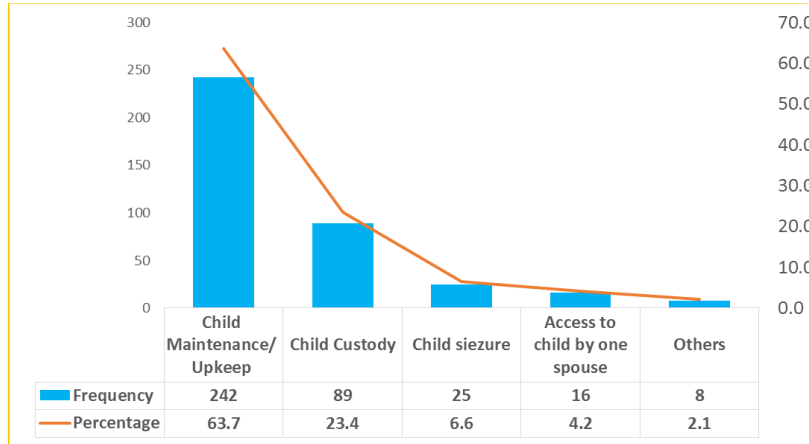
### **Methodology**

The study adopted the survey research method. The population of the study is the total number of families that have come under the administrative ambit of the Family Welfare Unit of the Rivers State Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation from 2011 to 2021 (evident in available case files). However, the staff of the sample for this study is 400 families that have had child protection cases between 2011 and 2021, derived using the Taro Yamane formula expressed thus:  $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$ . The second sample size is 10 staff drawn from the zonal offices across the state. Consequently, the total sample for this study is 410. To select the sample, (400) for families with child protection case history, the simple random sampling technique was adopted. In addition, 10 out of the 26 staff were selected purposively for interview purpose. Both primary (questionnaire & in-depth interviews) and secondary methods were adopted for the purpose of data collection. Quantitative (percentages, frequency distribution and chi-square statistics ( $\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(o-e)^2}{e}$ )) and qualitative methods of data analysis were adopted.

## Results

### Evaluation of Objectives

**Q1:** What are the types and categories of child welfare problems that the family welfare institution has addressed in Rivers State?



**Fig. 1:** Opinion of respondents on types of child welfare problems that the family welfare unit addresses

Fig. 1 above provides information on the types of child welfare problems that are most often reported to the Family Welfare Unit in Rivers State. The information is based on the aggregation or clustering of respondents' own cases into the various problem areas. From the data presented in the chart, it can be seen that more (242/63.7%) of the respondents had reported issues of child maintenance as their major problem, 89(23.4%) of them said child custody, 25(6.6%) of the respondents said child seizure by one spouse, 16(4.2%) of the respondents said access to their child/children by one of the spouses, while 8(2.1%) of them said others. However, Table 1 below captures secondary data on the number of child welfare issues by category that the family welfare unit have addressed between 2012 and 2015.

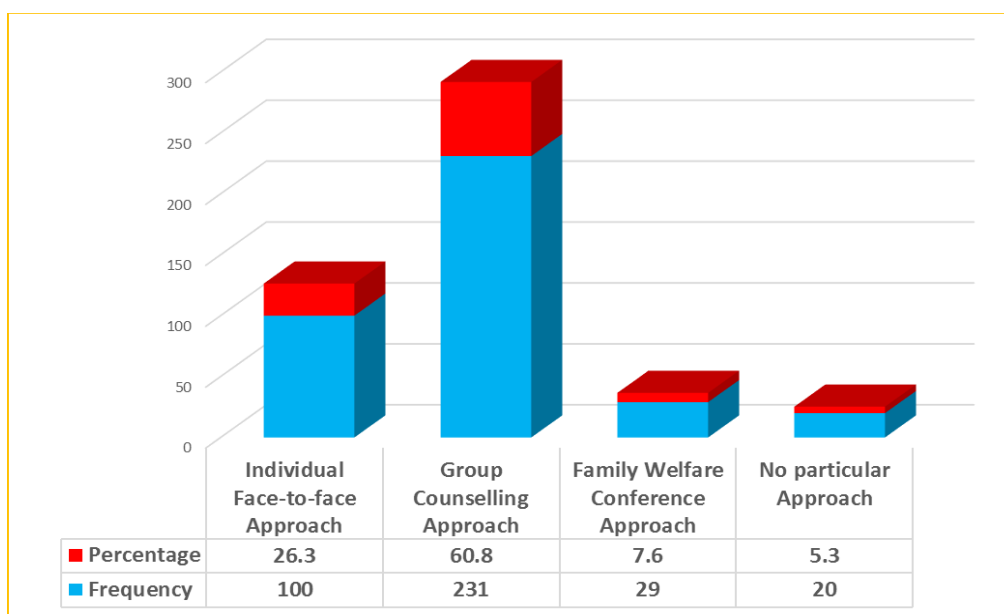
**Table 1:** Number of Child Welfare Issues by Category Handled by the Family Welfare Unit in Rivers State between 2012 and 2021

Type	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
Child Neglect	8	3	9	11	14	45
Maintenance /Upkeep	16	20	26	21	19	102
Child Custody	11	8	7	5	3	34
Child Adoption	2	0	2	1	1	6
Child Abandonment	6	3	6	4	2	21
Child Access	9	8	5	4	5	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>239</b>

**Source:** Family Welfare Unit Registry, 2022

The table above provides information on the number of child welfare cases by categories that have been treated by the family welfare unit in Rivers State from the year 2011 to 2015. The information shows that out of 239 child welfare related cases that were treated during the years in question, 102 of them constituting 43% were child maintenance and upkeep related. This goes a long way to corroborate the information presented in Fig. 1 above.

**Q2:** What are the approaches adopted by the family welfare institution in the administration of child welfare policy issues?



**Fig. 2:** Respondents opinion on the approaches used to administer child welfare issues

Figure 2 above provides information on respondents' opinion concerning the approaches used to administer child welfare problems when they are reported. Again, the information reflected in the chart is based on the clustering of respondents' opinion on the issue. From the data presented in the chart, it can be seen that 100(26.3%) of the respondents said the dominant approach used in the cases was the individual face-to-face method, 231(6.8%) of them said they went through group counselling, 29(7.6%) of the respondents said they had family welfare conferencing, while 20(5.3%) of the respondents said they did not experience any particular kind of method or approach in handling their cases.

### Hypotheses Testing

This section deals with the test of the four hypotheses stated earlier. The chi-square statistical technique was deployed here to test the hypotheses.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant difference between types of child welfare protection problems and the nature of the administrative approach used by the family welfare unit in Rivers State.

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant difference between types of child welfare protection problems and the nature of the administrative approach used by the family welfare unit in Rivers State.

**Table 2:** The Type of child welfare problems is likely to determine the administrative approach

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
<i>Male</i>	105	123	34	10	272
<i>Female</i>	58	28	10	12	108
<b><i>TOTAL</i></b>	<b>163</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>380</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2022

Table 2 above provides data on whether the type of child welfare problem is likely to determine the administrative approach adopted by the family welfare unit in Rivers State. From the table, 163 of the respondents strongly agree that this is a possibility, 151 of the respondents agree, 44 of the respondents disagree, while 22 of them strongly disagree. The data in table 2 above is further used for the chi-square computation and test of hypothesis 1 below.

**Table 3:** Chi-Square computation for hypothesis 1

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>O-E</i>	<i>(O-E)2</i>	<i>(o-e/e)2</i>
<i>Male</i>	105	116.67	-11.67	136.27	1.17
	123	108.08	14.92	222.48	2.06
	34	31.49	2.51	6.28	0.20
<i>Female</i>	10	15.75	-5.75	33.03	2.10
	58	46.33	11.67	136.27	2.94
	28	42.92	-14.92	222.48	5.18
	10	12.51	-2.51	6.28	0.50
	12	6.25	5.75	33.03	5.28
<b><i>Chi-Square</i></b>					<b>19.43</b>

**Source:** Compiled by author and computed using Microsoft Excel. Hence at 3 DF, the table value of  $\chi^2$  at 0.05 level of significance is =7.81 and computed  $\chi^2$  value is 19.43

**Decision rule:** The generally accepted decision rule for the application of chi-square  $\chi^2$  test states that: Accept null hypothesis if calculated value is less than the table value and reject hypothesis if the calculated value is greater than table value. In this study, since calculated value for  $\chi^2$  is 19.43 and table value is 7.81, the null hypothesis which states that “there is no significant difference between types of child welfare protection problems and the nature of the administrative approach used by the family welfare unit in Rivers State.” is hereby rejected. This leads to the acceptance of the alternate hypothesis and the submission that there is a

significant difference between types of child welfare protection problems and the nature of the administrative approach used by the family welfare unit in Rivers State.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the administrative approach adopted by the family welfare unit and the degree of protection that a child can get from the administrative decision reached.

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the administrative approach adopted by the family welfare unit and the degree of protection that a child can get from the administrative decision reached.

**Table 4:** The administrative approach would determine the degree of protection that a child would get from the unit

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
<i>Male</i>	28	43	104	97	272
<i>Female</i>	7	12	51	38	108
<b><i>TOTAL</i></b>	<b>35</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>380</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2022

Table 4 above provides data on whether the administrative approach is likely to determine the degree of protection that a child gets from the family welfare unit. From the table, 35 of the respondents strongly agree that the administrative approach certainly determines the level of protection for children, 55 of the respondents agree, 155 of the respondents disagree, while 135 of them strongly disagree. The data provided in Table 4 above is applied for the chi-square test in the table below.

**Table 5:** Chi-Square computation for hypothesis 2

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>O-E</i>	<i>(O-E)2</i>	<i>(o-e/e)2</i>
<i>Male</i>	28	25.05	2.95	8.69	0.35
	43	39.37	3.63	13.19	0.33
	104	110.95	-6.95	48.27	0.44
	97	96.63	0.37	0.14	0.00
<i>Female</i>	7	9.95	-2.95	8.69	0.87
	12	15.63	-3.63	13.19	0.84
	51	44.05	6.95	48.27	1.10
	38	38.37	-0.37	0.14	0.00
<b><i>Chi-Square</i></b>					<b>3.93</b>

**Source:** Compiled by author and computed using Microsoft Excel. Hence at 3 DF, the table value of  $\chi^2$  at 0.05 level of significance is =7.81 and computed  $\chi^2$  value is 3.93

**Decision rule:** The general accepted decision rule for the application of chi-square  $\chi^2$  test states that: Accept null hypothesis if calculated value is less than the table value and reject hypothesis if the calculated value is greater than table value. In this study, since calculated

value for  $\chi^2$  is 3.93 and table value is 7.81, the hypothesis which states that “There is no significant difference in the administrative approach adopted by the family welfare unit and the degree of protection that a child can get from the administrative decision reached” is hereby accepted. This leads to the conclusion that there is a relationship between the administrative approach adopted by the family planning unit and the degree of protection that a child can get.

## **IDI Outcome**

### **Child welfare protection problems in Rivers State**

Child welfare protection problems in Rivers State are usually addressed by the administrative function of the family welfare unit or department of the Ministry of Social Welfare in Rivers State. Much as this is the case, the staff of the unit have experienced several types of child welfare related problems. The FGD session revealed that the dominant child welfare protection problem that the unit encounters is the issue of upkeep. Participants in the FGD session point to the fact that child upkeep is a central issue which arises from neglect of children by one or two of the spouses in most cases the father figure. One of the participants in the FGD is quoted to have said that “although there are various child protection problems that come before them, but the problem associated with the upkeep of children remains the most reported in our office” (*Female Participant Aged, 36 years*).

However, other participants mentioned child custody as a serious problem that is usually reported at the office of the family welfare unit. This problem according to some of the FGD participants is enabled by the growing rate of divorce cases among married couples in the state. One of the participants captured it better when he opined that “the high rate of divorce has created a social scenario where children are at risk of which of their parent takes custody of them” (*Male participant, aged 41 Years*).

### **Approaches to Child Welfare Administration**

On the approaches to child welfare administration, the FGD participants believe that the main approach has been largely counselling. However, information from some of the participants suggest that the counselling often involves two or more people which implies that a group counselling approach is mostly used. In fact, one of the participants clearly pointed out that “in most cases, parties involved in child welfare and protection matters are usually called into one room and counselled on the case at hand.” In this regard, it could be said that there is a practice of what can be called a pseudo-family conference approach. We say this because more than just the contending parties in a child welfare or protection case, direct and semi-direct stakeholders are often involved in discussions leading to any form of administrative decision in this regard. In essence, family welfare conferencing goes beyond merely providing formative counselling to people seeking help on how to manage child related welfare issues. This is why one of the FGD participants is known to have stated that “in cases where more people involved in the matter have been consciously integrated into the administration of child welfare and or protection case, the problem is usually resolved easily” (*Female participant, aged 42 Years*).

## **Discussion**

The first finding of the study is based on the objective which focused on the need to examine and categorize the peculiar types of child welfare protection problems that the family welfare units have addressed in Rivers State. To achieve this objective, data collated from the field were presented and analyzed as reflected in Fig. 4.1 above. After the analysis of the information, it was found that there are several categories of child welfare cases or problems that the family welfare unit addresses. However, the most dominant of all of these cases is that of child maintenance or upkeep. This is followed by child custody which also bothers on the issue of upkeep since custody is often determined based on the ability of the custodian to provide for the child. In addition, child seizure, access to child by one parent among others tend to feature more in terms of the category of child welfare problem that the family welfare unit addresses on a daily basis.

The next finding in the study is related to objective two which is to examine the approaches adopted by the family welfare institution in the administration of child welfare issues in Rivers state. After analyzing the data collected in the course of the field work (*see Fig. 4.2 above*), it was found that group counselling approach represents that dominant way of administering child welfare related problem. However, the group counselling method adopted by the family welfare unit to address cases of child welfare does not sufficiently equate the family conference model. This is partly because the group counselling method limits the number of people required to participate in the administration or settlement of some of the child welfare cases that normally come before the family welfare unit. It becomes easy to see therefore, why family conference therapy is a major tool in terms of administering issues related to child welfare and protection policies. This finding supports that of Morros and Connolly (2012) who found in their study that when a broad range of stakeholders integrated into the administrative process of any child welfare related case, the chances of ensuring a healthy dialogue as well as a positive result are usually high.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Based on the data gathered and the findings arrived at, it can be concluded that while several categories of child welfare problems are addressed by the family welfare unit, the most common problem is the issue of child upkeep or maintenance. However, existing strategy or approach of administering child welfare related problems tend to be lacking in terms of the scope of stakeholders that partake in the process. This tends to limit the capability of the family welfare unit in terms of implementing their decisions. Based on this, the following recommendations have been made:

- i. Introduction of family welfare conferencing: This is very necessary since in most cases, it is more reliable than the group counselling approach. This because family welfare conferencing as a strategy to administer child welfare related problems involves a wide range of stakeholders and as such a broad-based solution is likely to emerge when it is adopted.
- ii. Government funding: There is need for government to provide adequate funds for the family welfare unit in order to enable it to implement its administrative decisions. With the right funding, the chances become very high that family welfare

administrators can implement their decisions through any means that they deem necessary.

- iii. Public awareness campaign: There has to be a widespread public awareness campaign so that the general public becomes aware of the role and responsibilities of the family welfare unit. This is because most people who default in terms of the decisions reached on their matter tend to do so out of ignorance. There is the chance that orientating people about the family welfare unit through radio jingles will go a long way to solve this problem.

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