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## **KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS OF BASIC PROVISIONS OF CHILD RIGHT ACT AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examined the level of knowledge and awareness of Child Right Act among secondary school students in Nkanu East Local Government Area, Enugu state, Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design. The sample size for the study was 271 respondents. The respondents for the study were derived through simple random sampling. The instrument for data collection was structured questionnaire titled: Knowledge and Awareness of Basic Provisions of Child Right Act Questionnaire “(KABPCRAQ)”. Data collected were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 20. The findings of the study revealed that 95.9% of the respondents were aware and had significant knowledge of child right act while 4.1% were not aware and knowledgeable about child right act. There appears to be a relationship between parents’ education and the students’ knowledge and awareness of Child Rights Act. Parents have significant role to play in creating awareness of child rights and also educating their children on their rights and what constitute the violation of such rights. The findings of the study also revealed that social worker advocate for the awareness and implementation of child right act. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that social workers should work closely with schools and parents to ensure that children are all categories of children are enlightened appropriately on their rights. Social workers should also organize community education on children’s’ right, as well as influencing government policies targeted at promoting the rights.*

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**Keywords:** Awareness, Basic provision, Secondary school, Child right act, Social work

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## **Introduction**

Children are the assurance for continuity of the human society, without children today there will be no society of humans' tomorrow. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989. The convention affirms children's entitlement to development, protection, participation and non-discrimination. It also acknowledges that the realization of these rights for children can only be accomplished through care and assistance of adults. The child right act is a national law that makes provision for the protection of the rights of a child without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of his/her parents' or legal guardian's sex, tribe, religion or political opinion, nationality, ethnic or social origin, disability, birth or other status (Avrukpere, 2012). The Act recognizes the rights of children, restores their confidence and self-esteem and improves their status. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, children's protection laws were put in place, including protection in the medical, social and judicial fields. This kind of protection started first in France and spread across Europe afterwards. Since 1919, the international community following the creation of the League of Nations started giving some kind of importance to that concept (child rights) and elaborates committee for child protection (World Health Organization, 2016). The UN general assembly in 1948 passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which refers in article 25 to childhood as "entitled to special care and assistance". It was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1959, the declaration recognizes rights such as freedom from discrimination and the rights to a name and nationality (Child Right Act, 2003). It also specifically enshrines children's rights to education, health care and special protection. Then in 1973, the International Labor Organization adopted convention No. 138 on the minimum age for admission to employment, which sets 18 years as the minimum age for work that might be hazardous to an individual's health safety (United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2011).

In order to promote awareness and to encourage states to act towards the protection and assurance of children's rights, the United Nations declared 1979 as international day of the child which sets in motion the working group to draft a legally binding convention on the rights of the Child. (Kapoor, 2000). The UN General Assembly in 1989 unanimously approved the Convention on the Right of the Child, which came into force the following year marking the 1990 world summit for Children. The International Labor Organization adopted Convention No.182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the worst forms of Child Labor in 1999 (Working Groups, 2007). Then in 2000, the UN General Assembly adopted two Optional Protocols to the convention on the Rights of the Child which came into force on 18 January 2002 and 12

February 2002 respectively: one was on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the other on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (Jaap, 2009).

Nigeria ratified the United Nations Convention on the Child's Rights in 1991. This implies that thenceforth the country had committed itself to a code of binding obligations towards her children. Among these obligations are the raising of awareness and the involvement of the civil society, including children, in the realization of children's rights. Following the submission of her initial progress report, the Committee on Children's Rights recommended, among other things, that the country should domesticate the Convention in order to facilitate its implementation under Nigerian law (UNICEF, 2007; Jacomy and Stevens, 2005). The Nigerian Federal Government enacted the Child's Rights Act (CRA) in December 2003. This legislation was adopted to implement principles enshrined in international instruments, including the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the 1990 African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (CRCW), which Nigeria ratified in 1991 and 2000, respectively. Since the Nigerian Constitution mandates that the legislative jurisdiction on matters affecting children belongs exclusively to states, the federal law was insufficient as a means to extend protection to all Nigerian children and, therefore, needed to be adopted by the states (Nigeria's Child Right Act, 2003). Today many states in Nigeria have adopted the Child's Rights Act even though some states are yet to adopt the Act.

There have been various suggestions as to how to go about achieving the goals of the Child's Rights Act. Education has been seen by scholars as the key to achieving these goals. According to Covell and Rowe (1999) educating people on the rights of the child is important not only for legal reasons but also for its potential in increasing rights-respecting attitudes and behaviors. Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, like all signatories, Nigeria is obligated legally to take measures to increase public awareness of children's rights as described in the Convention. According to Article 42 of the Convention, state parties are to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to their citizens. Therefore, this means that there is need to make people aware of the CRA through education using the media. According, to the Society for Children and Youth of British Columbia Canada (2011), knowledge of the UN Conventions on the Rights of the child and children's rights generally is lacking at all levels in most society. They therefore believe that there is need for a public awareness campaign to increase awareness of the child's rights. This is because greater public awareness can lead to: increase political will, implementation and monitoring, increased advocacy, positive proactive response to advocacy by adult members of the society,



realization of children's rights and improved wellbeing (Society for Children and Youth of British Columbia Canada, 2011). Interestingly, Akinwumi (2009) opined that the failure to create awareness and implement the child right act effectively can be traced to the failure of Nigeria to educate her citizens on human rights particularly on child's rights.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. ascertain the level of knowledge and awareness of the basic provisions of the child rights act among secondary school students.
2. examine the role parents play in the students' knowledge and awareness of child rights act.
3. examined the social workers contribute in the education and implementation process of the child right act.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study

1. What is the level of knowledge and awareness of the basic provisions of the child rights act among secondary school students?
2. What role do parents play in the students' knowledge and awareness of child rights act?
3. How can social workers contribute in the education and implementation process of the child right act?

### **Materials And Methods**

This study was carried out in Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. The choice of this area of study was purposive but informed by a major factor which is: Nkanu East is a Local Government Area where child abuse is prevalent and the communities therein have more of public schools where students are not properly informed on their rights and what actually constitute violation to such rights, however this makes for exposure to different forms of child abuse. According to the National Population Census (2006), Nkanu East Local Government Area has a total population of one hundred and forty-eight thousand, seven hundred and seventy-four (148,774). However, secondary school students in Nkanu East being the target population has the total population of 10,738 (Nkanu East LG Document, 2014). A study sample of 271 respondents was drawn using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula of sample determination. The study adopted simple random sampling (balloting), quota sampling and the convenience\availability sampling in choosing its respondents. The simple random sampling was adopted to select five (5) out of the nineteen (19) secondary schools in Nkanu East Local Government Area and quota sampling will be adopted to ensure that an equal number of questionnaires

(open and close ended) are administered in the selected schools. However, the questionnaires were distributed to students in the selected schools based on their availability. The sample was made up of 94 (34.7%) males and 177(65.3%) females. The majority of the respondents which is 81.9% fall within the age range of 15-18. Also, 98.5% of the respondents were Christians, .4% Muslims and 1.1% were of the African Traditional Religion. Looking at the educational qualifications of parents 51.7% have GCE/SSCE, 15.5% have NCE/OND, 10.7% have first degree and above while 22.1% have no educational qualification. In order to answer the questions in the questionnaire, respondents were required to respond yes or no to one question which show that they are aware or not aware of the Child’s Rights Act. The responses to these two questions were added up and based on that we developed two sides: those that are aware and those that are not aware of the Act. Also, another question which requires the respondents to mention any two Childs’ right they know was used to measure respondent’s knowledge of the contents of Child’s Rights Act. The responses of each respondent to all the items were added up and based on that we developed about four categories: based on the particular right of the child they know alongside those that does not know at all.

### **Results**

This section comprises of presentation and analysis of the data collected from the field. The analysis was based on respondents’ view from the questionnaire. The data obtained will be analysed using frequency distribution table.

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Male	94	34.7
Female	177	65.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
11-14	25	9.2
15-18	222	81.9
19 and above	24	8.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Religious affiliation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Christianity	267	98.5
Islam	1	.4
ATR	3	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>100.0</b>

From table 1, the respondents are made up of both males 94 (34.7%) and females 177(65.3%) showing that majority of the respondents are females, the table also shows that the respondents are between the ages of 11-14 years 25 (9.2%), 15-18 years 222 (81.9) and 19 years and above 24 (8.9). this shows that majority of the respondents are between the age range of 15-18. Again, it can be seen from the table that 98.5% of the respondents are Christians, .4% are Muslim while 1.1% are of the African Traditional Religion, however this shows that majority of the respondents are Christians.

**Table 2: Substantive Issues of the Research**

Knowledge of the act	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Awareness of the act</b>		
Yes	260	95.9
No	11	4.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Parent's education increases knowledge of the act</b>		
Yes	153	56.5
No	118	43.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>100.0</b>
My parents teach me my rights	153	56.5
My teachers teach me my rights	118	43.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Knowledge of any two rights of the child</b>		
Right to education/right to health care	34	12.5
Right to education/right to life	143	52.8
Right to education/freedom of speech	55	20.3
Right to education/freedom of worship	25	9.2
Don't know	3	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>How to improve knowledge and awareness of the act</b>		
Incorporating lessons on the rights of the in the school curriculum	58	21.4
Emphasis on the basic provisions of child right act by classroom teachers	16	5.9
Mass education and public enlightenment of the citizens on the rights of the child through the mass media	70	25.8

Opportunity for children to deliberate on their rights	32	11.8
All of the above	95	35.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>How social workers can enhance awareness of this act</b>		
Initiating the operation “know your right scheme”	27	10.0
Influencing/educating the government on the need to publicize the act	42	15.5
Public enlightenment on the right of children	19	7.0
All of the above	114	42.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>74.5</b>

Table 2 shows that 95.9% of the respondent are aware of child right while 4.1% are not aware. However, it can be observed that majority of the respondents indicated awareness of the act. The table also shows that 56.6% of the respondents believe that their parent’s education increases their knowledge of the act and that they do that by teaching them those rights while 43.5% of the respondents believes that their parents education does not increase their knowledge of the act and that they are being taught about their right by their teachers in school, it can be said that majority of the respondents are of the view that their parents education helps in increasing their knowledge of the act because their parents help in teaching them their right. From the table, 12.5% of the respondents mentioned right to education and health care as major components of child’s right act, 52.8% mentioned right to education and life as major components of child’s right act, 20.3% mentioned right to education and freedom of speech as major components of child’s right act, 9.2% mentioned right to education and freedom of worship as major components of child’s right act while 1.1% were of the view that they don’t know any two child right act. It can be observed that majority of the respondents 52.8% mentioned right to education and life as major components of child’s right act.

The table also shows that 21.4% of the respondents were of the view that knowledge and awareness of child right act can be improved by incorporating

lessons on the rights of children into the school curriculum, 5.9% were of the view that knowledge and awareness of child right act can be improved by laying much emphasis on the basic provisions of child rights act by classroom teachers, 25.8% were of the view that knowledge and awareness of child right act can be improved by mass education and public enlightenment of the entire citizenry on the rights of the child through the mass media and 11.8% were of the view that knowledge and awareness of child right act can be improved by creating opportunity for children to deliberate on their rights and 35.1% were of the view that knowledge and awareness of child right act can be improved by all of the above. It can be observed that majority of the respondents 35.1% were of the view that knowledge and awareness of child right act can be improved by the following: Incorporating lessons on the rights of children into the school curriculum; laying much emphasis on the basic provisions of child rights act by classroom teachers; mass education and public enlightenment of the entire citizenry on the rights of the child through the mass media; creating opportunity for children to deliberate on their rights.

Again, the table shows that 10.0% were of the view that what social workers can do to enhance the knowledge and awareness of the basic provisions of child rights act among secondary school students is to initiate the “operation know your rights” scheme in our various secondary schools, 15.5% were of the view that what social workers can do to enhance the knowledge and awareness of the basic provisions of child rights act among secondary school students is to influence government policies and educate them on the need to publicize children’s rights, 7.0% were of the view that what social workers can do to enhance the knowledge and awareness of the basic provisions of child rights act among secondary school students is enlightenment of the people on the rights of children and 42.1% were of the view that social workers can do all of the above to enhance the knowledge and awareness of the basic provisions of child rights act among secondary school students. It can be observed that majority of the respondents 42.1% were of the view that the following can be done by social workers to enhance the knowledge and awareness of the basic provisions of child rights act among secondary school students: initiate the “operation know your rights” scheme in our various secondary schools; Influence government policies and educate them on the need to publicize children’s rights; enlightenment of the people on the rights of children.

## **Discussion**

This paper was designed to access the level of knowledge and awareness of the basic provision of child right act among secondary school students, the parent’s role and that of the social workers in promoting child right awareness

and implementation. The study revealed that majority of the secondary school students were aware and knowledgeable of the basic provision of child right act. Only less than five percent of the population were not aware of the basic provision of child right act. The level of the awareness of the basic provision of the child right act stems from the fact that majority of the states in Nigeria have domesticated the child right act. According to UNICEF (2019) at least 12 states in Nigeria out of the 36 states have not domesticated the child right act despite its benefit for children in the country. However, in contrast to the above findings, a study conducted in Kenya by Anne & Ong'ondo (2013) using survey research design discovered that children in Eldoret Municipality, of Kenya were not sufficiently aware of their right despite the ratification and domestication of child right act by the country. Similarly, Stamatovic and Cicvaric (2019) in the Republic of Serbia conducted a survey which accessed awareness of the basic provision of child's right act among primary school pupil; the study indicated that the children's knowledge of the basic provision of the child's right act was low. This was particularly because the education on awareness and knowledge of child right was only left for teachers of civic education subject. The study shows that the responsibility was not either given to parents or teachers of other subject in school. In a different space of adult ages 18 years and above, a study by Okoye (2011) using cross sectional survey design revealed that resident of Nsukka town in Enugu State of Nigeria had very low level of awareness of the existence of child right act and those who were aware had little or not knowledge of the content of the act.

The study also revealed that majority of the students were of the view that their parents played significant role in helping them learn the basic provision of child right act. In fact, majority of the respondents indicated that to a great extent the knowledge of their rights as children came from their parents. While there is dearth of empirical evidence on the role of parents in children's awareness and knowledge of the basic provision of child right act, many scholars have demonstrated the significant role of parents in child's general education. According to Garcia and Thornton (2014) involvement of parents in learning helps to improve students' performance, reduce absenteeism and restore parents' confidence in their children's education. Furthermore, in mix research methods Voicu, Anghel and Savn-Cristescu (2015) analyzed factors that influence parents' attitude and behaviour towards children's right. The study revealed that parent's attitude towards children's right is conditioned by the dominant cultural model in the family. This implies that parents respect and protect the right of children based on the prevalent culture of the environment. Similarly, a study in India by Shanmugam, Ramchandra and Kanthara (2013) in a survey research design investigated parental knowledge and attitude towards child's rights. The study

revealed that majority of the parents had average level of knowledge regarding children's rights in all the dimensions such as health, education, equality and protection need of children. However, majority of the parents had neutral attitude towards children's right. This further implies that whereas parents had knowledge of child's right, its implication and compliance is still problematic.

The study also revealed that social workers have significant role to play in enhancing the basic provision of child right act among not just the secondary school students but also among the general public, so that through a collective effort, the right of the child will be protected significantly. The study revealed that social workers can take the following initiatives to enhance not just the knowledge of the child right act but it is implementation and execution from the urban area to the rural areas. Child's right protection, planning, execution and awareness are at the heart of social work practice (International Federation of Social Workers, 2002). Social workers perform the following role in child right awareness creation and implementation: role of researcher; protective role; role of engineers; role of training provider; role of expert rehabilitation; and planning role (Iravani, 2011). Educator role depict the practicality of social workers' actual engagement in enhancing the awareness of the basic provision of child right act among children to enhance the knowledge of their right, and among the general public. On the other hand, planning role situate a paradigm shift from mere awareness creation to actual deliberations, consultation and setting up strategies to enforce child's right protection at all level of government and society. Mavole, Mutisyua & Wambulwa (2017) in a systematic review of literature, evidentially proved that social workers also advocate for the right of special need children. These rights include right to special education and special care. Right to education is unique and paramount to the overall development of children. Children's right to education should be part of everyday social work practice involving children (Reynaert, Bie & Vandeveld, 2016).

### **Implication to Social Work Practice**

Social work with children is a demanding all-inclusive field of practice. Social workers must learn to scan a child's world and see the broad picture before determining where and how to initiate the helping process (Girwitz, 2013). Undoubtedly, this research though a small-scale study with some limitations in respect to generalizing findings will serve as a reference material to other researchers who may venture in discourse pertaining the knowledge and awareness of Child's Rights Act among Nigerians especially secondary school students.

Furthermore, social work as a profession has enormous responsibilities in the defense and protection of human rights which is evident in the International

Federation of social workers' definition of social work "the principle of human right and social justice is fundamental to the practice" (International Federation of Social Workers, 2001). From the foregoing, social workers play greater role in helping to publicize the basic provisions of child rights and to get the people both young and old to know their rights and what constitute human as well as child right violation. According to Sossou and Yogtiba (2008) social workers by their training are equipped with skills and techniques of mass education of citizen on the issues of the rights of the child. In the same vein, social workers are saddled with the responsibility of helping to protect the right of children and taking appropriate measures to challenging child abuse as well as child right violation, also they see to it that offenders are duly punished.

International Federation Social Work has declared that social work is a human rights profession (Healy, 2008) and the profession has from time been a human right profession having as its basic tenets the intrinsic value of every human being including children. Children's rights were included, under a broader umbrella of human rights, in the 2000 revised definition of social work, stating that "principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work" (International Federation of Social Workers, 2002). Similarly, social workers can help educate and enlighten the people and also children on their rights and what constitute child right violation, in this regard they should influence government policies as well as educate the government on the need to publicize children's rights especially among secondary school students.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of the study give a strong indication that greater percentage of secondary school students in Nkanu East LGA is aware of some of the basic provisions of child right act and also shows that parents' education affect students' level of awareness of the basic provisions of child right act; reason being that they are being taught their rights by their parents. The study showed that the knowledge and awareness of child right act can be improved by the following: incorporating lessons on the rights of children into the school curriculum; Laying much emphasis on the basic provisions of child rights act by classroom teachers; mass education and public enlightenment of the entire citizenry on the rights of the child through the mass media as well as creating opportunity for children to deliberate on their rights. To cap it all, the findings also revealed that social workers can enhance the knowledge and awareness of the basic provisions of child right act among secondary school students by: initiating the "operation know your rights" scheme in our various secondary schools; Influencing government policies and educate them on the need to publicize children's rights and enlightening people on the rights of children.



### **Recommendations**

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

1. The government as well as the general public should make efforts to ensure that the awareness of the basic provisions of child right act is brought to everyone especially the children. They should also make effort to partner with the ministry of education in order to incorporate lessons on child's rights into the primary and post primary school curriculum.
2. Parents should know that they play a significant role in creating awareness on child rights and also make efforts to educate their children on their rights and what constitute the violation of such rights because it will go a long way to curtailing the rate of child right violation.
3. Social workers should also stick to their responsibilities of organizing community education and public enlightenment on children's rights and what constitute child right violation as well as influencing government policies regarding child's right and educating them on the need to publicize children's rights.
4. The Nigerian government as one of the signatories of the United Nations Child's Rights Convention should equally take steps to enforce the implementation of the provisions of children's rights and ensure that offenders are punished.
5. The various state houses of assembly of the federation should make efforts towards creating children's parliament at the local levels to encourage students to fully integrate the children into the affairs of the country and for them to have their own voices.
6. The federal and state government should create social work clinics in government owned secondary schools as well as employ certified social workers. They should also encourage privately owned schools to employ social workers. This will help create the awareness of child right related issues as well as enlighten students, parents and guardians on the basic provisions of child right act and what constitutes its violations.

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